Summer 2013

A Transition Program: Students' Experiences and Perspectives

Donna Marie Burns

A TRANSITION PROGRAM: STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Doctor of Education

By

Donna Burns, M.Ed.

August 2013

DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
INTERDISCIPLINARY DOCTORAL PROGRAM FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Education (Ed.D.)

Presented by:

Donna M. Burns
B.S., Secondary Education/Biology, York College of Pennsylvania, 1995
M.Ed. Teaching and Curriculum, Pennsylvania State University, 2001

May 2013

A TRANSITION PROGRAM: STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES

Approved by:

_____, Chair
James E. Henderson, Ed.D.
Professor, Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership
Duquesne University

_____, Member
James A. Ryland, Ph.D.
Faculty Emeritus, Educational Leadership and Policy,
Shippensburg University

_____, Member
Nancy Hykes Stankus, Ed.D.
Faculty Emeritus, Educational Leadership and Policy
Shippensburg University

Program Director
James E. Henderson, Ed.D.
Professor of Educational Leadership and
Director, Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program for
Educational Leaders
Duquesne University School of Education

ABSTRACT

A TRANSITION PROGRAM: STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES

By

Donna M. Burns

August 2013

Dissertation supervised by Dr. James Henderson

The intent of this study was to investigate student perceptions of participation in a

transition program the summer before their ninth grade year. Studies have shown that

students who have an unsuccessful transition from middle school to high school are more

likely to fail ninth grade, which may ultimately lead to dropping out of high school.

However, the implementation of a transition program may help ease this transition and

provide the student with the tools necessary to acclimate to the changes of the high

school and be successful.

A purposive sample was comprised of eight students who participated in the

transition program. Four of the students were male and four were female, with one

gender representative from each grade level 9-12. The students were chosen to best

represent the population of participants as a whole. The students chosen ranged in

academic levels from average to gifted and two of the students were special education students.

The students were interviewed using open-ended questions allowing them to expound upon their thoughts and ideas. Students were asked the same questions regarding their perceptions on their participation in the program and their social interactions, academic, discipline, and attendance in high school. The interviews were also used to determine strengths and weaknesses of the program.

The results suggest that the students in this study felt that the program provided them with the tools to manage the layout of the new building reducing the likelihood of getting lost the first day of school. The students identified meeting the teachers prior to the start of school and making new friends or social relationships as benefits of the program. However, the students did not feel that their participation in the program had an impact on improving their academic achievement, reducing their discipline problems, or increasing their attendance. This was identified as a specific weakness of the program, but the students in this study did not have issues in these areas prior to participation.

Keywords: transition, success, failure, attendance, discipline, academic achievement

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Dixie Lee Burns for her constant love and

support and to my two daughters, Ryland and Bryton, who inspire me every day.

I would also like to dedicate this to all of the educators who dedicate their lives to

teaching and nurturing our children, our future.

ACKOWLEDGEMENT

First, I would like to thank my chair, Dr. James E. Henderson for never giving up on me, for the constant reminders and supportive emails, and for taking me under his wing. I am not sure I will ever be able to thank him enough. Secondly, I want to thank my mentor, Dr. James Ryland, for his amazing knowledge and skills. I am truly blessed to have been able to work with him. I would also like to thank Dr. Ryland and his amazing wife, Dr. Vonnie Ryland, for opening their home and hearts to me on many days and nights and for being like a second family to me through this entire process. They will forever be in my heart. I would also like to thank Dr. Stankus for her incredible guidance and support and for many dinners and meetings at the Café while working on my dissertation. She is a gift.

I want to thank my loving mother, Dixie Lee Burns, for never giving up on me, even in moments when I wanted to give up. She is truly an inspiration, and I continue to strive to make her as proud of me as I am of her. Thank you to my loving family and friends for walking this long and arduous journey with me. I could not have done it without all of their love and support. Finally, thank you to my loving other half, Brandon Gross, and our two beautiful children, Ryland and Bryton. Their love ignites my soul and inspires me to become a better person and share my love of learning. The future is ours and I cannot wait to treasure every second. All my love.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Changes; life is full of them. These changes vary from shifting fashion trends to altering careers. One of these changes is the structure of public schools. In the recent years, the population of public schools has increased dramatically. This can be attributed to real estate markets and the transformation of large open fields into major housing developments. With the increased number of homes in the school districts, the student population has increased exponentially in some rural districts (Whitener & McGranahan, 2003).

Forced to deal with the larger student population, many school districts are building new educational facilities. Due to budgetary constraints, many districts build smaller buildings then realign their grade levels to best use the facilities available. For example, an elementary school that once housed kindergarten through fifth grade, now may only house kindergarten through third grade. Because of this shifting in building grade-level structure, students are forced to transition from building to building more often than ever before. Historically, students transition from elementary to middle school and middle to high school. However, many students today are forced to transition from elementary to intermediate school, intermediate to middle school, and middle to high school (Geltner, Law, Forehand & Miles, 2011).

The increased number of school buildings may help satisfy a school district's immediate population growth and budgetary limitations, but is it best for children? Each time students change buildings, they are forced to deal with a barrage of new and unfamiliar experiences. The transition process causes the child to move from the known

to the unknown (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009). As with any unfamiliar incident, feelings of anxiety and trepidation often accompany the experience. All of this is overwhelming by itself; however, teenagers experience a heightened sense of anxiety as they are dealing with multiple changes in their lives. These changes include anatomical, physiological, psychological, and emotional changes (C.J. Hertzog, personal communication, November 17, 2008). Students are also troubled by the need to fit into the new school culture, the courses and graduation requirements, teacher and peer relationships, and understanding the changing credit system from building to building (Geltner, Law, Forehand & Miles, 2011).

One of the most traumatic changes occurs around the age of 13 when a child goes from the middle school to the high school.   This change, often only a walk across the parking lot to a new building, causes thousands of students anxiety and concern each year (Fields, 2002). Students are not only changing their academic lives, but they are going through other changes emotionally, physically, and socially. Research indicates as students advance into higher grades they face difficulties with their social groups, dealing with the larger number of peers, and interacting with authoritative adults (Chapman & Sawyer, 2001). Students are regrouped for each subject area causing the students anxiety about how they will maintain their current peer relationships; this is a greater concern for girls than boys (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009). Historically speaking, females have had more trouble transitioning to high school; however, both genders show evidence of stress today (Queen, 2002). Because of all of this anxiety, it is important to intervene early before students lose their motivation, which can lead to high absentee rates, increased discipline problems, and/or failing or dropping out of school (Reents, 2002).

The purpose of this study was to examine student perceptions on their participation in a transition program the summer before their ninth grade year. Qualitative analysis of this information helped identify the program's strengths and weaknesses.

When students are forced to deal with an overabundance of new issues, they are required to prioritize their concerns and determine what areas need immediate attention. As stated in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, students will fulfill their physiological, safety, and personal needs first (Queen, 2002). Therefore, for many students, academics fall to the bottom of that list. Students will seek to reduce the anxiety that directly impacts their personal and emotional security. This lack of concern or focus for academic success may lead to increased failure rates. Thus, a lack of success may exaggerate the anxiety and stress students are already feeling causing the students' fretfulness to continue, which may lead to discipline problems or absenteeism to avoid facing these issues.

Focusing on student success and reducing the anxiety that often accompanies transitions from building to building must become a priority for school districts. Many students are not achieving their academic potential because they are forced to singularly deal with all of the changes in their lives, specifically developmental and emotional changes (Letrello & Miles, 2003). The transition from middle school to high school coincides with many adolescent changes including cognitive, psychological, emotional and physical changes (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009). School districts must address this concern and determine a way to meet the overpopulation needs of their district, while creating an environment that is conducive to reducing student stress levels and promoting academic success. One possible solution to these problems is the creation of a transition

program, specifically for students moving from the middle school to high school. Several successful programs have been implemented internationally, such as the Bridge program in Seattle, Washington. According to Hernandez Sheets, Izard-Baldwin, & Atterberry (1997), this program provided students with transition services such as advisory meetings, study skills classes, and goal and career setting. Participation in this program proved to increase the average grades for ninth grade students by 2.2% and reduce discipline by 10%, comparing Bridge participants to non-participants.

Transition services may be defined "as a carefully planned, outcome-oriented process, initiated by the primary service provider, who establishes and implements a written multi-agency service plan for each child moving to a new program" (McNulty, 1989, p. 159, as cited in Repetto & Correa, 1996). This idea of transition services created an avenue for the creation of more comprehensive transition programs. Initial work on such programs began in the 1980s by the Office of Special Education Programs within the Department of Education. This initial focus was on helping children transition to kindergarten from home. The secondary transition movement began prior to this, in the 1960s and 1970s as work-study programs and career education. However, it did not emerge as its own field until the 1980s (Repetto & Correa, 1996).

Transition programs are designed to provide the answers and resources necessary to eliminate the trepidation of entering ninth grade. The design of these programs varies from place to place, but the main theme is the same and that is to lessen the anxiety students have and create a successful learning environment (Fields, 2002). Successful transition provides students with academic preparedness, independence, and coping mechanisms (Queen, 2002). All learners are capable of their own levels of success; but

that success is contingent upon how welcome they feel as they enter a new environment (Lindsay, 1998).

Authors, such as Rice (2001), Hertzog (1998), and Queen (2002), have stated that many schools offer basic level transition services. One of these services is a freshman orientation program. These events are helpful but are not comprehensive. The orientation program is often optional and brief. Students and their parents attend a one to two hour session in which teachers and administrators verbally overwhelm them with information. This is conducted to give the parents and students a brief view of the high school and introduce the new building and its policies. The reason for such a program is relevant; however, the common delivery method for this event may be ineffective and may cause even more anxiety and concern for students. Effective programs will identify and address concerns with safety, discipline, curriculum, and the building (Smith, Feldwisch & Abell, 2006).

The other basic level transition service currently offered by many schools is a building tour. As most people have experienced when traveling, a quick tour is not enough to dedicate the landscape to memory. This may only be done after an extensive experience in the new environment. Learning the layout of a high school is analogous to this experience. Most times a student will not remember the building layout or classroom locations after only a brief tour or exposure to the environment; he/she must experience extended time in that situation to truly remember it. As with the brevity of the orientation program, this swift experience with the building and its landscape may not provide the students with comfort, but instead with increased anxiety and stress.

According to Hertzog (1998), a comprehensive transition program differs dramatically from the basic transition services mentioned above. A full transition program offers a multitude of services and experiences for students to truly acclimate to their new building. These include a variety of services and prolonged time to deliver the information to the students. One example is a "ninth grade day" where students follow their schedule from bell to bell and experience the high school first hand along with informational sessions addressing questions or concerns students may have. Another option is services that continue throughout the ninth grade year, including a ninth grade course addressing study skills and personal growth to social activities for the freshman students. These are only two examples of many that may be included in a comprehensive transition program. Ultimately, a complete transition program addresses the questions and concerns students have as they enter high school, and it provides students with widespread resources to meet individual needs. How these things are accomplished may vary from district to district, but the underlying theme is extensive services for students as they enter ninth grade.

A great deal of research has yet to be performed in the area of transition programs. However, continued investigation into developmental changes in students and the correlation of such changes with building level transitions may reveal more information that may help address these concerns. Continued studies with a terminal goal of helping reduce the level of anxiety and/or fear students experience as they enter a new building may help improve academic success, attendance rates, and reduce discipline incidents, all of which may ultimately lead to greater success in life as well.

Overarching Questions

How can knowledge about students' experiences and perspectives inform understanding of the efficacy of a ninth grade transition program?

Does the ninth grade transition program provide experiences that help student adjustment and relationship development?

Does the ninth grade transition program provide experiences that help mitigate problems of attendance, discipline, retention, and academics?

Utilizing a qualitative approach, strengths and weaknesses in the program will be considered.

Significance of the Problem

There is a critical need to investigate issues that may be affecting student success, or lack of success. No Child Left Behind legislation was enacted in 2002, and it states that all students must score proficient on the state standardized test by 2014. Each state tests students annually in reading, math, and science; the science exam was field tested in 2007 and added officially in 2008. Exams are scored as advanced, proficient, basic, or below basic. Each year, schools must increase the number of students who score proficient on these exams; this is called Adequate Yearly Progress. No Child Left Behind expects schools to have incremental increases in students' scores each year, until 2014, when 100% of students are expected to score proficient. If schools do not meet the proficiency benchmarks, the schools are held accountable and may be put on a warning or improvement list at the state level. The state will continue to monitor the school's progression and corrective action may be taken. Even with all these federal and state laws set forth to ensure student success, schools continue to see high failure and dropout rates. Studies into promoting student success are vital for districts forced to meet

national requirements; however, more importantly, they are necessary to allow for a student's personal growth and achievement.

Many public schools experience surges in student populations. To deal with the growing number of students, many districts construct new school buildings. For each new building a district possesses or the reorganization of grade levels, the students are required to make additional transitions. These transitions are often difficult for children, as each transition introduces changes, new rules and/or policies, new faces, and all the anxiety that accompanies such events. Transition into high school is especially difficult as it includes pubescent changes, which have dramatic emotional impact on students as well as the academic challenges they face. Additionally, the size of the school and the number of transitions also contribute to achievement loss (Geltner, Law, Forehand & Miles, 2011).

When students are forced to deal with an onslaught of changes, they must also choose the order in which they address these concerns. Often times, students will focus on making personal and emotional adjustments, attempting to achieve emotional security and attain social status first. This choice frequently leaves academic motivation and success a lower priority. Students who lack the scholastic ambition often experience many levels of academic collapse.

Many areas have been identified as problem areas for students entering high school. These problems directly affect their ability to transition successfully. Students in larger high schools experience even greater difficulty entering the ninth grade. Students also view high school teachers as being less helpful than middle school teachers. Many of these perceptions develop from a fear of larger buildings, different environments, and

changing schedules (Queen, 2002). All of these problems may lead to unsuccessful transitions. Students who drop out from failure to transition successfully may experience lifelong difficulties with physical, social, emotional, and economic problems (Queen, 2002). Traditional high schools can no longer adequately meet the needs of all the students without addressing these concerns (Duke, 1999).

Although these changes seem momentary, there are long-term consequences that may result from the transition into high school. For some students, this act of changing from middle school to high school may be the precipitating factor in students eventually dropping out (Letrello & Miles, 2003). The cause for this may come from inadequate preparation for the next building level, which leads to lower test scores and higher frustration levels (Queen, 2002). This change is overwhelming and may affect students' coping skills, lower their self-esteem, and decrease their motivation to learn at all, resulting in retention and possibly dropping out of school (Letrello & Miles, 2003). Most successful people maintain the same basic abilities, such as learning as they go, being in control of their life, and the ability to adapt to changes (Martin & Marshall, 1995). These skills can all be learned if presented to the students at the appropriate time in their maturation.

Problematic transitions may result in a multitude of tribulations for students. One study in southern Georgia found that high schools that do not offer transition programs report retention rates in ninth grade as high as 40% (Hertzog & Morgan, 1998). Students who are retained once reduce their chance of graduating to 50%, and if they are retained twice the chance is reduced to 25% (Hertzog & Morgan, 1998). This study did not state

the demography of the school district; however, other research has stated that students in urban areas are at a greater risk for failure (Roderick, 2003).

Dropping out of school is a great concern for education and society. As many as 5% of all high school students leave school each year, and for low income students that number rises to 10% (Mizelle, 2005). Sadly, one in seven children born in the United States will not graduate from high school (Mizelle, 2005). Nationally, 23% of all dropouts are 15-16 years old, and 27% of all 15-16 year old students receiving special education services drop out of school each year (Fraiser, 2007). Even with the increasing importance of gaining a high school diploma, high school completion rates have not significantly improved since 1985 (Mizelle, 2005). The importance of earning a high school diploma carries into adult life. In 1990, median earnings of adult men 25-34, who dropped out of school, were 35% less than those that earned diplomas (Queen, 2002). Female dropouts earned 40% less than their high school counterparts and 65% lower than female college graduates (Queen, 2002).

At no other time in the lives of children will they experience such a diverse number of problems (Letrello & Miles, 2003). The transition into high school proves to cause academic and emotional problems. Research has shown that students show significant loss in achievement in science, social studies, and reading when they transition into high school (Adreon & Stella, 2001). This is only one step in the tier of transition. Students go through multiple transitions from elementary school to middle school and from middle school to high school putting the child doubly at risk for these problems (Alspaugh, 1998). Students who are retained as children develop negative attitudes about school and themselves, which may cause problems with curriculum and

10

success in later grades (Uphoff, 1990). Out of 22% of students who repeat ninth grade, only 10-15% of those students will graduate high school (Geltner, Law, Forehand & Miles, 2011).

   If there is a relationship between student participation in transition programs and the reduction of student retentions, absenteeism, and discipline referrals, it would be essential for school district administrators to examine the current transition programs being offered. Districts may need to consider implementing a comprehensive program so that it can provide students with all of the tools possible to help promote personal success. Ultimately, creating and executing a transition program would promote that individual students succeed, but with increased expectations and directives from national education legislature, such a program may be necessary to ensure the district is meeting federally mandated annual yearly progress.

   This author's experiences find that educational programs seem to generate themselves as quickly as they are discarded for a new and improved method. This theme of "flavor of the month" programs has educators frustrated. This frustration may lead to lack of effort on their part in implementing new programs for fear that their time will be wasted when it is thrown out for a new program. School districts are often too quick to implement a new or quick-fix program to cure a current educational problem. This may be done without properly piloting the program and researching its effects. To prevent transition programs from falling into the same educational black hole, research must be conducted in this area to express its effectiveness or demonstrate ineffectiveness in regards to student academic success, and absentee and discipline concerns.

Transition studies aid with investigations into what methods can be used to ease students through grade and building level transitions and help them be as successful as possible. Transition programs are designed to provide students with the tools necessary to make these transitions as stress-free as possible. Studies, such as this, are vital in determining the best methods for helping students be successful in school, and ultimately in life. If research can validate the benefits of transition programs, a template design for such programs may be introduced to every school to help benefit all students.

Transition studies are necessary and may help find ways to help students achieve high levels of success in high school and throughout their lives. There are many things that educators cannot account for or control, such as a child's biology, development, parental support, and etcetera. However, educators can provide structure and activities to help students productively transition into the high school, promoting academic and personal successes. If, in fact, there is a correlation between aiding students with this transition and reducing failure rates, absentee rates, and discipline referrals, then this study will prove to be significant in possibly changing how schools introduce ninth grade students to the high school in the future. Ultimately, this may also help districts meet No Child Left Behind's adequate yearly progress by 2014 by endorsing personal success one student at a time.

Transition programs may vary in style, implementation, and duration, but what they all have in common is promoting student success (Queen, 2002). A transition program aims at answering students' questions, addressing their concerns, and providing them with ample time to experience the new building and help remove the fear of the unknown. Fortunately, each district can customize their own method for meeting the

needs of their students, but it is the hope of this researcher that this study will provide another source of reference for the effectiveness of a transition program in regards to retention, attendance, and discipline.

Definition of Terms

Absentee rate – The total number of complete days of school missed by students. This does not include tardies or early dismissals.

Discipline referral – A formal referral form written to the administration from a staff member as a result of inappropriate behavior by a student.

Retention - A student is retained in his/her current grade resulting from a failure to earn enough academic credits to advance to the next grade level.

Transition – A movement or change from one building, grade, or academic level to another.

Transition program – A program designed to aid a person or persons in transitioning from one academic level to another by offering information, materials, and/or skills necessary to adapt to the change.

Assumptions

1. It is assumed all interviewed participants provided truthful answers to the researcher's questions.
2. All subjects had an equal opportunity to participate in the transition program.

Limitations

The following limitations have been noted in regards to this study:

1. The study is limited to one school district.

2. The type of student who chooses to participate in the program may differ from those who choose not to participate.

3. The researcher is both the director of the transition program and a teacher in the district.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE

Transition Problems and Background Information

As students experience major transitions in their lives, they deal with a flood of different feelings and experiences. This is particularly true as they transition into the secondary school setting. The students encounter physical growth, emotional instability, anxiety, fear, and false security (Letrello & Miles, 2003). With the onset of puberty, school transition also results in negative effects on students' self-esteem (Seidman, Allen, Aber, Mitchell, & Feinman, 1994).

Development from adolescence to adulthood occurs simultaneously in two areas. The first is naturally occurring developmental milestones, including biological and physiological changes that are involuntary. The second is situational changes when moving from one institutional environment to another (Cooney, 2002). These situational changes include transitions from class to class, grade to grade, and school to school. Situational changes can be addressed by providing students with the skills necessary to adapt to these changes.

Hertzog and Morgan (C.J. Hertzog, personal communication, December 2, 2008) completed three studies in Georgia and Florida schools in 1997, involving 35,600 students transitioning from eighth to ninth grade. All 35,600 completed the Harter Self-Perception Inventory. Additionally, 450 high schools were randomly selected to complete a survey on their transition practices. The results from this study were gathered from focus groups that were created from using 3,500 students from the 450 high schools

that were selected. The focus group sessions were conducted in groups of approximately 15 students to create the best opportunity for the students to talk about their feelings. From these focus groups the following areas were identified as areas of concern regarding students' self-perception: physical appearance, job competence, romantic appeal, behavioral conduct, and global self-worth. The study also identified the following areas of concern for students entering ninth grade (in order of greatest concerns to least concerns): bullying, mean teachers (student defined as assigning a large amount of homework), getting lost in the high school, being late to class, finding a boy/girlfriend, amount of homework, tests, graduation requirements, and co-curricular programs.

Queen (2002) explains that students experience approximately five transitions throughout their academic lives: preschool, elementary school, middle school, high school, and college or work. Classified as systemic transitions, these are changes in the various levels of public schools or grade levels. However, students also experience developmental transitions, which include physical, intellectual, social, and emotional changes.

High school students experience a barrage of situational changes as they enter ninth grade. Students are concerned with discontinuity in peer relationships, safety, being bullied, and making new friends (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009). They are expected to move from class to class, experiencing changes in subject matter, instructional materials and methods, teachers, and classmates. All of this transitional discontinuity can have a negative impact on student academic performance. This can be aggravated by high mobility families, which cause frequent school transfers and an increased number of systemic changes or transition from school to school (Rice, 2001).

Three types of discontinuity generally characterize the transition from middle to high school: in educational program, school climate, and social structure. A healthy school climate emphasizes academic achievement, supportive relations, and a serious and orderly environment. School climate is an important factor in student performance. Additionally, school size is associated with high levels of achievement, as well as more positive teacher attitudes and responsibility for student learning (Rice, 2001). Rice (2001) asserts that the ideal high school size is between 600-900 students. School size is a particular concern in urban areas where most students attend high schools with a large student population (Roderick, 2003).

Students receive a great deal of information as they transition into the high school; however, they feel that the most dependable information comes from relatives and siblings (Morgan & Hertzog, 2001). In order, most reliable to least reliable, are the sources students gather information from regarding middle school to high school transition: cousins, other students (bus and friends), current middle school staff, and school visitation or orientation programs (C.J. Hertzog, personal communication, December 2, 2008).

The transition from middle school to high school also creates anxiety over the challenges of a high school building. The change from small group (teams) and individualized instruction (departmentalization), instruction and pace are determined by the individual needs of the students, to whole-class instruction, instruction that is delivered to the entire class at once with little differentiation, is a colossal change resulting in academic struggles for many students (Alspaugh, 1998). This can be particularly traumatic for students with learning disabilities (Letrello & Miles, 2003).

Additionally, the academic bar is raised, and students are faced with copious homework assignments and a more rigorous grading system (Adreon & Stella, 2001). Prior to high school, students list academic achievement as one of the most important concerns; however, after entering high school, time management, social skills, behavior, and staying on task top their list (Smith, Feldwisch & Abell, 2006.) These changes cause many students to experience a decline in grades and attendance after transitioning into this setting (Letrello & Miles, 2003). Furthermore, they may experience fewer friends and have a greater vulnerability to negative peer influences (Queen, 2002).

Academic animosity may lead to larger scale problems in the life of a student. One survey addressed the reasons behind why students drop out of high school. The main reason for dropping out was a basic dislike of schools; 58% of boys and 44% of girls stated this as their response. Second, 46% of boys and 33% of girls offered student failure. Finally, suspensions or discipline troubles were listed by 19% of boys and 13% of girls (Anderson, Jacobs, Schramm, & Splittgerger, 2000, as cited in Queen, 2002). These are all areas that can be addressed by a transition or support program.

According to Rice (2001), academic pressures are a main concern for students transitioning into high school. Standards-based reform is intensifying graduation requirements resulting in more difficult courses and high student stress. If changes in curricula such as this are too sudden, academic student performance declines. The decline is magnified when teachers aggressively push academic requirements onto students. All of this is detrimental to students who are already overwhelmed by the initial transition to the high school level.

Rice (2001) reports that in 1992, the Longitudinal Study of American Youth (LSAY) studied student progress across the transition from middle to high school in regards to science and mathematics education. Achievement in both subject areas increased, showing that academic push leading to lower achievement is counterintuitive. School safety and the academic environment were found to magnify the negative impact of the transitions on student performance in math and science. An increase in student autonomy in course selection does have a negative effect on student academic progress, particularly in science, which may be attributed to lack of quality guidance (Rice, 2001).

Facilitation of successful systemic transitions includes more comprehensive efforts to help students adjust and thrive in a new environment, greater parent involvement to help students cope with changes, and the creation of a sense of community and belonging within the new building. Parent support is essential in buffering the negative impact transitions may have on students. Additionally, parent and student involvement in non-school activities has a positive effect on academic progress, particularly in mathematics (Rice, 2001).

Queen (2002) affirms that four basic types of students are identifiable in regards to student transitions. Type I students experience congruent worlds and transitions smoothly. Many are white, upper middle class, high achievers with academic pressure and stress. Type II students experience different worlds, but manage to "cross over" successfully. They include high achieving minority students, who may fear speaking up in class and isolate themselves. Type III students have great difficulty crossing buildings. They may do well in some classes, but poorly in others. Their primary concern is not being able to understand the content, causing worry and frustration. Finally, Type IV

students resist the change from building levels and are generally low achieving. Some high achieving students may be defined in this group if they lack familial and peer connections. These students are at risk for dropping out and often give up on themselves. Transition programs may help each type of student ease into the transition, breaking down perceived barriers.

Transition studies date back several decades. Initial studies began in the 1960s with a focus on work/study programs. Then, in the 1970s, transition studies carried into career education. In the 1980s, transition emerged as a field that focused upon student transitions, particularly students entering kindergarten from home (Repetto & Correa, 1996). Education must now carry these ideas into the 21st Century with a broader study and use of such programs.

Transition programs may help ease this change for students entering high school. Students who have difficulty transitioning into high school are at an academic and personal disadvantage; in contrast, those who are successful in ninth grade, are more likely to graduate (Geltner, Law, Forehand & Miles, 2011). Many are willing to agree that strategies to ensure the continuity in students' lives are necessary, yet what is meant by "transition programs" is not as clear (Kagan & Neuman, 1998). Secondary transition studies are new and relatively limited. Only a few of these studies investigate the effect of transition programs on the learning environment, and even less study the change in motivation (Anderman & Midgley, 1996). This accounts for the limited number of programs implemented today.

Chapman and Sawyer (2001) expound that education must begin to realize elementary, middle, and high schools often become separate islands for children, and at

each level the stakes become higher as students begin to connect success or failure with

life changes. Negotiating these changes alone may seem impossible to children.

Research indicates that three of four students reported that ninth grade was academically

more difficult than other grades, and one of five students reported feelings of isolation as

a result of entering high school. One theory provides grounded information with regards

to the benefits of transition services to meet these needs:

Chapman & Sawyer (2001) stated the following:

> Hirschi's (1969) social bonding theory provides a foundation for
> considering the potential positive effect of a high school transition
> program. Hirschi described a bond as an individual's connection to
> society. This bond is formed by four processes: (1) attachment (a
> student's level of caring about others); (2) commitment (the degree
> to which a student is cognitively invested in prosocial activities);
> (3) involvement (the amount of time a student spends in prosocial
> activities); (4) belief (the sense that students care that their
> behavior should be morally right). The theory posits that the
> stronger each of these elements is the stronger the others are, thus
> creating a firm connection between individuals and society. For
> adolescents, the hope is that connections exist with major
> socializing aspects of the culture: school, parents, and prosocial
> peers. (p. 236)

According to Queen (2002), transitions may also cause behavior problems for

students. As stated earlier, unsuccessful transitions may lead to poor academic success.

Unsuccessful students are more likely to be discipline problems and commit violent acts.

Violence is more prevalent when students feel they are not being taught what they want

to learn, which may lead to poor academic marks. This failure may lead students to feel

that they have no control over their lives. Research shows that students with poor grades

are three times more likely to threaten someone with a gun or knife and four times more

likely to threaten a teacher.

Queen (2002) continues to affirm that bullying is a growing epidemic in our public schools. Bullying has also been associated with poor transitions. Fifteen percent of students are involved in bully-victim incidences, and bullies may regularly harass one in ten students. Twenty-three percent of America's public school students state they have been victims of an act of violence either within the school or around the school. Twenty-two percent of students are "somewhat worried" about being hurt by someone else in or around the school. Twelve percent of teachers have also stated that student misbehavior interferes with their ability to teach the class as a whole. Concerns with female bullying are of greater concern in current studies. Females use relational or social aggression while boys tend to bully with their fists. Female students worry about being bullied more than male students; males are more concerned with peers, authority, and academics (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009). Bullying can be identified as early as third and fourth grade and may worsen with each additional transition. School climate can contribute to school violence or prevent it from occurring; the school plays a critical role in the environment that is created. Transition programs may help address this growing concern by teaching peer mediation and peer communication methods to students (Queen, 2002).

Queen (2002) explains that Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs states that human beings are motivated to satisfy their needs of relevant prepotency. These basic needs are: 1. physiological, 2. safety, 3. love, 4. self-esteem. Each need emerges as more important when the others are being satisfied. Safety is the number two need, and bullying threatens a student's safety and may trigger an emergency response. This response may be in the form of violent behaviors or lashing out. Therefore, any successful transition

program must ensure that students perceive the school to be a safe environment, safe from bullying or violence in any form.

Rice (2001) states, parental involvement also plays a key role in many of the problems students face during their adolescence years and academic transitions. When parents are involved in their students' lives, students have higher achievement and are socially adjusted. Additionally, if parents are involved in the young adolescent transition in their children's lives, they tend to remain involved through the middle school to high school transitions as well. This leads to higher academic levels and fewer behavioral problems, as rejected children are found to be more aggressive and academically despondent.

High school dropout rates have been increasing since the 1970s (Smith, 1997). This causes great concern for schools and for society. Research shows that 20% of students drop out of high school and 50% of those are located in inner cities (Magazinger & Rodham-Clinton, 1992). Additionally, students with behavior problems are at an increased risk of dropping out (Andrews & Dishion, 1995). These dropouts make up more than one-third of our work force (Magazinger & Rodham-Clinton, 1992).

Transition programs may be one answer to the problem of student dropouts. Studies continue to investigate the relationship between the number of school transitions and dropout rates (Alspaugh, 1998); however, dropout rates were significantly lower in schools that implement a detailed transition program (Smith, Feldwisch & Abell, 2006). Students attending a grade 6 to grade 8 grade middle school experience greater achievement loss in transition to the high school than do students transitioning from a K-8 building (Alspaugh, 1998). This may result from the double transition into sixth grade

and again in ninth grade (Alspaugh, 1998). Also, students in larger eighth grade classes had an increased likelihood of dropping out due to feeling lost in the crowd (Smith, 1997). Transition programs have proven to help reduce these dropouts. Continued research should continue to investigate if transition programs are the answer to lowering student dropout rates but, so far, transition programs look like promising tools for promoting the success of students.

Transitions programs prove to be beneficial for adjudicated youth. One study reported that juveniles who participated in vocational transition programs were less likely to recidivate than those who refused such services (Black, Brush, Grow, Hawes, Henry, & Hinkle, 1996). These programs may be used in many life-changing situations, in addition to those in academic settings.

<center>Retention and Dropout Concerns</center>

Student grade retentions and dropouts are areas of great concern in regards to student success, particularly in reference to students' transitions from middle school to high school as this is a time of great changes. Lack of engagement as a high school freshman may lead to increased risk of mental health issues, under performance, and dropping out (Blanch, 2007). Additionally, more students fail ninth grade than any other academic grade (C.J. Hertzog, personal communication, December 2, 2008). Therefore, student transitions, and ninth grade in particular, are very important for long-term student success. Effective transition programs can help promote such success.

According to C. J. Hertzog (personal communication, December 2, 2008), 29 states, including the District of Columbia, consider ninth grade to be the most problematic, in regards to student retentions, and nationally 35% of all students that drop

out of high school do so during the transition from ninth grade to tenth grade. This could be a result from poor transitioning. Furthermore, for every 100 students enrolled in ninth grade, 89 of those students will remain until their sophomore year, 81 until the junior year, and 75 will remain the senior year, which is approximately 25-30% of freshmen will earn their diploma in the standard four-years. This number is even lower in urban schools. Shockingly, approximately 1 in 4 (25%) students will graduate in Detroit, MI, Cleveland, OH, and Los Angeles, CA.

A study completed by Hertzog and Morgan (C.J. Hertzog, personal communication, December 2, 2008) investigated student dropout rates. In regards to school setting, urban, rural, suburban, there was no significance regarding student dropout rates and block scheduling had no impact either. However, school size did have an impact. Schools with less than 500 students had 8% dropout rates, 500-999 had 15%; 1000-1499 had 28%, 1500-1999 had 23%, and over 2000 had 16%. The larger schools had lower dropout rates because the larger schools create small school climates, which are similar to schools with smaller populations. They also studied how the buildings were set up and determined the following with a .001 significance: K-12 had approximately 0% dropout rates, 6-12 had 11%, 9-12 had 22%, and 10-12 had 15%. The results indicated that the most dropouts occur in the building where the ninth grade is housed. Early intervention for ninth grade students experiencing problems and failures shows promising results in reducing dropout rates (Smith, Feldwisch & Abell, 2006).

Hertzog and Morgan (C.J. Hertzog, personal communication, December 2, 2008) also completed a study of transition practices in Augusta, GA. Transition practices are programs or activities implemented to help students transition from grade to grade and

may include building orientation, student mentors, full-day programs, and various other activities. They examined an experimental group that implemented eight or more transition practices, which exhibited an 11% retention rate and a control group with less than nine transition practices, which 14% of students were retained, with .001 significance. They also found that the number of total transitions impact the dropout rates: 1-8 transitions had a 21% dropout rate and 9-14 had 10%. This may be due to an increase in middle school and high school teachers working together and communicating to create a multitude of transition practices.

The statistical examination of student retention and dropout rates is alarming. If a student is retained once, then there is a 40% chance of that student dropping out, and two retentions increases that percentage to 90% chance of that student dropping out (C.J. Hertzog, personal communication, December 2, 2008). Approximately every nine seconds a student will drop out of high school permanently (Hickman, Bartholomew, Mathwig, and Heinrich, 2008). Dropping out of high school impacts future financial earnings as well. According to Hertzog (C.J. Hertzog, personal communication, December 2, 2008) if a student dropped out of high school in 2005, his/her earnings were $17,229 compared to a high school graduate at $26,933 and college graduate at $52,671. This leads to a substantial difference over time.

Dropping out of high school may occur for many reasons. According to Smith, Akos, Kim, and Wiley (2008), however, the difficulties experienced when transitioning from eighth to ninth grade, may cause these rates to be higher. For example, course failures, suspensions, and expulsions are higher in ninth grade than any other grade, and they may eventually lead to dropping out of school. Programs designed to reduce

normative feelings of anxiety and anticipation may help address the challenges associated with this transition into high school, and ultimately reduce student retentions and/or dropout rates.

McIntosh, Flannery, Sugai, Braun, and Cochrane (2008) also examined dropout rates in the United States and Canada. They determined that in the United States, 10.3% of 16-24 year olds were dropouts in 2004, and 32.4% were between 16-19 years of age. In Canada, 9.8% of 20-24 year olds were dropouts in 2005. Of these Canadian dropouts, 62% were unemployed. This costs the taxpayers billions of dollars in lost revenue, welfare services, crime prevention and prosecution, and unemployment. This economic disadvantage also leads to higher rates of health problems, prison and death row incarcerations, and substance abuse and social assistance programs.

McIntosh, Flannery, Sugai, Braun, and Cochrane (2008) reported that the National Research Council stated that in 1993 the probability of adult public welfare dependency was reduced by 35% for each year of secondary education a student received. They also identified factors leading to students dropping out including academic failure, problem behavior, attendance rates, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, first language, learning disabilities, age, gender, socioeconomic engagement, school mobility, teacher-student relationships, school size, class size, family structure, parental educational support, and stressful life events. All of these areas should be examined prior to tenth grade in hopes of predicting dropout risks and preventing student dropouts.

Academic failure may lead to dropping out of school; however, this failure may go back as far as elementary school. According to Hickman, Bartholomew, Mathwig, and Heinrich (2008), students retained in elementary grades are at a greater risk of

27

academic failure in later grades and are also at risk for dropping out. A 10-year longitudinal study indicated students retained in elementary school earned lower grades, had higher discipline problems, performed below grade level, had lower scores on standardized tests, and dropped out of school more often than students who were never retained. It seems that the academic benefits from retaining a student begin to washout several years later. During the same study of 700 students, the students who graduated from school had an average suspension rate of 1.51 days and students who dropped out of school had an average suspension rate of 6.20 days. Identifying these key indicators early may develop transition programs and reduce student dropout rates.

Many factors influence a student's academic career and his/her risk of dropping out; some are individual factors and others are familial. A child's family is essential to his/her academic success. According to Hickman, Bartholomew, Mathwig, and Heinrich (2008) family mobility is a factor. In families that make multiple transitional moves, the children have greater difficulties adjusting academically, socially, and emotionally to all of the new environments. Family income also plays a role in student graduation rate. In 2003, national graduation rates were 79.19% for students with families whose income exceeded $100,000, 77.06% for those $50,000-$100,000, 74.75% for $20,000-49,999, and 72.49% for less than $20,000. Lastly, they determined that students with older siblings who dropped out of high school have higher dropout rates than students who do not have such siblings.

According to Trainor (2008), schools continue to struggle to meet the needs of children with disabilities, particularly students of color, low socioeconomic backgrounds, and/or from immigrant families that are English Language Learners (ELL) or dominate in

another language other than English. European American students with disabilities have a 62.5% graduation rate, Latina/o students have a 49.2% graduation rate, and African American students have 39.2% graduation rate. Students with high-incidence disabilities are especially at risk for dropping out. For example, 27% of students with learning disabilities left high school prior to graduation, and 53% of students with emotional and behavior disabilities dropped out. African American and American Indian students have higher incidents with emotional and behavior problems; therefore, African American students are 45% more likely and American Indians at 20% more likely to drop out due to their student needs not being met, stigmas associated with their ethnicity, low expectations, and/or other transition issues.

Hickman, Bartholomew, Mathwig, and Heinrich (2008) tracked students from kindergarten through graduation or drop out. They used a random sample of 119 students over four cohorts, randomly sampled 60 graduates and 60 dropouts, 49.2% female and 50.8% male, 77.8% Caucasian American, 15.7% Latina/o, 6.5% Native Americans, and a median family income of $29,500. The differences in grade point averages between the two groups appears to exist as early as first grade in reading, spelling, English, writing and mathematics, and the trend continued through eighth grade in all core subjects. Overall, grade point average differences appeared as early as the first semester of ninth grade and remained significant throughout high school. Differences in absenteeism were indicated as early as kindergarten. Absenteeism in first grade was significantly higher in the dropouts than that of the high school graduates. Dropouts were also more likely to be non-white students, showing no significance with family structure, place of birth, gender, siblings, or free and reduced lunches. Finally, the study showed that the majority of

dropouts were retained at least once during grades five to six, and of the students that were retained and graduated, the retention occurred between grades K-1.

Discipline Problems

According to McIntosh, Flannery, Sugai, Braun, and Cochrane (2008) studies indicate that poor academic performance and behavior problems are strong indicators of high school dropout risk.   These problem behaviors create barriers for graduation due to the disruption of academic time and increased use of suspension and expulsions as discipline methods. Many times, students act out due to feelings of isolation and not fitting in. These problems can be addressed with an appropriate transition program, which may reduce discipline rates and dropout rates. They determined that students with emotional and/or behavioral disorders have been found to be twice as likely to drop out of school and have higher course failures and grade retentions and are less likely to attend secondary school at all. Also, students with behavioral difficulties early on are at greater risk for developing problem behaviors and academic problems. Students who exhibit both emotional and behavior problems are at a greater risk of dropping out than students with a problem in only one of these areas. Less information is known about academic and behavior variables and how they interact during the transition period between eighth and ninth grade. The environmental change that occurs as students enter ninth grade provides an additional threat to the risk of dropping out.

The study completed by McIntosh, Flannery, Sugai, Braun, and Cochrane (2008) included a small school district in the Pacific Northwest during the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years. The K-12 enrollment included 5,542 students of which 2.5% were African American, 2.4% Asian American or Pacific Islander, 83.6% European American,

9.2% Latina/o or Hispanic, and 2.3% Native American or Native Alaskan, and 53% of

the students received free or reduce lunch. The district implemented sustained a School-

Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS), and all students who completed at least a

term of both grade eight and nine in the district participated. They used office discipline

referrals (ODR) to track and analyze student behavior and the Oregon State Assessment

and student grade point averages (GPA) to determine academic performance. Their

results showed that 65% of students did not have academic or behavior problems, 18%

had academic challenges only, 12% had academic and behavior problems, and 5% had

behavior problems only. They also determined that students with lower GPAs had more

ODRs, and students with two or more referrals saw a drop in their GPA from fall to

spring, whereas students with up to one referral had a stable GPA. Finally, they

determined that 35% of students in ninth grade needed additional support in one or both

areas. This study shows the relationship between academics and behavior are powerfully

linked, and waiting to identify these problems may leave students at risk for dropping out

and may be too late. Transition programs used to identify these risk factors and address

them, may ultimately lead to more academic success during high school.

A study conducted by Rodriguez (2007) in Brunswick County Schools examined

discipline concerns, specifically student suspensions. The Brunswick County Schools

issued 2,327 long-term suspensions during the 2005-2006 school year. This number

increased from 1,721 from in 2004-2005 and 2,284 in 2003-2004. The number of short-

term suspensions increased 4% from 289,752 in 2004-2005 to 302,303 in 2005-2006. In

response to these alarming statistics, the school district implemented a ninth grade

academy to help students transition and hopefully reduce the high number of suspensions.

They also implemented a transition program for students entering sixth grade, where students showed low test scores and discipline problems.

According to Johnson-Gross, Lyons, and Griffin (2008) Positive Behavior Support (PBS) identifies areas for problem behaviors in the school setting. They reported that 50% of problem behaviors that result in discipline referrals occur in non-classroom settings, such as hallways, cafeteria, etc. School-wide support promotes a positive climate within the school. This is accomplished by changing the discipline belief of utilizing a punitive approach to more positive approaches that acknowledge appropriate behavior. The hope is that by promoting positive behavior and creating positive incentives, student discipline problems may decrease, and academic success will increase. Few studies have been completed in the area of non-classroom setting problems; however, these are key areas of concern due to a large number of students with minimal adult supervision, unstructured activities, and high social interaction.

Finn, Fish, and Scott (2008) examine student misbehavior and the impact on student academic achievement. Classroom misbehavior may be identified as cutting class, tardiness, leaving classroom seats, speaking out of turn, disrupting instruction, and failure to follow directions or complete assignments and/or cheating. Misbehavior outside of the classroom may also be truancy, sale or use of illicit substances, bullying, fighting, gang activity, and/or vandalism. Misbehavior is harmful because it interferes with learning, decreases the chances of graduating, and reduces the likelihood of post-secondary education. It also impacts other students in the classroom by interfering with their academic time and learning. It can create an atmosphere of fear or distress by causing stress and distractions to all involved. In a survey of 805 members of the

American Federation of Teachers' Union, 17% reported they lost four or more hours of teaching time per week due to disruptive students, and 19% reported they lost two to three hours per week. If methods are enacted to address this misbehavior and prevent it, student success will only benefit from such changes.

Finn, Fish, and Scott (2008) continue with a study of eighth grade students through high school and examined misbehavior and its impact on academic outcomes. Students who dropped out were contacted and administered a survey instrument. Of the participants, 80% attended public schools, 7.6% attended Catholic schools, and 4.5% attended private schools. They found that male students exhibited more misconduct than female students and students from low-income households (less than $20,000) were more likely to misbehave than students from middle level households ($20,000-$49,999). They did not find notable differences between urban and suburban schools, but did find that student misbehavior was related to academic misbehavior; the more misbehavior a student exhibited the lower the students' grade point average. In the study 54% of all students demonstrated at least one misbehavior, 29.5% demonstrated two or more, and 16% demonstrated three of more. Students who dropped out exhibited all seven misbehaviors more often than the students who graduated. In this study, these misbehaviors were class cutting, disruptive behavior, fighting, getting into trouble, alcohol, marijuana, and/or gang membership. Based on this study, schools should identify policies or current practices that may be promoting such misbehaviors and eliminate them and address positive behavior reinforcement in hopes of encouraging student success.

According to Nichols, Mahadeo, Bryant, and Botvin (2008), problem behaviors, such as drug use, delinquency, and risky sexual behaviors have been increasing during the middle school years. National data shows higher prevalence for drug use among 14-15 year olds versus 12-14 year olds. The differences are: cigarettes 2.4% v. 9.2%, alcohol 4.2% v. 15.1%, and marijuana use 0.9% v. 5.9% for 12-13 year olds v. 14-15 year olds, respectively. It was also determined that anger levels influenced drug use in multiethnic urban youth, but had a small significance with Caucasian students. The study suggests that anger management and anxiety reduction programs may help lower these occurrences in younger students.

When addressing student success, all areas must be considered, including behavior problems and their impact on academic accomplishments. Students who drop out of school tend to experience higher levels of disciplinary problems in school. These problems typically originate at home with poor parental discipline during the first five years of life. Children who tend to exhibit these problems are rejected by their peers and may become detached from school (Hickman, Bartholomew, Mathwig, & Heinrich, 2008). Early identification of problems and implementation of programs to help address and improve these problems may lead to higher graduation rates and student achievement.

<div align="center">Attendance Problems</div>

Absenteeism is directly related to student academic success because of the missed opportunities to learn; it is an inverse relationship for achievement and absenteeism. Students who have a greater number of absences in elementary school, middle school, or high school are more likely to drop out of school prior to graduation (Finn, Fish, & Scott,

<div align="center">34</div>

2008). According to Hickman, Bartholomew, Mathwig, and Heinrich (2008), attendance rates in kindergarten are predictive of attendance in higher levels of education. Dropouts averaged 16 days of absences in kindergarten compared to ten days for students who have graduated. This six-day difference increased the likelihood of dropping out by 30%. Academic self-esteem, poor attendance, and poor grades may eventually lead the child on a pathway to dropping out of school.

Wimmer (2008) explains that School Refusal Behavior (SRB) is a term that refers to all attempts to miss school, students who act out and complain about school, and their absences, which may accumulate to days, weeks, or months. It may also include students who have a phobia of school in some sense. Approximately, 2-5% of students miss school because of anxiety, and when it includes tardiness and other unexcused absences it increases to approximately 28%. School factors that are associated with SRB are problems with other students or staff members, large groups of low-achieving students, large class size, negative interactions, too much emphasis on academic competition, school violence and/or gang activity. School-wide initiatives to remove these barriers and create a safe and caring school environment are keys to reducing school avoidance. Students must feel like they are not alone and that there are places for them to go to feel safe if they feel threatened. Transition programs may help provide this environment or safe zones for kids as they enter school each day.

Redmond and Hops (2008) examine student absenteeism and factors associated with it. Students who exhibited higher rates of absenteeism included students whose parents were divorced or separated, lower socioeconomic backgrounds, first or earlier born children, and students where homes placed relatively low emphasis on out of home

recreation activities. Up to 28% of school-aged children refuse to attend school at one time or another for reasons other than illness or familial conditions, and 1-5% of school refusal lasts more than two weeks and/or is associated with distress, tantrums or aggression. This absenteeism may represent underlying psychiatric conditions.

Redmond and Hops (2008) continue that absenteeism is used by many federal and state legislatures as a measure of public school integrity and effectiveness. Reducing absenteeism is a part of a federal initiative in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and the more recent No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which monitors school absentee rates and holds schools accountable for high level of student absences. Some risk factors for absenteeism to consider are students who are English Language Learners (ELL), students who receive free and reduced lunches, and those receiving a variety of special education services. High levels of absences lead to a cascade of problems such as grade retention, low self-esteem, school dropout, and potentially a lower standard of living.

Redmond and Hops (2008) conducted a study in a mid-sized urban school district in the intermountain West region of the United States. The study examined absentee rates and students with special needs and disorders. The participants were 51.8% Caucasian American, 31.8% Hispanic/Latino, 5.3% Pacific Islander, 4.5% African American, 4.4% Asian American, and 2.2% American Indian/Alaskan Native. Of these students, 58.7% received free and reduced lunch, 37.1% are English Language Learners, and 61.9% lived with both parents. Additionally, 14.4% received special education services, and of those 55% were learning disabled (LD), 16.4% had communication disorders (CD), and 11.85% for emotional disturbances (ED). The results indicated that

LD and ED students had a higher rate of attendance problems, and CD students did not appear to be a sufficient risk for absenteeism. CD students did not perceive themselves as less happy or less well off than their counterparts, even with their mild to severe language impairments.

Social Factors

The social aspect of public school is very important to students and a source of great reward and great anxiety for some students. For adolescents, high school brings with it new status, freedoms, and challenges. It also brings with it a threat of social exclusion, which results in emotional distress (Newman, Newman, Griffen, O'Connor, & Spas, 2007). When students feel bad about themselves, they are often ignored or asked to leave high school, instead of being celebrated and supported (Knestling, 2008). Without this emotional and physical support during times of stress, adolescents will internalize (depression) and externalize (substance-abuse) these issues. Students who are able to retain or increase their sense of belonging and support from others will show better mental health and exhibit fewer risky behaviors (Newman, et al, 2007)

According to Peterson-Nelson, Caldarella, Young, and Webb (2008) social competence, or the ability to interact successfully with others, is paramount to school success and academic achievement. Students with Emotional and/or Behavior Disorders (EBD) have difficulty forming and maintaining relationships with peers, but also with teachers. They may misinterpret social situations and have difficulty with problem-solving skills. The socially withdrawn student rarely enjoys positive relationships and if untreated can become serious. Educators have become more aware of these problems with highly publicized acts of violence at schools nation-wide. These withdrawn students

are often called internalizers and are filled with anxiety, depression, are quiet, and feel invisible. This can affect academic performance, physical health, employment opportunities, and psychological adjustment. Schools must pay attention to such problems students face and address them before students hurt themselves or others physically or do academic damage that may become irreparable.

Knestling (2008) conducted a study at Washington High School, which is a medium-sized, comprehensive high school grades 9-12. A purposive sample was utilized including 17 students, 10 males and 7 females, 13 Caucasian American and 4 African American, 1 freshman, 6 sophomores, 3 juniors, and 7 seniors. Eight of the 17 were retained in elementary or middle school. In the study, teachers stated they thought the graduation rate over the past five years had been maintained; however, the truth was the rates dropped from 88% to 71.5%. The study revealed that the students appeared to be more familiar with the dropout rates than the teachers or administration. It also revealed that the students' behaviors changed when they felt as if they were a part of the school community; as they became important and valued members of the schools' network, they become more invested in the school. These results can help the school create programs and services to help create feelings of ownership for students and develop team building among the student body.

Newman, Newman, Griffen, O'Connor, and Spas (2007) examined the relationship between sources of support and student success. In year one, a sample 205 eighth grade and ninth grade students from a high-income, predominantly white, community in southern Rhode Island were surveyed. Two middle schools contributed 53 and 51 participants, respectively and 122 females and 83 males. In year two, 60 students

from the eighth grade cohort of year one were surveyed again when they were in ninth grade. A new cohort of 129 eighth grade students was added to the sample. Peer support and family support were assessed using the Perceived Social Support (PSS) measure, which is designed to measure the extent an individual perceives that his/her need for support, information, and feedback are fulfilled by friends and family. The results showed that students who perceived a greater sense of school belonging, friendship, and parent support also had higher grades in school. The results also confirm the transition to high school is accompanied by a decline in school belonging and higher levels of depression. Peers, parents, and school all play key roles in creating a sense of well-being during transition in life and in school. This information can be used to create and implement programs to help facilitate this sense of belonging for all students, particularly those at transition periods.

<div align="center">Students with Learning Disabilities</div>

Transition programs are created to help all students; however, one subgroup of students identified as needing such services is youth with disabilities. Disabilities are difficult to define, as it is a compilation of environmental issues; but it typically refers to the limitations in functioning as a result of a physical or mental impairment. An individual who is limited in one environment may not be limited when components of that environment are adapted (Wittenburg, Golden, & Fishman, 2002). Transitions are more challenging for students with special needs (Fraiser, 2007).

Transition programs focusing on students with disabilities are created to help students successfully negotiate the evolution from school to work and community life. These programs require effective, innovative, and continuing partnerships with a variety

of stakeholders to ensure collaborative transition efforts are obtained (Benz & Lindstrom, 1999). Transition teams consisting of school and adult service professionals, parents, and disabled youths must determine a comprehensive plan so graduating students can receive and access the support services they will need to engage in a purposeful adult life (Cooney, 2002).

Wittenburg, Golden, and Fishman (2002) asseverate that public policy began to change in the 1970s and 1980s for students with learning disabilities by focusing on integration of disabled students into regular classrooms and developing an Individual Education Plan (IEP) to assist students through high school. IEP's are created for students with special needs ranging from learning to health disabilities. The IEP states specific services and/or adaptations that must be implemented to ensure the student is receiving the best education possible. In most cases, these services can be provided within the basic school environment. However, most recent changes in these policies that focus on integration of disabled students introduced more accountability for transition outcomes, particularly related to employment. This transition component outlines roles for participants and provides coordinated activities supporting the individual's movement from youth to adult living, education, and employment. These changes were concurrent with policy changes in The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which focuses on integration of learning disabled persons into the mainstream. To date, one main concern remains and that is the lack of a uniform system to serve this diverse population (Wittenburg et al., 2002).

Students with learning disabilities may be at a higher risk than the average student due to the plethora of life problems they deal with every day. These students experience

the same changes and challenges as regular education students, but they must also cope with the stigma and social ridicule that is assigned to them by their high school peers. Comprehensive transition programs provide these students with tools to deal with these challenges. Dowdy, Carter, and Smith (1990) describe a study that reveals that learning-disabled students are not receiving the transition services they need to be successful in secondary and post-secondary schools. The students stated that they need additional instruction in career exploration, job seeking, and independent living skills. However, the most profound fact that developed from this study is that special education and vocational rehabilitation professionals are not significantly influencing the lives of the students. Schools must be more effective in offering transition programming if students with learning disabilities are to maximize their chances for post secondary success.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, also known as IDEIA – Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act) mandates that all states must provide free and appropriate public education to students with disabilities. According to Wittenburg, Golden, and Fishman (2002), The National Longitudinal Transition Survey (NLTS), from the early 1990s, states that the majority of special education students are males (69%) and in comparison to nondisabled youth, they are disproportionate from non-white families (35%). The largest impairment categories include: learning disabled (56%), mental retardation (24%), emotionally disturbed (11%), and speech impairments (3%).

In 1997, amendments were made to The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to emphasize that the purpose for a free and appropriate education was to help prepare students for independent living or post-high school schooling or

41

employment (Benz & Lindstrom, 1999). This amendment also emphasizes that transition planning must begin at age 15, or earlier if it is appropriate for the student through course preparation (Wittenburg et al., 2002). The need to help learning disabled students transition into post-secondary life is validated with statistics showing the difficulties such students face as compared to their non-learning disabled peers. Benz and Lindstrom (1999) report that studies show that students with learning disabilities are more likely to drop out of school, become unemployed or underemployed, be disengaged in work or continuing education activities, and get into legal trouble. Over the past ten years, 30% of learning disabled youth graduated high school, and within the first year of leaving school, they remained far behind the general population with regard to rates of competitive employment (46% vs. 67%, respectively), participation in post secondary education (27% vs. 68%, respectively), and residential independence (37% vs. 60%, respectively).

Transition programs have been implemented to ensure that students with disabilities advance smoothly from school to adulthood (Cooney, 2002). According to Wittenburg, Golden, and Fishman (2002), statistics show that 51% of students with disabilities exiting school during the 1994-1995 school year reportedly required alternative education services to complete their basic education requisites. Additionally, 80% required further case management to attain employment, continuing education, and/or achieve independent living goals (Benz & Lindstrom, 1999). The exact combination of programs a child should participate in depends upon the individual needs of the student, his/her family, the family's socioeconomic resources and eligibility requirements.

Public education facilities must address the needs of all of their students, including those with learning disabilities. Over 90% of learning disabled students attend public secondary schools rather than "special schools" that only serve youth with severe disabilities (Wittenburg et al., 2002). Inclusion and mainstreaming is a key element to public schools and providing the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) or providing the student with disabilities with the greatest amount of time in a regular classroom setting with his/her peers without disabilities. Student participation in inclusive school activities improves the likelihood of making successful post-secondary transitions (Cook & Rumrill, 2000). However, during the transition to post-high school life, the universal support structure disappears. Some students will continue to receive streamlined services from other agencies, but most will not have access to such a system. However, many of these non-school programs have eligibility requirements that change with age, thus complicating the transition process (Wittenburg et al., 2002).

According to Wittenburg, Golden, and Fishman (2002), The National Longitudinal Transition Survey (NLTS) states that the majority of former special education students participate in competitive employment at some point three to five years following school and many work a full-time job (42.9%). Approximately one-quarter of the students are enrolled in post-secondary education of some sort and more than one-third live independently. Despite moderately high employment and post-secondary rates, there is still the frightening statistic that almost 30% of disabled youth are arrested. Transition programs uniting both school and non-school programs have dramatic implications for disabled students and the school-to-work movement. However,

one of the biggest challenges is consolidating legislation and programs to create a coordinated system of integrated support and programs for students with disabilities.

Students with learning disabilities consist of a broad group of individuals; however, it also includes a subgroup of women in particular. Women with disabilities are unique populations with an inimitable set of barriers they must face. As women transition back to work, they face both social and psychological barriers, which researchers call the "double disadvantage." Unfortunately, women with disabilities are twice as likely to be unemployed as their non-disabled peers (Reed, 1999). With today's changing world, programs must address how to help women with disabilities be successful.

Reed (1999) explains that the number of employed women has increased dramatically from decades past. Today, more than half of all American women, married or unmarried, are working as compared to less than one-third in 1950. In 1992, the Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor reported that 58% of married women with a youngest child under the age of three worked compared to only 26% in 1970. They also estimated that 99% of American women will work outside of the home for pay at some point in their lives. In 1990, 21% of households were headed solely by women as compared to 15% in 1950. Today, women are called upon to provide essential income to both two-parent and single-parent homes. The economic impact of disability on education, employment, and earnings has proven to be far more devastating for women than men. Work transition programs may help alleviate many of these problems women face.

Reed (1999) continues to assert that according to history, women have battled for career positions; this is exacerbated by the struggle of living with disabilities. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 10% of all women ages 16-64 have work-related disabilities, 14% work full-time compared to 52% of women without disabilities and 22% of men with disabilities. Additionally, women with disabilities tend to earn a much lower income than women without disabilities or men with disabilities (Reed, 1999).

Reed (1999) asserts that service providers must begin to address the problems women face as they transition into employment. The impact of discrimination and stereotyping against both women and women with disabilities has a devastating impact on women by limiting their confidence and discouraging their transition efforts. Employers must provide strategies to aide in this transition process and ensure success in the workplace for women with disabilities. This can be done by providing vocational training, mentors, personal adjustment counseling, workplace accommodations, help with obstacles such as transportation and child care, and focus on helping identify strengths and abilities.

Nietupski, McQuillen, Berg, Daugherty, and Hamre-Nietupski (2001) describe The National Longitudinal Transition Study, which examines the vocational differences for students with disabilities in comparison to their non-disabled counterparts. It states that only 23% accessed post-secondary education, compared to 52% for non-disabled students, and dropout rates ranged from 28%-48% versus 25% for non-disabled students. In regards to vocational statistics; 76% of those working with disabilities were in low skills occupations (service/labor), their wages were significantly lower than non-disabled

workers, and nearly 30% of all working people with disabilities earned below poverty level wages.

Nietupski, McQuillen, Berg, Daugherty, and Hamre-Nietupski (2001) describe the High School High Tech (HSHT) program. This program was created in an effort to tackle the issues addressed in the NLTS study. HSHT is a program created to overcome the shortcomings of previously conducted transition efforts and improve the post-school outcomes for students with mild disabilities. This program includes four critical elements; including tours and site visits, job shadowing, internships, and technology camps. The purpose is to promote the transition of students with disabilities into a one, two, or four-year post-secondary high tech training program. The President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities (PCEPD) reports that HSHT has served more than 10,000 students in over 60 sites across the country. Of those students, 75% transitioned to post-secondary schools. This program works in collaboration with business partners and community support.

Roessler and Brown (2000) assert that Career Keys is a comprehensive service delivery program that addresses the transitional needs of children with disabilities. The program focuses on encouraging the transition of high school students with disabilities into community college programs. This is achieved through an outreach seminar offered during their senior year of high school. Through this program, 71% of students with disabilities enrolled in a post-secondary two-year program.

Roessler and Brown (2000) continue to explain that students with disabilities may lack skills to make the transition from post-secondary training to work, but they may also lack the skills required to retain and advance in these positions. Career Keys helps

students develop the self-understanding and skills necessary to take their next vocational or educational steps. Career Keys focuses on three keys: 1. choosing an academic and occupational goal, 2. learning one's strengths and limitations in regards to vocational performance, 3. commitment to further education or job. Implementation of Career Keys results in full career services improving education/vocational outcomes for students with disabilities in a two-year post-secondary setting. Participating helps students with disabilities gain both self-knowledge and the skills needed to develop and implement their appropriate life plans.

Benz and Lindsrom (1999) describe the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program, which helps youth develop vocational skills, obtain employment, and live independently. VR has been a partner in a transition effort since the initiation of the federal transition improvement initiative. VR has provided services for disabled youth for over 50 years. Nationally, the collaboration between schools and VR agencies is not common; mostly the relationship is created by referral only. The most common barriers for this collaboration are inaccurate perceptions of vocational rehabilitation by the school community and ineffective procedures to structure collaboration by schools and VR staff.

Benz and Lindsrom (1999) continue to explain one collaborative school-to-work transition model, which is the Youth Transition Program (YTP). YTP is collaboration between the Oregon VR Division and the Oregon Department of Education. As of 1998, YTP is an ongoing service delivery program in 75% of high schools in Oregon, funded through a combination of school districts and state VR funds. It was created to respond to the need to improve secondary and post-secondary outcomes for students with disabilities. The help YTP provides begins in school and carries through the early

transition years in adult life. YTP students were more likely than non-YTP students to earn higher average hourly wages than other disabled students ($5.69/hr vs. $5.31/hr, respectively), higher weekly wages ($181/week vs. $157.00/week, respectively), and remain in their highest paying positions (70% vs. 56%). YTP youth were also less likely to lose their job due to quitting, being laid off, or being fired (27% vs. 40%, respectively). Finally, positive employment outcomes hold steady for two years after the completion of the program (Benz & Lindstrom, 1999).

<div align="center">African American Students</div>

Urban and low income students are often wrongly and negatively labeled as low achieving, struggling, and disadvantaged. However, Cooper and Liou (2007) identified that there are a large number of urban students at risk of failure, particularly in high-poverty urban schools. They suggest that by eighth grade 40% of the African American and Latina/o youth are in situations that may cause them to be "at risk" for academic failure. However, if students are given the appropriate information, they exhibit the behaviors and skills necessary to overcome obstacles and barriers that many urban students encounter.

Ethnicity is a significant factor in African American achievement and in shaping the behavior of the students. African American students are exposed to subtle and obvious racial stereotyping by other students and teachers. Teachers, counselors, and administrators often convey the belief that they do not expect African American students to perform at the same level as other students or to excel academically. Transitions have a potential to amplify these problems and concerns and lead to academic problems (Holcomb-McCoy, 2011).

Newman, Myers, Newman, Lohman, and Smith (2000) investigated the impact transitions have on minority youth, particularly African Americans. When comparing African American students to white students during middle school to high school transition, African American males liked school less as they got older, their grades dropped, they were more likely to experience behavioral problems, their parents were less likely to approve of their friends, and they experienced increased stress concerning their academic future. African American students attending and graduating from college has greatly increased over the past 50 years; however, they are still only half as likely to complete a four-year college as white students. The National Center for Educational Statistics reported in 1994, of the 12% of the 16-24 year olds that did not complete high school, 8% were Caucasian Americans, 13% were African Americans, and 30% were Latino (Queen, 2002). Transition programs may catch these problems early and counsel students on time management and study skills in hopes of preventing feelings of hopelessness and unfortunate results as stated above.

Newman, Myers, Newman, Lohman, and Smith (2000) continue to explain that African American culture has an impact on academic success. This culture puts a greater influence on neighborhood, family, extended family, and school environment in regards to the child's academic motivation. Particularly the role of the mother has been revealed to have a great impact on academic achievement. However, African Americans are less likely to receive support from other African Americans for academic excellence. Teacher attendance also plays a key role, specifically in the academic success of African American males. Schools that had high teacher attendance rates and small class sizes

proved to keep African American males more academically engaged than schools with the reverse.

Roderick (2003) emphasizes dramatic declines in economic prospects of the non-college bound students have elevated the importance of completing high school and participating in post-secondary education to aid in future successes. Unfortunately, high school years show severe decline in student motivation and academic engagement. A common perception is that African American adolescents, particularly males, are most likely to shun school and form peer groups that will discourage hard work and success.

Roderick (2003) goes on to explain that African American males notoriously have the poorest rate of high school completion. In Chicago, of students that were freshmen in 1992, only 37% of African American males graduated four years later, compared to their female counterparts at a 55% completion rate. This may be linked to marked decline in engagement and performance as they move from elementary to middle school to high school; urban students are at the highest risk. These declines are linked to eventually dropping out of school.

Roderick (2003) states students in urban areas tend to experience marked declines in academics, involvement, and perception of the quality of school environment as they move into high school. In Chicago, attendance rates show eighth grade students attend school regularly, while tenth grade students report an average of 30 days of absence. Additionally, urban freshmen experience academic difficulties; more than 40% of incoming ninth grade students fail a major subject in the first semester, and 20% fail two or more. African American males were approximately 50% more likely to fail a major subject in their first high school semester, compared to female students. Based on

Roderick's study, research concludes that problems faced by urban students must be addressed so that they may be as successful as their rural counterparts.

According to Roderick (2003), transitions for African American males pose a great difficulty for many reasons. One main reason is differences in external supports and skills, disproportionate effects of school environments, coping resources and strategies. African American males have the fewest of these resources, including those necessary to meet new academic and social challenges. They also have fewer familial resources, thus receiving less guidance and support. In particular, they lack a male role model depriving them of crucial levels of support, mainly during adolescence. Overall, as African American males transition to high school, they experience the most dramatic declines in support and quality of relationships and school experiences.

Discipline concerns for African American males are a key issue. Due to fewer positive coping resources, many are likely to adopt negative coping skills such as avoidance and withdrawal leading to long-term problems. They may also be disproportionately affected by the increased emphasis on discipline that occurs in larger schools; therefore, having the greatest incidence of suspensions and probations after the transition to middle school (Roderick, 2003).

Roderick (2003) reports on a study that was conducted in Chicago at South Side High School, which serves a population of 100% African American students. South Side High School is an average achieving urban school with more than 700 students in the ninth grade class. The study followed students from eighth grade through tenth grade. The results showed that both male and female students experienced a dramatic decline in their performance during their first semester in the high school, with boys showing a

significantly larger decline in grades. However, differences in attendance rates were not as severe by gender. Conversely, class attendance rates plummeted between eighth and ninth grade. In regards to discipline, ninth grade teachers reported more negative behavior than eighth grade teachers reported for both genders.

Roderick's (2003) academic results showed that in eighth grade, only two students, one male and one female, failed a course. However, in the first quarter of ninth grade, 60% of male students failed one or more courses versus 41% of females. By the end of ninth grade, 80% of males had failed one or more courses, and more than 25% were failing virtually all of their courses or had dropped out. For female students, 41% were failing a course, and only 12% were having serious academic problems. After 90 days in the high school, many of the males were already at risk for not advancing grade levels. By their senior year, 60% of the males and 20% of the females had dropped out of school. The transition to high school proved to be far more devastating for the males in this study.

Roderick (2003) goes on to state that it is vital that high schools develop effective transition programs to give African American males the maximum opportunity to be successful. By establishing high expectations, quality teaching, and structured and personalized approaches, schools can promote high achievement and engagement for all students. Schools must make a systematic attempt to personalize assistance and allow teachers to develop communities to meet the needs of their students. They must also focus on reducing the size of all high schools, particularly urban schools. This reform should be a top priority in bridging the racial achievement gap.

Other Transition Programs

Lindsay (1998) describes a transition program that was created at Worthington Kilbourne High School in Ohio. This program was founded on the idea that all learners are capable of success based upon how welcome they feel in the learning environment of the school. Their transition program begins 12 months before students arrive. The students attend a discussion called *Conversations with the Principal,* where the administrator listens to concerns of the students and their parents and addresses methods for easing this transition process. The students also attend visitation days at the high school during their eighth grade school year. This allows them to talk to upperclassmen and experience high school life. Finally, the students meet with the staff for informal orientation the day before school starts. This provides answers to remaining questions, familiarity with the campus and the staff, and experience with school procedures, such as lunch, bell schedules, and much more. This program addresses transitional concerns by listening to the needs of the students and providing the answers to student concerns.

Sullivan (2002) reports that Colenso High School in Napier, New Zealand implemented a transition program called Choices. This program was created to address students who were educationally and socially disengaged. This program included adventure based learning, mentoring, and academic skills development. The Colenso High School philosophy is "*Ehara taku toa e te toa takitahi engari e te toa takitini"* or "my strength is not mine alone, it is the strength from those around me." In hopes of achieving this philosophy, the goals of the programs are to identify at-risk students, develop individual skills, provide ongoing school support, create a stable learning environment, and provide academic, behavior, and people skills. This program was a

major success as it resulted in the prevention from failure for 100% of the at-risk students that participated.

Hernandez Sheets, Izard-Baldwin, and Atterberry (1997) explain the Bridge program, which is offered at Ingraham High School in Seattle, Washington. This program was created in 1991 because 22% of the freshmen withdrew within the first few weeks of school. All ninth grade students are enrolled and participate in regular meetings to encourage communication, self awareness, study skills, goal and career setting, and address wealth and family concerns. As a result of this program, the Bridge ninth grade students had 70.7% of their grades at or above a C, while previous ninth grade students had a 68.5% above a C. As tenth grade students, Bridge students averaged 75.8% above a C, while non-Bridge tenth grade students averaged 68.0% above a C. Finally, Bridge ninth grade students were disciplined 24% compared to the 34% for non-Bridge students.

Gideon (2004) explains a Ninth Grade Center that was implemented by Crockett High School in Austin, Texas. This program was created to address the retention problems with ninth grade students. In 1996-1997, 42% of ninth grade students were retained; in 1998-1999 it was reduced to 11% and 5% in 2000-2001. The improvement in retention rates was credited to the Ninth Grade Center preventing students from "falling through the cracks." This was achieved through a four-day transition camp offered in August prior to the ninth grade year. The program offered academic teaming, teen leadership, open admission for athletes and fine arts, a ropes course, fabulous teen awards, and parental involvement. This is another example of an effective transition program benefiting the student participants.

Lampert (2005) explicates the Freshman Advisory Program at Maine East High School in Chicago, Illinois. This program provided mentors to students to help deliver structured academic and social guidance throughout the ninth grade year. The advisory sessions replaced freshman study hall and used a curriculum that was based upon attachment, achievement, and awareness. Attachment refers to connections students feel with one another and the school, achievement for academic success, and awareness of oneself and healthy life decisions. This program showed signs of success when the retention rates dropped from 37% (02-03) to 23% (04-05). Additionally, participation in after school activities increased from 72% (02-03) to 78% (04-05).

Mahruf, Shohel, and Howes (2007) address transition issues in Bangladesh, where non-formal primary schools play an important role in the education of students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The schools are run by non-governmental agencies and provide a relevant, yet free, basic education to millions of children. The non-formal primary school environment is much different than that of a formal primary or secondary school. The key differences are the relaxed attitude and environment of non-formal schools; specifically the interactions between students, teachers, and non-governmental organizations coworkers are friendly and casual in nature. However, one major problem has surfaced and that is that children attending non-formal schools tend to struggle to make the successful transition to and from high school.

Research was conducted by Mahruf, Shohel, and Howes (2007) in two geographical sites, Bogra and Norshingdi, which represent different socio-economic backgrounds. The transition between school systems is understood as potentially critical life events in child development, but also in institutional terms, as well. In nonformal

55

schools, the links between home, school, and street are varied; all operate on different levels in the mind of the child who experiences them. The children stated that there is a lesser connection between these elements in the formal schools. Young people's transitions between these two contexts will continue to be studied and policy and practice will be generated to ease this transition ensuring student success.

Seyfer and Truss (2001) implemented The Whitefish Bay Transition Project, which was based upon the following study. Eighth grade students and teachers were given a survey, and the results were used to identify areas of concern and perceptions between middle school and high school buildings. The problems that were identified were rumors of hazing, access to drugs and alcohol, fear of temptation, and fear of homework and testing policies. Based on this information, the essential transition areas were identified as leadership, communication, articulation, and response. Leadership developed ongoing dialog between the middle schools and high schools. Communication improved with combined staff development programs. Articulation incorporated teachers informing next year teachers of students' expectations, blended curricula, attendance charts, analysis of standardized test results, interventions, and nominations for special service. A response system addressed hazing, referrals to the homework center, and monitoring program. By the end of the year, the focus was no longer on the environmental barriers that students faced, and the middle and high school faculties no longer existed as separate entities and worked to promote successful transitions.

Cooper and Liou (2007) completed a study at Valley High School in the greater Los Angeles, California area. Data were collected on eighth grade students prior to the ninth grade school. The participants were involved in the 2004 High School Summer

Bridge Program, which was a three-day residential program to expose students to people, information, and experiences to help ease the transition. One-hundred and forty-one students submitted applications to participate, but only 119 completed the full application process. The participants were 98% Latina/o, 61% female and 65% bilingual in English and Spanish; less than 8% were born outside of the United States, and 96% were from homes where parents or guardians had a high school education or less. However, 98% had a goal to attend college, but 84% spent less than one hour per week studying outside of class. The data revealed students have limited contact with their guidance counselors, but 90% felt their counselor hoped they would be successful in college; however, only 28% reported that going to college was important to their counselors. Based upon this study, for effective transitions and academic success in post-secondary high school, counselors must increase their expectations and develop multicultural competency.

Smith, Akos, Kim, and Wiley (2008) conducted a study at a large public school district in Midwest, United States. Two groups transitioned from two middle schools (6-8 grades) to a ninth grade academy. One-hundred and seventy-two students participated in the survey and 46% were female and 54% male. Additionally, 55% were African American, 29% Caucasian American, 7% Hispanic, 7% multicultural and less and 1% Asian American, 33% received free or reduced lunches, and 119 of the 172 completed the post-transition survey. The survey measured feelings about social, academic, and organization aspects of high school, using a 4-point Likert scale. Prior to ninth grade, students were concerned about course difficulty and getting lost, but looked forward to the new freedoms. Concerns over participating in activities were identified as freshmen do not normally get selected for starting positions, such as first flute, student council, etc.

causing some students to underestimate their potential. It was determined that schools need to determine how and when the school disseminate information to students and parents prior to transitioning to the high school. Parents that monitor activities and are involved in their students' academic life contribute to a more successful and smoother transition into the high school.

Creating a Transition Program

The need for transition programs stems from years of research by educators into the troubles students experience when in moving from building to building; however, concerns have also risen from parents and staff over the years. Common themes as students enter high school are lack of academic preparedness, indifference toward homework, lack of study skills, and lack of parental involvement (Hertzog, 1998). Middle school and high school teachers tend to blame each other for these problems (Queen, 2002). Transition teams are created to help students develop academically and prepare themselves for the expectations of the high school curricula (Hertzog, 1998).

Queen elucidates that the creation of a transition program requires the input of all constituents; combined thoughts and efforts are compiled in creating a program that best addresses a specific school's problems or concerns. The planning portion of creating such programs is critical. A committee must be created to address the concerns from both the middle school and high school levels. It must also include parents and students from both schools. This group must prioritize concerns and identify the resources available for development and implementation of strategies to address the concerns. The committee must also address a timeline for implementation, financial resources, and evaluation and revision of the program once implementation has occurred (Queen, 2002).

The combined efforts of this group of individuals will guarantee the creation of a program to address district concerns, but also ensure the necessary financial and community support for annual renewal of the program.

Queen (2002) continues to assert many general ideas that can be used universally to ensure a proper program is being created. These may include: Parents' Night activities to discuss curriculum, expectations, and responsibilities; high school orientation for students to become familiar with the building layout; visitation day or teacher swap day; pen pals (MS to HS); creation of a freshman pamphlet or booklet with commonly asked questions and answers; and creation of a transition team to facilitate and maintain transition activities. Inclusion of these key components in a transition program will help create a service that best meets the needs of the students, staff and parents.

Morgan and Hertzog (2001) also support the need for the inclusion of all constituents when creating a transition program. They state that the need for teachers, parents, students, and administrators' involvement is critical. This provides well-rounded input, but also eliminates the middle and high school faculties from blaming each other for instructional downfalls. When utilized, the transition program should be maintained throughout the ninth grade year and be evaluated for effectiveness. Each year, the team should analyze the data and determine any changes for the next year's incoming class.

Creation of a transition program is only a part of the solution for promoting student success. Chapman and Sawyer (2001) affirm that adequately implementing the program is the second key factor. Proper implementation will ensure that all members of the organization believe in the program and support its efforts. If parents and students perceive the Middle School as supportive, the transition program must make this a

primary goal for the transition process. Creating trust between the parents and the building personnel will provide students with comfort and create a supportive network for the program to be successful. For transition programs to accomplish their goals, it is no longer appropriate to think of the middle school and high school as separate places or separate experiences (Duke, 1999). The transition program must focus upon creating a fluent movement from one grade level to another and remove the fear of building changes and focus on continuum of the programs offered.

Transition programs offer students immediate gratification with answers to questions, familiarity, experience within the new building, and many other instant responses to student concerns. However, the students' need for information does not cease at the beginning of the school year. Proper programs must ensure continued support for students throughout the ninth grade year and an avenue for students to seek out and receive additional support or services (Mizelle, 2005). A program that provides summer support only is not a complete program for benefiting student needs.

Programs can also be created to help ease the transition from high school to work or non-academic post-secondary life. According to Charner, Fraser, Hubbard, Rogers, & Home (1995), there are ten key elements to a successful school-to-work transition program. They include: administrative leadership; commitment to the program; cross-sector collaboration; fostering self-determination in all students; school based learning; work based learning; integration of career information and guidance; building a progressive system that starts before grade 11; ensuring access to postsecondary options; and creative financing. Transitions do not only occur from one academic building to

another; therefore, schools must also prepare students for the problems and anxiety they may face as they enter the work force as a high school graduate.

Monforton and Morton (1995) state that not all transition programs provide the same benefits to all students. One study revealed that after students participated in a transition program for one year, no attitudinal benefits were noted. In fact, the students' attitudes deteriorated over the course of year. Also, both males and females showed negative responses at the end of the year for motivation, sense of control over performance, and mastery of content. The general decline in attitude suggests a strong developmental problem that is generating a negative attitude regardless of the transitional services offered to the students. This study suggests that transition programs cannot be considered the amazing cure to the problem of transition, and many other factors may affect the outcome of such programs.

As research continues to investigate the soundness of transition programs and their impact on student successes, more answers will be provided into this relatively new field of study. However, until more research, case studies, and analysis are completed, a definitive answer cannot be provided as to whether transition programs benefit, harm, or have neutral impact on students.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study involved the effects of student perceptions of a transition program the summer before ninth grade. To investigate this issue, interviews were conducted to analyze student experiences and perspectives of the transition program, recognize student identified successes and failures in attendance, discipline, and retention, and the impact on relationships and social experiences. Students were selected from a purposive sample utilizing a non-probability sampling technique, which is explained in greater detail in Method of Sampling section of this paper.

Population

The population for this study was approximately 350 ninth grade students at a small suburban public high school, grades 9-12, in south-central Pennsylvania. The population of the school district was approximately 3700, and participation in the transition program was voluntary.

The school district is made up of five local municipalities. According to the United States Census Bureau (2002), the demographics of the district's community consist of 14,888 persons; 14,472 are white/Caucasian and 416 are non-white. The households consist of 4,264 family households and 1,502 non-family or single households. Educationally, 79.2% of the community have a high school diploma or higher and 11.9% have a Bachelor's Degree or higher. In regards to the main language spoken in the community, 13,649 speak English, and 1,239 speak a language other than English. The employment rate shows that 11,557 persons over 16 are employed;

however, 4.6% of the families are below the poverty level, and 6.1% of the individuals are below the poverty level.

Method of Sampling

The method of sampling for this study was a purposive sample, which is a non-probability sampling technique. This study focused on maximum variation sampling or heterogeneous sampling, which allowed for a wide-range of perspectives to be represented. Four males and four females were selected to participate in the open-ended interviews; they represented a cross-section of the population that participated in the transition program. These students will represent all grade levels (9-12).

The students participated in a transition program that was created based upon the research and implementation of a similar program at another Pennsylvania public school. The program utilized in this study was conducted over a two-day period in August before their ninth grade year. During the spring of their eighth grade year, students attended an assembly in the high school auditorium showing a video promoting the transition program. This video showed the students clips from previous programs including information on activities from both days and student interviews. Students were also provided with brochures on the program, and registration forms were sent home with the school's monthly parent mailing. Based upon this information, the students and parents decided to participate or not participate in the program.

The first day of the program was held on the high school campus. In the morning, students rotated through seven 20-minute lessons taught by their future teachers, counselors, and administrators. Each of the lessons focused on topics that have been identified as areas of concern by middle school students, such as: high school rules

63

and schedule, dating, esteem, conflict resolution, multicultural sensitivity, bullying, online bullying, and available activities at the high school. The students rotated through all seven seminars, staying within their group all morning. The afternoon of day one, students were regrouped and rotated through beginner to moderate-level adventure-based education initiatives. Beginner-level adventure-based activities involve very little challenge or fear. They included tossing balls or objects from person to person or moving across flat marks on a floor. They involved problem-solving and communication, but did not involve a risk of injury. Moderate-level adventure-based activities involve a greater chance for fear and injury than beginner level. For example, participants had to get their team through holes in a rope spider web or scale a horizontal telephone pole a few feet off the ground. These still involved problem-solving and communication, but also involved a small risk of injury. This prepared the students for day two.

On day two, students were bused to an off-campus ropes course. Students were regrouped once more, and they spent one-half of the day on moderate to advanced-level adventure-based initiatives such as low ropes and cable challenges. The cable challenges involved scaling metal cables several feet off the ground without belay or other rope security measures or getting the entire group over an eight-feet tall wall without the aid of ladders or ropes. These challenges involved a higher risk of injury and fear. The other half of the day the groups completed advanced-level initiatives on a 55-feet Alpine tower, including climbing the tower, crossing a rope bridge 50 feet in the air, scaling high rope or cables 50 feet in the air, and zip line. All of these initiatives involved security

measures such as harnesses, belaying, helmets, and carabineers; however, the fear factor greatly increases with the height of these activities.

Both days, at the completion of each initiative, a trained staff member debriefed the group of students. This allowed the group to analyze their activity and reassess what they should improve upon for the next problem they encountered.

The program was voluntary and students who participated included a higher number of motivated and success-oriented students; however, the program sought out students who needed the program more or would have benefited more from participating and provided financial assistance to families that were unable to pay for the program. This was done by teacher referrals, guidance counselor recommendations, and administrative involvement.

The purpose of this study was to determine students' perceptions about their participation in the transition program the summer before their ninth grade year. The students attended ninth grade during the 2004 – 2005 through 2007 – 2008 school years in a suburban high school in south-central Pennsylvania.

All participants were offered detailed information on the program and its benefits. They were also offered the opportunity to participate in the transition program. The program's inaugural year was the summer before the 2003 – 2004 school year.

<div align="center">Qualitative Methodology and Analysis</div>

To help find the answer to the questions posed in this study, a qualitative approach was utilized. Patton (1990) states, "Qualitative methods are useful for capturing differences among people and programs" (p. 104). He continues to explain that

a qualitative approach is appropriate for "individualized outcomes for unique case studies of people and programs" (p. 104).

A Systems Perspective: Background

Qualitative methods are research methods that are used to determine what people do, know, think and feel. It is often accomplished by interviews, observing, and analyzing data. It is not an appropriate method for every program; however, it is beneficial for process studies and evaluations to determine how something happens rather than the results. For example, programs and interventions would profit from this type of analysis. Qualitative methods also benefit when evaluating individualized outcomes, such as delivery of educational or human services that are concerned with the individualization of such programs (Patton, 1990).

Patton (1990) explains that a systems study will ask how a system functions as it does and also why the system as a whole functions in that way. Due to the problem that the term *systems* has a vast variety of definitions, it is necessary to attend to three main points. The first is that a systems perspective is important when dealing with and understanding real world complexities, particularly seeing whole entities as embedded in context with still a larger whole. The second is that some approaches will depend profoundly on qualitative inquiry. Finally, the third point is that a systems orientation may help in making sense of the qualitative data that is generated.

Patton (1990) continues with a view of holistic thinking as a central part of a systems perspective. "A system is a whole that is both greater than and different from its parts" (p. 79) and these parts are interconnected and interdependent so that any cause and

effect analysis may distort more than it enlightens. Therefore, the changes to one part may lead to changes in another part, and so on.

Patton (1990) explains that synthetic thinking is necessary to explain system behavior. First, the part that is trying to be explained must be considered a part of the larger or containing whole, which will go on to be explained. Finally, understanding the containing whole is disaggregated to explain the parts, which reveals both their roles and functions. This reveals the function rather than the structure of the system, thus revealing why it does or does not work; however, it does not reveal how it works.

<div align="center">A Systems Perspective: Qualitative Applications</div>

Patton (1990) reveals that qualitative methods have many strengths, including a naturalist inquiry strategy of approaching a situation without having predetermined hypotheses present. It allows the theory to emerge from the fieldwork experiences and is rooted in data. In order for this approach to be effective, the field must be approached with an open mind. Phenomenology is a procedure that is recommended for taking into account biases and predispositions that may develop both during the field work and the analysis so that the researcher can get to the true quintessence of the phenomenon that is under study.

Another qualitative application that may be utilized is Hermeneutics, which is a philosophy stated by Patton (1990) as a "study of interpretive understanding or meaning, with special attention to context and original purpose" (p. 84). It is a Greek technique that refers to interpreting legends, stories or other types of texts. This method uses qualitative strategies to determine a context or meaning for what people do.

Case studies are a qualitative approach used to evaluate individualized outcomes or are used in specific cases that puzzle researchers for one reason or another. This method is particularly useful in determining unusual failure or dropout rates (Patton, 1990).

A Systems Perspective: Methodology

For this study, standardized open-ended interviews were utilized. Patton (1990) states, this style is characterized by "the exact wording and sequence of questions are determined in advance. All interviewees are asked the same basic questions in the same order. Questions are worded in a completely open-ended format" (p. 288). The strengths of this format are "respondents answer the same questions, thus increasing comparability of responses; data are complete for each person on the topics addressed in the interview. It reduces interviewer effects and bias when several interviewers are used. Permits evaluation users to see and review the instrumentation used in the evaluation. Facilitates organization and analyzes of the data" (p. 288). Finally, the weaknesses of this method are "little flexibility in relating the interview to particular individuals and circumstances; standardized wording of questions may constrain and limit naturalness and relevance of questions and answers" (p. 288).

Interviewing is used to determine what someone else is thinking, and the open-ended interview used to access perspective of the person being interviewed. It is used to determine things that cannot be directly observed. Researchers cannot observe feelings, thoughts, previous behaviors, or situations that preclude the observer; therefore, interviewing allows the researcher to enter into that person's perspective in regards to these areas. In regards to program evaluation, interviewing allows the evaluator to

capture the perspectives of the participants, staff, and others associated with the program. Interviewing allows the interviewee to bring the interviewer into his/her world for a brief time (Patton, 1990).

According to Maykut & Morehouse (1994), in qualitative research, particularly school or organizational settings, participants are often carefully selected based on the possibility that each participant will increase the variability of the sample. A random sample ensures that the sample accurately represents the entire population from which it was selected. This is the method of sampling used in this study. The researcher will use systematic random sampling to include two students from each year of the study, one male student and one female student; eight students total will be studied utilizing standardized open-ended interviews.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

This study used qualitative research interviews as a method for data collection. This technique conveys a richness and intensity of details in the individual's story that may not be possible by simply studying data or numbers. It creates an opportunity for the subject to open up and truly express their experience and the feelings and emotions as a result of that experience (Nicholls, 2011). This method also describes the central themes in the lives of the participants. It is particularly helpful in understanding the story behind the interviewee's experiences and allows for the pursuit if in-depth information (Valenzuela & Shrivastava, 2008).

Qualitative research interviews provide techniques that are beneficial in obtaining information from the participants. The standardized, open-ended interview asks each participant the same core questions, created by the interviewer. This is done to ensure that core topics and information are covered during the process. However, this method is also more personal than using a questionnaire or survey. Interviewees are allowed to expound upon their answers and the interviewer can interact directly with the participant and ask additional questions to provide deeper clarification and understanding of the participant's experience (Valenzuela & Shrivastava, 2008).

The setting used for the interviews remained consistent for each participant. The interviews were conducted in the same office in the high school providing a constant atmosphere with minimal distractions. It was explained to the participants that their names would be changed in order to protect their privacy. The format of the interview

and the use of recording devices were explained, and each participant was allowed to gain greater clarification, ask questions or express concerns prior to initiating the interview. At the conclusion of the interview, participants were allowed to provide any additional information of interest prior to finalizing the process (Valenzuela & Shrivastava, 2008).

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

For this study, a purposive sample was used, which is a non-probability sampling technique. The participants were chosen based upon the judgment of the researcher. This allowed the researcher to focus on particular characteristics of the population. This particular study focused on maximum variation sampling or heterogeneous sampling, which allows for a wide-range of perspectives to be represented. This method is particularly beneficial when the sample size is small. If the sample size is below 30, random sampling is far too dangerous to use because, even though random, there is a high chance that the sample will not be a representation of the entire group. Maximum variation sampling will allow the researcher to deliberately select persons who represent the population as a whole (List, 2004). This method is also designed to get input from a variety of angles and focus on common themes that may develop (Lund Research, Ltd., 2012).

For this study, eight students were chosen, four males and four females. One male and one female were chosen from each age group, i.e.: one male/one female freshman, sophomore, junior and senior. Additionally, the students were chosen based upon their academic achievement levels, i.e.: special education, honor roll, distinguished honor roll, special needs – Asperger's Syndrome, and average performer.

Participant 1

Karen is a 16 year old, female, Caucasian student in grade 11. She is an honor roll student. Overall, Karen had a very positive experience with the transition program. Her main points of discussion were the benefits of working with other students and meeting the teachers before school.

Interviewer: Did <transition program> help you adjust from middle school to high school? If so, how? If not, why?

Karen: Yes, because I got to meet some of the teachers and just be with other people who I did not know as much from my grade and also the older kids who were helping out.

Interviewer: Did meeting the teachers over the summer help you to adjust to high school? If so, how? If not, why?

Karen: Yes, because when you saw those teachers you went, oh yeah, I remember who this person is and I can go to them. But other teachers who were not really in it is just like who is that, I don't know but other teachers that were not really in it just like I don't know who you are.

Interviewer: Did <transition program> affect your relationships with your peers? If so, how? If not, why?

Karen: I would say yes, because of the teamwork that we had to do with a lot of the sessions. … the sessions helped us to be able to talk with each other and explain more. Overall, Karen states that the transition program did benefit her in her transition to the high school and helped her create better relationships. In regards to her personal

72

academic success, she describes her academic performance as "very high" and in regards to her discipline record she states, "I am Queen – no detentions, no suspensions, not even a lunch detention."

Participant 2

Damon is an 18 year old, male, Caucasian student in grade 12. He is a distinguished honor roll student. Although Damon seemed to enjoy the program, his overall experience was not nearly as positive. Damon describes himself as a motivated student with few discipline problems and feels there were few benefits besides getting to know everybody coming in a few days before school starts. Participation did not improve or change the mindset he already had prior to the program.

Interviewer: Did <transition program> help you adjust from middle school to high school? If so, how? If not, why?

Damon: I think it did not necessarily like not in any particular way other than just getting to know everybody coming in a few days before school started and meeting the teachers and seeing what the school was like.

In regards to relationships:

Damon: I worked with a lot of people that I never thought I would actually be helping with. I could connect with them in a way. It was like a stepping stone to meeting new people.

Damon describes his academic performance as high, "I have a 3.8 GPA." He also stated that in regards to discipline, that "I wasn't planning on getting into trouble in the first place."

73

Overall, Damon seemed to enjoy the opportunity to meet new peers and create relationships, but did not feel that the program was beneficial in regards to his academic performance or discipline.

Participant 3

Paul is a 17 year old, male, Caucasian student in grade 10. Paul has High Functioning Asperger's Syndrome (HFA) and social phobia. He is a distinguished honor roll student, but struggles daily and in and out of the classroom to establish relationships with other students and teachers. He does have a Gifted Individualized Education Program (GIEP) and is listed as special needs due to the problems stated above. He does address some of these problems in the interview process.

Interviewer: Did <transition program> help you adjust to the social aspects of high school? If so, how? If not, why?

Paul: The problem is that I am a social outcast. I am not sure how it socially affected me; I do not think that it did too much.

However, he does mention that meeting the teachers prior to school was a benefit to him.

Interviewer: Did <transition program> help you adjust from the middle school to the high school? If so, how? If not, why?

Paul: Yes, because I got to meet some of the teachers and it also helped me get the layout of the school with the tour.

Interviewer: Did meeting the teachers over the summer help you to adjust to high school? If so, how? If not, why?

Paul: Yes, because when I got to school I felt like 'Hi, what is your name?'. I knew some faces and it was less awkward.

74

Paul describes himself as a stellar student with grades ranging from 98% to 100%. He also stated that the program did not affect his academic performance, attendance or his discipline record. He states: "I only miss school if I am like lying on my death bed." Overall, Paul reflects positively on the program in regards to meeting the teachers; however, the program does not seem to impact his other areas of performance directly.

Participant 4

Missy is a 15 year old, female, Latino student in grade nine. Missy mentions, several times, that meeting new peers and her teachers were the most beneficial part of the program.

Interviewer: Did <transition program> help you adjust from the middle school to high school? If so, how? If not, why?

Missy: It actually did because there are some people that I did not actually know that I met <at the program> and ended up having classes with them. I knew somebody instead of not knowing anybody and wandering around by myself.

Interviewer: Did meeting the teachers over the summer help you to adjust to high school? If so, how? If not, why?

Missy: Yes, because some of the teachers like one of them, I had her for homeroom and class and I knew her and felt comfortable around her.

In regards to academic success:

Missy: I struggle some, but I do my best to make my grades. My parents are very strict so I am not supposed to get anything lower than a B, but sometimes that falls short.

Interviewer: How did <transition program> affect your academic record?

Missy: It didn't.

Overall, Missy describes the relationships she created as very beneficial, but did not seem to feel that it impacted her academic success. She also stated that she did not have any attendance or discipline concerns prior to or after the program.

Participant 5

Neal is a 16 year old, male, Caucasian student in grade 11. Neal is a distinguished honor roll student. Neal had a slightly different view of the program and what he thought were the most beneficial parts. He focuses on the benefit of meeting the upperclassmen who served as ambassadors for the program.

Interviewer: Did <transition program> help you adjust from middle school to high school? If so, how? If not, why?

Neal: Yes, it definitely did because I got to meet some of the upperclassmen that were helping me transition in.

Interviewer: Did meeting the teachers over the summer help you adjust to high school? If so, how? If not, why?

Neal: Yes because I got to know their names, but I think I went to the kids who were chaperoning more.

He did feel that working with other groups of his peers helped "break the ice for high school." However, he feels that his academic and discipline records remained the same regardless of his participation in the program.

Participant 6

Beth is a 15 year old, female, Caucasian student in grade 10. Beth is an average student and expresses the benefits of the program on her peer relationships, but does not feel it helped her in other areas.

Interviewer: Did <transition program> help you adjust from the middle school to the high school? If so, how? If not, why?

Beth: It did, kind of. Because high school is a lot harder than I thought it would be and it is different from middle school. So, it showed me you are going to be able to ask other people if you need help.

Interviewer: Is there any way you think that it really did help you?

Beth: It was a fun thing to do, but I think I would still be the same if I didn't go.

She does explain that she enjoyed meeting the teachers prior to having them in class, but does not feel that the program truly benefited her in regards to her academics or attendance. She describes her academic performance as good; however, she states that she is not on honor roll or distinguished honor roll. In regards to discipline she states: "I think it does make a difference because it helps you be more disciplined. They told you what to do and worked as a team that is the way you should do it in school."

Participant 7

Matt is a 14 year old, male, Caucasian student in grade nine. Matt focuses on the differences and changes from middle school to high school as this is forefront in his experience as a ninth grade student.

Interviewer: Did <transition program> help you adjust to the social aspect of high school? If so, how? If not, why?

Matt: Yes, everyone is pretty much together at one time. In middle school you had three different levels.

Matt: <Program> did teach you teamwork and how to support your friends.

Interviewer: Did <transition program> help you adjust from middle school to high school? If so, how? If not, why?

Matt: I think it did. It helped me learn some of the teachers and how the school worked. Polices and things are different here than in the middle school.

Overall, Matt really identified the differences between middle school and high school and the program helped clarify some of these changes for him, for example the changes in rules and expectations, traditional schedule to block scheduling, and teacher expectations.   However, he did not feel it impacted his performance areas and specifically stated that he "doesn't see how it would" affect his discipline record.

Participant 8

Anna is an 18 year old, female, Caucasian student in grade 12. Anna is a special education student with an active Individualized Education Program (IEP). Her experience focuses on the social aspect of the program and

Interviewer: Did <transition program> help you adjust from working with the teachers prior to the start of school. middle school to high school? If so, how? If not, why?

Anna: I think it did. You got to meet teachers and you got to experience what it would be like to be in a classroom when you went to the upper classrooms and met the teachers. In regards to meeting the teachers prior to school:

Anna: I got to see what they were like and how they were. Like if they were nice or not and if I was going to like or not like the teacher.

Anna has an interesting perspective in regards to the academic benefits of the program. She states the program did not affect her academics, but she clarifies by stating

that it did affect her social skills. She specifically states that participating in the program helped improve her performance on group projects.

Overall, Anna does not feel it changed her attendance performance or discipline, but it did help her improve her social interactions with peers and students and that directly impacted her performance in certain academic arenas, for example the program helped her acclimate socially and create new peer groups and that benefited her in classes with group projects or team building activities.

Themes

Peer Relationships

One of the main themes that developed from the interviews was the influence the program had on creating and improving social and peer relationships. Each student felt that the program allowed him/her to meet new students or renew old friendships. Beth specifically states: "When I was there I was with a girl that I used to be friends with and I was with her and I started talking to her again." Often times, students can become trapped within their friendship circle, but this program allows the students to meet other students and work as a team. In addition to meeting their own peers, several students stated that they enjoyed meeting the upperclassmen who served as ambassadors to the program. As a freshman, seeing an upperclassman as a friendly face can have a soothing impact. Neal felt this was a great benefit to him, he states: "the upperclassmen helping me transition in." Additionally, the program allowed students to create relationships that had academic benefits. Karen stated: "… the teamwork that we had to do… helped us to be able to talk with each other."   Missy also stated that meeting students in the summer and then having class with them allowed her to "know somebody" and she could focus on

class instead of feeling isolated. However, a few of the participants stated that they worked with people they already knew or as Paul, who is diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, stated that he is a, self-proclaimed, "social outcast" so their experiences were slightly different.

Meeting the Teachers

Another main theme was the benefit of meeting the teachers prior to start of school. The participants felt that meeting the teachers lowered anxiety levels, provided a friendly face when coming into the high school for the first time, and allowed them to experience their personalities prior to having them in class. Neal states: I got to know their names; it was just an ice breaker and helped me get into the groove for high school." Karen felt that meeting the teachers provided a familiar face and created a comfort level not provided with the teachers she did not meet prior to school. Missy benefited because she met her homeroom teacher over the summer, which made the first day of school much easier on her as she had already had the chance to get to get to know her teacher and could ease into the first day programs. Anna echoed these statements by stating: "You got to meet the teachers and you got to experience what it would be like to be in a classroom." However, it was especially beneficial for Paul, who has HFA and social phobias. Paul stated that meeting the teachers over the summer helped because "I knew some faces and it was less awkward." Damon backs up this statement, by also stating that "it wasn't as awkward and you kind of knew what to expect and which teachers you were going to like." One problem with the program is that not every teacher was involved in the program; therefore, there were many teachers the students did not get the chance to meet prior to the start of school.

Familiarity with the Building

The participants did state that the building map and tour they were provided with the program was helpful to them as they entered the high school or the first day of class. Missy stated that "I got to explore the high school that day and some of my classes were in the classrooms that I went to." However, Karen felt that the map was more beneficial than the tour, "I think if a teacher would have given <the tour> it would have been a little bit easier." Paul also benefited, stating: "It also helped me get the layout of the school with the tour." This is very beneficial for Paul who already suffers from social anxieties from the Asperger's Syndrome. Overall, the tour and map were helpful, but having the ambassadors facilitate the tour may have impeded it from achieving its full benefits.

Several less obvious themes were identified from the interviews. It was surprising to see, but most of the students did not feel like the program benefited their academic performance nor did it improve their attendance or discipline records. The participants stated that these remained constant from middle school to high school and that they may have gained some confidence in regards to group work or socially motivated projects, but that their individual motivation remained unchanged; many simply stated "it did not affect it at all."

In conclusion, the main benefits of the program, as identified by the participants, are the ability to meet the teachers prior to the first day of school and meeting and connecting with other students. Both of these can be linked to the social aspects of high school, however, meeting and creating a comfort level with the teacher can also lead to improved academic performance. The participants did not seem to make this link; their focus was more on social comfort walking in the classroom on the first day of school.

Additionally, they had great concerns with understanding the layout of the building and eliminated the fear of getting lost on the first day of school. All of these items are linked to overall student success, including comfort with the building, reducing anxiety on the first day, teamwork, and improving social interactions. Confidence in these areas can lead to improved attendance, discipline and academics (Geltner, J, Law, B, Forehand, A & Miles, DA, 2011).

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Transition programs have not been studied extensively, and many of the studies focus on transition to post-secondary life. This study focuses on the transition from middle school to high school and the emergent themes described by the experiences of the students in this study. This Chapter discusses the emergent and subthemes in relation to existing literature and presents the limitations of this study. Finally, this Chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications for further research.

The findings of this study provide insight into the students who participate in a transition program the summer before ninth grade. Some of the experiences are similar to each other; however, some of the findings highlight the unique experiences of students as they are forced into new social groups and situations.

Social Impact

Transitioning into high school causes a great deal of anxiety for some students. Students face social, curriculum, and peer challenges as they enter into the new world of high school (Smith, Feldwisch, & Abell, 2006). Before high school, students are often grouped and function in the same academic and social groups all day long. In high school, the departmentalized format forces students to be regrouped for different subjects, which may cause anxiety about maintaining their current peer relationships (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009). Transition programs provide an opportunity for students to meet and work with their peers prior to the start of the school year allowing them to create new relationships and reduce some of the anxiety. Many of the subjects in this study stated

that the program impacted their social experience in high school by allowing them to meet new people and work with other students. For example:

"… the training exercise that we did outside that helped us be able to talk with each other…" - Karen

"… I worked with a lot of people that I never thought I would actually be helping with them. I could connect with them in a way. I thought it was like a stepping stone to meeting different people." – Damon

"I met new people." – Missy

"When I was there I was with a girl that I used to be friends with and I was with her and I started talking to her again." – Beth

"It taught teamwork and how to support your friends." – Matt

"It helped me interact with people better. It got me used to working with more people." – Anna

"I got to meet a lot of new friends and it just helped break the ice for high school." - Neal

However, not every student felt that the program helped with their peer relationships. One student expressed that did not impact his social relationships. Paul, a student with Asperger's Syndrome states:

"…people I was there with I already knew so it didn't change much. The problem is that I am a social outcast. I am not sure how it affected me. I do not think that it did that much."

Almost every student expressed that the program provided them a benefit socially, at some level, for their high school transition. For some it was providing an opportunity

to meet new people and add a friendly face in a "sea of unknown faces" (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009). For others, it allowed them to rekindle lost friendships. Research shows that the apprehensions of transitioning to high school can lead to declining academic achievement and attendance (Fraiser, 2007); therefore, reducing some of the social fears may allow students to focus their energies on being successful during high school.

Meeting the Teachers

The transition from middle school to high school brings a variety of changes, all of which can cause anxiety and fear in students. In high school, the number of classes and class size increase causing the students to fear that the teachers will not know them as well, they may have less contact with the teacher, and the teacher may not be available when they need him/her (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009). The students hope for meaningful connections with teachers so that they can reach out and get assistance when necessary (Geltner, Law, Forehand, & Miles, 2011). A transition program can provide an opportunity for students to meet their teachers prior to school; this can help reduce some of the angst that accompanies this transition. Every student who participated in this study stressed the benefits of meeting the teachers prior to the start of the school year. For example:

" …when you saw those teachers you went 'oh yeah, I remember who this person is and I can go to them.' But other teachers that were not really in <the program> it was like who is that, I don't know who you are." – Karen

"… we got to see all of the teachers we were going to have so it wasn't as awkward and you kind of knew what to expect and which teachers you were going to like and which teachers you were not going to like." - Damon

"Yes, because when I got to school I felt like 'Hi, what is your name?' I knew some faces and it was less awkward." – Paul

"…I had one of the teachers for homeroom and I knew her and felt comfortable around her." – Missy

"… I got to know their names. It was just an ice breaker and helped me get into the groove of high school." – Neal

"I liked meeting the teachers before I had to go my first year in high school. You got their personality and what they were like before you had class with them." - Beth

"…just to know what their strengths and weaknesses were or how to act with them and how they would handle you." – Matt

"I got to see what they were like and how they were. Like if they were nice or not and if I was going to like the teacher or not." – Anna

Research shows that teachers play a critical role in easing the transition for students by assisting them with the integration into the high school. The role of the teacher in supporting students has been underscored (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009). By providing students an opportunity to meet the teachers, see how they instruct, and present a chance to sit and talk to the teacher and really gain a comfort level can all help remove the fear often associated with the rigors of high school teachers. It allows students to gain a level of trust and understanding so that teachers may seem more approachable if the student should need to seek out additional assistance or help, academically or personally. By removing any of these obstacles or concerns prior to entering high school,

it allows the students to focus their energies on academics and success rather than drowning in the fears this transition generally presents.

<div align="center">Familiarity with the Building</div>

One of the main concerns for students as they enter high school is the fear of getting lost (Frasier, 2007). Students worry about being able to find their way around or getting lost in the new, larger building (Smith, Feldwisch, & Abell, 2006). Students spend too much time focusing their attention on room locations, going to the wrong class and other geographic and organizational changes that they lack focus on their academics (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009). Many transition programs recommend providing tours to relieve some of this anxiety (Dorman, 2012); however, a simple tour may help the students with some of their geographic concerns, but may be too short to truly provide the resources necessary. The transition program in this study not only provided a tour, but provided a map and 20-minute lessons in the same classrooms they would have classes in the following school year. The three-part approach hoped to truly familiarize the students with the classrooms and the facility so that the first day of school they could focus on being successful and not fearing the layout of the building. Overall, this proved to be successful. For example:

> " …having the map, I could plan out where I needed to go. I think if a teacher would have given the tour it would have been a little bit easier." - Karen
>
> "I got to explore the high school on that day. I had some of my classes in the classrooms that I went into." – Missy
>
> "… seeing what the school was like. So you are not just like coming in the first day unaware of what is going on." – Damon

"it helped me get the layout of the school with the tour." – Paul

"We moved around to different classrooms in the high school. So, I got a feel for

it what the high school looked like and everything." – Neal

Providing students with a tour is beneficial; however, allowing them the opportunity to

participate in a mini-lesson in the classroom with that teacher and providing a map

extends the benefits of this concept. One of the main phobias students have entering high

school is the fear of getting lost in the new, larger building (Smith, Feldwisch, & Abell,

2006). A transition program can provide several opportunities for students to familiarize

themselves with the new environment, map out their personal schedule, and focus on

other exciting events of the first day of school. Additionally, meeting the teachers before

school starts provides a sea of now familiar faces that the students can approach if they

do get lost or have questions; all of these things will reduce the level of anxiety and

increase the students' confidence as they enter this new step in their educational career.

<div align="center">Attendance, Discipline, and Academic Benefits</div>

Research shows that students who participate in a transition program have fewer

discipline referrals and better attendance than those who did not participate (Geltner,

Forehand, & Miles, 2011). In this study, we focused on these three areas to determine if

participating in the transition program actually did provide these benefits. Unfortunately,

the results are inconclusive. The transition program in this study is optional; therefore,

the students who chose to take part were often the students that did not have problems

with attendance, academics, or discipline prior to participating in the program. For

example:

Attendance

"It probably did affect it somewhere, it does not seem like it would have done much." – Karen

"I have fairly good attendance. <Participation in the program> did not affect it; my attendance was never really poor." – Damon

"I only miss school if I am like lying on my death bed. I have always been like this." – Paul

"It didn't help in any way." – Missy

"Yes, it helped me improve my attendance, I don't know how." – Neal

"I <was absent> because I was either sick or probably a dentist appointment or something. <Participating in the program> did not help." – Beth

"It really didn't help much." – Matt

"I don't think it affected it at all." – Anna

Discipline

"I am Queen – no detentions or suspensions, not even lunch detention. <The program> probably made me realize that I should listen to my teachers more and listen to other people." – Karen

"Never been in much trouble. I got lunch detention in middle school before, but that was about it. Nothing in high school, but I wasn't planning on getting into trouble in the first place." Damon

"I think it does make a difference because it helps you be more disciplined. They told you what to do and you worked as a team. That is the way you should do it in school." - Beth

Paul, Missy, Neal, Matt and Anna all state that it did not impact their discipline at the high school level.

Academics

"It did just from listening skills and being able to listen to people. Listen to the teachers more easily. You don't get everything handed to you all the time like in middle school." – Karen

"In <the program>, you had to pay attention to some of the thing open your eyes to a lot of things. In school, you basically have to open your eyes and open your ears to let you learn what your teachers are teaching. I guess it helps a bit." – Missy

Damon, Paul, Neal, Matt and Beth all stated that it did not impact their academic success. Their academic level was maintained from middle to high school.

Studies have shown that students that have difficulty transitioning into ninth grade are at a disadvantage academically and personally (Geltner, Law, Forehand & Miles, 2011). The students in this study seem to be successful in regards to academics, discipline and attendance. Therefore, it must be stated that these students were successful in these three areas prior to participating in the program and before transitioning into the high school.

Limitations

Although this research was carefully prepared and conducted, there are several unavoidable limitations. First, the study was limited to one school district. The specific program studied is only offered at one school district. It would be beneficial to find several school districts with similar programs, compare and contrast the programs, and

analyze the benefits of participation. The second limitation is the type of student that chose to participate in the program. The program is optional, and the students that participate may already be motivated students. Finally, the researcher is both the director of the transition program and a teacher in the district that was studied. The study may benefit by having an outside party conduct the interviews so that students may feel more free to answer honestly without fear disappointing the teacher or offending the program.

<div align="center">Implications for Practice</div>

This study provides a qualitative view into what a transition program is and the benefits it provides the students who participate. The findings and implications are not intended to generalize information to other programs. Instead, it is my intent to provide data from the students' perspective on the transition from middle school to high school and the changes that occur and can impact student success. The body of knowledge will provide practitioners with new information that may help create transition programs and focus on making ninth grade students more successful, in hopes of increasing the number of students who graduate high school.

One important implication is that all ninth grade students should participate in a transition program. The program should be mandatory for all students to participate. Students who are already motivated and successful will be provided more tools to amplify that success, opportunities to meet more peers, and geographic familiarity. At-risk students, who are truly the students that need a program such as this, would benefit by the knowledge gained about the new building, programs, and changes, but, also learning study skills, teamwork, and peer communication. The program in this study is optional; therefore, many of the students who truly need a program such as this simply

opt not to participate. Mandatory participation or implementation of the program into the school day or curriculum would allow every student to benefit from the transition program. The first and possibly the second day of school, for ninth grade students only, would consist of the transition programming. This would allow every student to attend the program and mandate that every ninth grade teacher participate as well.

A second implication is to ensure that the program includes all of the teachers that a student may experience in ninth grade. The students in this study repeatedly stated that meeting the teachers prior to school was a great asset to their transition. Allowing the students to meet every teacher they may have could help alleviate some of the apprehension and fear of the unknown.

A third implication is involving parents in the process. Parents often become less involved as students move from primary to secondary levels. Conducting a transition program for parents or including them in the current program will help provide them with the same answers their students are seeking. It allows the parents to help their own child by being knowledgeable of the high school, its practices, and the teachers. Ensuring parents and students are receiving the same information may open up more communication and provide the students with an additional support system at home.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study provides a great deal of insight into the benefits and problems of this transition program. However, it also creates more questions in regards to the benefits of these types of programs. Further investigation is necessary to determine if student success in academics, discipline, and attendance resulted from participation in the program or because the students who opted to participate in the program were already

motivated learners. A study such as this may be repeated at a school where the transition program is implemented into the school year and all students participate.

Future investigations should be conducted on an entire grade level utilizing a program that is mandatory for all students. By analyzing how every student in that grade performs after participating in the transition program will provide greater insight into the programs benefits or downfalls.

A study of several programs in a variety of geographic, ethnic, and financial levels would provide greater research into the benefits of a transition program. A cross-section analysis of a variety of barriers and obstacles may help provide greater insight to the success of transition programs on student success.

Comparative studies with urban and rural school districts would provide additional research to see if the results are truly universal or if geographical, ethnic, or other societal issues impact their success. The programs would have to be comparable.

Personal Reflection

Studying this program provided me an opportunity to truly examine the program from the student perspective. I was involved in the inception of this program and have dedicated countless hours and truly believed in its benefits. However, this investigation gave me the chance to ask the students what they thought and get a real insight into who matters, the students.

First, I was truly shocked to realize that the students interviewed did not feel the program was a real benefit to them in regards to academics, attendance, and discipline. The foundation for the program design and our research focused on providing these students with the tools to improve these three areas. Personally, it was difficult to absorb

that the three areas we had hoped to really have an impact on, turned out to be the least affected.

Secondly, learning about the social benefits of the program was a true joy for me. I was so focused on the academic benefits of the program; I had not given the social aspect much thought. After completing this study and reading more literature, I was pleasantly surprised to realize how beneficial the social transition is to overall student success as they enter ninth grade. This program seems to provide the foundation for students to create greater social groups, which in turn may lead to greater success and achievements.

Finally, as a teacher, getting an opportunity to interview these students, get their true insight into the transition into high school and their trials and tribulations, has provided me with an insight that can only be described as priceless. As we get older, we forget how difficult these times and changes can be, but completing this study allowed me a first-hand view into the mind of the student during this difficult time in his/her life. It allowed me to adjust how I conduct my classes the first few weeks of school. I feel blessed to have had this opportunity to grow as a researcher, but also as a teacher.

References

Adreon, D. & Stella, J. (2001). Transition to middle and high school: Increasing the

success of students with Asperger's Syndrome. *Intervention in School and Clinic,*

36, 266–271.

Alspaugh, J.W. (1998). Achievement loss associated with the transition to middle school

and high school. *Journal of Educational Research, 92,* 20-26.

Anderman, E.M. & Midgley, C. (1996). Changes in achievement goal orientations after

the transition to middle school. *EDRS,* 1-24.

Anderson, L.W., Jacobs, J., Schramm, S., Splittgerber, F. (2000). School transitions;

Beginning or the end of a new beginning? *International Journal of*

Educational Research, 33(4), 326-336.

Andrews, D.W. & Dishion, T.J. (1995). The adolescent transitions program for high-risk

teens and their parents: Toward a school-based intervention. *Education and*

treatment of children, 18, 478–499.

Benz, M.R. & Lindstrom, L. (1999). Improving collaboration between schools and

vocational rehabilitation: The youth transition program model. *Journal of*

Vocational Rehabilitation, 13, 55-63.

Black, T.H., Brush, M.M., Grow, T.S., Hawes, J.H., Henry, D.S., & Hinkle, R.W. (1996).

Natural bridge transition program follow-up study. *Journal of Correctional*

Education, 47, 4-12.

Blanch, R.H. (2007). Self-concept, school engagement and the high school freshman

experience. *University of Denver.* 1-105.

Chapman, M. V. & Sawyer, J. S. (2001). Bridging the gap for students at risk of school failure: A social work-initiated middle to high school transition program. *Children & Schools, 23,* 235-240.

Charner, I., Fraser, B.S., Hubbard, S., Rogers, A., & Home, R. (1995). Reforms of the school-to-work transition. *Phi Delta Kappan, 77,* 40-43.

Cook, B.G., & Rumrill, P.D. (2000). Inclusion and transition: Partners in progress or policy paradox? *Kent State University,* 13-21.

Cooney, B.F. (2002). Exploring perspectives on transition of youth with disabilities: Voices of young adults, parents, and professionals. *Mental Retardation, 40,* 425-435.

Cooper, J. & Liou, D.D. (2007). The structure of culture of information pathways: Rethinking opportunity to learn in urban high schools during the ninth grade transition. *The High School Journal. 91,* 43-56.

Dorman, B. (2012). The supported teen: Transitioning to high school. *Leadership*, *45*(5).

Dowdy, C.A., Carter, J.K., & Smith, T.E.C. (1990). Differences in transitional needs of high school students with and without learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 23,* 343-348.

Duke, D.L. (1999). The future of high school. *Virginia Journal of Education,* 48-52.

Fields, D. (2002). Transition 101: From elementary to middle school. *Education Digest, 67,* 38-41.

Finn, J.D., Fish, R.M., & Scott, L.A. (2008). Educational sequelae of high school misbehavior. *The Journal of Educational Research.* 259-274.

Fraiser, J. (2007). Transitioning students with disabilities from middle to high

school. *TEACHING Exceptional Children Plus*, *4*(2).

Ganeson, K., & Ehrich, L. (2009). Transition into high school: A phenomenological

study. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *41*(1).

Geltner, J., Law, B., Forehand, A., & Miles, D. (2011). Improving high school transition

with CAT camp. *Georgia School Counselors Association Journal*.

Gideon, B.H. (2004). Creating a safety net. *Principal Leadership, 4,* 65-66.

Hernandez Sheets, R., Izard-Baldwin, G., & Atterberry, P. (1997). Bridge: A program

designed to ease the transition from the middle level to the high school. *National

Association of Secondary School Principals, 81,* 93-99.

Hertzog, C.J. & Morgan, P.L. (1998). Breaking the barriers between middle school and

high school: Developing a transition team for student success. *National

Association of Secondary School Principals, 82,* 94-98.

Hickman, G.P., Bartholomew, M., Mathwig, J., & Heinrich, R.S. (2008). Differential

developmental pathways of high school dropouts and graduates. *The Journal of

Educational Research.* 3-14.

Holcomb-McCoy, C. (2011). A smoother transition for Black teens. *Educational

Leadership.*

Israel, G.D.. (2009). Determining sample size. In Univeristy of Florida IFAS Extention.

Retrieved from http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/PD006.

Jaeger, R.M. (1990). *Statistics: A spectator sport.* Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Johnson-Gross, K.N., Lyons, E.A., & Griffin, J.R. (2008). Active supervision: An

    intervention to reduce high school tardiness. *Education & Treatment of Children.*

    31(1), 39-52.

Kagan, S.L. & Neuman, M.J. (1998). Lessons from three decades of transition research.

    The Elementary School Journal, 98, 365-379.

Knestling, K. (2008). Students at risk for school dropout: Supporting their persistence.

    Preventing School Failure. 52(4), 3-10.

Lampert, J. (2005). Easing the transition to high school: Students in their first year at

    Chicago-are high school find a lifetime in upperclass mentors. *Association for*

    Supervision and Curriculum Development, 61-63.

Letrello, T.M. & Miles, D.D. (2003). The transition from middle school to high school.

    Clearing House, 76, 212-215.

Lindsay, D. (1998). Middle-level to high-school transition. *Education Digest, 63,* 62-64.

List, Dennis (2004). Maximum variation sampling for surveys and consensus groups.

    Adelaide: Audience Dialogue. Available at

    www.audiencedialogue.org/maxvar.html, 12 September 2004.

Lund Research, Ltd. (2012). *Dissertations and theses: An online textbook*. Retrieved

    from http://dissertation.laerd.com/

Magazinger, I. & Rodham-Clinton, H. (1992). Will America choose high skills or

    low wages? *Educational Leadership,* 10-14.

Mahruf, M., Shohel, C., & Howes, A.J. (2007). Transition from nonformal schools:

    Learning through photo elicitation in educational fieldwork in Bangladesh.

    Visual Studies, 22, 53-61.

Martin, J.E. & Marshal, L.H. (1995). Choicemaker: A comprehensive self-determination transition program. *Intervention in School & Clinic, 30,* 147-157.

Maykut, P. & Morehouse, R. (1994). *Beginning qualitative research: A philosophic and practical guide.* London: The Falmer Press.

McIntosh, K., Flannery, K.B., Sugai, G., Braun, D.H., & Cochrane, K.L. (2008). Relationships between academic and problem behavior in the transition from middle school to high school. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions. 10(4),* 243-255.

McNulty, B. A. (1989). Leadership and policy strategies for interagency planning: Meeting the early childhood mandate. In J.J.Gallagher, P.L.Trohanis, & R.M. Clifford (Eds.), Policy implementation and P.L. 99-457: Planning for young children with special needs (pp. 147-167). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Mizelle, N.B. (2005). Moving out of middle school: Young adolescents' seamless transition to high school requires cooperative planning by middle and high school educators. *Educational Leadership,* 56-60.

Monforton, V. & Morton, L.L. (1995). Does the implementation of transition years philosophy really impact student attitude? *Guidance & Counseling, 11,* 25-29.

Morgan, P.L., & Hertzog, C.J. (2001). Designing comprehensive transitions. *Principal Leadership. 1,* 10-16.

Newman, B.M., Myers, M.C., Newman, P.R., Lohman, B.J., & Smith, V.L. (2000). The transition to high school for academically promising, urban, low income African American youth. *Adolescence, 35,* 45-66.

Newman, B.M., Newman, P.R., Griffen, S., O'Connor, K. & Spas, J. (2007). The relationship of social support to depressive symptoms during the transition to high school. *Adolescence. 42(167),* 441-459.

Nichols, T.R., Mahadeo, M., Bryant, K., & Botvin, G.J. (2008). Examining anger as a predictor of drug use among multiethnic middle school students. *The Journal of School Health. 78,* 480-486.

Nicholls, C. (2011). *The advantages of using qualitative research methods.*. Retrieved from http://www.alexander-technique-college.com/files/2011/10/books_articles_qualitative.pdf

Nietupski, J.A., McQuillen, T., Berg, D.D., Daugherty, V. & Hamre-Nietupski, S.M. (2001). Preparing students with mild disabilities for careers in technology; A process and recommendation form Iowa's High School High Tech Program. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, 16,* 179-187.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Pub. L. No107-110. 115 Stat. 1425 (2002). Retrieved March 24, 2007, from Lexis/Nexis Congressional.

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Peterson-Nelson, J.A., Caldarella, P., Young, K.R., & Webb, N. (2008). Using peer praise notes to increase the social involvement of withdrawn adolescents. *Teaching Exceptional Children. 41(2),* 6-13.

Queen, J.A. (2002). *Student transitions from middle to high school: Improving achievement and creating a safer environment.* New York: Eye on Education.

Redmond, S.M. & Hops, J.L. (2008). Absenteeism rates in students receiving services for

   CDs, LDs, and EDs: A macroscopic view of the consequences of disability.

   Language, Speech, & Hearing Services in Schools. 39(1), 97-103.

Reed, C.A. (1999). Women with disabilities making the transition back to work:

   Psychosocial barriers and interventions. *Department of Rehabilitation Education*

   and Research, University of Arkansas, 13, 67-72.

Reents, J. N. (2002). Isolating 9th graders. *School Administrator, 59,* 14 – 19.

Repetto, J.B. & Correa, V.I. (1996). Expanding views on transition. *Exceptional*

   Children, 62, 551-563.

Rice, J.K. (2001). Explaining the negative impact of the transition from middle school on

   student performance in mathematics and science. *Educational Administration*

   Quarterly, 3, 372-400.

Roderick, M. (2003). What's happening to the boys? Early high school experiences and

   school outcomes among African American male adolescents in Chicago.

   Urban Education, 38, 538-607.

Rodriguez, J.M. (2007). Schools elect to suspend students: Short suspensions reduce

   dropout rate, system says. *Knight Ridder Tribune Business Week.* 1.

Roessler, R.T. & Brown, P.L. (2000). Transition and the community college: A Career

   Keys model for students with disabilities. *Department of Rehabilitation,* 24-29.

Seidman, E., Allen, L., Aber, J.L., Mitchell, C., & Feinman, J. (1994). The impact of

   school transition in early adolescence on the self-system and perceived social

   context of poor urban youth. *Child Development, 65,* 507-522.

Seyfer, S. & Truss, J. (2001). The Whitefish Bay transition project. *Principal Leadership. 1,* 16-18.

Smith, J. B. (1997). Effects of eighth-grade transition programs on high school retention and experiences. *The Journal of Educational Research, 90,* 144-159.

Smith, J.S., Akos, P., Kim, S., & Wiley, S. (2008). Student and stakeholder perceptions of the transition to high school. *The High School Journal. 91(3),* 32-42.

Smith, J., Feldwisch, R., & Abell, A. (2006). Similarities and differences in students' and parents' perceptions of the transition from middle school to high school. *Research in Middle Level Educatin*, *29*(10).

Sullivan, K. (2002). The choices program: An educational opportunity for "at-risk" students as they enter high school. *McGill Journal of Education, 37,* 37-56.

Trainor, A.A. (2008). Using cultural and social capital to improve postsecondary outcomes and expand transition models for youth with disabilities. *The Journal of Special Education. 42(3),* 148-162.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2000). *Statistical abstract of the United States*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Uphoff, J.K. (1990). *Real facts from real schools: What you're not supposed to know about school readiness and transition programs.* New Jersey: Modern Learning Press.

Valenzuela, D., & Shrivastava, P. (2008). *Interview as a method for qualitative research.* Retrieved from http://www.public.asu.edu/~kroel/www500/Interview Fri.pdf

Whitener, L.A. & McGranahan, D. A. (2003). Rural America: Opportunities and challenges. *Amber Waves, 1,* 1-8.

Wimmer, M. (2008). Why kids refuse to go to school... and what schools can do about it. *The Educational Digest.* 32-37.

Wittenburg, D.C., Golden, T., & Fishman, M. (2002). Transition options for youth with disabilities: An overview of the programs and policies that affect the transition from school. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, 17,* 195-206.