School Counselors' and Administrators' Perceptions of Middle School to High School Student Transition Programs

Russell L. Claxton, Liberty University
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SCHOOL COUNSELORS' AND ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL TO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT TRANSITION PROGRAMS

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

ATHENS, GEORGIA
2000
SCHOOL COUNSELORS' AND ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF
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The purpose of this study was to identify those activities that promote student success during the transition from middle school to high school. In addition to identifying programs which promote success and reduce transition problems experienced by students, this study also determined similarities and differences in transition programs between schools or school systems.

This study involved collecting data from middle and high schools in six large school systems in the metropolitan Atlanta area. The selection of the schools in this study was based on each school’s enrollment, racial distribution, and the number of students in the free or reduced lunch program – a measure of socioeconomic status.

A counselor or administrator from each school was designated as the contact person and was asked survey questions from the Transition Activity Assessment Instrument (TAAI) about their school’s transition program. The questions on the TAAI were generated from transition activities cited in the review of related educational literature. The TAAI included Yes or No questions with a space for comments, as well as open-ended questions. Data that were collected from the responses to the Yes or No questions on the TAAI were analyzed using percentage and frequency count, while the data collected through the comments and open-ended questions were analyzed using descriptive statements.

A summary of the responses found minimal variance of Yes responses between groups. Schools groups identified in the study responded similarly to the survey instrument in most categories. Furthermore, the answers to the open-ended questions carried common themes and similarities between groups.
In conclusion, this study did not support the idea that there is a difference in transition programs between Fulton County schools and other metropolitan Atlanta school districts. Likewise, no support was found for the idea that there is a difference in programs among schools of varying student populations in the metropolitan Atlanta area. Determining the significance of the variance between middle school and high school responses would require additional research.

INDEX WORDS: Transition Programs, Student Transitions, Articulation, Ninth Grade, Middle School, High School
DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my family - my wife Bunnie, my daughter Emi, our son Lee, and my parents, for their love and support through the years and through several degrees. The more time passes, the more I realize and appreciate how wonderful my family truly is. Most of all, I am thankful to God for the ability and persistence to complete this study.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I was only successful in completing this study with the assistance of many helpful and knowledgeable people. My sincere thanks to my major professor Dr. L. David Weller. His support and insight through many revisions and corrections kept me humble yet encouraged. Without such help it would have been easy to give up early in the process. I sincerely thank Dr. C. Thomas Holmes, Dr. John Dayton, Dr. Kenneth Tanner, and Dr. William Wraga for serving on my committee and for your contributions toward the development and completion of my study. And special thanks to Linda Edwards for help with registration and scheduling over the years.

I could not have completed my study without the support of the three principals that I worked under during the past four years. My former principals, Dr. Robert Burke and Barbara Kriner, and my current principal, Ronald Tesch, gave their support and allowed me the flexibility to attend classes and meet deadlines.

I also consider myself fortunate to have studied along side many educators and scholars who have shared their knowledge and experience. From my cohort group to the many classmates and colleagues who added real life experience to academic theory and practice. I also express my appreciation to those educators that took time out of their busy schedules to provide the information that was crucial to my study.

I know I am truly blessed to have such a wonderful family. I thank my wife Bunnie, who is my best friend, my best proof-reader, and my best motivator, who took care of everything else so that I could work and never complained when I spent many evening in class or in front of the computer. She truly is my inspiration. I thank my parents, Gerald and Rosemary Claxton, for without them
I never would have even completed my first degree. I appreciate their support, encouragement and sacrifices over the years. I also thank my in-laws the Fishers for their support and understanding.

I am thankful to the many family and friends for their patience and understanding when I was absent from social and family get-togethers. I can not remember the last time I was able to socialize without thought of the academic work waiting for me at home.

There is no way I will ever remember to thank every one who has helped along the way. I do know that I never could have completed the process without the help of many others. Most of all, I know I could not have done it without God who provided the strength and persistence for me to continue.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Student transitions from one educational level to the next have been a concern of educators for years. The idea that many students experience difficulties during this time is addressed in reports dating back over 100 years (Toepfer, 1986). In the early history of public education, it was common for all grades to be housed in the same building. At that time students only had two transitions, consisting of the advancement from home to school and from school to vocation.

As urban areas continued to grow, and schools increased in size, schools divided into elementary and secondary levels. The need for child labor caused many students to discontinue their formal education at the elementary level, while the primary purpose of the secondary school was preparation for college or vocation (Weller, 1999). Although children from wealthy families seldom attended public schools before the 1900's the number of students enrolled in secondary public schools continued to grow rapidly (Pulliam, 1982). Advancement in technology also increased enrollment numbers in the secondary grades. Reduction in the need for child labor that often took priority over education, and an increasing exigency for basic skills that would be needed in high school, put more demands on the elementary level school (Weller, 1999). Although it was possible to add classrooms to the elementary school, it was difficult to build classrooms that were desirable for the use of both elementary and secondary age children (Briggs, 1920).

In the early 1800's, few students attended school past the elementary grades. It wasn't until around 1890 that the public high school began to emerge
as a separate educational presence in the United States (Inglis, 1918). As academic needs continued to change, and rapid population growth continued in many areas of the country, the need to keep schools at a manageable size helped to bring about a new division of the K-12 school. Many school systems began separating into elementary, middle and secondary levels. This new middle level school was meant to address several problematic issues in the K-12 academic structure. To some, the middle level school was merely a way to meet growing enrollment needs, but to others it was a long overdue chance to meet the unique needs of the young adolescent student. There had been a common assumption for years that the young adolescent student should be segregated both from the younger and from the older students (Briggs, 1920). However, many middle level schools were established for reasons that had little to do with the academic or social development of young adolescent age group (George & Shewey, 1994).

Advocates of the junior high recognized the need for a separate educational setting, separate from the elementary and the high school. Some of the educational needs that were to be addressed by the junior high included the following:

1. Programs designed for the individual needs of students;
2. Introduction to college-preparatory courses at an earlier age;
3. Enhanced educational opportunities;
4. Relief from overcrowded elementary schools;
5. Providing a gradual transition from elementary to high school; and
6. Expanding the curriculum to provide more exploratory and vocational classes (Calhoun, 1983).

Even though the intent of developing a middle level school was to provide a more age appropriate education, the junior high and high schools were more
alike than different. The junior high that founders had intended to be a bridge
between the elementary and secondary levels, had turned into a place more
suitable for the teenager than the young adolescent (Alexander, 1969).

In the early 1900's, the middle level schools that existed were referred to
as junior highs and had a structure similar to that of the high school. By the late
1940's a separate junior high followed by a separate senior high had become
the predominate pattern of school configuration in the United States (Lounsbury
& Vars, 1978). At the typical junior high, teachers were based in academic
departments, students were promoted or retained based on subject
performance, students were grouped according to I.Q. scores, and
interscholastic athletics dominated at the expense of intramural activities
(Weller, 1999). Junior highs often mirrored the high schools, and even the junior
high leaders often came from the ranks of high school assistant principals
(George, 1990).

Until the 1970's, most students entering high school had either
experienced the similar junior high setting or progressed directly from
elementary grades (National Middle School Association, 1995). For many
students the transition from middle grades to high school, if there was one,
involved only minimal adjustments. Although some proponents claimed that the
goal of the junior high was to acknowledge and meet the unique needs of the
preadolescent (Koos, 1927), the junior high faced much criticism for not
adequately meeting the needs of the ten to fourteen year old. This age group
had been treated as "stepchildren" in education with their needs not being met at
the elementary or the junior high level (Compton, 1978).

During the 1950's and 1960's, public education in the United States
became more humanistic and child centered in approach (Chamberlain, 1992).
The middle school concept developed in the 1960's was intended to better
address the specific needs of the early adolescent. However, many educators failed to define or implement middle school programs adequately. A survey conducted in 1967 found that less than half of the middle school administrators surveyed listed meeting the unique needs of the 10 to 14 year old age group as the primary reason for building a middle school (Cuban, 1992). Alexander (1969) emphasized that the middle school was not meant to be a reworking of the junior high school. He suggested that the word "middle" described the student in the middle between childhood and adolescence, and the school in the middle between elementary and secondary education. Lounsbury & Vars (1978) believed that research makes it clear that the middle school is subject to the same gap between theory and practice that kept the junior high from reaching its expected potential. Changing the name of the middle level school is not nearly as important as changing the developmental direction (Chamberlain, 1992).

There have been various opinions on the most effective middle grades configuration. The 6th through 8th middle grade configuration was promoted in the 1960’s by educators such as Alexander (1969) and Eichorn (1966). This grade configuration was the most prevalent in the middle school movement. Johnson (1963) and Vars (1966), however, both concluded that good teachers, sound curriculum, and a program designed to meet the needs of the young adolescent were more important than grade placement configuration.

It was not until the 1970’s that the middle school became the more common middle grade configuration across the United States. The middle school was different from the junior high in philosophy and structure and quickly grew in popularity. In slightly more than three decades, the number of middle schools grew from a few hundred to thousands, while the number of junior high schools decreased (Weller, 1999). From 1970 to 1976 alone, the number of identified middle schools grew from 2,298 to 4,060 (Lounsbury & Vars, 1978).
As popularity of the middle school concept continued to grow, educators contemplated what characteristics would define the concept. Alexander, Williams, Compton, Hines, Prescott, & Kealy (1968) describe the middle school as “a school providing a program planned for a range of older children, preadolescents, and early adolescents that builds upon the elementary school program for earlier childhood and in turn is built upon by the high school’s program for adolescence” (p. 5). Despite the efforts of middle school activists, many middle schools retained characteristics of the junior high from which they were trying to differentiate themselves. Team teaching and interdisciplinary curricular organization became basic features of the emerging middle school concept, but in practice traditional subject disciplines remained dominant in the curriculum (Hiebowitsch & Wraga, 1998).

During the 1970’s and 1980’s, educators continued to struggle toward consensus on the central elements of the middle school (George & Shewey, 1994). In Georgia, the middle school concept was defined and implementation was encouraged by the backing of government funds through the Middle School Incentive Grant (Georgia, 1990). The Middle School Incentive Grant provided monetary support to schools that agreed to adhere to the basic criteria of the true middle school concept as defined by the state of Georgia. Commonly accepted characteristics of the middle school structure include the following:

1. Interdisciplinary teaching teams: group of teachers that teach the same group of students, represent each of the core academic areas, and are located in the same area of the building. These teams promote closer relationships between teachers and students and facilitate connection between subjects.
2. Common teacher planning time: allows teachers on the same team to plan strategies for teaching the team and individual students on that team.

3. Exploratory and enrichment curriculum: a variety of courses that allow students to explore and develop interests and abilities.

4. Intramural activities: these activities provide opportunities for students to participate, regardless of skill levels, in an environment where competition is minimized.

5. A core academic program: includes English/Language Arts and its subcomponents, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies.

6. Variable class scheduling configuration: schedule variations such as block scheduling, flexible scheduling, and flexible-modular scheduling.

7. Independent study: individualized instruction and specially developed materials.

8. Guidance and the advisor-advisee program: emphasis on assisting students with emotional development, character development, and career guidance.

9. Emphasis on social development: providing opportunities for students to learn and practice appropriate interaction with peers and adults.

10. Child-centered philosophy: allowing students to develop at their own pace with less emphasis on mastery of skills and tracking (Weller, 1999). During the evolution of the middle school, some middle level schools adopted the middle school configuration in name only and continued to practice as a junior high (Calhoun, 1983). Furthermore, teachers at schools that may have adopted the middle school philosophy, often felt they were so overloaded with other responsibilities that there was little time to implement strategies such as interdisciplinary instruction (Vars, 1987). But for those schools that truly
embraced the middle school concept, the new middle grades structure made the middle grades a distinctly different entity, no longer a replica of the high school (Weller, 1999).

In 1983, two-thirds of the schools called middle schools were organized as 6th through 8th grades (Calhoun, 1983). The new middle level educational structure caused a change in dynamics for the student making the transition from middle school to high school. An age group of students who had once faced the transition to a similar educational setting were now entering high schools that seemed to many like an intimidating and unfamiliar educational environment. Eccles & Midgley (1989) suggested that student transition problems often result from a mismatch of the psychological needs of the young adolescent and the characteristics of the school's social environment. While many educators today are proponents of the middle school concept, some still criticize it, but few will argue that students often need help adjusting to the differences between middle school and high school.

Students experiencing difficulty adjusting to a new educational setting is not an uncommon problem. Lounsbury (1984) suggested that not all students learn sequentially according to the clock and calendar of the graded school system. Many students advancing to a new educational level experience a decline in academic performance, increased absenteeism, increased behavioral disturbances, and decreased participation in extracurricular programs (Fritzer & Herbst, 1996). Students experiencing several significant life changes at the same time are at an even greater risk of failing to make the transition successfully (Simmons, Burgeson, Carlton-Ford & Blyth, 1987). Although many students outwardly appear to make the adjustment easily, most face some degree of anxiety (Sportsman, 1987).
Middle school to high school transition programs help students succeed in numerous ways. By informing middle school students about what they can reasonably expect at the high school level, they may be less anxious about the "unknown" (Fowler, 1988). Explanation of class and activity options can help students to make better decisions about proper academic placement and pursuing strengths and interests. An introduction to high school faculty and students reduces the middle school student's anxiety of not knowing anyone or how they will be treated as ninth graders. Increased exposure of students to the high school prior to the ninth grade can significantly reduce some problems these students may experience during ninth grade (Epstein & Maclver, 1990).

Schools and school systems address student transition in a number of ways. A transition program is the combination of a number of activities a school or school system has chosen to meet the transition needs of its students. A transition program may be as simple as an open house, or as thorough as months of interrelated activities. Some of the more common high school transition program activities address issues such as registration and course requirements, policies and rules, campus familiarity, and social adjustment (Hertzog & Morgan, 1992).

There are many considerations that effect a school's implementation of a transition program. Time, funding, personnel, and student needs must all be considered when developing a program. All schools do not have the same transition needs or resources, making it difficult for educational leaders to develop a blueprint of an effective transition program. However, it is important that each school attempt to meet the transition needs of its students. If a student falls behind or becomes discouraged during the first year of their high school career, they may not be able to recover during the next three years of high school.
The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify those activities that attempt to promote student success during the transition from middle school to high school. This study also helped to determine what similarities, differences, and trends existed within transition programs at schools of varying student populations. Furthermore, the study investigated the selected schools' employees' perception of the effectiveness of programs that existed to assist students during the transition from eighth to ninth grade in these schools. The study compared the transition programs in Fulton County, Georgia, high schools and their feeder middle schools with those of comparable schools in the metropolitan Atlanta area.

Definition of Terms

Administration - the principal and assistant principals of a school.
Articulation - the linking of curriculum from one educational level to the next. Articulation helps to insure that ninth grade curriculum starts where the eighth grade curriculum ended.
Collaboration - the process of sharing and combining resources at two educational levels to improve the transition process between the two.
Extracurricular Activities - activities not directly related to the curriculum that usually take place outside of the normal school day. These may include athletics, fine arts, clubs, and service organizations.
Feeder School - the middle school in which a particular high school's students previously attended.
High School - school housing grades nine through twelve inclusive.
Junior High - a school housing a minimum of grades seven and eight and structured similarly to the high school. Common junior high characteristics
include department configuration based on subject area, emphasis on skill and concept mastery, and interscholastic competition.

Metropolitan – counties (school systems) surrounding the city of Atlanta, Georgia.

Middle School - a school housing grades six through eight, inclusive and exclusive, and structured in accordance to the middle school guidelines as established by The Georgia Department of Education. Common middle school characteristics include interdisciplinary teaching teams, common teacher planning time, exploratory curriculum, and advisory programs.

Middle School Incentive Grant - additional government funding of the middle school program based on the adherence to specific middle school program criteria.

Orientation - the process of familiarizing parents and or students with the campus, faculty, and curriculum.

Transition - the change that a student experiences when advancing from one educational level to the next. This usually includes a change in campus, school faculty, academic structure, and social acquaintances.

Transition Activity - an activity intended to address a specific transition need or needs. An individual school’s or school system’s transition program may consist of few or many activities.

Transition Program - a program consisting of a number of transition activities designed to help students adjust to the differences from one educational level to the next. A program may consist of many, or only a few transition related activities and vary greatly between schools and systems.
Research Questions

The following five research questions provided the direction for this study:
1. What are the similarities and differences between transition programs in Fulton County Schools and those of similar metropolitan Atlanta schools?
2. Are the transition programs perceived differently by the selected high schools than by the feeder middle schools?
3. What are the similarities and differences in transition programs between urban and suburban schools in metropolitan Atlanta?
4. What transition activities do the respondents consider effective?
5. What transition activities do the respondents consider ineffective?

Significance of the Study

This study was intended to add to the knowledge base concerning middle school to high school student transition activities and programs. Research pertaining to those activities which help students cope with the difficulties of moving from one educational level to another assists educators in learning about the transition process as a whole. Important distinction from practicing educators will be examined to determine the components of selected transition programs, the need for these programs, and the perceived benefits of the programs to students. The literature provided support that transition programs can help students adjust academically and socially to the differences in the high school and the middle school. There was mounting evidence that middle school to high school transition programs (when well structured) contribute to the success of students in ninth grade (Cooke, 1995; & Meyer, 1995). However, there is limited research concerning the needs and benefits of eighth to ninth grade transition programs.
While each school and school system is unique in its students' transition needs, research consistently supports the idea that most transition programs yield some measurable benefit (MacIver, 1990). The results of this study may provide schools with important research findings to enhance their own transition programs.

Limitations

This study was limited to self-reported data from selected public middle schools and high schools in metropolitan Atlanta, Georgia. The results of this study can not be generalized to all schools in the state of Georgia, and caution should be used in generalizing any of the conclusions from the study. Further limitations of the study concerning transition programs include the following:

1. The study did not define transition program success;
2. The schools in the study did not define transition program success;
3. The schools in the study provided no data as evidence of success;
4. The schools in the study collected no data as evidence of success;
5. The study did not provide data to prove transition program success; and
6. No test of reliability was conducted on the survey instrument (TAAI).

Organization of the Study

The study was organized into five chapters. Chapter I includes the introduction of the study, importance of the study, the purpose of the study, definition of key terms, research questions, significance of the study, limitations, and the organization of the study.

Chapter II reflects a comprehensive review of literature describing school transition programs and the effects of these programs on students and learning.
The chapter describes the need for transition programs, recently implemented transition programs, and the benefits of these programs.

Chapter III describes the method and procedures used in this study including: research design and procedures, restatement of the purpose, research questions, sample, instrumentation, validity, and data analysis.

Chapter IV reports the findings of the study.

Chapter V contains the summary of the results, and findings and conclusions reached as a result of the research. The final chapter also presents recommendations for further studies.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Educational literature consistently suggests that many students struggle with the transition from one educational level to the next. These transitions often include home to elementary school, elementary school to middle grades, middle grades to high school, and high school to college or vocation. After students spend from three to five years at a school, they are forced to leave the comfort and familiarity of that school to attend what is usually a larger school with older students and a more diversified population. Transition means "a change from one place to another" (Morehead & Morehead, 1981, p.551), and for many students it can be a complex process. Although the student's maturity level and knowledge may change from one transition to the next, the general areas of concern among students are similar and may include academic, social, and physical challenges. In the middle school to high school transition specifically, student failure rates increase significantly as students enter the ninth grade from the eighth grade (Pantle, 1992; Reyes, Gillock, & Kobus, 1994). Most middle school to high school transition programs focus on orientation to high school policies and campus familiarity (Jett, Pulling, & Ross, 1994), and although these two aspects are important to a transition program, there are many more transition areas that need to be addressed.

The need to "bridge the gap" between educational levels is not new. A desire for better articulation (marked by clarity and effectiveness of language) between elementary and secondary schools was addressed in National Education Association reports dating back as far as 1894. In recent years, the addition of the middle school (an additional transition) has increased the need
addition of the middle school (an additional transition) has increased the need for a comprehensive transition program that addresses the many concerns and difficulties faced by students progressing from one level to the next (Toepfer, 1986).

The purpose of this chapter was to review the related literature on transition programs and activities currently being implemented in some schools. A transition program is considered to be a number of transition activities specifically used to help students adjust to the change from middle school to high school. A transition activity is a single aspect of a transition program such as a field trip allowing eighth graders to visit the high school or a visit of ninth grade counselors to the middle school. Research and information from practicing educators was collected to determine the components of selected transition programs, the need for these programs, and the perceived benefits of the programs to students. Although the middle school to high school transition is often the most difficult transition for students, there is significantly less information about the middle school to high school transition process than there is about the elementary to middle school or the high school to college transition process. Not only is there less information on the transition process between middle school and high school compared to other school transitions, there are also fewer transition activities to assist students in making the adjustment from middle school to high school than there are from elementary school to middle school or from high school to college (MacIver, 1990).

Although most schools have a number of transition activities that could be termed as a "transition program", the term is vague and inconsistent. In that regard, the review of related literature examined individual transition activities that may be used independently or as part of a multi-faceted program at a number of schools. The chapter concludes with a review of related literature.
concerning possible problems with the implementation of transition programs, and critical elements of transition programs.

**Need for Transition Programs**

Many schools consist of middle and high school grades together and treat students similarly, and thereby, make the transition from middle grades to high school grades non-existent. Although this grade configuration is not uncommon, the increases in school size and growth of urban areas has made it popular for middle grades to be separate from the high school grades. The call for middle level schools came from various political and education groups around the turn of the century. The purpose of middle grades was as a transition or bridge for the educational period between childhood and adolescence (McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins, 1996). However, this additional educational level also added an additional school transition, and for some students an increased number of challenges to overcome (Toepfer, 1986). Although the development of middle grades created an additional transition between eighth and ninth grade, students were expected to continue to function in the educational process as if there was no transition. Ninth graders at the beginning of the academic year are not much different academically, physically, socially, and emotionally from eighth graders at the end of the academic year, yet they are often expected to adjust quickly to an entirely different environment (Jett, et al., 1994). Research conducted on transition processes helped educators to realize that student transitions were a significant concern for students, parents, and teachers. When students struggle with transitions, the academic and social problems that may arise such as drop outs and lower performance are detrimental to the student and to society as a whole.
Fritzer & Herbst (1996) stated that transferring to a new school or grade creates a period of time for students which is often characterized by declining academic performance, increased absences, increased behavioral disturbances, and decreased participation in extracurricular programs. This may cause ninth graders to veer so far off course that it will be difficult to get back on track. Furthermore, ninth graders are usually the largest grade of the high school population, yet they often have the lowest grade point average and highest dropout rate (Fritzer & Herbst, 1996; Reyes, Gillock, & Kobus, 1994). Although Garnier, Stein, & Jacobs (1997) described dropping out of high school as a complex process that usually begins during childhood, research by Smith (1997) confirms that many schools openly acknowledge a high failure rate among freshman students. One school described by Sheets, Izard-Baldwin, & Atterberry (1997) had over 20% of the ninth grade class drop out of school within the first year of high school. A study by Hertzog & Morgan (1992) suggests that most students decide to continue or not continue high school during their ninth grade year, and Marshall (1992) cited research that suggests a strong correlation between high school dropouts and the difficulty they had as ninth graders making the transition from the middle school to the high school.

The transition experience is unpleasant to many students (Phelan, Yu, & Davidson, 1994), but they are not the only ones who have concerns about the transition process. Parents, teachers, and administrators are also concerned about students making the eighth to ninth grade transition successfully. The following concerns are from all three populations: students, parents, and school administrators.

Student Concerns

There are many factors that cause anxiety among students as they make the transition from middle school to high school. First, they lose their social
status by going from the top to the bottom of the social, physical, and academic ladder. Second, many high school students fear being "bullied" by the older, bigger students but are less prone to report it than when they were in middle school (Whitney & Smith, 1993). Cooke (1995), Martirano (1997), and Weldy (1991) listed the following primary concerns of students entering the ninth grade:

1. Adjusting to grading differences and standards;
2. Less explaining, less reminding, and less guidance from teachers;
3. Stress from more difficult tests and examinations;
4. Lack of time to spend with friends and family;
5. Complex schedules;
6. More and different students, some of whom disrupt the learning environment;
7. Feeling lonely or isolated;
8. Missing old friends and being unable to make new ones; and
9. Being overwhelmed by the school size.

To add to these concerns, Cooke (1995) stated that ninth grade students perceived teachers to be less helpful and less concerned about their interests than teachers in the middle school. Wells (1996) suggested that ninth grade students perceive a significant "shift" of responsibilities onto their own shoulders, leading to additional pressure. Sportsman (1987) implied that although boys' and girls' transition concerns varied somewhat, both groups' primary concerns had to do with academics, relationships, and school activities. And Paris, Lawton, Turner & Roth (1991) stated that low achieving eighth graders became more anxious about the transition to high school than their high achieving peers because many of them were already struggling academically in their current environment. Concerns about class presentations, unkind teachers, keeping up
with assignments, lower grades, and harder work can be added to the long list of
commits that may effect a ninth grade student (Arth, 1990; Maute, 1991).

Although the factors listed above are common concerns among ninth
grade students, these concerns are often accompanied by other concerns about
home life and outside pressures not related to school. Many ninth grade
students today come from home environments that are not favorable or
supportive toward school achievement and involvement in school activities.
Students may come from single or working parent homes with minimal adult
supervision and role models. Outside pressures may also include negative peer
influence, relational conflicts or financial hardships. When students come from
abusive environments or come to school hungry, academic success becomes
more of a challenge. All of these concerns combined with the newly realized
outside pressures of career choices, dating relationships, more independence,
driving, and part time jobs make the task of helping students make a smooth
transition an even greater challenge (Hertzog & Morgan, 1992). As stressful as
the transition is from middle school to high school for the average student, these
concerns are augmented for a student that has special needs such as a learning
or behavior disorder.

Parent Concerns

At a time when parental support and influence is extremely important to
student success, many parents become less involved with the schools and the
education of their children. Although the parents may be just as concerned
about their student's education at the middle school and high school as they
were at the elementary school, they often do not feel as needed by their child as
they were and do not perceive that they are as welcome at the high school
(Barber & Patin, 1997). One reason parents do not perceive that they are
welcome at the high school may be attributed to the fact that many parent
concerns about the transition process are viewed by the school as adversarial. Parents sometimes blame the high school or criticize staff when they feel their child is not supported as they were at the middle school. Cooke (1995) described the primary parent concerns of students entering high school as follows:

1. Unreasonably high expectations and standards;
2. Teachers unwillingness to extend extra help;
3. Punitive policies or punishment; and
4. Teachers’ and administrators inflexibility.

Many of these parental concerns can be attributed to their experiences with the middle school and elementary school. Just as students may struggle adjusting to the differences at the middle school and high school levels, many parents do not know what to expect and have to adjust to the differences as well. Increased student responsibility, more demanding curriculum, and less familiarity with teachers are just a few differences that may be unexpected to parents of ninth graders as well as to the students themselves. Other parent concerns include questions about their student’s academic performance, social interaction, and preparation for the future. Parents, as well as students, need transition programs to reduce anxiety (Combs, 1993) and will usually become more involved if they perceive general opportunities and invitations from the school (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

Although the role of parents is quite different when a student is in the ninth grade than when that student was in elementary school, the parents’ influence is still a key factor in the student’s success at school. Parents as well as students want to know what high school is going to be like (Sansone & Baker, 1990). Making parents knowledgeable about grading policies, homework, curriculum, and school activities reduces parent anxiety and the student benefits
from an informed parent. Parents need to understand and be actively involved in
the decisions their student make about their high school careers (Paulson,
1994). Schools should also involve parents in the transition process by having
them serve on planning committees, advisory groups, or join parent support
groups (Weldy, 1995).

School Concerns

From an organizational perspective, there are significant differences in
middle school and high school structure that account for many of the difficulties
students face in making the transition adjustment (Wiles & Bondi, 1981).
Educational leaders must decide if these differences will be addressed by
making changes at the middle schools, making changes at the high schools,
making changes at both levels, or by helping the students adjust to the
differences. These differences are intensified when each level has it's own
training, licensing, and professional organizations (Weldy, 1990). How these
differences should be addressed is divergent within the literature.

Although teachers and administrators are often aware of the transition
concerns of students and parents, they often expect students, parents, or the
previous or subsequent school to be responsible for a successful transition
(Brazee, 1987). This reluctance to take responsibility for student transitions can
only be resolved through cooperation between everyone involved in the
transition process. High schools should not expect ninth grade students to
suppress their natural energy and activity to adapt and conform to an
organizational structure designed for 17 and 18-year-olds (Jett, et al., 1994).
Likewise, middle schools should not send students off without preparation for
their new high school environment.

When asked about transition concerns, teachers may often have a
separate list from students or parents. A common list of a high school teacher's
transition concerns usually includes a mention of the students being poorly prepared academically for high school. Examples may include upcoming students' inability to do long range assignments, complete work on time, a lack of parental involvement, and inappropriate behavior (Cooke, 1995). Middle school teachers are concerned about a lack of support, caring, or time for adjustment when the students arrive at the high school. Administrators are usually in a better position than the teachers to understand and influence the entire transition process. However, they are often consumed by everyday school activities and the needs of their students to the point where the transition process does not become a priority until the end of the year (Leiderman & Terzopolos, 1991). It is common for an assistant principal, counselor or teacher to be in charge of a school's transition program.

**Transition Program Strategies and Activities**

Transition programs vary in kind and duration, and there is no general agreement on the exact composition of an effective program. Although the average number of activities per high school transition program is between three and four, the needs addressed by these activities vary significantly from one school to the next (MacIver, 1990). Transition programs may include activities implemented by the middle school, the high school, or through a collaborative effort of these two units. The most common transition activities fall under one of the following categories:

1. Registration and course requirements - includes student schedules, graduation requirements, elective options, and academic levels.

2. High school policies and rules - includes discipline guidelines, attendance policy, student privileges, and school activities.
3. Campus familiarity - includes learning to navigate class changes, increasing awareness of available facilities, and meeting staff members.

4. Social adjustment - includes dealing with new social expectations, interaction with older students, and age appropriate behavior.

The most basic program may only include a visit to the middle school by the high school administrator or counselor, a visit to the high school by the upcoming ninth graders, and/or an open house at the high school for parents at the beginning of the school year. An entire program may consist of a week or two of activities at the end of the eighth grade year, or at the beginning of the ninth grade year (Sheets, et al., 1997). Some of the more structured and in-depth programs may start at the beginning of the students’ eighth grade year and continue through the end of the student’s ninth grade year. These programs often include teachers, counselors, administrators, parents, and students from both the middle school and the high school in a well-planned, highly collaborative effort.

The transition activities described below are those listed in the literature as addressing the more salient needs of students in the transition process. Each activity was cited in the literature two or more times and was grouped according to the following categories: high school conducted activities, middle school conducted activities, middle school - high school collaboration programs, parent orientation activities, student visitation activities, student involvement in activities, and counseling/ advisement activities.

**Activities Conducted by the High School**

Ideally, middle school teachers should be as concerned about students’ educational success at the high school level as the high school teachers are. However, in a practical sense, the high school teachers are often more
concerned about transition activities because they have more to gain or lose from the transition process. The success or failure of the transition program will directly effect the high school teachers, where as the middle school teachers may not be effected as much. For this reason, high schools often conduct more transition activities for eighth grade students than do middle schools.

A common transition activity conducted by the high school is to have administrators, counselors, and/or teachers from the high school visit the middle school and speak to eighth grade students. Student orientation meetings address items such as registration and course requirements, presentation of high school policies and procedures, and social expectations of the ninth grade students. Although this was not the most frequently cited transition activity in the review of literature, Hertzog and Morgan (1992) describe this visit to the middle school as the most commonly occurring transition activity in most schools.

In addition to information concerning academics, many high schools like to present extracurricular opportunities to students during their eighth grade year. Extra curricular activities can be a significant part of the high school experience for many students (Fitzsimmons & Lewis, 1996). Many believe that extracurricular involvement is a strong factor in promoting student success and many schools have made this a priority in their transition programs. Ninth grade clubs, sports teams, and fine arts groups are common in many high schools (Hertzog & Morgan 1992). Some schools conduct a fair, in a carnival type setting, with display booths presenting information on clubs, vocational courses, magnet programs, sports, and electives, as well as items related to the academic curriculum. Riley (1984) suggested that an ideal time to conduct fairs is during an open house or an orientation meeting when parents can also be exposed to what the school has to offer.
Regardless of the amount of preparation students have experienced prior to the beginning of the ninth grade school year, there will still be some amount of anxiety among these students as they begin the ninth grade. An activity used by some high schools is to open one day early for ninth grade students to specifically address some of their transition concerns. The benefit of this activity is that it allows ninth grade student to experience a full day of school without a feeling of intimidation of the older students. A school may want to bring in its faculty and some upperclassmen a before school starts for additional orientation of ninth grade students (Pohl, 1995). This staggered opening allows for registration of unexpected students, emphasis of key transition concerns, and help for those students who missed earlier transition activities (Cooke, 1995). Even if it is not feasible to stagger the start of school, it is possible to accomplish some of the same goals by beginning the first day with a freshman only assembly. This allows school personnel to make ninth graders feel welcome and emphasize important information and to familiarize students with names and faces of some staff members (Mayer, 1995).

Ninth grade team teaching, school within a school, ninth grade “houses”, or separate extracurricular clubs and sports for ninth graders can also help students to adjust to the high school structure. These factors help limit ninth grade students’ interaction with older students during their first year of high school. Like middle school teaching teams, ninth grade teaching teams have common teacher planning times and separate groups of students for each group of two or three teachers. Team teaching allows students to have fewer teachers and this provides for more personal interaction with teachers getting to know their students better. Research by Bryk and Thum (1989) found that student attendance is improved when teachers are interested in and engaged with students. Team teaching also makes it easier to group students by ability
because all of the ninth grade students remain with ninth grade teachers (Fritzer & Herbst, 1996).

Several school have boasted of improved success among ninth graders by housing them in a "freshman village" (MacDonald, 2000). However, when the freshmen are housed in a separate area of the building, or in a totally separate building, the ninth grade experience may be a continuation of what the students experienced at the middle school. Although some aspects of the high school team approach have yielded positive results such as a reduced failure and dropout rate during the ninth grade, it is possible that some of the problems were merely postponed until the students entered grade ten. The individual school must determine how much of the high school structure they want students to be, or not to be, exposed to their first year.

Activities Conducted at the Middle School

Just as a teacher can take pride in seeing an individual student progress to next level, the middle school staff can take pride in the progression of an eighth grade class as a whole. It is important to the transition process that the middle school provides young adolescents with a supportive and challenging experience (Belcher & Hatley, 1994). Some students, however, are still reluctant to "let go" of the middle school culture. Most middle school students look forward to the benefits and opportunities of a new school, but have a desire to keep the familiarity of their current school (Odegaard & Heath, 1992). To help bring a conclusion to the middle school experience, some schools have established "traditions" that will help students leave their middle school years behind them. One "tradition" is an annual eighth grade banquet or dance. Both of these activities are intended to mark the end of the middle school experience. Based on the preferences of students, parents, and school staff, middle schools may choose to have a more formal ceremony or awards presentation to serve
the same purpose. Some schools hold a "graduation" or capping ceremony, similar to a high school graduation, to represent the completion of a stage in life. Just as in most high schools, this can be a very meaningful time for the students and it can help eighth grade students to put their middle school years in the past (Rosa & Vowels, 1998).

**Middle School - High School Staff Collaboration**

A successful transition program requires collaboration and cooperation between administrators, counselors, and teachers at the middle school and high school level (Marshall, 1992; George, Stevenson, Thomason, & Beane, 1992). Both levels must take ownership in promoting long-term student success and working together to meet the needs of each class making the transition from the eighth to the ninth grade.

For a well planned and structured collaborative transition program, many schools start by identifying a transition team or committee made up of parents, students, and school personnel from both schools before program activities begin. This planning team is then responsible for the overall development and implementation of the transition program. This team provides information to teachers, parents, and students about the transition process at various stages, with input from those involved at both schools (Combs, 1993). The transition program should do more than just tell students how high school is going to be, it should help prepare them for high school. The transition planning team can help identify school practices that interfere with the smooth transition from the middle school to the high school. The planning team can also identify ways to facilitate this transition and even recommend activities that can be used as a system-wide program (Brazee, 1987). In order to benefit students at the middle school and at the high school, this team should be made up of members from both levels.
Communication between teachers at the middle school and at the high school is very important (Rossi & Stokes, 1986). Some transition programs include regularly scheduled meetings between high school and middle school teachers to discuss academic and nonacademic concerns for the purpose of preparing high school teachers to meet the needs of the upcoming ninth grade class. These meetings may include the review of student test scores and class work, and/or the discussion of special needs and behavioral problems of upcoming ninth grade students. To help students with the transition to the high school, it is not only important that the high school teachers understand the needs of the upcoming ninth grade class, but also the middle school teachers need to be aware of personal data and information on previous ninth grade classes. This information may be social, academic, and/or behavioral and can be used as a tool to help revise and improve transition programs. Some schools have conducted surveys of upcoming ninth grade students to assist in understanding the needs and concerns of those students (Gentry & Siehl, 1990). Although high school counselors will usually meet with eighth grade teachers to discuss the transition process as a whole, the meeting between high school and middle school teachers often address more specific concerns or questions about students or groups of upcoming ninth grade students. By helping both middle school and high school teachers become more aware of the students' middle school background and the high school teachers' future expectations, these meetings help to eliminate or minimize complaints and accusations among teachers that either level alone is to blame for transition difficulties (Brazee, 1987).

Communication between levels can also help to insure that ninth grade students begin academically where they left off at the end of the eighth grade. Curriculum articulation has received "lip service" in school systems around the
country, but few school systems actually make it a priority. Middle level educators rarely have an adequate knowledge of the programs at both the elementary school and the high school (Alexander, Williams, Compton, Hines, Prescott, & Kealy, 1968).

In theory, curriculum articulation means to join or connect curriculum in the schools that precede and the schools that follow, suggesting that students need to be provided with learning experiences that are logical, continuous, and sequential (Alexander, 1989). The middle school curriculum should connect the broad general elementary curriculum to that of the subject-centered high school (McEwin, et al., 1996). In order to accomplish this, schools need to minimize curriculum overlaps and gaps between all levels and grades. Overlap refers to students needlessly repeating previously completed objectives, while gaps describe necessary prerequisite information missing from the kindergarten through twelfth grade curriculum. To minimize these two problems requires communication and collaboration among all grades, kindergarten through twelfth (Weldy, 1990). Although the school system or state curriculum may be designed with this in mind, what is actually being taught in the classroom may be significantly different. Some classes may not complete the entire curriculum prescribed for that grade or subject, while others may complete different or additional objectives. This may become obvious when a high school has several feeder middle schools and the students enter the high school with varying academic backgrounds that are not based entirely on ability.

Teacher “shadowing” is a collaborative strategy that can work for teachers at the middle school or the high school. Some schools have teachers spend a day, or part of a day, observing a teacher at another grade level. Middle school teachers can observe high school classrooms and vice-versa. Shadowing can be enlightening to teachers who have spent most of their
careers at the same grade level. Another variation with a similar objective is a teacher swap day where middle school and high school teachers actually trade places for a day (Combs, 1993). The benefit to the high school teachers who participate in this activity is that they may acquire a better idea of where their ninth grade students are coming from, and the middle school teachers may better understand what will be expected of their students in the future.

Collaborative transition activities do not have to be independent of the classroom. Marshall (1992) suggested that transition activities should be integrated into Language Arts classes at the middle school and at the high school. Marshall notes that a letter writing network is a good way to get students involved in the transition process. One high school organizes letter writing between eighth and ninth graders through their language arts teachers. The purpose of the project is to have eighth graders establish a student contact at the high school while acquiring answers to questions about high school life and what can be expected in the first year of high school. The letter writing practice in itself, is a beneficial activity for the students. This activity promotes the "pen pal" concept and can be expanded into a buddy program in the fall where eighth grade students can meet and interact with their high school writing partner. Another writing activity described by Marshall (1992) requires that ninth grade students keep a journal of their high school experiences for the first few weeks or months, and then forward those journals to be read by or to, eighth grade students. Both of these activities allow for ongoing information to, and possibly feedback from, eighth grade students about what they can expect from high school.

**Student Involvement**

Students can be a valuable resource in helping other students make a smooth transition. Encouraging the younger middle school students to interact
socially with the older high school students may help them feel less intimidated and more confident socially and emotionally. This interaction helps upcoming ninth grade students by building confidence in their ability to have positive relationships with older students, and familiarizes them with someone they will recognize when they enter the high school in the fall. Some of the socialization process occurs during the eighth grade students' visit to the high school as they meet and observe high school students. However, an additional socialization process is to have a select group of high school students visit the middle school. These students may describe high school life to a group of eighth grade students or interact casually with individual eighth grade students. The age and grade of the visiting high school students may vary, and there are numerous variations of how this socialization function is conducted. Some counselors will take selected ninth grade students with them when they visit the middle school to assist in presenting transition information to the eighth grade students. These high school students help to reiterate the counselor's message in a way that students may receive differently, and can answer questions from a student's perspective (Combs, 1993). Some eighth grade students may perceive adults as being out of touch with student concerns, but will consider advice given from older students who have recently experienced similar transition concerns.

Other transition programs that actively involve students include reunions or homecomings that allow high school students to return to their middle school for a special event and interact with the eighth grade students. A similar transition activity promotes year round high school student visitation to the middle school to have lunch with, tutor, or simply socialize with eighth grade students (Rosa & Vowels, 1998). Opportunities exist throughout the school year for high school students to return to the middle school and interact with the eighth grade students. High school students who are uncomfortable around
groups of students can still help by mentoring or tutoring an individual eighth grade student or by describing their own difficult experiences during the transition process.

Many high schools get students of all grades involved in the transition process because middle school students often are more at ease and more receptive to information given by, and interaction with, other teenagers (Rosa & Vowels, 1998). Mentoring is one of the primary ways that high school students get involved in the transition process. Mentoring may include one-on-one academic instruction, relational role modeling such as a big-brother/big-sister program, or group student interaction. Hertzog (1996) suggested “buddy groups”, which are groups of eleventh grade students that meet regularly with groups of ninth grade students to counsel and build positive relationships. The group approach is less personal, but may also be less threatening than one-on-one interaction for some students. Student mentoring gives younger students a source of information as well as a familiar face when they enter the high school. At a time when friendships and social interaction are particularly important, it is helpful to include activities that will provide incoming students with social support (Eccles & Midgley, 1998). These mentoring relationships can be encouraged to continue throughout the student’s ninth grade year.

Student Visitation Activities

One of the more prevalent concerns of upcoming ninth grade students have is their familiarity with the high school campus. The more visits a student can make to the high school’s campus before ninth grade entrance, the easier they find their way and the more comfortable they will be around the high school during their first few weeks.

The second most common activity described in the literature is a student “field trip” or visit to the new school. Pohl (1991) described this visit to the
school as an informal greeting that often includes a student prepared video
describing the school. A tour of the building conducted by high school students
and/or teachers is usually included, sometimes with refreshments provided by
the PTA. Some schools may prefer an evening visit that does not disrupt the
school day, but such activities offer a less realistic view of the school
environment. Other schools may allow upcoming eighth graders to sit in on
classrooms and view instruction and student interaction first-hand. Most
sources agree that upcoming freshmen should be given numerous opportunities
to become aquatinted with the building that may be significantly larger than their
previous school. It is the opinion of some authors that many high schools are
too large in size and population, making the adjustment to high school more
difficult for ninth graders. Lounsbury (1996), for example, recommended that
school buildings should house no more than 500 students. Smaller student
populations help ninth grade students to get aquatinted to teachers, feel less
intimidated, and become more involved.

Case (1989) cited a common transition practice often referred to as
“student shadowing”. Shadowing entails activities in which eighth grade
students attend regular classes, eat lunch, and experience a day in the life of a
high school student. The eighth grade student may follow an older high school
student through all or part of that student’s typical school day. The size of the
school may dictate how the shadowing activity can be conducted. For some of
the smaller middle schools with populations of less than one thousand
students it may be possible for all eighth graders to visit the high school. In
middle schools with more than one thousand students it may be necessary to
allow only a portion of the eighth graders to visit the high school. These
representatives may then report important information back to each class or
team. Either option provides students with necessary information about the ninth grade and what will be expected of them.

It is important for upcoming ninth grade students to experience the various aspects of the high school setting beyond the classroom when they visit. To expose middle school students to the high school in different situations, some high schools offer free passes to eighth grade students to attend extracurricular activities. This not only promotes extracurricular involvement among freshmen as they are exposed to these activities; it also allows them to interact with the older high school students and increases familiarity with the school campus. Depending on the number of students participating in this activity, a school may have a special night set aside to invite the entire eighth grade class at one time. These activities may also include the addition of a school tour or a social time that includes refreshments.

**Parent Orientation Activities**

Parents are an important part of the middle school to high school transition (Combs, 1993). To effectively assist and support their child during the transition period, parents need to be informed during the transition process. With that need in mind, many schools' transition activities attempt to prepare parents as well as students.

The most commonly used transition activity cited in the literature for parents is an open house or parents' night. Mayer (1995) stated that the high school usually hosts an open house in early spring, which is attended by eighth grade students, parents, and numerous staff members and students from the high school. This activity usually includes an assembly conducted by the high school that allows several school leaders to address the parents and students. Department heads and curriculum leaders may review the programs of study and present a synopsis of the academic guidelines relevant to ninth graders.
The student council advisor, athletic director, and/or administrator can emphasize to students and parents the importance of meaningful involvement in a variety of high school curricular and extracurricular activities. The open house usually includes a tour of the school that is often conducted by high school teachers and students. A school may want to showcase student accomplishments or projects while introducing parents and students to the school and staff.

It is important that communication with parents and students remain a major priority throughout the transition process for teachers, counselors and administrators. In addition to the meeting with families in person, many high schools include publications to convey important transition information. Publications may include a simple letter, or a detailed booklet. High schools may distribute a copy of literature already printed for the current high school students and parents, such as a PTA newsletter or the school newspaper, to upcoming students and their families. This allows parents and upcoming students to become familiar with high school issues and events. In addition to these publications, many schools develop literature specifically for the transition process. According to Gentry & Siehl (1990), one school distributes a monthly newsletter to the middle school from the high school counseling department that addresses issues important to the middle level student. These publications include information on upcoming school programs and activities, important dates, and columns by the school counselor or principal addressing specific interest areas for students and how parents and students can begin to prepare for ninth grade. Presenting the newsletter as information exclusively for eighth graders promotes interest among those students. Adding puzzles or prizes in the letter can also entice eighth graders to actively read the newsletter.
Counseling/Advisement Activities

The role played by eighth and ninth grade school counselors is important to the transition process, and their involvement in transition activities is essential to a program’s success (Kaiser, 1995; Pohl, 1991). Some counselors initial transition activity is to meet with students and parents during the student’s eighth grade year. These meetings allow counselors to initiate the advisor/advisee relationship and discuss such topics as course requirements, scheduling, school policy and extra curricular activities. Hertzog & Morgan (1992) describe an advisor/advisee program that begins in the spring of the students’ eighth grade year. This program focuses on high school counselors who visit the middle school to describe life at the high school. These counselors meet with small groups of ninth grade students that may be selected in a number of ways such as career interests, faculty recommendations or alphabetical order. The counseling sessions can occur weekly or monthly and stress the importance of good study skills and becoming involved in high school activities. Ninth grade students benefit from early involvement with counselors, who prepare the students to make educated decisions based on information given during the counseling sessions.

In the spring of each year, many high school counselors visit feeder middle schools to meet with the middle school teachers with multiple objectives. Primarily, the structured orientation may allow the staff to plan registration, placement, and the transfer of records. This time provides opportunity to discuss strengths, weaknesses, placement and special needs of the upcoming ninth grade students as a class as well as individual needs or potential problems (Milligan, 1995). Although this orientation can be beneficial for the placement and meeting special needs of students, it is not recommended that this time be
used as a negative discussion that may "label" students before entering the ninth grade (Bloomer, 1984).

In addition to sporadically occurring counseling prior to the students' entrance into the ninth grade, an ongoing counseling aspect can be implemented to continue addressing specific student needs throughout the entire ninth grade year. There are various times and formats for ongoing ninth grade counseling programs. One example is to provide guidance to ninth grade students by turning the traditional "homeroom" into an advisement period. This time that was often set aside for mundane tasks such as attendance and making announcements, can instead be used as a time to address the specific needs of the ninth grade students. Teachers can discuss items such as course requirements and options, responsible decision making, and setting goals with their students. Although this time may still include some school business such as attendance and general school announcements, advisement can also include teacher conducted mini seminars to follow up on previous transition activities and to promote student success. Teachers may take one advisement period, or several, to address topics important to students such as study skills, career planning, drugs and alcohol, parent problems, or peer pressure (Riley, 1984).

Because of the time restraints placed on the morning advisement period, some schools choose to conduct freshman workshops during the regular school day or even during lunch instead of in the morning. These workshops address items similar to those that may be addressed during homeroom advisement but in greater detail, and some schools identify and hold in-service training for teachers that are more interested or more effective in advising ninth grade students (Mayer, 1995). One high school schedules all first semester ninth grade students into a separate all ninth grade class for one period each day (Sheets, Izard-Baldwin, & Atterberry, 1997). To get an early jump on this
process, a similar advisement approach can be implemented during the eighth grade year.

Transition programs may include several of the above activities to address the most significant concerns of the population being served. There are many ways these activities can be combined to design a program to meet the transitional needs of an individual school. With proper planning, and the involvement of educators, parents and students, transition programs can help students succeed during their first year of high school.

Benefits of Transition Programs

Findings from research on student transition programs vary. However, many believe that benefits can be realized in numerous areas of concern from transition programs (Mayer, 1995; Combs, 1993; and Cooke, 1995). Some authors insist that schools with several, diverse transition activities experienced fewer students being retained or dropping out of the transition grade (Smith, 1997). In the eighth to ninth grade transition, this would mean fewer students having to repeat the ninth grade or drop out of school during the ninth grade. One high school with a ninth grade dropout problem addressed and improved the situation by implementing a ninth grade transition program (Faconti, 1987).

Students also need opportunities to experience success. Schools providing transition activities which aim to provide opportunities for success have indicated that these opportunities have improved students' academic performance (Kaplan, 1996). The transition for many students can be another chance to get off to a good start academically, regardless of past performance. Frender (1990) and Walker & Newman (1995) suggested that once students have experienced some academic success it becomes easier for them to learn.
In addition to reducing anxiety among students, transition programs may reduce many concerns of teachers and parents. When students have participated in a thorough orientation program, teachers do not have to spend as much class time going over school policies. The familiarity with the building and school policies also helps to reduce student and parent anxiety about entering a new and unfamiliar school. Transition programs provide students and their families with a bridge between the comfortable well-known middle school and the new and often unknown high school (Fowler, 1988).

While many transition activities focus directly on academic achievement and social adjustment, others address these areas indirectly by promoting involvement in extracurricular activities such as sports teams, or a co-curricular activities such as the math team (Dickinson & McEwin, 1997). Literature consistently supports the idea that students who are involved in extra curricular activities are consistently more successful in the classroom (VanSciver, 1984). Some educators support the idea that high school extra curricular activities are just as important as activities in the classroom. VanSciver (1984) implied that students who participate in school activities have lower dropout rates, higher grade point averages, miss less class time, and have a greater success rate in life after high school than non-participants. Students learn additional lessons that they may not get in the classroom such as teamwork, loyalty, courtesy, respect for self and others, tolerance, discipline, courage, responsibility, ethics and pride through co-curricular programs (Kanaby, 1996). Activities that promote these attributes can help a student adjust to and succeed at the high school level and can be a helpful addition to a transition program. In addition to the learning opportunities provided during school activities, students feel more connected to the school and to other students because of their involvement in these activities.
Although there are many that will deny the importance of extracurricular activities, or even conclude that they interfere with the academic process, we know that not all students are going to excel in the classroom. VanSciver (1984) argues that the opposite is also true. When extracurricular activities are reduced or eliminated the results are increased student absenteeism, higher dropout rates, and more discipline problems. These extra opportunities for a student to succeed may be determining factors in a student graduating or dropping out of school.

Regardless which transition activities a school chooses, it is important that the need for a transition program be addressed. Hertzog & Morgan (1992) agree that providing students with transition activities at either the middle school, the high school, or both, has proved to greatly reduce their apprehension and increase their sense of belonging, and MacIver (1990) also attests that most transition programs yield some measurable benefits.

Program Implementation Problems

There has been a significant amount of information written about the transition from elementary school to the team approach of the middle school. Unfortunately, there is little research published which helps schools to improve the transition from middle school to high school (Hertzog, 1996). Much of the research is published contains contradictory information and "finger pointing" in regard to what student needs are and who is responsible for meeting those needs. Although some schools feel they do not have the financial and personnel resources for a comprehensive transition program, there are other pitfalls that are more likely to get in the way. Some of the more common problems for schools implementing a transition program are described below.

Collaboration
One of the primary obstacles in implementing an effective transition program is often the lack of collaboration between the middle school and the high school. Many of the transition problems students face are derived from the different organizational structures of the middle and high school such as student grouping or teaching teams. Until the 1960's, middle grades were structured as junior high schools possessing a similar structure to the high school and presenting less significant changes from one level to the next (National Middle School Association, 1999; Weller, 1999). When the middle school concept was introduced to meet the needs of the young adolescent, with it came more substantial differences between the two levels (Brown, 1981). Although there is little written about the competitive nature of the junior high verses the middle school philosophy, it is evident that some who support the middle school philosophy see a need for the high schools to adjust their structure to meet the needs of students who have experienced the middle school concept. And the high school (or junior high) opinion is often that middle schools should be more like the high school to better prepare students for the high school environment.

The guidelines for middle school structure vary from state to state (Riesz & Ziemek, 1991), but in Georgia, the state legislature identified key elements of the middle school concept and helped insure implementation by providing financial supplements to those schools adhering to the prescribed middle school criteria (Georgia, 1990). Georgia's key components that distinguish the middle school structure from the high school's are:

1. Interdisciplinary teaching teams;
2. Exploratory curriculum;
3. Common teacher planning time;
4. Intramural athletics;
5. Emphasis on teacher advisory programs; and
6. Multi-age or other academic grouping
(Corbett, 1992; Georgia, 1990; Lawton, 1992; Lincoln, 1997; and McCarthy, 1970). High schools, on the other hand, are traditionally organized by subject area departments rather than teaching teams. High schools often emphasize skill and concept mastery and allow interscholastic competition in clubs and sports, with less emphasis on building a positive self-concept (Howard & Stoumois, 1970).

A competitive rather than a cooperative relationship between middle schools and high schools may interfere with the needed collaboration between levels. Proponents of the middle school concept sometimes refer to middle school as being "student centered", with the high school being "subject centered", insinuating that middle schools focus on students while high schools focus on subject content (Howard & Stoumois, 1970). In describing the transition process, some describe middle grade schools that prepare students by adopting a more "junior high" philosophy as high school impersonators. Others describe middle schools that adopt the middle school philosophy as those that are based on a philosophy of education that was specifically designed to meet the special needs of the preadolescent learner. One proponent of the junior high philosophy, however, claims that the benefits of the middle school structure are not as conclusive as some suggest (Case, 1989).

On the other hand, the student-centered philosophy of the middle school is occasionally ridiculed by the content centered high schools as lacking rigor and discipline. There are others who insist that middle schools are not adequately preparing students for high school and that they put too much emphasis on concepts such as raising self-esteem and avoiding competition (Leo, 1996). Many see the junior high philosophy as being more conducive to a smooth transition because it is more similar to the high school, requiring less
adjustment from students. Mizelle (1995) described research in which some high school students coming from middle school stated that middle school teachers should have done more to prepare them for high school, including giving them more demanding work and responsibility. Although some conclude that students perform better academically when middle school concepts are implemented (Student self concept, 1996), others believe that there are few significant differences in achievement or attitude between the two. As many middle grade reformers push to return to certain junior high type practices, middle school practitioners find a way to convince others that the middle level school should emphasize developmental responsiveness to accomplish academic achievement and self esteem (NMSA, 1996).

The number of middle schools in the United States has significantly surpassed the number of junior highs in the past thirty years, but it is likely that the debate between the middle school and the junior high school philosophy will continue (Weller, 1999; Wiles & Bondi, 1981). Individual schools and systems must find a way to assist students, regardless of which middle grade structure exists. According to Marshall (1992):

The different philosophies of education frequently practiced in these two different buildings [middle school and junior high school] coupled with a lack of articulation between the staffs that work in them, results in what may be best defined as blatant educational malpractice. The resulting disruption in the continuity of the experiences of the students who pass from the middle schools to the high schools manifests itself in a near catastrophic adjustment phase for these students. (pg. 26)

There are various strategies for reducing the disruption students face in middle school to high school transition. Some suggest a revamping of the middle school and high school grade structure so as to leave ninth grade at the
middle school. Although most middle schools include students sixth through eighth grade, Klesse (1997) believes that when middle schools include ninth graders, those students perform better academically, are more involved in school, and have better attitudes than ninth graders in the 9 through 12 high school. Some believe that ninth graders who remain in the middle school are better able to make the transition from middle school to high school because they have an extra year to mature.

Curriculum

A lack of curriculum articulation between academic levels often magnifies the problems students experience during a school transition. To have an isolated curriculum is not a good practice for schools if they plan to provide a productive twelve year experience for their students (Marshall, 1992). In other words, educators should consider what students are learning prior to entering, and after leaving their school. When educators disregard the need for curriculum articulation they often become focused on teaching “their” subject matter without regard to the students’ background or future. Cooke (1995) suggests that curriculum articulation should minimize gaps and overlap in both programs and learning expectations as students move from one school program or unit to the next. Students should not have to repeat content they have mastered, nor should they miss valuable prerequisite skills in the transition from middle school to high school. The need for curriculum articulation can be best addressed by the regular meeting of the staffs at both levels for the purpose of coordinating curriculum.

Evaluation

To support the need and implementation of most educational programs today, educators need “proof” that a program is truly worthwhile and beneficial to
students. The effectiveness of most transition programs, however, is not easily supported with hard data, and for several reasons.

First, there is a lack of existing literature in the area of middle school to high school transitions. Much of the research on school transitions focuses on elementary school to middle school programs.

Second, there are many factors that affect a successful student transition. It is hard to determine which, if any, transition activities actually affected the students in the transition process. A reduced failure rate among an entire freshman class, for example, could be the result of numerous factors such as better middle school preparation, better high school teaching, or more parental involvement.

Third, it is difficult to establish baseline data for comparison. Riley (1984) suggests that transition programs can be evaluated by examining freshman grades, attitudes, discipline and attendance records. However, comparing one year’s freshman class to another can sometimes result in an “apples to oranges” comparison. The performance of a ninth grade class may be a reflection of the impact of another school policy such as retention of eighth graders (Allen & King, 1996). When students who are not ready for the ninth grade academically are promoted, it can have a negative effect on the ninth grade failure rate.

Furthermore, students are merely a reflection of the community itself (Conway, 1992). A low or high achieving ninth grade class may have been influenced most by their home environment with minimal blame or credit going to the school transition program. An increase or decrease in student performance or a change in attitude toward school may not always be correlated to the transition activities.

Effects of a transition program are difficult to measure when the group of students the program is designed to help changes each year. Even if all
variables in the program remain constant, the changing student population, to some extent, determines the success of the program.

**Critical Elements of Transition Programs**

Of the transition activities found in the review of literature there are numerous possible combinations to form transition programs. There is no simple program guideline consisting of the "best" strategies for all schools. Just as every student is different, each school and system is different and will have unique transition needs. However, there are several general transition activities that merit consideration as an important part of any transition program. Marshall (1992) cited the following objectives as being important to most programs:

1. Providing students with information concerning sequences of study, course offerings, and levels of courses;
2. providing students with information concerning high school rules and regulations;
3. familiarizing students with student life in high school; and
4. acquainting students with the high school facilities.

A three-year study sponsored by the National Association of Secondary School Principals of a variety of types and sizes of schools, listed the most critical elements in the transition process as communication, cooperation, consensus, and commitment (Weidt, 1995). In order to address each of these issues, it is important to communicate with and seek involvement from staff, parents, and students.

**Staff Involvement**

Almost every pronouncement on middle level education lists guidance as a high priority, but with student-counselor ratios as high as 1 counselor to every 400 students, guidance counselors alone can not provide the attention
adolescents in transition need (Vars, 1997). Teachers can get involved in the guidance process through homeroom or class activities (Delaney, 1986). A middle school teacher’s involvement in the guidance process may include discussing high school course requirements or diploma options with eighth grade students. A high school teacher may incorporate study skills or conflict resolution tips into the curriculum. Administrators and/or counselors organize most transition programs, but an effective transition program needs the involvement and support of almost all educators at the middle school and the high school.

Parent Involvement

Some believe that for a transition program to be successful, parents must be involved (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989). Barber and Patin (1997) emphasize the importance of parent involvement in a student’s life during adolescents but note that this is when most parents become less involved in their children’s school activities. Many parents feel their children need less support at school as they grow older and believe that the school and their students do not want their involvement. But research supports the idea that students have less trouble with the transition process when they have a stable and supportive home environment (Combs, 1993). A study by Chandler and Johnson (1988) indicated that most parents want to share transition responsibilities with the school and teachers but many of them do not understand the process or are not comfortable with what is involved in the transition program.

One way to get parents involved is to look for opportunities for them to be included in school governance. Instead of using parents as a valuable resource in the transition process, too many schools look at parents as part of a problem because they often complain or resist change (Cooke, 1995). But even
uncooperative parents when allowed to help plan, implement, and evaluate the school’s transition program can become informed and supportive. When parents are involved in the school, they are often more involved in the life of their child.

**Student Involvement**

According to Riley (1984), “Those most enthusiastic about high school, those most highly motivated to succeed, are generally those who have yet to take their first class” (pg. 113). The most important part of the transition process, the student, is sometimes overlooked. Teachers and administrators may tell eighth grade students how it’s going to be in high school, but often leave them out of the decision making loop. It is important to set the tone for freshman early in the school year by involving students as much as possible in the transition process. Riley (1984) states that principals should establish a theme for the freshman class to help give students a sense of purpose and direction. Each freshman class will have a new theme but share some common goals:

1. The new students should be made to feel that they are welcome and an important part of the school community.

2. Freshmen should be challenged by high expectations for academic accomplishments.

3. They should consider themselves part of a cohesive group (their class) and be proud of that membership.

4. They should be told about the importance of their high school years in their development as productive adults.

5. They should be challenged with the responsibility for hard work and self discipline that a successful high school career demands.
Communication

In order to solicit the involvement of staff, parents, and students in the transition process, it is important that lines of communication between each of these groups remain unbroken. Communication between teachers at both levels, parents and the school, and students with parents should be a priority. Pohl (1995) acknowledges that parents need as much information as possible about the transition process to insure student success. The staff member at each school who is responsible for transition activities is in the best position to facilitate communication. Communication may include letters mailed or sent home with students, phone calls, school announcements, or meetings held during or after school. By providing prompt, thorough, and consistent information to students, parents, and teachers at both levels, the chance that everyone will be working together toward a successful transition can be increased.

Summary

The need for transition programs from one educational level to the next has been an issue with educators since before the turn of the century. Until the 1970's, the common middle grade school was often referred to as a junior high school and was similar to the high school in many ways. In the 1970's to 1990's, the middle school concept became increasingly popular and was described by proponents as being designed to meet the unique needs of the early adolescent (Weller, 1999; Wiles & Bondi, 1981). However, in the middle schools, the differences between the middle grades and the high school were more significant, intensifying the difficulties many students had entering the high school from the eighth grade.
Research supports the idea that many students experience difficulty making the transition from the middle school to the high school. These difficulties often include declining academic performance, increased absences, increased behavioral disturbances, and decreased participation in extracurricular programs (Fritzer & Herbst, 1996). Most students experience some degree of anxiety as they begin the ninth grade. Students entering ninth grade may have questions about their social status such as wondering if they will be liked by other students, if they will be picked on, and if they will be popular with the opposite sex. Students may also be anxious about academics. Common questions of an upcoming ninth grader may be how to know what courses to take, will the courses be too difficult, and will there be too much homework? Wondering if there will be enough support from teachers and parents may add to the student’s anxiety, as well.

Parents may also experience anxiety as their child makes the transition from the middle school to the high school. A parent may have many of the same concerns as their child, but with less emphasis on the social interaction and more emphasis on their students interaction with teachers and administrators. Parents are often concerned about the competitive standards and high expectations placed on their child by high school teachers and administrators. Parents may also have concerns about teachers being less flexible or less helpful to their child. Other parent concerns may be associated with differences in disciplinary guidelines and school procedures.

Educators’ concerns about the middle school to high school transition usually revolve around the differences in the middle school and high school. Middle schools must continue to seek ways to improve the preparation of eighth grade students for high school. High schools, on the other hand, should focus
on helping ninth grade students adjust to the differences between middle school and high school and minimizing those differences when possible.

A transition program may include only a few activities, or many, and is usually designed to meet the specific transition needs of a school's student population. Although transition programs may vary in kind and duration, they most often address at least one of the following:

- Registration and course requirements
- High school policies and rules
- Campus familiarity
- Social adjustment

Transition programs often call for the involvement of various groups of educators, parents, and students. All of the transition activities cited in the review of literature are grouped into one of the following categories:

- activities conducted primarily by the high school staff
- activities conducted primarily by the middle school staff
- middle school - high school collaboration
- involving students in transition activities
- eighth grade student visitation to the high school
- parent orientation activities
- counseling/advise ment activities

Research supports the idea that transition programs can yield measurable benefits for ninth grade students such as reduced failure rates, dropout rates, fewer ninth grade discipline problems, and reduced student anxiety about entering high school (Maclver, 1990). Many transition programs are designed to provide ninth grade students with additional opportunities to be successful academically and socially. These successes can help to encourage and motivate students toward future accomplishment. Transition programs also
benefit students by promoting involvement in school activities. Research on student involvement in extracurricular activities consistently correlates student involvement with success in the classroom.

There are several potential problems educators may face when attempting to implement an eighth to ninth grade transition program. One is a lack of communication and collaboration between the middle school and the high school. An effective program should be a team effort involving educators at both levels. Another problem faced by some schools is a lack of curriculum articulation. The middle school and high school should plan their curriculum content so that the student’s ninth grade curriculum begins where the eighth grade curriculum ends. The last potential problem cited is the difficulty in evaluating transition programs. There are so many variables that effect how successful a ninth grade student is or is not, that it is hard to determine what impact, if any, a transition program has on a student or group of students. Furthermore, a program directed toward ninth grade students would target a new and different population each year, making it difficult to compare the effects of a program from one year to the next.

Transition programs are as unique as the schools themselves, each addressing student needs that can be met in a variety of ways. There is no one program proven to be the “best”, and no one activity that is considered necessary for all transition programs. There are, however, several key elements that are considered by many educators to be important parts of most transition programs. Transition programs often emphasize providing upcoming ninth grade students with the following information:

- information about high school courses
- information about high school rules
- what to expect from high school life
- information or tours aquatinting students with the high school campus

Another important part of a transition program is obtaining the involvement and support of educators, parents, and students at both levels, and facilitating communication and cooperation among these groups. The answer to many schools transition problems is a coordinated effort between the middle school and high school (Pantileo, 1992).

Few will argue that the need for transition programs has continued to grow and most schools should have a transition strategy in place. Cooke (1995) states that when transition programs between elementary and middle school, and between middle and high school are left to chance, without direction or coordination, there is no guarantee that such programs will be effective, will continue, or will be linked with other activities. One school transition program is described as an eight month process (Kaiser, 1995), while another is an intense twelve hour program just before school starts (Hewins, 1995). Still others include only a couple of activities at random intervals, yet almost all enjoy positive results of some kind. The schools, families and students that experience unnecessary difficulty are those who assume that all students will make a successful transition without assistance and guidance.

Currently, many schools are becoming more aware of student transition needs and difficulties, but more research is needed to help identify effective transition programs.
CHAPTER III
METHOD

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the method and procedures used in this study. The following sections are included: Research Design and Procedures, Restatement of the Purpose, Research Questions, Sample, Instrumentation, Validity, and Data Analysis.

Research Design and Procedures

For the purpose of this study, five Fulton County high schools and five metropolitan Atlanta high schools of similar size and student populations were selected. Up to 2 of each of the 10 high school's feeder middle schools were also selected for the study to compare middle school counselors' and high school counselors' responses to questions about their transition programs. Fulton County school system has a unique geographical make up that is over seventy miles from end to end with schools that are located both north and south of Atlanta. Some Fulton County schools are considered urban, while others are considered suburban. The US Census of 1990 defines urban as "a city with 50,000 or more inhabitants", suburban refers to "the residential community outside of a city or town" (US Census, 1998, p.27). To collect data that are representative of the student population within Fulton County, Georgia, suburban high schools and urban high schools were selected for the study. The five metropolitan Atlanta high schools that were selected for comparison with the five Fulton County high schools were selected because they were closest in size and student population to the selected schools within Fulton County. Metropolitan is defined as "a city of 50,000 or more inhabitants, it's counties, and
surrounding counties, which had a high degree of social and economic interaction with the core" (p. 27).

The five Fulton County high schools selected for this study were chosen to be representative of school size and student population make-up from the north and south geographic areas of Fulton County. The high schools chosen from outside of Fulton County were selected based on information from the Georgia School Report Card (1998). These schools were found to be similar to the five Fulton County schools in enrollment, ethnicity, and free and reduced lunch status of their student populations. The feeder middle schools to each of the ten high schools selected for this study were the middle schools that are designated as feeder schools by their local school board policy.

The data for this research were collected through interviews at each of the selected high schools and at their feeder middle schools with their respective counselors. A data collection instrument, the Transition Activity Assessment Instrument (TAAI), was developed to assess the characteristics of transition programs. The TAAI provided a research instrument to promote consistency in questioning during the interview and data collection process. Each interviewee was asked twenty-six questions that were based on transition activities found in the research literature. Four open-ended questions were included to allow for additional respondent information that may not have been included in the twenty-six questions developed from the research literature.

Middle school to high school transition programs are designed to assist students in making an easier transition from the middle school structure to the high school structure. The responsibility for these programs at a given high school or middle school may be shared by various staff members. Research literature suggests that teachers, counselors, and/or school administrators may be responsible for a school's transition programs. Although teachers and
administrators are often involved in the transition process, school counselors are most consistently cited in the research literature as having significant roles in school transition programs. Therefore, the interview questions for this research were directed toward those middle school and high school counselors who were most actively involved in the transition process at each school (Kaiser, 1995; Pohl, 1991).

Restatement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify those activities that attempt to promote student success during the transition from middle school to high school. This study also helped to determine what similarities, differences, and trends existed within transition programs at schools of varying student populations. Furthermore, the study investigated the selected schools' employees' perception of the effectiveness of programs that exist to assist students during the transition from eighth to ninth grade in these schools. The study compared the transition programs in Fulton County, Georgia, high schools and their feeder middle schools with those of comparable schools in the metropolitan Atlanta area.

Research Questions

There were five research questions that provided the direction for this study:

1. What are the similarities and differences between transition programs in Fulton County Schools and those of similar metropolitan Atlanta schools?

2. Are the transition programs perceived differently by the selected high schools than by the feeder middle schools?
3. What are the similarities and differences in transition programs between urban and suburban schools in metropolitan Atlanta?

4. What transition activities do the respondents consider effective?

5. What transition activities do the respondents consider ineffective?

**Sample**

The sample for this study was five selected Fulton County high schools and five selected metropolitan Atlanta high schools of comparable size and student populations in five other counties. Included in the sample were the middle schools that feed primarily into each of the 10 high schools. Each of the 10 high schools and their feeder middle schools were selected based on comparable student enrollment, ethnicity, and the number of students receiving free or reduced lunch – an indication of socioeconomic status. Of the five Fulton County high schools selected, three of the schools were in north Fulton County and included a student population of no more than 50% minority and low free or reduced lunch status. The other two Fulton County high schools selected were in south Fulton County and included a student population of over 50% percent minority and high free or reduced lunch status. For each of the five Fulton County high school selected for this study, a school with a student population comparable to that school in size, ethnicity, and the number of students receiving free or reduced lunch was selected from the metropolitan Atlanta area.

**Characteristics of Sample High Schools**

The high schools in this study were described by using numbers A-1 through A-5 for the Fulton County high schools, and B-1 through B-5 for the metropolitan Atlanta high schools not in Fulton County. For example: School A-1, a Fulton County high school, and school B-1, a metropolitan Atlanta high school, were similar to each other in enrollment numbers, ethnicity, and
percentage of students participating in a free or reduced lunch program. High schools A-2 through A-5 likewise, compared to high schools B-2 through B-5 (see Table 1).

Table 1

Description of Student Populations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>FRL</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>O</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>1%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1%</td>
<td>7%</td>
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<td>1%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>39%</td>
<td>99%</td>
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<td>1%</td>
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<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>11%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-4</td>
<td>2157</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-4</td>
<td>2159</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-5</td>
<td>1225</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-5</td>
<td>1325</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N=student enrollment; FRL=percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch; B=black; W=white, O=other.

Instrumentation

The instrument developed and used for this study was the Transition Activity Assessment Instrument (TAAI). The instrument consisted of 30 questions specifically designed to assess each school's transition program and program activities. The first 26 questions on the TAAI were based on transition activities found in the related literature. The last four questions on the TAAI were
open-ended and were intended to collect information about the respondent’s perceptions of their school’s transition program.

Validity

Content validity for the TAAI was determined through the literature on transition programs. The following citations were identified for each of the transition activities:

1) Open House or Parents’ Night at the beginning of the school year (Gentry & Siehl, 1990; Maclver, 1990; Marshall, 1992; Odegaard & Heath, 1992; Pantle, 1992).

2) Eighth grade students visit the high school in the spring of eighth grade (Combs, 1993; Cooke, 1995; Hertzog, 1996; Mayer, 1995).

3) Ninth grade counselors and/or administrators visit with eighth grade students as a group regarding high school requirements and guidelines (Hertzog & Morgan, 1992; Kaiser, 1995; Marshall, 1992; Mayer, 1995).

4) Mentoring - older high school students assist ninth graders in making the adjustment to high school (Combs, 1993; Hertzog & Morgan, 1992; Mayer, 1995).

5) A Transition Team is formed to plan, implement and evaluate transition activities (Combs, 1993; Cooke, 1995; Mayer, 1995; Pantle, 1992; Rosa & Vowels, 1995; Weldy, 1990; Weller, 1999).

6) High school newsletter, school newspaper, or other publication is sent to eighth grade students and/or parents (Cooke, 1995; Mayer, 1995; Siehl & Gentry, 1990).

7) Advisor/advisee program - ninth grade counselors meet with students and/or parents individually during their eighth grade year (Jett et al., 1994; Kaiser, 1995; Lounsbury, 1996; Pohl, 1991; Weller, 1999).
8) Shadowing - an eighth grade student will follow a high school student for a day to gain an understanding of high school life (Case, 1989; Cooke, 1995; Maclver, 1990).

9) High school counselors meet with middle school teachers during students' eighth grade year (Bloomer, 1986; Brazee, 1987; Hertzog, 1996).

10) High school students visit the middle school to speak to or socialize with students (Cooke, 1995; Hertzog, 1996; Maclver, 1990).

11) High school teachers review eighth grade work and test scores to address needs and strategies (Brazee, 1987; Odegaard & Heath, 1992; Mayer, 1995).

12) High school brings ninth graders in one day early in the fall, or designates first day for separate ninth grade activities and assembly (Cooke, 1995; Hewins, 1995; Mayer, 1995).


14) Block of time for self contained guidance and counseling of ninth graders (Mayer, 1995; Odegaard & Heath, 1992; Vars, 1997).

15) Study skills classes directed toward ninth graders to assist with academic adjustment (Hertzog & Morgan, 1992; Mayer, 1995; Riley, 1984).

16) Extracurricular "fair" or publication - activity or literature to introduce and explain extracurricular options to ninth graders (Hertzog, 1996; Pantleo, 1992; Riley, 1984).

17) Curriculum alignment is organized between the middle school and the high school (Bloomer, 1986; Combs, 1993; Weldy, 1990, Weller, 1999).
18) School survey of upcoming ninth grader to help determine their needs and concerns (Cooke, 1995; Odegaard & Heath, 1992; Siehl & Gentry, 1990).

19) Buddy groups - pairing a group of ninth graders with a group of tenth or eleventh graders for peer counseling and support (Hertzog & Morgan, 1992; Kaiser, 1995; MacIver, 1990).

20) End of year culminating activities for eighth graders, such as "graduation" or capping ceremony, dance, field trip, breakfast, or picnic (Hertzog & Morgan, 1992; Rosa & Vowels, 1995; Weldy, 1990).

21) Teacher swap or shadowing day between eighth and ninth grade teachers (Combs, 1993; Hertzog & Morgan, 1992; Weldy, 1990).

22) Journaling - ninth grade students keep a journal that is later shared with eighth graders to help them understand the high school experience (Cooke, 1995; Hertzog & Morgan, 1992; Marshall, 1992).

23) Pen pals - correspondence between eighth graders and high school students, allowing questions and feedback (Hertzog & Morgan, 1992; Marshall, 1992; Rosa & Vowels, 1995).

Data Analysis

The data collected from research questions on the TAAI were analyzed using frequency count and percent. Responses to the four open ended questions were grouped according to categories derived from respondents' answers to the survey instrument questions and with representative statements presented for each of the respondent groups.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter was to present the findings of the data collected in this research. Chapter IV is organized into three sections. The first section describes the research participants who provided transition information about each school selected for the study. The second section describes the student populations of the schools included in the study. The third section describes the outcomes of data analysis in relation to the research questions of the study.

Description of Research Participants

The participants in the transition program survey were the counselors or administrators who were identified at each school as having responsibility for that school’s transition program. The initial contact of each school was made to each school’s counseling department or designated administrator. With few exceptions, schools identified a counselor as being responsible for organizing and overseeing their transition program. However, there were two schools that identified an assistant principal as being responsible for that school’s transition program. In those two schools, a school administrator was interviewed as the data source to collect responses on the survey instrument.

The 20 interviewees included in this study represented 6 different school systems. In all cases the respondent was a full-time certified employee of the respective school system.
Research Questions

The data for this study were collected to provide responses to five research questions. The five research questions that provided the direction for the research survey were as follows:

1. What are the similarities and differences between transition programs in Fulton County Schools and those of similar metropolitan Atlanta schools?
2. Are the transition programs perceived differently by the selected high schools than by the feeder middle schools?
3. What are the similarities and differences in transition programs between urban and suburban schools in metropolitan Atlanta?
4. What transition activities do the respondents consider effective?
5. What transition activities do the respondents consider ineffective?

Analysis of Data

The Transition Activity Assessment Instrument (TAAI) was used to collect data for this research. The instrument contains 31 questions, 26 of the questions required a YES or NO answer with optional comments. Five questions were open-ended and required descriptive answer. Respondents were asked to answer YES if their school's transition program included the activity in question, and NO if their school did not include the activity, or if they were not sure if their program included the activity in the question.

Questions one through three in the TAAI were general questions to ascertain if a school had a transition program. Questions 4 through 26 were specific questions about individual transition activities found in the related literature. Questions 4 through 26 were asked in descending order based on the number of times the activity was cited in the literature. Table 2 describes the
Table 2

Number of Transition Activity Citations in the Literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Extracurricular Fair</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Curriculum Alignment</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Counselor Visit to MS</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Open House</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Student Visitation</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Counselor – Teacher Mtg.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>HS Students to MS</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Transition Team</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Review of 8th Grade Work</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>HS Publication</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>End of Year Activity</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Advisor Program</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>9th Grade Activity Day</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Guidance Block</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Study Skills Class</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Teacher Swap</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Buddy Groups</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>9th Grade Team</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Student Survey</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Student Mentoring</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Student Shadowing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Journals or Pen Pals</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
number of times respondents stated that a particular activity was part of their school's transition program.

Respondents were next asked if their school had a comprehensive transition program, 80% (17) responded YES. In a study by Mac Iver (1990) school transition programs averaged 3 to 4 activities, with as many as 10 activities and as few as no activities. Schools in this survey averaged 8.5 activities per school. Table 3 lists the responses of each group to this question.

Table 3
Responses to Survey Question Number 1
Comprehensive Transition Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Group</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Schools</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Schools</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton County Schools</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro Atlanta Schools</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools (total)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 3 respondents that said they did not have a comprehensive transition program averaged 6.6 transition activities, while the 17 respondents stating that they did have a comprehensive program averaged 8.8 activities. Of the 20 schools in this study, 90% (9) of the high schools and 80% (8) of the middle schools stated that they did have a comprehensive transition program.
Some school systems coordinate transition programs among their schools; others allow the high schools and feeder middle schools to develop their own transition programs. In this survey, 60% (12) of the respondents said that they developed their own transition programs among individual schools (see Table 4). Although resources may have been provided by the school systems, transition activities were not dictated at the district level in these schools. Of the schools not in Fulton County, 60% (6) have transition coordinated at the district level, while only 20% (2) of Fulton County schools responded likewise.

Table 4

Responses to Survey Question Number 2

System Wide Transition Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Group</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th></th>
<th>NO</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Schools</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Schools</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton County Schools</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro Atlanta Schools</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools (Total)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When respondents were asked if the high school and middle school worked collaboratively to plan and implement transition programs, all 10 (100%) of the high schools and 90% (9) of the middle schools stated that they did work collaboratively with the other school. Table 5 displays the responses to this question.
Table 5
Responses to Survey Question Number 3
Collaborative Transition Planning

| School Group                      | YES | | | NO | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----| | |-----| | | |
| High Schools                      | 10  | 100% | | 0  | 0% |
| Middle Schools                    | 9   | 90%  | | 1  | 10% |
| Fulton County Schools             | 9   | 90%  | | 1  | 10% |
| Metro Atlanta Schools             | 10  | 100% | | 0  | 0% |
| Low Free or Reduced Lunch         | 8   | 100% | | 0  | 0% |
| High Free or Reduced Lunch        | 8   | 100% | | 0  | 0% |
| All Schools (Total)               | 19  | 95%  | | 1  | 5% |

Pantle (1992), stated that a coordinated effort between the middle school and high school is essential to a successful transition program. One (5%) middle school respondent reported that the middle school and high school did not work collaboratively on their transition program, however, the counselor at the high school of that feeder middle school reported that their transition program was a collaborative effort.

Respondents were then asked if they had an open house or parents night activity at the high school for eighth grade students. As seen in Table 6, 80% (16) of the respondents stated that this activity was part of their school's transition program. All 10 (100%) of all high school respondents stated that an open house or parents night was part of their transition program, while only 60% (6) of all middle school respondents answered positively. Fulton County schools
responded positively more often than metro Atlanta schools (90% to 70%), and schools with high free or reduced lunch responded positively more often than schools with low free or reduced lunch (100% to 63%).

Table 6
Responses to Survey Question Number 4
Open House

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Group</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Schools</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Schools</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton County Schools</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro Atlanta Schools</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools (Total)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 16 schools responding positively to this question, 8 (50%) reported high attendance and positive feedback from parents. One high school estimated that 75-80% of all eighth grade parents attended their open house.

A major transition program activity designed to allow eighth grade students an opportunity to visit the high school is an eighth grade field trip to the high school campus (Cooke, 1995). Table 7 shows that 80% (16) of all respondents surveyed stated that students visited their receiving high school as a group during the spring of their eighth grade year.
Respondents' additional comments about the activity stated that it most often include an assembly addressed by an administrator or counselor, student presentations, and a tour of the high school building. One respondent stated that their school divides students into small groups and allows them to sit in on classes during a school day. Another said their school brings the students in on a Sunday afternoon to avoid disruption of regular classes.

Table 7

Responses to Survey Question Number 5

Eighth Grade Students Visit High School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Group</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Schools</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Schools</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton County Schools</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro Atlanta Schools</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools (total)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this study, nine high schools send an administrator or counselor to the middle school to speak to eighth graders. This activity usually occurs in the spring and includes topics such as registration, course requirements, school policies and procedures, and social expectations. Hertzog and Morgan (1992) describe this visit as the most commonly occurring transition activity in most schools. Of the 20 respondents included in this survey, 17 (85%) answered YES
when asked if this activity was included in their transition program. The results of this question are presented in table 8.

All metro Atlanta schools (100%), and all high free or reduced lunch schools (100%), answered this question positively. However, Fulton County schools and schools with low free or reduced lunch responded positively a fewer number of times (70% and 75% respectively).

Table 8

Responses to Survey Question Number 6

Administrators and Counselors Visit Middle School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Group</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th></th>
<th>NO</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Schools</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Schools</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton County Schools</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro Atlanta Schools</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools (Total)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents were next asked if their program included a student mentoring activity. This activity consists of older students, usually tenth or eleventh graders, meeting with ninth grade students to assist in various aspects of high school life. Table 9 presents the responses to this question. Of the 20 respondents surveyed, only 2 (10%) stated that their program had such an activity.
Table 9
Responses to Survey Question Number 7
Student Mentors

| School Group                  | YES | | | | | | NO | | | | | |
|------------------------------|-----| | | | | | N | | | | | | % | | | | | |
| High Schools                 | 2   | 20% | | | | | 8  | | 80% | | | | | |
| Middle Schools               | 0   | 0%  | | | | | 10 | | 100% | | | | | |
| Fulton County Schools        | 0   | 0%  | | | | | 10 | | 100% | | | | | |
| Metro Atlanta Schools        | 2   | 20% | | | | | 8  | | 80% | | | | | |
| Low Free or Reduced Lunch    | 1   | 15% | | | | | 7  | | 85% | | | | | |
| High Free or Reduced Lunch   | 0   | 0%  | | | | | 8  | | 100% | | | | | |
| All Schools (Total)          | 2   | 10% | | | | | 18 | | 90% | | | | | |

Question 8 of the TAAI asked respondents if their school formed a transition team to plan, implement, and evaluate their school’s transition activities. A transition team is a team that includes school staff, parents, and even students at both levels (Hertzog & Morgan, 1996). Of the 20 schools included in this survey, 12 (60%) were found to have a transition team in place. Of the 12 respondents that answered YES to this question, 80% (8) were Fulton County schools compared to 40% (4) that were metro Atlanta schools. The responses to this question are displayed in Table 10. Schools that have their transition programs developed and implemented from the central office level are also those that had fewer transition planning teams. Respondents that said they developed their own programs were most likely to have a transition team at their school.
Table 10

Responses to Survey Question Number 8

Transition Teams

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Group</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>NO</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Schools</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Schools</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton County Schools</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro Atlanta Schools</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools (Total)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the information eighth grade students and parents receive from the high school by word of mouth, some schools send home a printed publication such as a newsletter, school newspaper, or student handbook to eighth grade families (Cooke, 1995; Meyer, 1995). These publications may help students and parents become more familiar with the high school even before other meetings occur. This distribution of materials may be a one-time occurrence in the spring, or a regular process throughout the school year. Technology has even made it possible for some schools to provided parents with school information via the Internet. Table 11 shows that out of the 20 schools surveyed, 11 (55%) send home printed material to the families of rising ninth graders.
Table 11

Responses to Survey Question Number 9

School Publication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Group</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Schools</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Schools</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton County Schools</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro Atlanta Schools</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools (Total)</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 10 was asked to determine if schools in this study conducted individual advisement with students or parents during their eighth grade year. Individual meetings are held during the student’s eighth grade year (usually for registration purposes), or at the beginning of their ninth grade year to discuss graduation requirements. The meeting at the beginning of their ninth grade year helps introduce the student to high school guidance personnel and addresses beginning of the year concerns (Siehl & Gentry, 1990). Table 12 shows that 7 of 20 schools have an individual counseling program. Of the seven respondents that answered YES to this question, four said that individual counseling was provided but voluntary for students. There were three respondents that said they tried to meet with all students if possible. All six groups of schools in this survey had between 30% and 40% positive responses.
Table 12
Responses to Survey Question Number 10
Advisor/Advisee Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Group</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th></th>
<th>NO</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Schools</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Schools</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton County Schools</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro Atlanta Schools</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools (Total)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Shadowing is a transition activity that allows an eighth grade student to follow a high school student for all or part of a school day. When respondents were asked if their school practiced this activity, only two respondents (10%) reported that they did. This big brother/sister type program may allow the younger students to learn from the older students, as well as gain exposure to the school campus. The older student’s school experiences, especially when it has been positive, can be beneficial when shared the younger student. Table 13 displays the response results of this question. Of the 2 (10%) respondents that said they do have a student shadowing activity, both said it was conducted only with student leadership (i.e. Student Council or BETA Club). The student leadership then returned to the middle school to share their experience with other eighth grade students.
Table 13

Responses to Survey Question Number 11

Student Shadowing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Group</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th></th>
<th>NO</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Schools</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Schools</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton County Schools</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro Atlanta Schools</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools (Total)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents were next asked if high school counselors met with eighth grade teachers to discuss transition items such as student registration and appropriate academic placement. Brazee (1987) described the importance of communication between high school personnel and eighth grade teachers in meeting the needs of ninth grade students. Of the 18 respondents that gave an answer of YES to this question, 8 stated that the additional information gained helps teachers better prepare for incoming ninth grade students. Another 3 respondents stated that this activity was very helpful for improving teachers' understanding of the transition process as a whole. Table 14 presents the results of this question.
Table 14

Responses to Survey Question Number 12
Counselors Meet With Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Group</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Schools</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Schools</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton County Schools</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro Atlanta Schools</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools (Total)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents were asked if high school students visited the middle school to speak to or interact with middle school students. This activity may include formal meetings or casual interaction. Table 15 shows that 12 (60%) of the schools in this study do participate in such an activity. In a study by Maclver (1990) this activity was listed as another way to get students involved in the transition process. The lowest number of positive responses to this question was from the high free or reduced lunch group at only 2 (25%), while 8 (100%) schools with low free or reduced lunch responded positively. Fulton County schools responded positively more often than metro Atlanta schools 7 (70%) to 5 (50%).

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Table 15

Responses to Survey Question Number 13

High School Students Visit Middle School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Group</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Schools</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Schools</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton County Schools</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro Atlanta Schools</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools (Total)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When high school teachers review the eighth grade work and test scores before the students arrive, they may be able to assess strengths and weaknesses of those students before they step through the door. Of the 20 schools in this survey, 11 (55%) reported that ninth grade teachers did review the academic performance of the upcoming ninth grade students. As shown in table 16, seven (70%) of the high school respondents said they included this practice in their transition program, but only 4 (40%) of the middle schools stated it was included in theirs.

Of the 11 (55%) schools that included reviewing eighth grade student work in their program, 5 (25%) respondents noted stipulations as to how it was conducted. One respondent added that work was only reviewed for students with an Individual Education Plan (I.E.P). Another respondent stated that only
Table 16

Responses to Survey Question Number 14

High School Teachers Review Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Group</th>
<th>YES</th>
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<th>NO</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Schools</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Schools</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton County Schools</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro Atlanta Schools</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools (Total)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) scores were reviewed, while three (15%) others said that only grades in core subjects were considered. Three of the respondents that answered positively also stated that these reviews were used primarily for placement in the appropriate academic classes.

Question 15 in the TAAI asked respondents if ninth grade students returned to school a day early in the fall or were separated from the rest of the student body on the first day of school for transition activities. Schools may bring the ninth graders in a day early in the fall with the entire school staff and numerous students from grades 11 and 12 at school to help acclimate the new students to the high school setting. While Mayer (1995) described ninth grade assembly and orientation day on the same day that upper classmen arrive. In this survey, 7 (35%) of the respondents stated that they had a similar activity.
Table 17 displays the number of schools that include this activity in their transition program.

Table 17

Responses to Survey Question Number 15

Start School Early

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Group</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th></th>
<th>NO</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Schools</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Schools</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton County Schools</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro Atlanta Schools</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools (Total)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 10 high schools in the survey 6 (60%) stated that they use this activity, while only 1 (10%) of the middle schools responded positively. Of the 7 respondents that replied positively to this question, 4 respondents stated that this activity was conducted on the first day of school. Of the three schools that brought the students in early, two schools used only partial days and one program included all students of any grade new to the high school.

Respondents were next asked if their school’s transition program included ninth grade teams. Ninth grade teams were only mentioned five times in the research literature, and only practiced by three (15%) of the schools in this survey. However, 3 of the respondents stated that they had recently become
aware of the concepts growing popularity in their geographical area. Hertzog (1996) describes ninth grade teaming as one of the most effective steps you can take to help students make a successful transition. And Jett et al. (1994) added that ninth grade teams reduce negative peer pressure and improve student rapport with teachers. Table 18 shows that no more than 25% of any school group in this study have implemented ninth grade teams.

Table 18

Responses to Survey Question Number 16

Ninth Grade Teams

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Group</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Schools</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Schools</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton County Schools</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro Atlanta Schools</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools (Total)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked if the high school had a block of time for self-contained guidance and counseling, 6 (60%) of the high schools responded positively, while none of the middle schools answered in the positive. The number of positive responses for all groups to this question was 6 (30%) as seen in Table 19. Of the 6 respondents that answered YES to this question, 1 respondent stated that this counseling activity occurred throughout the school year as
mentioned in the related literature (Riley, 1984). Another respondent mentioned
that self-contained ninth grade guidance occurred only at the beginning of the
school year. Of the 6 positive responses, 2 respondents added that this activity
was primarily for academic advisement.

Table 19

Responses to Survey Question Number 17

Guidance Block

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Group</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th></th>
<th>NO</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Schools</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Schools</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton County Schools</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro Atlanta Schools</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools (Total)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents were next asked if study skills classes directed toward
ninth graders were provided as part of their transition program. Of the 20
schools in the survey, 5 (25%) responded YES. No more than three schools in
any group responded positively to this question. Of the five schools that conduct
this activity, two schools combine study skills classes with their other ninth grade
counseling activities. Two of the respondents stated that student placement in
these classes was based on recommendations from the student’s teachers or
counselors, and one school offers the classes but makes them available to
upper classmen as well as ninth graders. Table 20 displays the survey results for this question.

Table 20

Responses to Survey Question Number 18

Study Skills Classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Group</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Schools</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Schools</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton County Schools</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro Atlanta Schools</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| All Schools (Total)             | 5   | 25%| 15  | 75%

Extracurricular activities can be a significant part of a student's high school life. An extracurricular "fair" and/or literature that describes extracurricular activities can introduce student involvement options while helping students become more familiar with the school in general (Pantleo, 1992). This activity was only mentioned four times in related literature, but received 17 (85%) positive responses from participants in this survey. Table 21 shows that at least 75% of all groups responded positively to this question.

Of the 17 respondents that stated their school included an extracurricular fair, 6 respondents said that their school included this activity during their open house. At two of the schools that responded positively to this question,
representatives from the high school visited the middle school to conduct this activity. A Multi-media presentation (video or power point) is an additional form of communication used by two other schools to present extracurricular options. Of the 4 respondents that said they send home extracurricular publications, 1 said that they were very helpful to students, while another respondent said that the publications were not well utilized by students.

Table 21

Responses to Survey Question Number 19

Extracurricular Promotion Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Group</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Schools</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Schools</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton County Schools</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro Atlanta Schools</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools (Total)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Curriculum articulation involves developing and maintaining continuity between eighth and ninth grade curriculum. Although most counties and states make many of the curriculum decisions, respondents were asked if their school made additional effort to align curriculum between eighth and ninth grades specifically. Weldy (1990) states that curriculum articulation between levels helps to promote consistency, continuity, comprehensiveness, and valid
assessment. Of the 20 respondents in this survey group, 17 (85%) said their schools make a concerted effort to align curriculum between eighth and ninth grades (see Table 22).

Table 22

Responses to Survey Question Number 20

Curriculum Articulation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Group</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th></th>
<th>NO</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Schools</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Schools</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton County Schools</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro Atlanta Schools</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools (Total)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At least 75% of the respondents in each group responded YES to this question about curriculum alignment. Curriculum alignment was described using the term "Vertical Teaming" by 3 respondents. This term indicates an effort between teachers at both grade levels. Of the 17 positive responses to this question, 3 respondents stated that their schools only focused on core subjects such as math and science, and four schools in the Fulton County group allow eighth graders to earn credit toward high school courses in select subjects.

Respondents were then asked if upcoming ninth grade students were surveyed to determine specific needs and concerns, 3 (15%) respondents stated
that they were. All three positive responses to this question were from Fulton County schools that also had a low number of students on free or reduced lunch. Table 23 represents the results from all schools surveyed.

Table 23
Responses to Survey Question Number 21
Eighth Grade Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Group</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th></th>
<th>NO</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Schools</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Schools</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton County Schools</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro Atlanta Schools</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools (Total)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the three (15%) schools that conduct a student survey, one conducts the survey orally and another describes it as a writing assignment. Of the 17 respondents that said their school does not use this activity, 3 said they would like to use it in the future.

Respondents were next asked if their schools pair groups of ninth graders with groups of upper classmen to form "buddy groups". These groups can provide peer counseling and support. Hertzog and Morgan (1992) stated that these groups are often used in transition programs to assist ninth grade students in making the adjustment to high school. Of the 20 schools in this survey, four
use buddy groups for this purpose. The group of schools with a low number of free or reduced lunch students had no positive responses to this question (see Table 24). One respondent described this activity as part of a student mentoring program, another said it was part of a peer counseling program.

Table 24

Responses to Survey Question Number 22
Buddy Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Group</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Schools</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Schools</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton County Schools</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro Atlanta Schools</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools (Total)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When respondents were asked if the middle school had any culminating activities for eighth graders, 4 respondents stated that they did. Middle school respondents in this survey responded YES to this question more than the high school respondents 8 (80%) to 3 (30%). Metro Atlanta schools responded YES more often than Fulton County schools 7 (70%) to 4 (40%), while the total of positive responses for all schools was 11 (55%). The results are shown in Table 25. Numerous activities were cited by the 11 respondents that answered YES to this question, 5 of the 11 said they used more than one. The activities mentioned
include a picnic, an eighth grade dance, a breakfast, a lake party, an award
ceremony, a graduation or "capping" ceremony, a yearbook signing, honors day,
and a trip to Six Flags. Although 3 high school respondents answered YES to
this question, none were sure of the specific activities conducted, and 3 middle
schools described this as a very popular activity.

Table 25

Responses to Survey Question Number 23

End of Year Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Group</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th></th>
<th>NO</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Schools</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Schools</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton County Schools</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro Atlanta Schools</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools (Total)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers as well as students can be involved in shadowing activities.

Combs (1993) describes an activity that encourages teachers to visit the feeder
school of their choice for at least part of a day. Teachers from the feeder middle
school can also visit the high school for the purpose of observing what may be
expected of the upcoming eighth grade students. Of the 20 schools included in
the survey, 4 (20%) have a teacher shadowing activity. All four schools that
include this activity in their transition program were in Fulton County, and three
of those four were high schools. A teacher "swap day" can be a variation of this activity that allows both the middle school and the high school teacher to benefit from the activity. Table 26 presents the number of positive answers to question 24.

Table 26

Responses to Survey Question Number 24

Teacher Swap or Shadowing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Group</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th></th>
<th>NO</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Schools</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Schools</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton County Schools</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro Atlanta Schools</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools (Total)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 25 asked respondents if student journals were used as a transition activity. This involves journals about high school life, written by high school students, and shared with eighth grade students. This activity was cited three times in related literature, but no schools in this survey reported using this activity (see table 27). There were 2 respondents that said they would like to use this activity in the future.

Another activity that was cited three times in the literature but received no positive responses in this survey is the use of "pen pals". This involved letter
Table 27
Responses to Survey Question Number 25
Journaling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Group</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Schools</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Schools</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton County Schools</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro Atlanta Schools</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools (Total)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 28
Responses to Survey Question Number 26
Pen Pals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Group</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Schools</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Schools</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton County Schools</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro Atlanta Schools</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Free or Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools (Total)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
writing between high school and middle school students. One school does this as an English class assignment that allows eighth grade students to make contact with a high school student (Marshall, 1992). The results of this question are displayed in table 28.

There were more activities cited in the related literature than those represented in questions 1 through 26. However, activities cited less than three times were not considered in the development of the TAAI.

Questions 27 through 31 of the TAAI were open-ended questions, which were designed to allow the respondents to comment on and/or describe their schools transition program. Respondents were asked to comment on which activities they believed were or were not effective, how success of the program was measured, what would make their program more effective, and any other relevant information.

Although these five questions were open-ended, most of the answers could be categorized into four general themes. Question number 27 asked respondents to list the most effective parts(s) of their school's transition program. Most responses could be categorized into one of the following:

1. Middle school student visitation to the high school, and orientation concerning high school guidelines and requirements was considered most important by 6 of the respondents.

2. Five respondents answered that involving the parents in the transition process (i.e. parent night) was most effective.

3. Student counseling and guidance activities were listed as most effective by 5 respondents.

4. Communication between parents, students, and school staff was listed by 2 respondents.
Question number 28 asked respondents to list the least effective parts of their transition program. These answers primarily identified perceived deficiencies in the particular school's transition program. Some of the activities listed as most effective at some schools were listed as deficient areas at other schools. Of the 20 respondents, 13 did not sight a least effective part of their transition program. The answers given by respondents can be grouped into the following general categories:

1. Lack of communication between schools, parents, and students was listed by 4 respondents.
2. Two respondents listed difficulty clarifying academic requirements to students and parents as least effective.
3. Lack of individual exposure to the high school setting (students only visit as a large group) was listed by one respondent.

Question 29 asked respondents to identify strategies that would make their transition programs more effective. This question allowed respondents to identify transition need that have not been met by their current program. The most common needs listed can be categorized as follows:

1. Five respondents said that individual student visits to the high school, such as a shadowing activity would be helpful.
2. More transition activities in general are needed according to 3 of the respondents.
3. Three respondents mentioned more student advisement and counseling as a need.
4. Three respondents listed a need for a student mentor program.
5. Better communication between schools, parents, and students was needed in their program according to 4 respondents.
6. Only one middle school feeding into only one high school would be helpful according to one respondent.

Question 30 asked respondents to describe how the success of their transition program is measured. The question allowed respondents to summarize information that may have been answered in the "How is it effective" portion of questions 1 through 26. Three respondents stated that they had no way to measure effectiveness. Responses to question 30 included:

1. Eight respondents listed feedback from students, teachers, or parents as a significant measurement.
2. Personal observation was listed four times as the means of measurement.
3. Two respondents said that accuracy of scheduling/placement (number of schedule changes)* was a measurement of effectiveness.
4. Grades/failure rate* was listed by one respondent.
5. Discipline occurrences* was the answer of one respondent.
6. Attendance* was a measurement cited by one respondent.

*These items could potentially provide numerical data for the evaluation of transition programs. However, none of the respondents used baseline data or minimum standards to compare this information. Improvement in grades, attendance, and discipline were cited in the research literature as common benefits of effective transition programs (Hertzog, 1996; Weldy, 1990). Although these items were mentioned by several of the respondents in this study, the measurements were only by personal observation. Response examples include: "grades improved", "attendance improved", or "discipline occurrences decreased".

Question number 31 asked respondents to share any other information that they deemed relevant to their transition program. Of the 20 respondents, 17
stated that they had no additional information to share. The three respondents that answered question 31 provided the following answers:

1. The fact that many students at our high school have an older sibling(s) who went to our school has helped our transition program.
2. Our transition program is always changing and adapting.
3. A good relationship between the middle school and the high school has been helpful.
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction
Many educators are becoming more aware of the need to develop programs to promote student academic success during the transition from middle school to high school. Trends of increasing failure rates, dropout rates, and discipline problems among ninth grade students have caused educators to look for new ways to address these problems. This study involved collecting data from middle and high schools in six large school systems in the metropolitan Atlanta area. The results helped identify the transition activities currently being utilized, and the perceptions of their effectiveness at each school included in the study.

This chapter provides a summary of the problem and the investigation into the use of eighth to ninth grade transition programs at selected schools. The chapter contains conclusions and recommendations for further study. The chapter was organized into the following sections: summary of the purpose, research questions, summary of related literature, summary of research method, summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations for further study.

Summary of the Purpose
This study identified those activities that are intended to help promote student success during the transition from middle school to high school. This study helped to determine what similarities, differences, and trends currently exist within transition programs at schools of varying student populations.

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Furthermore, the study investigated the selected schools' employees' perception of the effectiveness of programs that exist to assist students during the transition from eighth to ninth grade in these schools. The study compares the transition programs in Fulton County, Georgia, high schools and their feeder middle schools with those of comparable schools in the metropolitan Atlanta area.

**Summary of Related Literature**

Educational research consistently reports that many students experience difficulty making the transition from the middle school to the high school. These difficulties often include declining academic performance, increased absences, increased behavioral disturbances, and decreased participation in extracurricular programs (Fritzer & Herbst, 1996; Roderick, 1991; and Toepfer, 1986). Ninth grade is often the largest grade of the high school population, yet they often have the lowest grade point average and the highest dropout rate (Jett et al., 1994).

There are numerous concerns that students may have during the transition from eighth to ninth grade. These concerns include academic challenges, social interaction, or differences in the campus. These stresses may vary significantly from one student to another. These concerns are in addition to social, emotional, and physical changes that are common to the young adolescent.

Students are not the only population that expresses concerns about the transition from middle school to high school. Parents and educators share many of the same concerns. Many parents do not know what to expect from their child's high school experience. Furthermore, parent involvement in their child's education often declines at the high school level. Parents are less likely to meet with teachers, volunteer at the school, or assist their child with homework.
Educators, likewise, have become increasingly aware of the need to assist students during this volatile time in students' educational lives (Cooke, 1995).

Although the results of research on transition programs vary in their findings, many suggest that schools with transition programs experience some benefit (Combs, 1993; Cooke, 1995; Mayer, 1995; and Smith, 1997). Transition programs may also be used to address the general concerns of the school population such as test scores, or specific problems such as ninth grade dropout rate (Faconti, 1987). Transition programs may vary significantly from one school or system to another, but most programs have a cluster of activities that address the following topics:

- Information on registration and course requirements
- High school policies and rules
- Campus familiarity
- Social adjustment

Schools often face obstacles improving transition programs for several reasons. Some of the transition obstacles include a lack of communication or differences in philosophy between the middle school and high school personnel. Another difficulty may be the evaluation of activities from one year to the next. Each incoming ninth grade class consists of different students that may perform differently regardless of transition activities. An effective transition program ideally involves a coordinated effort between the middle school and high school students, parents, and educators.

Research calls for continued growth of transition programs and the importance of schools having a transition strategy in place (Toepfer, 1986). Research notes that transition programs can yield measurable benefits for ninth grade students such as reduced failure rates, dropout rates, fewer ninth grade discipline problems, and reduced student anxiety about entering high school.
(Faconti, 1987). Although the need for transition programs continues to be called for in the literature, research on these programs is limited (Hertzog, 1996; MacIver, 1990).

**Summary of Research Method**

For the purpose of this study, five high schools from the Fulton County School System and five high schools from five other metropolitan Atlanta school systems were selected. The primary middle school that feeds into each high school was also included in the study. The selection of the schools in this study was based on each school’s enrollment, racial distribution, and the number of students in the free or reduced lunch program. Information on each school was obtained from the State of Georgia Department of Education school report cards.

A counselor or administrator from each school was designated as the contact person and was asked survey questions from the Transition Activity Assessment Instrument (TAAI) about their school’s transition program. The questions on the TAAI were generated from transition activities cited in the review of related educational literature. Respondents were asked if their school participated in each of the activities appearing on the TAAI. Participants were then asked to provide additional information about their school’s transition program. The TAAI included Yes or No questions with a space for comments, as well as open-ended questions. Data that were collected from the responses to the Yes or No questions on the TAAI were analyzed using percentage and frequency count. The data collected through the comments and open-ended questions were analyzed using descriptive statements.
Summary of the Findings

Respondents were asked 31 questions, requiring Yes or No and descriptive responses. These questions were designed to provide an opportunity for each respondent to provide a description of their school’s transition program. Respondents were asked what they perceived as effective or ineffective parts of their transition program, what would make their program more successful, and how success of the program was measured.

Respondents’ schools were categorized into seven groups. Each group included schools with similar characteristics for the purpose comparing answers. The seven respondent groups were as follows: 1) all high schools, 2) all middle schools, 3) all Fulton County schools, 4) all metropolitan Atlanta schools not in Fulton County, 5) schools with a low number of students receiving free or reduced lunch, 6) schools with a high number of students receiving free or reduced lunch, and 7) all schools. Groups were not exclusive and each school was in more than one group (i.e. - A Fulton County high school is included in the “all high schools” group and the “all Fulton County schools” group).

The Yes or No portion of questions 1 through 26 presented no significant difference in the answers of any one group. The groups represented in this study appeared to have similar transition activities regardless or school enrollment, free or reduced lunch status, or school system.

The most significant difference in the response groups was between the middle school respondents and the high school respondents. High school participants often stated that their transition program included a particular activity while that school’s feeder middle school respondent stated that they did not. This occurrence suggests that respondents at the middle school and at the high school were not always aware of, or perceived activities of the other school
differently. The literature supports the idea that middle schools and high schools often fail to collaborate on transition activities (Marshall, 1992).

Schools in this survey conduct an average of 8.5 activities in their transition programs. A study by Epstein & Maclver (1990) stated that on the average, schools use three to four activities per transition program. These data indicate that schools included in this study may be implementing an exceptional number of transition activities but do imply that more activities insure a more effective transition program.

The answers to the descriptive questions of the TAAI primarily described the respondents' perception of their transition program. Most of the responses to the descriptive portion of the survey were based on the personal observations and opinions of the respondent. Common answers included perceived strengths, weaknesses, and needed improvements. The consistent thread that runs through most of these answers is that evaluation of these programs is based primarily on the respondent's personal observation or feedback from other groups. Programs were evaluated subjectively with little or no numerical or measurable data.

Findings and Conclusions

The findings from this study were as follows:

1) Transition programs in Fulton County schools were similar to transition programs in comparable metropolitan Atlanta school systems. Both "Fulton County schools" and "metro Atlanta schools" groups responded similarly to the transition activity questions asked in the survey. This was consistent among schools of varied student population. Both high schools and middle schools were included in these two groups. No literature was cited in this study that suggested that a difference in these two groups would be found.
2) Similarities in results from several school systems may have been attributed to the fact that all school systems represented in this research are large metropolitan Atlanta school systems. Research including rural schools, or schools near other cities, may have had a broader range of findings. Furthermore, schools in close proximity are more prone to communicate and share ideas.

3) The minimal variance in answers between high schools and middle schools may have been a result of the high schools' increased sense of transition responsibility. This may include the awareness that most of these students will attend high school for the next four years. While the middle school may not share the same concern for students who will no longer be attending their school. Another possible explanation is that the high schools did not always share all aspects of their transition program with the middle school. The middle school respondents may not be aware of all the transition activities that are conducted at the high school.

4) The schools included in this study participated in an exceptional number of transition activities. A study by Maclver (1990) indicates that school transition programs averaged three to four transition activities. The schools included in this study averaged almost 10 activities per transition program. Although more activities do not always translate into more effective transition programs, it does suggest some amount of effort to promote success.

5) None of the respondents used quantitative data to influence the course or evaluate the success of their transition programs. All of the respondents in this study evaluated the success or shortcomings of their transition programs by the personal observations and perceptions of parents, students, and/or school personnel.
6) There was a lack of data supporting the evaluation of these transition programs may be attributed to the difficult nature of comparing one ninth grade class to another ninth grade class that may be very different. More conclusive data might require a longitudinal study including student performance prior to entering high school.

The conclusions derived from this study were that there were minimal differences between transition programs in Fulton County schools and those of schools in other metro Atlanta districts. Likewise, it was concluded that there was no support for the idea that there is a difference in programs among schools of varying student populations in the metropolitan Atlanta area. More research would be necessary to determine the reasons and significance of the difference in perception between middle school and high school respondents in regard to these programs.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

1. Conduct a longitudinal study comparing performance of ninth grade classes over the course of several years, at similar schools with and without transition programs.

2. Study the success of groups of ninth grade students before and after the implementation of a transition program. Consider academic performance and social adjustment.

3. Collect data on groups of ninth grade students that include grade point average, test scores, attendance, and drop-out rate. Each group's performance in each of these areas prior to entering high school should be considered.

4. Organize the study to include feedback from teachers, students, and parents in regard to their transition program.
5. Organize a state or national study to include schools outside of the metropolitan Atlanta area. Include urban and suburban schools of varying student populations.
REFERENCES


Georgia Code of Regulations, Section 160-4-2-.05 Middle School Program Criteria. (1990). Atlanta: Georgia Department of Education: Office of Instructional Programs Division of General Instruction.


Middle school program criteria (1990). Georgia Department of Education, Office of Instructional Programs.


Student self-concept: What does the research say? (1996, September/October) *Schools in the Middle, 6*(1), 15.


APPENDICES
Transition Activity Assessment Instrument (TAAI)

The following questions are asked and answered during a phone or personal interview with the counselor at each of the selected high schools and their feeder middle schools who is most involved in the eighth to ninth grade transition process. These answers should reflect what each counselor believes to be true of their individual school.

1) Our school has a comprehensive transition program consisting of activities designed to assist students during the transition from middle school to high school. Yes No

2) Our school system coordinates or directs transition activities at most of the schools within the system. Yes No

3) Our middle school and high school work collaboratively to plan and implement transition activities. Yes No

Our eighth to ninth grade transition program includes the following activities:

4) Open House or Parents' Night at the beginning of the school year Yes No
   If Yes, how is it effective? _______________________

5) Eighth grade students visit the high school in the spring of eighth grade Yes No
   If Yes, how is it effective? _______________________

6) Ninth grade counselors and/or administrators visit with eighth grade students as a group regarding high school requirements and guidelines Yes No
   If Yes, how is it effective? _______________________

7) Mentoring - older high school students assist ninth graders in making the adjustment to high school Yes No
   If Yes, how is it effective? _______________________

8) A Transition Team is formed to plan, implement and evaluate transition activities Yes No
   If Yes, how is it effective? _______________________

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9) High school newsletter, school newspaper, or other publication is sent to eighth grade students and/or parents

If Yes, how is it effective? 

10) Advisor/advisee program - ninth grade counselors meet with students and/or parents individually during their eighth grade year

If Yes, how is it effective? 

11) Shadowing - an eighth grade student will follow a high school student for a day to acquire an understanding of high school life

If Yes, how is it effective? 

12) High school counselors meet with middle school teachers during students' eighth grade year

If Yes, how is it effective? 

13) High school students visit the middle school to speak to or socialize with students

If Yes, how is it effective? 

14) High school teachers review eight grade work and test scores to address needs and strategies

If Yes, how is it effective? 

15) High school brings ninth graders in one day early in the fall, or designates first day for separate ninth grade activities and assembly

If Yes, how is it effective? 

16) Ninth grade teaming at the high school

If Yes, how is it effective? 

17) Block of time for self contained guidance and counseling of ninth graders

If Yes, how is it effective?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18)</td>
<td>Study skills classes directed toward ninth graders to assist with academic adjustment</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>If Yes, how is it effective?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>19)</td>
<td>Extracurricular &quot;fair&quot; or publication - activity or literature to introduce and explain extracurricular options to ninth graders</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>If Yes, how is it effective?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>20)</td>
<td>Curriculum alignment is organized between the middle school and the high school</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>If Yes, how is it effective?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>21)</td>
<td>Survey upcoming ninth grader to help determine their needs and concerns</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>If Yes, how is it effective?</td>
<td></td>
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<td>22)</td>
<td>Buddy groups - pairing a group of ninth graders with a group of tenth or eleventh graders for peer counseling and support</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>If Yes, how is it effective?</td>
<td></td>
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<td>23)</td>
<td>End of year culminating activities for eighth graders, such as a graduation or capping ceremony, dance, field trip, breakfast, or picnic</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>If Yes, how is it effective?</td>
<td></td>
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<td>24)</td>
<td>Teacher swap or shadowing day between eighth and ninth grade teachers</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>If Yes, how is it effective?</td>
<td></td>
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<td>25)</td>
<td>Journaling - ninth grade students keep a journal that is later shared with eighth graders to help them understand the high school experience</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>If Yes, how is it effective?</td>
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<tr>
<td>26)</td>
<td>Pen Pals - correspondence between eighth graders and high school students, allowing questions and feedback</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>If Yes, how is it effective?</td>
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</table>
Descriptive Questions:

27) What do you see as the most effective part(s) of your school’s transition program?

28) What do you see as the least effective part(s) of your school’s transition program?

29) What would make your transition program more effective (what are your students’ transition needs)?

30) How do you measure the success of your transition program?

31) What else would you like to tell me about your transition program?