# THE HIGH SCHOOL FRESHMAN TRANSITION

A DISSERTATION

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BY

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## ABSTRACT

**DISSERTATION:** The High School Freshman Transition

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The purpose of the study was to identify the student's perspective of the difficulties of transitioning from eighth grade to high school. The intent of gathering this information was to provide primary source data for additional study and development of effective transition experiences for students entering the ninth grade. The study identified five primary areas of concern gleaned from previous research and used a survey to quantify student responses to discover which areas were of most concern to students. The research included demographic information to compare male responses to female responses; the responses of students who had an older sibling attend high school to the responses of students who were the first in their family to go through this transition; and the responses of students from a low performing, high poverty, highly ethnically diverse school setting with students from a high performing, low poverty, and less ethnically diverse school setting. The population for the study included 285 eighth grade students from two different middle level schools. The study revealed both new and significant findings as well as insightful information from students in regard to their perceptions of the challenges associated with the transition from eighth grade to high school.

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The High School Freshman Transition

## Chapter 1: Introduction

In its publication, *The Condition of Education 2010*, The National Center for Education Statistics states that approximately 25 percent of the students who started as freshmen in 2003 in public high schools in the United States did not graduate from high school with their classmates in the spring of 2007 (Aud et al., 2010, p. 66).

Even further alarming are reports that course failures, suspension and expulsion rates, and high school drop out rates are higher in the ninth grade that any other high school grade levels (Hertzog & Morgan, 1998; Roderick & Camburn, 1999).

Robert Balfanz, a researcher from John Hopkins University reports that one in ten or 1700 high schools nation-wide can be described as “Drop-out Factories” which are defined as having 60 percent or fewer of freshman make it to their senior year and graduate. These schools are primarily large urban schools or smaller rural schools with high poverty and high proportions of minority students (2007, p. 2).

Educators and policy makers including federal agencies, governors, and foundation and business leaders continue to be committed to secondary education reform particularly aiming at low performing high schools. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 focuses on graduation rates along with student proficiency in reading and math as standards to meet “adequate yearly progress” (AYP).

In Indiana, House Bill 1347 was enacted in 2006 to required high schools to report annually the number of freshman who fail to earn enough credits to become sophomores. This was one of Indiana’s first efforts to promote early identification of students at-risk not to

graduate (Indiana Code, 20-20-8-8). In 2009, House Bill 1343 was enacted to provide funding for schools with Drop-out Prevention plans (Indiana Code, 20-20-37-4).

Corinne Herlihy of MDRC, a social policy research organization, writes that “the transition to high school is a critical point in the educational pipeline, and the ninth-grade can be characterized as one of its leakiest junctures” (2007, p.6).

A 2004 study of public school enrollment patterns found that there has been a sharp increase in the number of students enrolled in ninth grade over the last thirty years, indicating that an increasing number of students are being retained in ninth grade, and the rate at which students disappear between ninth and tenth grade has tripled over the same time period (Haney, 2004).

Most researchers agree that the transition from eighth grade to the freshman year can be a difficult journey for students. It is characterized as a time of many changes in both the internal and external lives of students. Educators and researchers typically cite external factors such as school size as students move from smaller more nurturing middle schools or junior highs to large high schools where students face greater anonymity and a more competitive, grade-oriented environment (Roeser, Strobel, & Quihuis, 2002). Internally, the transition can cause anxiety in students that challenges the coping skills of adolescents, especially those at-risk. As adolescents go through the social and emotional changes associated with puberty while transitioning to high school, they experience both the development of higher order thinking skills coupled with the increased importance of peer relationships (Cauley & Jovanvich, 2006). Dealing with physical changes, striving for independence from family, and acquiring new methods of intellectual functioning are all emotional issues for emerging adolescents (Leterllo & Miles, 2003).

"Students have many fears real and imagined. At no other time in development is a student likely to encounter such a diverse number of problems simultaneously" (Wiles & Bondi, 2001, p. 35).

It is clear that the transition from eighth grade to the freshman year of high school is difficult, but it is the end result of unsuccessful transitions including high drop-out rates, poor on time graduation rates, and low achievement that receive the most attention (Herlihy, 2007).

**Statement of the Problem**

Numerous studies have identified the negative outcomes associated with the transition to high school such as, poor attendance, decline in grades, newly emerging discipline problems, and new feelings of alienation or social rejection (Newman et al, 2007; Smith et al, 2008; Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006).

A study by Hertzog and Morgan found that students going from grade eight in the spring to grade nine in the fall had a significant drop in the Harter Adolescent Self-Perception Inventory in the areas of physical appearance, job competence, romantic appeal, behavioral conduct, and global self-worth. He continued the study and found that in the spring of their ninth grade year, males had the lowest self-perception of their physical appearance and females had their lowest perception of global self-worth (1998). A review of research literature consistently notes that the transition into high school is marked by increased disengagement and declining motivation among students, which in turn, predict subsequent school failure and dropout (Kemple et al., 2005).

Unfortunately, few studies provide evidence to support students during this critical time (Herlihy, 2007). Administrators, teachers, and parents have struggled for decades with ways to decrease the negative effects of the transition to high school by developing the following: separate ninth grade academies, extensive orientation programs, mentor programs connecting

freshmen with older students, buddy programs for new students, and other articulation programs between the high school and junior high school. However, the research community has provided little guidance about how, when, and whom should be targeted for resources intended to ease the transition (Rice, 2001).

What is surprising in most of the studies on the transition from eighth grade to high school is that the voices of those who are most closely involved, *the students*, have been rarely heard (Akos & Galassi, 2004). Questions to consider are: How do these eighth grade students view school transitions? What aspects of these transitions do they worry about or find difficult? Are there aspects of school transitions that they feel good about? What and who do they find most helpful in these transitions? What do students believe they need to be successful in the journey from eighth grade to high school?

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to identify the student's perspective of the difficulties of transitioning from eighth grade to high school. The intent of gathering this information was to provide primary source data for additional study and development of effective transition experiences for students entering the ninth grade. More specifically, this study sought to

1. Identify the most significant areas of concern found in previous research regarding the transition from eighth to ninth grade.
2. Develop a survey instrument that could be used to quantify eighth grade student's perceptions of those significant areas of concern.
3. Examine the results of the survey to identify student's level of concern in each identified area.
4. Compare the five areas of concern and determine which areas students perceive as most significant.
5. Compare the perceptions of male and female students.
6. Compare the perceptions of eighth grade students from a low performing, high poverty, and highly diverse school setting with students from a high performing, low poverty, less diverse school setting.

7. Compare the perceptions of eighth grade students who had an older sibling go through high school with the perceptions of students who would be the first in their family to make this transition.
8. Provide a way for student voices to be heard as primary source data for additional study and development of transition experiences for students entering high school.

**Significance of the Study**

Research about the transition to high school encompasses multiple perspectives about the many transition issues students face and which ones are most important. Academic concerns and social concerns have both been identified as the primary concerns in transition studies. However, other concerns have surfaced as well, such as procedural concerns about being able to navigate a bigger school and dealing with multiple teachers and classes. Fitting in, making new friends, getting along with peers, and coping with older students or bullies have been duly noted (Akos, 2004). Concerns about teacher support, school safety, and understanding the requirements that must be met to earn a high school diploma, let alone qualify for college admission, all have weighed into the complexity of transition to high school at some point (Smith et al., 2008).

Although many transition programs and practices have been reviewed, recommended and studied over the years, there have been very few studies conducted to identify primary source data from the students themselves. Many of these transition programs and practices address what educators perceive as students main sources of stress and anxiety during this transition. Although many studies make reference to the emotional difficulty of this time in the life of the adolescent, again, few studies delve into the actual lives of the students themselves to collect their personal perceptions of the journey from eighth to ninth grade. The significance of this study is that the data collected will be from students and will share the students' perceptions of this transition which is essential for future study and development effective programming and practices that will meet the academic and emotional needs of eighth grade students entering high school.

## Research Questions

The general research question this study will answer is: What do eighth grade students perceive to be the most significant areas of concern in transitioning to high school?

This general research question subsumes these specific questions:

1. Are social relationships a significant concern to eighth grade students during the transition from eighth grade to high school?
2. Are the logistics of high school such as, finding classes, being on time, or simply knowing where to get help, etc., a significant concern to eighth grade students during the transition from eighth grade to high school?
3. Is student safety a significant concern to eighth grade students during the transition from eighth grade to high school?
4. Are the academic "nuts and bolts" such as, credits, graduation requirements, Grade Point Average (GPA), class rank, study skills, etc., a significant concern to eighth grade students during the transition from eighth grade to high school?
5. Are teacher relationships and instruction a significant concern to eighth grade students during the transition from eighth grade to high school?
6. Are students more concerned about some of the areas than others?
7. Do female eighth graders concerns in the five areas noted above differ from male eighth grade student concerns?
8. Do student concerns of students attending lower performing schools with high ethnic diversity and poverty differ from student concerns in high performing schools with low ethnic diversity and poverty in these five areas?
9. Are students with older siblings who have attended high school less concerned in these five areas than students without older siblings who have attended high school?

## Limitations

Findings and conclusions of the study may be limited by the following conditions:

1. The responses are limited by the seriousness and authenticity with which students report their perceptions of concerns about the transition to high school.
2. The study is limited by the student's comprehension of the questions on the survey instrument.
3. The study is limited to the forty questions on the survey instrument.

**Definitions**

The following terms are used as categories and are defined as follows:

- *Academic Nuts and Bolts* - can be defined as having a clear understanding of the requirements, structure, and terminology used in high school academia. In addition, the knowledge of where to get information and help is noted under this category.
- *Teacher Relationships and instruction* - can be best defined as the establishment of a warm caring environment that is conducive to meaningful learning coupled with teaching strategies that are motivational and expectations that are in range of the student's academic abilities.
- *Logistics* - can be defined as the ability to navigate both the geographical layout of the school, as well as, the crowds of students within the confines of the school, rules and procedures, such as finding lockers, classes, and the best routes to get to classes on time.
- *Social Relationships* - can be simply defined as the daily interactions between students and their peers.
- *Student Safety –* can be defined as both a feeling of well-being at the high school as well as the ability of the high school staff to protect students from violence.

**Summary**

This study is divided into an introductory section, five chapters, including this one, and the appendices. Chapter One provided an introduction to the study, a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, significance of the study, research questions, limitations of the study, and definitions of key terms.

Chapter Two presents a review of the related research literature on the transition from eighth grade to high school including a summary of the most significant concerns noted in transitioning eighth grade students to high school; the academic, social, and emotional effects of the transition; and the results of varied transitional programming as it relates to issues in this study.

Chapter Three focuses on the research methodology of the study, including information about the population sample, the instrument used to collect data, the collection and analysis of data.

Chapter Four presents a descriptive analysis and statistical findings to answer the research questions.

Chapter Five presents a summary of the findings, conclusions, suggestions and recommendations for future studies.

The Appendices include a brief background on each member of the jury panel, the survey, survey information shared with parents of the respondents and permission form, survey information and student assent form, approval form from the Institutional Review Board, and certificate of completion for the Human Participant Protections Education for Research Teams.

# Chapter 2: Review of Literature

## The Drop-out Crisis

The focus on the transition from eighth grade to high school is the result of a national focus on the high school graduation rate crisis in the United States. In the report *The Condition of Education 2010,* The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that in 2006–07, about three-quarters of the 2003–04 freshman class graduated from high school on time with a regular diploma. This equated to about 2.9 million graduates and conversely indicated that a little more than 1 million students did not graduate with their peers (Aud et al., 2010, p. 66). The rate is calculated as follows:

> This indicator examines the percentage of public high school students who graduate on time with a regular diploma. To do so, it uses the *averaged freshman graduation rate*—an estimate of the percentage of an incoming freshman class that graduates 4 years later. For each year, the averaged freshman enrollment count is the sum of the number of 8th-graders 5 years earlier, the number of 9th-graders 4 years earlier (when current-year seniors were freshmen), and the number of 10th-graders 3 years earlier, divided by 3. The intent of this averaging is to account for the high rate of grade retention in the freshman year, which adds 9th-grade repeaters from the previous year to the number of students in the incoming freshman class each year. (Aud et al., 2010, p. 66)

The purpose of this calculation is to statistically account for what is described as the *ninth grade bulge*. Because of a lack of progress during the freshman year, many students are held back making ninth graders the highest percentage of the overall high school population. This is followed by what is described as the *tenth grade dip* where students drop out prior to their sophomore year (Wheelock & Miao, 2005).

For instance in 2002-2003 there were 3,824,670 students enrolled in grade eight. In the following 2003-2004 school year that number rose to 4,281,345 which represents the *ninth grade bulge* and included ninth grade students who had not reached the requirements to earn

sophomore status. The following 2004-2005 school year the number of students in grade ten dropped to 3,750,491 which represents the *tenth grade dip* that includes students who dropped out prior to their sophomore year or at the end of the ninth grade year. This equates to a loss of ten and a half percent of the total number of students continuing in school (Williams & Richman, 2007, p. 2).

Researchers at John Hopkins University found that up to 40 percent of ninth graders in cities with the highest dropout rates repeat grade nine. Of that group of repeaters only 10-15 percent continued through high school and graduated (Balfanz & Letgers, 2004, p. 2). In Urban high-poverty high schools, 40 percent of the total number of dropouts quit after their freshman year while low-poverty districts see 27 percent of the total number of drop-outs quit after grade nine (Williams & Richman, 2007, p. 2).

African American and Latino students are three times more likely to drop out than white students. They report that twenty-nine of the fifty states in the United States see their greatest "leakage" in the "educational pipeline" as occurring between grades nine and ten (Williams & Richman, 2007, p. 2).

While the drop-out crisis in the United States is a complex problem that cannot be solved by educators alone, the statistics do identify a gap in the K-12 education system that requires more in-depth study to try to determine why such large numbers of students are choosing to drop out of school during this transitional time in their academic careers.

**Research on the Effects of the Freshman Transition**

Schiller (1999) defined academic transition as "a process during which institutional and social factors influence which students' educational careers are positively or negatively affected by this movement between organizations" (p.216). This definition points to the complexity of

this journey by adolescents as “multiple organizations and constituencies interact, often encompassing different ways of thinking” (Smith et al., 2008, p.32).

The negative results associated with this transition can have both internal and external effects on students such as increased stress levels, decreased self-esteem, deteriorated academic performance, and heightened risk for maladjustment. Research indicates that a student’s grades, self-esteem and sense of academic efficacy are likely to decline after the transition to high school (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). The National Research Council (NCR) found in 2004 that the transition into high school is marked by increased disengagement and declining motivation, particularly for low-performing youth (National Research Council, 2004). Studies back as far as 1991 found that many adolescents experience a decline in grades and attendance (Barone et al., 1991). The transition can be even tougher on students with learning disabilities or special needs where crisis can occur because with increased academic difficulty, the student’s compensating efforts are not longer adequate (Letrello & Miles, 2003). Minority students seem to be at greater risk for adjustment and academic difficulties in transitioning to high school (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

When adolescents move into middle school or high school, the anxiety is complicated further by other normal changes such as puberty, social and emotional development, the growing importance of peer relationships, and the development of higher order cognitive skills. Students who experience the stresses of numerous changes often have lower grades and decreased academic motivation (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). This “perfect storm” of external change in transitioning to high school coupled with internal changes associated with adolescence and puberty can be best described as follows:

> As students in eighth grade prepare to enter ninth grade, they are experiencing significant physical growth and change. Wiles and Bondi (2001) wrote that the

> middle school years for ten to fourteen-year-olds are characterized by emotional instability. Erratic and inconsistent behavior is present; anxiety and fear are also common and contrast with reassuring false security. Dealing with physical changes, striving for independence from family, and acquiring new methods of intellectual functioning are all emotional issues for emerging adolescents. "Students have many fears real and imagined. At no other time in development is a student likely to encounter such a diverse number of problems simultaneously" (p. 35). Students experience a transition in their physical environment in the move from one school to another, as well as different academic requirements, larger school size, and new social interactions. (Letrello, 2003, p. 1)

## The Causes of the Negative Effects of the Freshman Transition

### Academic nuts and bolts.

In a study by Smith, Akos, Lim, and Wiley (2008), the school staff expressed concern with students transitioning from middle school to the freshmen center. These areas include students' lack of understanding about earning credits, academic expectations, and attendance policies. The study described the way high school students earn credits towards graduation as "a major transition issue" that emerged in their exploration of the transition to high school. Middle school/junior high students typically receive grades each quarter and then "pass" to the next grade level or are retained in their current grade. High school students, however, are awarded a credit towards graduation for each course they pass per semester. If they fail to pass an academic course, they do not receive a credit and must re-take the course or take an alternate course to make up for it at some time in the future. The study reported that the school staff believed that first semester freshman students "have no clue" about the difference in academic policy at the high school level until "they see a zero" on their transcript. Furthermore, the idea of a transcript as a cumulative record of course completion and subject mastery is also foreign to most incoming freshmen students. It is very different from the report card they have received as an academic record they had received in prior years (p.38).

The same study also noted that counselors and teachers pointed to the school's strict adherence to the attendance policy as another major concern with freshman transitioning to high school. The policy states that students who have ten unexcused absences in a class may not receive credit for that class. They noted that the policy is clearly expressed to students and families, but because credits aren't earned at the middle school, there is no such consequence. They believe students do not understand the seriousness of missing school. One counselor explained it this way,

> If a freshman student comes in and is used to missing 10 days of school every semester, unexcused absences, it is going to hit them when they get here. Because at this level that means they are going to fail the class. And they are not going to be able to get a break. It is the attendance requirement, period. (Smith et al., 2008, p.38)

Rice (2001) noted in her study that students and parents having the authority to choose courses had a negative effect on student academic progress, particularly in science. The high school course-taking practices of students has been shown to affect student achievement as the freedom to select courses generally increases as students move from middle to high school. This freedom has implications for the course-taking patterns of students. Rice states that without proper guidance, when students and their parents, who have not had this freedom in the past, make decisions on course selection there can be an inappropriate pattern of study created for students. This could result in underachievement if courses are too easy or failure if courses chosen are too difficult. Either scenario is likely to have a negative effect on academic progress (p. 376).

One principal expressed a similar concern about the rigor of freshmen classes. Although the principal acknowledged that the students like the freedom of selecting courses, he expressed

concern that students enroll in multiple rigorous courses that follow a rather traditional pattern that many students are not ready to take. The result is that many students fail (Smith, 2008).

Several studies cite the importance of communicating and teaching parents and students information about the academic expectations for students. Having a clear understanding of the requirements, structure, and terminology used in high school academia is paramount to student success and lowering student and parents fears of the unknown. Parents and students need multiple opportunities to discuss, explore, and experience the academic and organizational similarities and differences between middle school and high school (Mizelle, 1999).

**Teacher relationships and instruction.**

Several studies cite the importance of teacher relationships in the transition to high school. Because high schools are usually larger with teachers interacting with higher numbers of students more teacher control and authority typically exists. The environment requires more formalized rules and regulations that can result in a more impersonal school climate (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

Newman notes in a 2007 study that during the transition to high school, adolescents lose familiar teachers, coaches, advisors, and routines. High schools are typically more anonymous settings than middle schools and they are typically larger buildings with more students in larger classes. As a consequence, high school students receive less individualized attention from teachers. He cited that an adolescent's sense of school belonging was positively associated with motivation for school, effort, level of participation, and eventual achievement in school. Key to that sense of belonging is that students have established a social connection between themselves and the adults in the school and the culture of the school (Newman, 2007).

Murdock found in a longitudinal study of student perceptions in seventh grade and then again at the end of ninth grade that the relationship between the student and teachers can be a predictor of motivation and adaptation in school. The study found that positive teacher relationships that include both warmth and care coupled with "clear communication that student's academic learning and success are valued" has resulted in highly motivated middle school students. Conversely, students who drop out of high school report poor relationships with teachers and perceived disrespect and unfairness towards them (Murdock, 2000, p. 328).

The impact that teacher relationships have in the transition to high school was also evident in two studies of eighth grade students in the Young Scholars Program (YSP) at Ohio State University. Students in the program perceived teachers in high school as expecting them to be more mature and responsible and as needing less monitoring of schoolwork (Newman, 2000). In a subsequent study, the students also reported that high school was harder than eighth grade and that some teachers were unapproachable, too busy, and belittling (Newman, 2000). In fact, all of the YSP students who were struggling in ninth grade made negative comments about their teachers. Some students perceived that teachers did not care about them (Newman, 2000).

Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) reiterated the importance of the teacher-student relationship in their study on successful transition programs, especially students from disadvantaged home settings. They cite the YSB study, noting that high performing students typically had more support systems such as family, friends and others to help them through the transition, while low performers relied almost exclusively on teachers and other school staff. They stress the importance of the students knowing that an adult at the school is committed to helping them be successful (p. 25). Newman's (2000) YSB study concluded the importance of

making sure that every student has at least one important adult who is committed to his or her academic success and is competent to support the child's learning.

Common in many of the studies is the students' desire to be taken seriously by their teachers as students. Participants in a study by Wentzel (1997) described caring teachers as those who demonstrated a commitment to their teaching, recognition of individuals' academic needs and strengths, and a democratic interaction style. Similarly, Murdock (2000) found that students were more engaged academically to the degree that they perceived their teachers as fair and equitable toward them in the classroom as well as holding high expectations for them (p. 343).

Rice (2001) noted in her study that discontinuity in the school climate and educational practices can have a negative impact on the transition to high school. She defined school climate as "how actors in the educational process perceive and characterize the school atmosphere." School size, positive teacher attitudes, emphasis on student achievement, supportive environment, and orderliness were cited as the main elements of school climate. Educational practices were described as academic expectations, teacher push, standards based curriculum, coursework difficulty, and course-taking practices. Her study revealed a significant positive effect of a decrease in teacher push on student achievement across the transition. Rice concluded that that students may benefit from a short-term hiatus from overwhelming academic pressure while they adjust to the new school environment (p. 389).

In summary, teachers are clearly the point of contact for students upon entry to high school. The teacher's ability to create a warm caring environment that is conducive to meaningful learning, coupled with teaching strategies that are motivational and expectations that are in range of the student's academic abilities has a significant impact on students positively

transitioning to high school. The conclusions drawn from multiple studies support the vital role teacher relationships play in the successful transition to high school.

**Logistics.**

Students transitioning from a junior high or middle school setting to a high school setting are moving from an environment where they not only have a thorough understanding and awareness logistics necessary to successfully navigate each day, they also have a comfort level of knowing where they are going and how the school environment functions. Moving into a new high school setting raises similar procedural concerns as moving into middle school, including finding classes, having enough time to get to classes or to eat lunch, and opening their lockers. High school freshman are also concerned about knowing the school and classroom rules, and the procedures and consequences for breaking them (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). Added to the stressors equated with the new environment are the complexities of a larger school environment including multiple classes taught by different teachers (Smith et al., 2008). Junior highs and middle schools often arrange students into smaller groups of students described as “pods” or “teams” that were housed in the same geographic location in the school and often had common procedures for hallway, lunch, bathroom, and other procedural and logistical concerns. High schools are typically larger and more bureaucratic than middle schools that can lead to depersonalization and lack of a sense of community (Lee & Smith, 2001).

While logistical concerns top the list of most surveys and qualitative studies collected from eighth grade students, most agree that these concerns are short lived and are no longer of concern after the first few weeks (Litrello & Miles, 2003).

**Social relationships.**

Although few studies have examined the changes in social support that occur between eighth and ninth grade and the impact it has on the transition to high school, adjusting to the social aspects of a school transition may be as important as adjusting to its academic demands. In addition, these two aspects may well be intertwined. For example, Akos and Galassi (2004) found that although the top transition concern in their study was academic at both the middle and high school levels, students said that their primary method of adjusting to or getting comfortable in the new school was spending time with friends. Newman (2007) described the transition to high school as a time when the adolescent's social support system is potentially disrupted and reorganized and that the three primary sources of social support—family, peers, and school adults—are each likely to undergo changes as a result of the developmental transitions of adolescence combined with the transition to high school.

To add further complexity to the transition, students change in social status as they move from being the oldest and most physically mature in their middle school, to the youngest and most often least physically developed among their peers at the high school. Their status as a student, athlete, leader, or even negative status as bully, class clown, etc. is often disrupted as students move into the larger high school environment. Newman found that peer group structures from middle school are disturbed as students move to larger high schools and students often regroup into new cliques and crowds. Ability grouping, academic tracking, and varied activities may bring students into contact with new peers and make it difficult to find time to interact with former middle school friends (Newman, 2007). A study by Holcomb-McCoy (2007) supports the notion that students may become distracted by the increased complexity of social interactions that are fostered within the high school environment. Peers emphasize fitting in and belonging, and this can be a great source of pressure and anxiety for many students. Further, due to the

increase in the number of students, the high school environment can become a more anonymous setting than the middle school environment as students who were top scholars and athletes in middle school may experience role loss when they arrive in high school and that outcomes following transition are largely determined by the ability of the student to cope with and manage change in the new environment (p. 253).

In addition, students experience developmental changes during the high school transition. According to a study by Cauley & Jovanovich (2006), students become more autonomous and self-reliant, depend less on parents, and can be influenced more by peers. In fact, peer conformity has been found to peak at ninth grade. Relationships with peers expand and more intimate friendships are established. In addition, students begin the search for identity and explore and experiment with different possibilities. The developmental changes and challenges facing students beginning middle school or ninth grade include advances in cognition, concerns about physical and sexual changes, making and keeping friends, and desires for more autonomy. Often the school environment exacerbates adolescents' concerns (p. 16). Murdock (2000) found that peer-influence effects are assumed to be greatest among early adolescents as this is often a time of heightened self-consciousness coupled with instability in one’s own identity. Thus, adolescents may be particularly vulnerable to potentially negative peer influences as they make such transitions (p. 329). In a study by Newman (2007) the importance of students establishing and maintaining social relationships is emphasized as failure to do so can result in multiple negative developmental outcomes including loneliness, school dropout, internalizing symptoms, aggression, criminality, and substance use (p. 444).

The high school transition is an especially sensitive period when adolescents are seeking to establish meaningful experiences of group identity and belonging (Newman, 2007). From

having a friend who eats the same lunch period to having someone you already know in each class period, research supports that social concerns are woven in every aspect of the transition to high school for students.

**Student safety.**

Student safety can be defined as both a feeling of well-being at the high school as well as the ability of the high school staff to protect students from violence. Although discussed in minimal depth, most studies of student concerns associated with the transition to high school include student fears for personal safety. A study by Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) reported that as students moved into high school, the concerns of the transition to middle school reappeared in somewhat different forms. Student's most typical answer was being both excited and scared about going to high school. Student safety seems to surface in the social sphere most often described as "getting along with older students, and dealing with bullies" (p. 17). A study by Mizelle & Irwin (2000) echoed these findings stating that students are excited about more freedom, more choices, expanded extra-curricular choices, and new friendships, while being concerned about being lost, bullied by older students, harder classes, strict teachers, and fear of bad grades.

In a study by Rice (2001), she found that concerns about school safety had a negative impact on student performance in both math and science during the transition to high school. She cited that the degree to which members of the school community feel safe is one indicator of the quality of the interactions in the school. The issue of school safety is one that has been targeted in the National Education Goals because of its potential to disrupt the learning environment for students. She noted that, in general, safety becomes a more salient concern as students move into their teenage years and progress to higher levels of education. Schools at more advanced levels

tend to be less safe, and it is reasonable to suspect that a decrease in safety causes distractions that can have a negative impact on student performance, particularly for students coming from smaller relatively safer environments (p.375).

While school safety is one element of the high school climate and culture, the student concerns of being teased, bullied, or simply the general fear of moving from a known secure environment to most often a larger, unknown environment can have a negative impact on the transition to high school.

**Summary**

In reviewing previous research on the transition from eighth to ninth grade several themes emerge as the major concerns noted by students, parents, teachers, administrators, and other educational theorists. While all agree that educational transitions are complex and many factors play into a successful or unsuccessful transition for students, five areas seem to rise to the top as the most prevalent found across the body of research.

The impact of the transition on the social relationships of students is a topic cited often as an area of growing literature and study. While there is little research on the changes in social support that students encounter during the transition to high school, past research on the topic suggest that maintaining meaningful friendships, fitting in, and making new friends in high school is of more importance to students than academic success. Concerns such as going into the larger high school setting and having classes without friends or other students you know were noted along with finding friends with whom to eat lunch. Deeper social issues include being able to maintain close relationships founded in junior high or earlier. Newman described the importance of these social connections as follows;

A growing literature highlights the importance of social support for health, life-satisfaction, and positive adjustment. Human beings have a fundamental need to form and maintain positive, enduring interpersonal relationships. The satisfaction of these needs is associated with positive outcomes while deprivation or disruption of these relationships is associated with negative outcomes. Contact with specific individuals who share a close, affectionate bond is associated with feelings of pleasure, calm, and reduced anxiety. Separation from those who are socially valued, and the threat of social exclusion are sources of emotional distress (Newman, 2007, p.442).

A second area that emerged was a concern about understanding the requirements, structure, and terminology used in high school academia, or academic nuts and bolts. The focus on earning credits, having a good grade point average, maintaining a high class rank, and even the importance of a student's transcript of grades, credits, and test scores were foreign concepts to incoming ninth graders. This system was much different than their current system of simply earning grades and "passing" to the next grade level. Adding to the complexity are meetings with school counselors to plan pathways of study, earn different types of diplomas, and being required to follow courses in sequence along with conversations about future plans and employment (Smith, 2008). As the importance of these decisions are emphasized, student concerns rise often to an overwhelming level, especially for students who have not been successful in middle school or junior high.

Logistics, defined as the ability to navigate both the geographical layout of the school, as well as, the crowds of students within the confines of the school, rules and procedures, such as finding lockers, classes, and the best routes to get to classes on time seemed to surface at some point in most research especially those that involved some type of feedback from students,

teachers, and building administrators. While this surfaced as a concern, most post transition studies found this to be short lived after a few weeks of high school and students were able to learn their way around the school. Many studies cited student participation in transition activities provided by the high school staff and students was beneficial in addressing this concern. Almost all transition programs had focused activities centered on logistic information and practice.

The establishment of a warm caring environment that is conducive to meaningful learning coupled with teaching strategies that are motivational and expectations that are in range of the student's academic abilities was another theme that presented itself often in some form in previous research. Fear of strict teachers, classes being "harder," too much homework, and feelings of being ill-prepared for the academic challenges of high school were cited as examples of concerns from students transitioning into grade nine. One study by Smith (2008) found that eighth grade teachers and ninth grade teachers knew very little about how the other level operated, thus many of the communications about the expectations from high school teachers were exaggerated by junior high teachers which added to student concerns about the high school environment. In the realm of instruction and teacher relationships, the perception noted in many studies described the transition as moving from a smaller, more personal environment, to a larger more impersonal environment which resulted in concerns by students, parents and some teachers (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000).

Finally, student safety emerged in several studies and student concerns about being bullied by older students and fitting in a larger school environment. Few studies delved deeper into student perceptions to investigate the specifics of these concerns beyond the obvious, but the feeling of well-being at the high school as well as the ability of the high school staff to protect students from violence emerged as a concern particularly of ninth grade students and parents.

It is clear that research must play a stronger role in guiding the efforts to ensure a better transition to high school for ninth grade students. As Rice (2001) noted in her study "that work is needed to clarify the trade-offs inherent in school transitions and to inform practices designed to improve these processes" (p. 390). Rice also noted that future work should reflect the reality of how school transitions unfold for different types of students so that research can play a more useful role as educators continue to wrestle with this issue.

It seems imperative that more specific research on the perceptions of students actually experiencing the transition be tapped to be able to meet the needs of students who struggle through the transition and optimize the experience for all students.

# Chapter 3: Methodology

## Procedure

The purpose of the study was to identify the student's perspective of the difficulties of transitioning from eighth grade to high school. The intent of gathering this information was to provide primary source data for additional study and development of effective transition experiences for students entering the ninth grade. More specifically, this study sought to

1. Identify the most significant areas of concern found in previous research regarding the transition from eighth to ninth grade;
2. Develop a survey instrument that could be used to quantify eighth grade student's perceptions of those significant areas of concern;
3. Examine the results of the survey to identify student's level of concern in each identified area;
4. Compare the five areas of concern and determine which areas students perceive as most significant;
5. Compare the perceptions of male and female students;
6. Compare the perceptions of eighth grade students from a low performing, high poverty, and highly diverse school setting with students from a high performing, low poverty, less diverse school setting;
7. Compare the perceptions of eighth grade students who had an older sibling go through high school with the perceptions of students who would be the first in their family to make this transition; and finally
8. Provide a way for student voices to be heard as primary source data for additional study and development of transition experiences for students entering high school

## Population and Sample Used in the Study

The population for the study included approximately 285 eighth grade students attending two different schools. School "A" had 122 of approximately 300 eighth graders respond to the survey (44 boys, 73 girls, 5 unidentified). School "A" is located in a metropolitan area on the east side of Indianapolis, Indiana. School "A" has 76 percent of its eighth grade students on free or reduced lunch and is 30 percent white/non-Hispanic and 70 percent of the eighth grade class is

of non-white ethnicity. As seventh graders 58.6 percent passed the English/Language Arts portion of the Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress (ISTEP) examination while 67.5 percent passed the math portion and 52.2 percent passed both math and English/Language Arts tests. School “B” had 169 of approximately 500 eighth graders respond to the survey (72 boys, 95 girls, 2 unidentified). School “B” is a high performing junior high school located in a northern suburb of Indianapolis, Indiana. School “B” has 24 percent of its eighth grade students on free or reduced lunch and is 69 percent white/non-Hispanic and 31 percent of the eighth grade class is of non-white ethnicity. As seventh graders 84 percent passed the English/Language Arts portion of the ISTEP examination while 90.7 percent passed the math portion and 80.6 percent passed both math and English/Language Arts tests.

**Instrument Used for the Collection of Data**

The instrument, exhibited in Appendix B, was developed to collect data on the perceptions of eighth grade students on the transition to high school. The 40 items used in the final form of the instrument were gleaned from professional literature and reviewed by a juried panel of experts for validity. Those items, reflecting feedback from the juried panel were placed in a common format for the purpose of the study. The 40 items were arranged in random order for student response, but were organized as follows:

- Questions 1, 6, 11, 16, 21, 26, 31, and 36 addressed Social Relationships
- Questions 2, 7, 12, 17, 22, 27, 32, and 37 addressed Academic Nuts and Bolts
- Questions 3, 8, 13, 18, 23, 28, 33, and 38 addressed Logistics
- Questions 4, 9, 14, 19, 24, 29, 34, and 39 addressed Teacher Relationships and Instruction
- Questions 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, and 40 addressed Student Safety

For the purposes of the study the following guidelines were used to determine the level of concern and how it would be described:

- If the average score of the responses for an area was 8.0 or lower, it was considered "not a concern."
- If the average score of an area was between 8.1 and 12.0, it was considered a "concern", but a "low" concern for students. This represents the lower quartile of items marked as "somewhat concerned" through "significantly concerned."
- If the average score of an area was between 12.1 and 24.0, it was considered an area of "high" concern. This represents the three upper quartiles of items marked as "somewhat concerned" through "significantly concerned."

**Validity**

A juried panel of experts reviewed the final form of the instrument to determine validity. The juried panel included two guidance counselors/directors who serve in public schools working with eighth grade students and two high school guidance counselors/directors who work with freshmen transition activities. In addition two leading university professors served on the panel, one being a leader in the field of school counseling while the other is a leader in the field of psychology. The panel consisted of the following members:

- Dr. Ann Kring, Professor, University of California Berkeley University, Berkeley, CA.
- Dr. Charlene Alexander, Professor, Ball State University, Muncie, IN.
- Nancy Herndon, Guidance Department Director, Hamilton Southeastern High School, Hamilton Southeastern Schools, Fishers, IN.
- Linda Brown, Guidance Department Director, Fishers High School, Hamilton Southeastern Schools, Fishers, IN
- Jackie Wolf, Guidance Department Coordinator, Fishers Junior High School, Hamilton Southeastern Schools, Fishers, IN.
- Chris Graves, Guidance Department Coordinator, Riverside Junior High School, Hamilton Southeastern Schools, Fishers, IN.

**Reliability**

Reliability was assessed in two ways. First, the internal consistency of the total scale and five individual areas was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Second, test-retest reliability was

assessed by having a small group of students take the instrument on two occasions, with the retest taking place two weeks later and using Pearson correlations.

**Research Questions**

Research Question 1: Are social relationships a significant concern to eighth grade students during the transition from eighth grade to high school?

Research Question 2: Are the logistics of high school such as, finding classes, being on time, or simply knowing where to get help, etc., a significant concern to eighth grade students during the transition from eighth grade to high school?

Research Question 3: Is student safety a significant concern to eighth grade students during the transition from eighth grade to high school?

Research Question 4: Are the academic "nuts and bolts" such as, credits, graduation requirements, Grade Point Average (GPA), class rank, study skills, etc., a significant concern to eighth grade students during the transition from eighth grade to high school?

Research Question 5: Are teacher relationships and instruction a significant concern to eighth grade students during the transition from eighth grade to high school?

Research Question 6: Are students more concerned about some of the areas than others?

Research Question 7: Do female eighth graders concerns in the five areas noted above differ from male eighth grade student concerns?

Research Question 8: Do student concerns of students attending lower performing schools with high ethnic diversity and poverty differ from student concerns in high performing schools with low ethnic diversity and poverty in these five areas?

Research Question 9: Are students with older siblings who have attended high school less concerned in these five areas than students without older siblings who have attended high school?

**Collection of Data**

The survey was taken by students at School "A" over five days between March 4 and March 8, 2013. Prior to the survey, parents were informed of the study and gave written permission for their student to participate in the survey. Permission slips were returned by 134 parents to allow their student(s) participate in the study and 122 of the 134 students with parent permission chose to complete the survey. The survey was taken by students at School "B" over five days between March 18 and March 22, 2013. Prior to the survey, parents were informed of the study and gave written permission for their student to participate in the survey. Permission slips were returned by 179 parents to allow their student(s) participate in the study and 169 of the 179 students with parent permission chose to complete the survey. Six students did not complete the measure, and thus the final sample size for analyses is 285. On March 22, 2013 data collection was completed. The researcher established a total response rate from both schools of 93 percent of eighth grade students who had written permission from parents participated in the study. Of the approximately 800 parent permission slips sent home with students, only 313 were returned for a response rate of approximately 39 percent of responses granting parental permission to participate in the study.

**Analysis of the Data**

Dr. Kianre Eouanzoui of Ball State University and Dr. Ann Kring of the University of California Berkeley University served as statistical consultants for this study.

Descriptive statistics of the instrument, reported in frequencies and percentages, are presented in the tables. Comparisons were made between various items. The research questions were tested using various analyses described in Chapter 4.

**Summary**

The development of the research methodology began with an explanation of the process used once the purpose of the study was established resulting in the development of a survey instrument. A description of the population sample was provided followed by a more detailed explanation of the survey instrument including the metric used to determine the level of concern of the students. Next, the use of a juried panel of experts to determine validity of the instrument was noted along with the members of the panel, their titles, and educational setting. To access reliability, Crombach's alpha was used to access internal consistency of the total scale and five areas of concern and Pearson correlations were used to assess test-retest reliability of the instrument. The research questions were then noted followed by a detail description of the collection of data. Finally, the methods used to analyze the data were explained.

# Chapter 4

## Results and Discussion

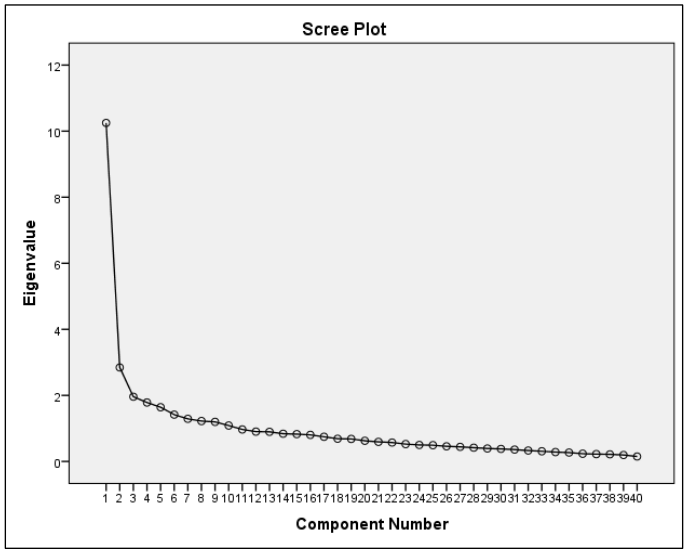
The population for the study included 291 eighth grade students. Prior to the survey, parents were informed of the study and gave written permission for their student(s) to participate in the survey. Permission slips were returned by 313 parents to allow their student(s) to participate in the study. Approximately 93% (291 of the 313 students with parent permission) chose to complete the survey. Of the approximately 800 parent permission slips sent home with students, only 313 were returned for a return rate of approximately 39 percent of parents granting permission for their student(s) to participate in the study. Six students did not complete the measure, and thus the final sample size for analyses was 285.

This chapter includes methods of analysis, and an interpretation of research data. The presentation of the data includes descriptive statistics for the survey instrument (frequencies and percentages), factor analysis of the survey, multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) to test group differences, correlations to assess test-retest reliability, and Cronbach's Alpha to assess the survey instrument's internal consistency. For all MANOVAs, in cases when sphericity was violated, the Huynh-Feldt correction for degrees of freedom was used when estimates of sphericity were greater than 0.75; the Greenhouse-Geisser correction was used when estimates of sphericity were less than 0.75 (Girden, 1992).

**Methods of Analysis**

The first analyses were conducted to determine the psychometric properties of the survey. Although the researcher developed items to capture the identified five domains of concern to eighth graders, the first step was to assess whether the measure indeed captured these domains. Principal Components factor analysis with varimax rotation was used to assess the factor structure of the survey. Examination of the scree plot indicated a five factor solution fit the data, with five factors having an eigen value greater than 1 (see Figure 1). The five factors accounted for 46.2% of the variance in the survey.

Figure 1




Thus, varimax rotation was set to extract five factors. The factor structure is presented in Table 1. In general, the *a priori* determination of the five areas was confirmed by the factor analysis. For the Teacher Relationships and Instruction area, all items had a loading of .20 or greater on the same factor. Similarly, all but one or two items had highest loadings on the other four factors. In addition, item-total correlations were all above .20 (and most were above .30) for

the items comprising the five areas suggesting that the items within each area corresponded to one another to reasonable degree.

Table 1
Factor Analysis

| Rotated Component Matrix[a] | |
|---|---|
| | Component |
| **Teacher Relationships and Instruction** | |
| 4. Are you worried about the high school classes being harder than junior high? | .527 |
| 9. Do you think most 8th grade students are worried about the high school classes being harder than... | .343 |
| 14. Are you concerned that the high school teachers will be meaner or less friendly than the junior... | .506 |
| 19. Do you think most 8th grade students are worried that the high school teachers will be meaner or... | .496 |
| 24. Are you worried that the homework load at the high school will be too much to handle? | .676 |
| 29. Do you think most 8th grade students are worried that they won't be able to handle the homework... | .491 |
| 34. Are you worried that high school teachers won't help you the way they did in junior high? | .372 |
| 39. Are you concerned that you won't be in teams at the high school? | .388 |
| **Academic Nuts and Bolts** | |
| 2. Are you concerned that you may not have the study skills needed to succeed in high school such as... | .008 |
| 7. Do you think most 8th grade students are worried about having the academic skills to succeed in high... | .572 |

| | |
|---|---|
| 12. Are you concerned about important tests you take in high school like the graduation exam, or college... | .445 |
| 17. Are you concerned about high school credits, such as earning enough credits for graduation, or earning... | .405 |
| 22. Do you think that most 8th grade students are worried because they aren't sure of what high school... | .548 |
| 27. Are you concerned about taking the correct classes to meet the requirements for college? | .238 |
| 32. Are concerned about your grade point average and class rank? | .381 |
| 37. Are you concerned about making sure you take classes as a freshman that will get you into classes... | .216 |
| **Safety** | |
| 5. Are you concerned that older students will bully you in high school? | .670 |
| 10. Do you think most 8th grade students are concerned that older students will bully them in high school... | .431 |
| 15. Are you concerned about fights and getting hurt at the high school? | .640 |
| 20. Are you afraid of violence at the high school? | .701 |
| 25. Are you concerned that the high school might not be as safe as the junior high school? | .571 |
| 30. Do you think most 8th grade students are concerned that high school might not be as safe as the... | .414 |
| 35. Are you concerned that the high school teachers won't watch over the students as closely as they... | .183 |
| 40. Do you think most 8th grade students are concerned that the high school teachers won't watch over... | .159 |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Logistics** | |
| 3. Are you worried about getting lost at the high school? | .466 |
| 8. Are you concerned about getting through the lunch lines and finding a seat to have lunch with you... | .785 |
| 13. Do you think most 8th grade students are worried about getting through the lunch lines at high school... | .334 |
| 18. Are you worried about having enough time to get to your locker and on time for class? | .246 |
| 23. Are you concerned about the high school being crowded and the hallways being difficult to get the... | .126 |
| 28. Are you worried about getting into trouble because you're not sure of the rules or which rules are... | .105 |
| 33. Are you worried about knowing how to get help if you have questions or problems at the high school... | .207 |
| 38. Do you think most 8th grade students are worried that they don t know how to get help if they have... | .041 |
| **Social Relationships** | |
| 1. Are you concerned about being in high school classes with students that you don t know? | .212 |
| 6. Do you worry that you and your friends won't be as close when you move on to high school? | .209 |
| 11. Are you concerned about having someone to sit with at lunch? | .106 |
| 16. Are you concerned about fitting in with other social groups or cliques at high school? | .534 |
| 21. Do you think most 8th grade students are worried about how they will fit in socially in a big high... | .119 |

| | |
|---|---|
| 26. Are you concerned that you will be pressured to drink, smoke, and/or do drugs in high school? | .738 |
| 31. Are you worried that your friends will be pressured into smoking, using or abusing alcohol or other... | .606 |
| 36. Are you concerned that the amount of high school work will affect your social life? | -.007 |
| Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.[a] | |
| a. Rotation converged in 11 iterations. | |

Because the factor analysis generally supported the prior determination of the five areas of concern, the researcher opted to retain the five areas for the remainder of the analyses. Importantly, the five areas had high internal consistency as indicated by Cronbach's alpha: Social Relationships (.71), Logistics (.73), Safety (.79), Nuts & Bolts (.80), and Teacher Relationships and Instruction (.76). Cronbach's alpha for the total scale score was .92. In addition, test-retest reliability was assessed using Pearson correlations and demonstrated that the instrument was stable across two weeks (see Table 2). Test-retest reliability for the five areas were as follows: Social Relationships (.83), Logistics (.86), Safety (.63), Nuts & Bolts (.78), and Teacher Relationships and Instruction (.89). Test-retest reliability for the total score was .74.

## Interpretation of Research Data

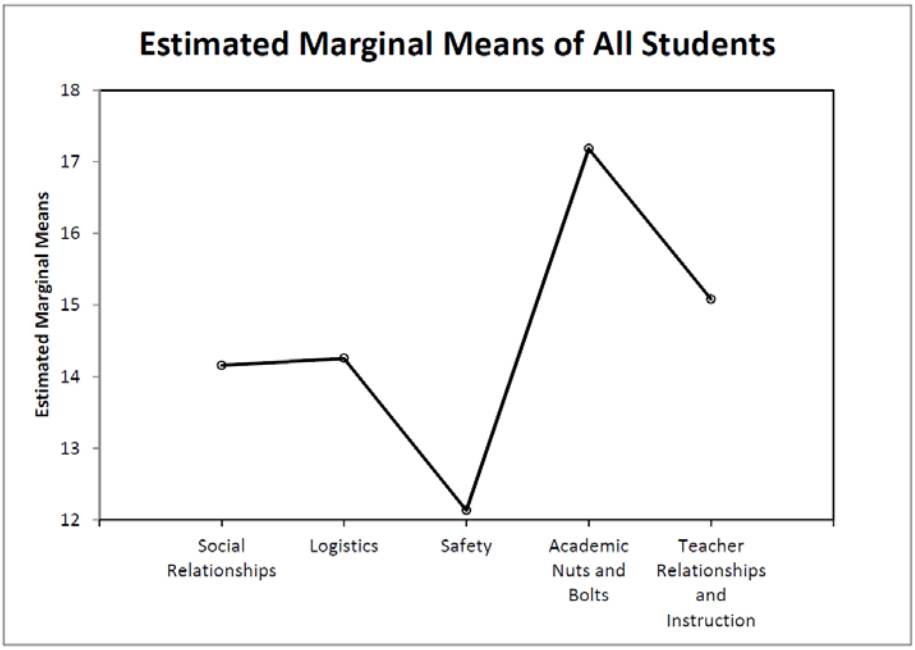
### Research questions 1 – 6.

Means and standard deviations for the five areas across the entire sample are presented in Table 2 and Figure 2.

Table 2

| Five Areas of Student Concern | Mean | Std. Deviation | N |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Social Relationships | 14.1579 | 3.33562 | 285 |
| 2. Logistics | 14.2561 | 3.40996 | 285 |
| 3. Safety | 12.1333 | 3.26038 | 285 |
| 4. Academic Nuts and Bolts | 17.1825 | 3.69931 | 285 |
| 5. Teacher Relationships and Instruction | 15.0807 | 3.36675 | 285 |

Figure 2




As can be seen in Table 2 and Figure 2, students across both schools A and B were most concerned about the academic Nuts and Bolts of high school as well as Teacher Relationships and Instruction and least concerned about Safety. Concerns about Social Relationships and Logistics fell in-between.

**Research question 7.**

Sex differences were examined using a 2 (Sex: Male, Female) X 5 (Area: Social Relationships, Teacher Relationships and Instruction, Safety, Nuts and Bolts, Logistics) repeated measures MANOVA. In cases when sphericity was violated, the Huynh-Feldt correction for degrees of freedom was used when estimates of sphericity were greater than 0.75; the Greenhouse-Geisser correction was used when estimates of sphericity were less than 0.75 (Girden, 1992).

The sex main effect was not significant, however the Sex X Area interaction was, $F(4, 280) = 6.47$, $p < .001$. Specifically, female eighth graders scored higher than male eighth graders on the Social Relationships and Logistics scales. Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 3 and shown in Figure 3

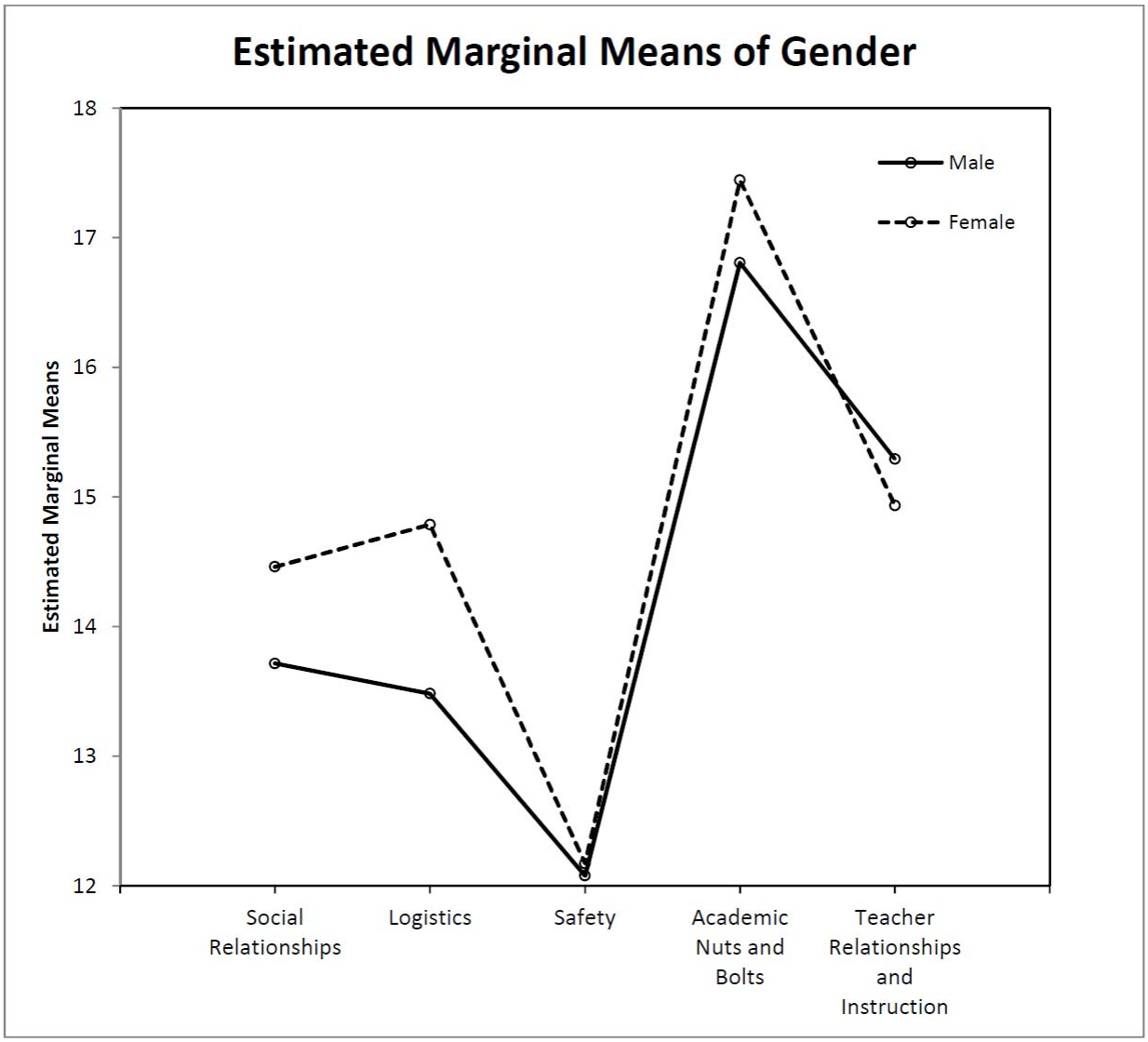
Table 3

**Descriptive Statistics**

**Comparing Female/Male Students**

| Areas of Concern | Gender | Mean | Std. Deviation | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Social Relationships | Male | 13.7155 | 3.27256 | 116 |
| | Female | 14.4615 | 3.35410 | 169 |
| | Total | 14.1579 | 3.33562 | 285 |
| 2. Logistics | Male | 13.4828 | 3.42239 | 116 |
| | Female | 14.7870 | 3.30794 | 169 |
| | Total | 14.2561 | 3.40996 | 285 |
| 3. Safety | Male | 12.0776 | 3.47451 | 116 |
| | Female | 12.1716 | 3.11489 | 169 |
| | Total | 12.1333 | 3.26038 | 285 |
| 4. Academic Nuts and Bolts | Male | 16.8017 | 3.76764 | 116 |
| | Female | 17.4438 | 3.63982 | 169 |
| | Total | 17.1825 | 3.69931 | 285 |
| 5. Teacher Relationships and Instruction | Male | 15.2931 | 3.50904 | 116 |
| | Female | 14.9349 | 3.26807 | 169 |
| | Total | 15.0807 | 3.36675 | 285 |

Figure 3




**Research question 8.**

To assess whether students at the different schools expressed different concerns, a 2 (School: A, B) X 5 (Area) MANOVA was conducted. In this analysis, the school main effect was significant, $F(1,282) = 25.03$, $p < .001$, as was the School X Area interaction, $F(4, 279) = 6.30$, $p < .001$. In general, students at school A reported more concerns than students at school B. This was particularly true for student concerns in the areas of Nuts and Bolts and Logistics.

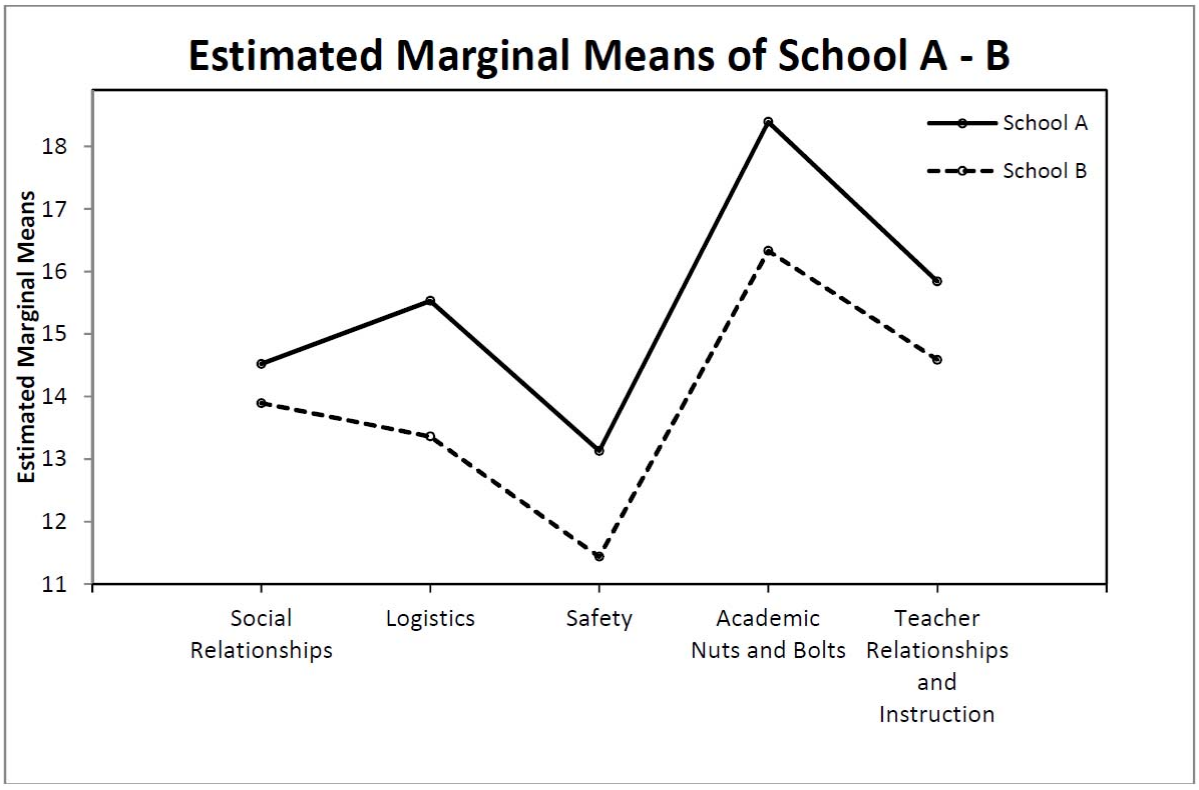
Table 4

**Descriptive Statistics**

**Comparing Students from Schools A and B**

| Areas of Concern | School | Mean | Std. Deviation | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Social Relationships | B | 13.8922 | 3.19078 | 167 |
| | A | 14.5214 | 3.52234 | 117 |
| | Total | 14.1514 | 3.33971 | 284 |
| 2. Logistics | B | 13.3593 | 3.31884 | 167 |
| | A | 15.5299 | 3.14745 | 117 |
| | Total | 14.2535 | 3.41569 | 284 |
| 3. Safety | B | 11.4371 | 2.79747 | 167 |
| | A | 13.1282 | 3.62353 | 117 |
| | Total | 12.1338 | 3.26612 | 284 |
| 4. Academic Nuts and Bolts | B | 16.3293 | 3.87678 | 167 |
| | A | 18.3932 | 3.07649 | 117 |
| | Total | 17.1796 | 3.70552 | 284 |
| 5. Teacher Relationships and Instruction | B | 14.5868 | 3.19119 | 167 |
| | A | 15.8376 | 3.45403 | 117 |
| | Total | 15.1021 | 3.35320 | 284 |

Figure 4




**Research question 9.**

To assess whether having an older sibling in high school mitigated students concerns, a 2 (Sibling: Yes, No) X 5 (Area) MANOVA was conducted. The Sibling main effect was significant, $F(1, 283) = 5.28$, $p=.022$ indicating that those 8th graders who had an older sibling in high school expressed fewer concerns than those who did not as shown in Table 5 and Figure 5.

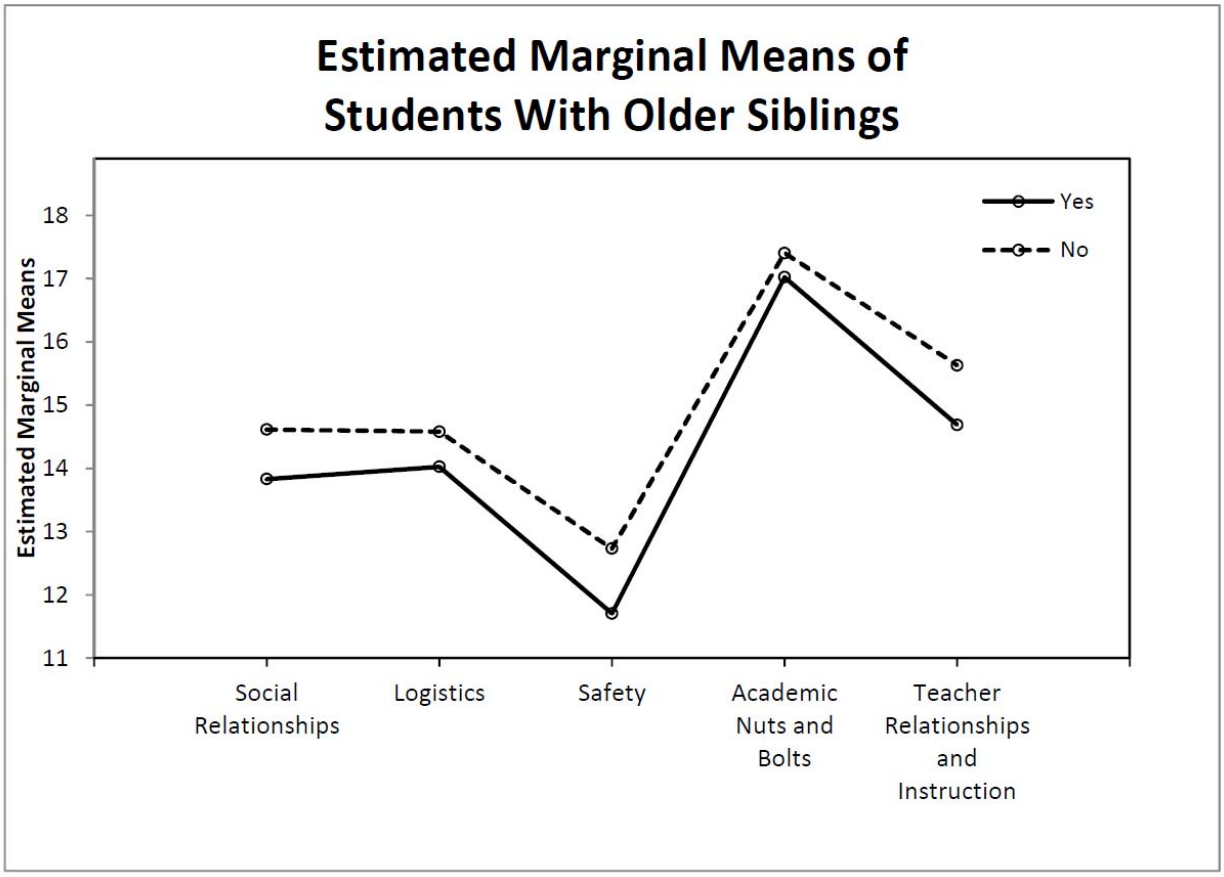
Table 5

**Descriptive Statistics**

**Comparing Students With/Without Older Siblings**

| Areas of Concern | Do you have an older brother or sister who attended high school? | Mean | Std. Deviation | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Social Relationships | Yes | 13.8313 | 3.14236 | 166 |
| | No | 14.6134 | 3.55134 | 119 |
| | Total | 14.1579 | 3.33562 | 285 |
| 2. Logistics | Yes | 14.0241 | 3.40401 | 166 |
| | No | 14.5798 | 3.40612 | 119 |
| | Total | 14.2561 | 3.40996 | 285 |
| 3. Safety | Yes | 11.7048 | 3.01766 | 166 |
| | No | 12.7311 | 3.49745 | 119 |
| | Total | 12.1333 | 3.26038 | 285 |
| 4. Academic Nuts and Bolts | Yes | 17.0241 | 3.70086 | 166 |
| | No | 17.4034 | 3.70140 | 119 |
| | Total | 17.1825 | 3.69931 | 285 |
| 5. Teacher Relationships and Instruction | Yes | 14.6867 | 3.35903 | 166 |
| | No | 15.6303 | 3.31372 | 119 |
| | Total | 15.0807 | 3.36675 | 285 |

Figure 5




**Summary**

The presentation of data began with a description of the population sample of 291 eighth graders who had parent permission to participate in the study. Six students chose not to participate resulting in a ninety-three percent positive response from students with permission and a final sample size of 285 students. Next, factor analysis of the survey instrument was used to determine if the five pre-determined areas of concern were statistically reliable. The factor analysis generally supported the five areas pre-determined by the researcher. The areas had high internal consistency determined by Cronbach's Alpha. In addition, test-retest reliability, assessed using Pearson correlations, demonstrated that the instrument was stable across the two week span

between tests. Descriptive statistics were used and interpreted to address the research questions. The data findings were explained and presented in tables and figures.

# Chapter 5

## Summary and Conclusions

The study revealed both new and significant findings as well as insightful information from students in regard to their perceptions of the challenges associated with the transition from eighth grade to high school. This chapter begins with a summary of specific findings from the results of the survey for each research question. That section is followed by conclusions, recommendations for future study, and a summary of the chapter.

Research Question 1: Are social relationships a significant concern to eighth grade students during the transition from eighth grade to high school?

Perhaps the most interesting finding in this area of concern was that while being a significant concern for students, it ranked in the middle range in comparison to the other areas. One would expect that social relationships would be near the top of concerns by adolescents since it is such a developmental force in this age group. Several researchers described this transition as a disruption to the student's social structures and support systems, so one would assume that students would be more alarmed entering a much larger environment and moving from being the oldest, most physically mature, and enjoying the highest status in school to being the youngest, least mature physically, and having "freshman" status (Newman, 2007). Other negative associations include increased complexity of relationships in the high school as it is a bigger more anonymous setting where establishing a sense of belonging and fitting into the new environment can be unsettling (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

The study did find that female students were significantly more concerned about social relationships than male students and students who had an older sibling attend high school before

them were significantly less concerned about social relationships than students who did not have an older sibling. It could be possible that students taking the survey instrument in eighth grade are still secure within their social relationships as most of the difficulties that are highlighted in previous research report the negative social effects occurring during the freshman year.

Research Question 2: Are the logistics of high school such as, finding classes, being on time, or simply knowing where to get help, etc., a significant concern to eighth grade students during the transition from eighth grade to high school?

Students in the study found logistics to be of significant concern, but it ranked in the middle range in comparison to the other areas. This was another interesting finding in that logistical concerns are typically ranked at the top of most surveys and qualitative studies, though most researchers have found that these concerns usually are non-existent after the first few weeks of school (Litrello and Miles, 2003).

Previous research identified fundamental stressors such as finding classrooms, navigating hallways and bathrooms, being on time for class, lunch lines, as well as more complex concerns regarding rules, procedures, and consequences for breaking them as major concerns for eighth graders (Cauley and Jovanovich, 2006). Eighth grade students are usually transitioning from a smaller environment where they have been grouped in “teams” or “pods” and a have a high level of confidence about where they are, where they are going, and how to get there. They also have a keen understanding of how the school environment functions. Most transition programming for eighth graders include tours, visits, and class meetings to help incoming freshman learn the geographical layout and procedures which may account for the quick resolution of this area of concern.

The study found that female students, again, were significantly more concerned about this area than male students and students who had an older sibling attend high school before them were significantly less concerned about logistics than students who did not have an older sibling. There was a significant difference between school A and B in this area of concern. Students from school A, a lower performing school with high poverty and high diversity, were much more concerned about logistics than students from school B, a high performing school with low poverty and less diversity.

Research Question 3: Is student safety a significant concern to eighth grade students during the transition from eighth grade to high school?

The finding in this area was remarkable in that across all factors of comparison, safety received the lowest score of any area of concern. The average score of the total survey sample lies on the borderline between “low concern” and “high concern” based on the guidelines established for the purpose of the study.

While discussed in minimal depth in previous research, almost all studies of student concerns regarding the transition to high school include student safety as a prominent concern. Most researchers identify “being bullied by older students” or “getting along with older students” as concerns of students moving to high school (Cauley and Jovanovich, 2006). Rice found that concerns about school safety had a negative impact on student performance in both math and science during the transition to high school (Rice, 2001). Student concerns of being teased, bullied, or caught up in fights, or other possible violent situations can be exacerbated in the transition from a smaller, known, secure environment to a larger unknown environment, yet students in the study were minimally concerned about student safety. Another external factor that makes this finding extremely unusual is that the survey was administered approximately

three months after the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut where 20 elementary students and six staff members were killed in a horrific school shooting in mid-December. The attention to school safety has been unprecedented since that time by school officials, government officials, and media, yet the study found that student perception of school safety is of minimal concern. Male and female students both scored safety almost identically on the borderline between an area of low and high concern. Students from School A, a lower performing school with high poverty and high diversity, were significantly more concerned than school B, a high performing school with low poverty and less diversity, yet both ranked school safety much lower than other areas of concern. The average score of school B students scored safety at the "low concerned" level, while the average score of school A students were at the low end of "high concern." Likewise, students who had an older sibling attend high school before them were significantly less concerned about safety than students who did not have an older sibling, but both groups were minimally concerned. Average scores of students who had an older sibling attend high school before them fell in the "low concern" category while average scores of students without an older sibling fell into the low end of a "high concern" area.

Research Question 4: Are the academic "nuts and bolts" such as, credits, graduation requirements, Grade Point Average (GPA), class rank, study skills, etc., a significant concern to eighth grade students during the transition from eighth grade to high school?

The study found student perceptions of academic nuts and bolts as the highest over-all area of concern in the study. This is an important finding in that there is very little research on the negative effects of this area and it is an area rarely addressed in transition programming by schools. While several studies stress the importance of communications of academic expectations, having a clear understanding of requirements and terminology seems to be a

significant worry for 8th grade students. Students across both schools A, a lower performing school with high poverty and high diversity, and B, a high performing school with low poverty and less diversity, were far more concerned about this area than any other area in the study. Students from school A showed the highest level of concern in this area than any other sub-group in the study and significantly higher than school B inferring that students who attend lower performing schools with high poverty and diversity are significantly more concerned about academic nuts and bolts. While students who had an older sibling attend high school before them were significantly still less concerned about this area than students without an older sibling, this area of concern had the smallest margin of difference between the two groups.

Research Question 5: Are teacher relationships and instruction a significant concern to eighth grade students during the transition from eighth grade to high school?

The study found teacher relationships and instruction to be significant as the second highest scoring area of concern. This result was more expected and consistent with current research. Because high school teachers are the primary point of contact upon entry to high school and junior high teachers have the important role of preparing and sending off eighth graders to high school, the importance of these relationships in the transition to high school was confirmed by the study. Additionally, the difficulty and amount of work and how much academic support teachers would give students to be successful were also highlighted as key elements in this area of concern.

Students from both schools found this area of concern significant. Students from school A, a lower performing school with high poverty and high diversity, again were more concerned than students in school B, a high performing school with low poverty and less diversity, but the difference was not as large as the difference found in the areas of nuts and bolts and logistics.

Average scores of students who had an older sibling attend high school before them were again significantly less concerned than those without an older sibling, but both groups scored the teacher relationships and instruction as the second highest area of concern.

Research Question 6: Are students more concerned about some of the areas than others?

The study found that the area of academic nuts and bolts is clearly the highest area of concern as perceived by students in the study. The area of teacher relationships and instruction is another area of high concern for students. The study found the area of safety as the area of lowest concern by students in the study. The areas of Logistics and social relationships while found to be areas of high concern scored well above the area of safety, but well below the areas of nuts and bolts and teacher relationships and instruction.

Research Question 7: Do female eighth graders concerns in the five areas noted above differ from male eighth grade student concerns?

In general, the study found female students to be more concerned than male students, but only significantly more concerned about the areas of social relationships and logistics. Female and male students had almost identical scores and very low concerns in the area of safety. Both scored academic nuts and bolts and teacher relationships and instruction as high areas of concern.

Research Question 8: Do student concerns of students attending lower performing schools with high ethnic diversity and poverty differ from student concerns in high performing schools with low ethnic diversity and poverty in these five areas?

Students from school A attend a lower performing school with high ethnic diversity and poverty. Students from school B attend a high performing school with low ethnic diversity and poverty. Students from school A were significantly and consistently more concerned about each

area than students from school B. Students from school A were much more concerned about academic nuts and bolts and logistics than students from school B. Students from both schools ranked nuts and bolts and teacher relationships and instruction as their highest areas of concern as well as ranking safety as their lowest area of concern. Schools A and B differed slightly in that school B ranked social relationships as a higher concern than logistics, while school B found logistics to be more of a concern than social relationships. An important finding of the study would seem to indicate that eighth grade students from different school settings share similar concerns, yet students from low performing schools with high poverty and ethnic diversity report a higher level of concern than students from high performing schools with low poverty and low ethnic diversity.

Research Question 9: Are students with older siblings who have attended high school less concerned in these five areas than students without older siblings who have attended high school?

The study found a significant difference in the level of concern that students who had older siblings who have attended high school before them and students without older siblings. It would appear that having an older sibling navigate the transition to high school greatly lessens the level of concern for their younger siblings. Students with older siblings attending high school before them were much less concerned about safety, teacher relationships and instruction, and social relationships, while the smallest margin of difference was in the area of academic nuts and bolts, the area of highest concern for all students and sub-groups of students in the study.

**Conclusions and Discussion**

The purpose of the study was to identify the student's perspective of the difficulties of transitioning from eighth grade to high school. The first challenge was to identify the most

significant areas of concern found in previous research regarding the transition from eighth to ninth grade. The researcher was able to locate and study the work of several key researchers who had studied this transition specifically or other areas that related directly to the transition to high school. As themes emerged through the literature review as well as research questions, the next challenge was to create a way to quantify student perceptions of this transition through development of a valid and reliable survey instrument that could be used to capture eighth grade student's perceptions of those major areas of concern. The survey was completed through the guidance and expertise of a juried panel of experts and administered by the researcher to students in two school settings following the recommendation of the dissertation committee and the protocols of the Institutional Review Board. Once the data was gathered, it was statistically reviewed and after completion and evaluation of the summary of findings the researcher has reached the following conclusions:

**Academic nuts and bolts.**

The most important and new finding of the study was the level of concern that students placed on what the study termed as "academic nuts and bolts." This area was defined as students having a clear understanding of the requirements, structure, and terminology used in high school academia and having the knowledge of where to get information and help when needed. Survey questions in the area revolved around concerns about college admissions tests, graduation exams, credits, transcripts and criteria for earning a diploma, grade point averages, class rank, courses of study and having the study skills necessary to be successful in high school.

Students from schools A and B, male/female, students with or without older siblings who attended high school ahead of them, all reported they are most concerned with this area above all others in the transition to high school. Unfortunately, this was the area that had the least amount

of prior research. Most of the information reported in literature was gleaned from high school teachers, counselors, and administrators who noted the lack of understanding students had about the nuts and bolts about how high school works.

Many, if not all high schools have some type of transition programming for inducting the new freshman class into the high school setting. Most include tours by current students or faculty, meetings with guidance counselors to plan school schedules, and informing students about extra-curricular activities. Some more extensive programs include more activities to enfranchise students into the culture of high school, but this area of nuts and bolts appears to be neglected. With the exception of the counselor meeting and the student handbook, very few other activities would address the concepts of credits, required coursework for different types of diplomas, transcripts, and their relation to admission to college.

The difficulty in providing this information to students is understandable as the complexity of the information would be too cumbersome for a short counselor meeting or a large group presentation. Never-the-less, based upon this finding, schools must break down this information into digestible pieces that students can learn over time to alleviate student concerns and promote a better transition to high school. It stands to reason that seventh grade and first semester of eighth grade would be ideal times to cover this material so students are confident and informed prior to going into the planning and transition activities for high school which typically start in January of each school year. This information could be covered by various disciplines, such as grade point averages and class rank would be good math activities, testing practices in almost all disciplines can be related to college entrance examinations, and each subject could cover the course progression students can follow through their four year plan of coursework.

To further stress the importance of developing programming to support students in this area of concern, the students from school A, a low performing, high poverty, and highly diverse school, ranked this area the highest concern of all other sub-groups. A large body of evidence marked low performing, high poverty schools as the biggest contributors to the high school drop-out epidemic labeling some as “drop-out factories”. Black and Hispanic students from low performing, high poverty schools are the students most likely to drop out in high schools throughout the country. While transition programming is a small piece of a complex school and community issue, it is an important support offered at the point of contact, touching each individual student.

And finally, while having an older sibling go through the high school transition was found to be a significant clear advantage across all areas, its smallest increment of difference from students making this transition first in their families was in the nuts and bolts area of concern. Even our students with the least amount of concern and highest level of confidence, had high concerns in this area.

The root causes of the concerns about the nuts and bolts of high school were not investigated in this study, but a conclusion can be drawn that it does in fact cause a high degree of concern in eighth grade students transitioning to high school. Whether the concern is rooted in the fear of the unknown or that this area is a known quantity that students realize is of great importance that raises it to such a high level, it is an area that if addressed, may have a significant impact in lowering student concerns in the transition to high school.

**Teacher relationships and instruction.**

While this area of concern was expected and much more established in prior research, it was interesting that it ranked as the second highest concern among the eighth graders in the study.

This area was defined as the establishment of a warm caring environment that is conducive to meaningful learning coupled with teaching strategies that are motivational and expectations that are in range of the student's academic abilities. Survey questions asked students if they were worried about high school classes being harder than in their current school or if they were concerned that the teachers would be less friendly. Other questions covered concerns about handling the work load or worries about the teachers being willing to help if they were struggling in class.

Again, the study did not examine the root causes of the concern, but some conclusions can be drawn. Students are in some fashion getting the message that high school teachers may not be as friendly or caring as their current teachers or that the workload may be so much more rigorous than eighth grade that it may be too much for them.

It could be that middle school teachers in an effort to motivate students may cause more stress by inferring to students messages such as "you better work hard now and get prepared because the high school teachers won't cut you any slack" or "the high school teachers have many more students so you have to learn how to learn independently, they won't help you like I do." Mizelle and Irvin stressed the importance of middle school teachers meeting with high school teachers to articulate their practices and standards so middle school teachers could have a clearer understanding of what occurs at the ninth grade level (2000). This information sharing of accurate information with students may reduce stress rather than raise it. Messages that

communicate to students that moving to ninth grade will be much like the transition from seventh grade to eighth grade can reduce the concerns of eighth graders. Statements like, “the material may be a bit tougher, but you will be ready to handle it just the same as you did this year,” or “the high school teachers have study sessions before or after school if you need help and some kids get help in study hall” can lower eighth graders anxiety in this area of concern.

This study supports previous research that recommends articulation meetings between the teachers from the sending school and teachers from the receiving school. This collaboration and sharing of information is essential in helping students transition successfully to the next level. Unfortunately, very few school systems subscribe to this practice. While most school districts have vertical curriculum planning meetings, meet to discuss curricular scope and sequence, and meet to choose text books and materials, few take the time and scheduling effort needed to address the transition to high school. This study emphasizes the importance of providing opportunities for staff to share accurate information and collaborate to reduce the concerns of students and thus providing a more successful transition to high school.

**Logistics and social relationships.**

The interesting conclusion drawn from the result of the study in the areas of logistics and social relationships was the lower level of concern where students ranked them in comparison to the other areas. Based on prior research one would predict these two areas to be areas of high concern, perhaps ranked numbers one and two. This study concludes that while concerned, students are not as concerned as most previous studies report.

Logistics can be defined as the ability to navigate both the geographical layout of the school, as well as, the crowds of students within the confines of the school, rules and procedures, such as finding lockers, classes, and the best routes to get to classes on time.

Almost all studies of the transition to high school mention logistics in one form or another and that student concerns about finding their way to class, being able to successfully make it through lunch lines, passing periods, and other practices, procedures, rules and regulations are foremost stressors in student's minds. While most studies report these stressors to be quickly resolved within the first days of school, it was surprising that students in this study ranked this area at a mid-range level of concern.

Social relationships can be simply defined as the daily interactions between students and their peers. The importance of social relationships in the life of the adolescent are well documented and grades seven through nine are often referred to as a time where peer acceptance and peer pressure are extremely strong forces. The study asked students if they were worried about fitting in, concerned about the affect high school might have on their social life, fears about being pressured by peers to make bad choices, or worries that current friends might not stay as close as they are now. Again, it was surprising that students in this study ranked this area at a mid-range level of concern when compared to the other areas.

In comparing the prior research with the current study, most studies found the disruption of the social relationships to occur during the freshman year. One could conclude that at the time the students took the survey their social relationships were intact and while concerned, not overly concerned about the future of their social relationships.

**Student safety.**

Another surprising and unexpected result of the study was the student's perception of concern over school safety. The students scored this area on the borderline between low concern and high concern. What makes this even more remarkable is that the survey was taken approximately three months after the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut

where 20 elementary students and six staff members were killed in a horrific school shooting in mid-December. During the testing window when the survey was taken the media coverage on school safety, gun control, school safety legislation, and national, state, and local responses to the tragedy were prevalent, yet the study found that student perception of school safety is of minimal concern.

Student Safety was defined as students having both a feeling of well-being at the high school as well as the ability of the high school staff to protect students from violence. The survey asked students if they were worried about being bullied, fights or other violence at school, and if they were concerned about the teacher's ability to keep them safe.

The study found that while female students were more concerned in most areas than male students, both groups scored safety almost identically. School A and B both perceived safety as the lowest area of concern, but school A students were significantly more concerned about school safety than the students from school B. Likewise, students with an older sibling who attended high school were significantly less concerned about safety than student who are the first in their family to attend high school.

The good news is that over-all students feel safe in school and are not overly concerned that the high school will be less safe than their current setting. One could conclude that the efforts and emphasis on school safety in the last fifteen years have resulted in students perceiving school as a safe and secure place, even against the backdrop of the tragic events that have occurred.

**Sub-group conclusions.**

The study examined three primary sub-groups. Female responses compared to male responses, School A responses compared to school B responses, and the responses of students

with an older sibling who attended high school compared to students who are the first in their family to go through the transition to high school.

As noted earlier we can conclude that in general female students were more concerned than male students, but only at a significant level in the areas of logistics and social relationships. This information would indicate a possible need for gender specific transition activities, especially in these two areas. Most educators agree that same sex classes or activities in adolescence foster more authentic conversations by both genders on topics that may be perceived as embarrassing or threatening.

The study presents two interesting conclusions in comparing the responses of School A to School B. The first is that regardless of student's poverty level, performance level, and ethnic population all eighth graders from both schools identified the same areas that were of significant concern. This is important as the study identified areas that appear to be consistent across demographic settings. The second conclusion is that while the schools share significant concerns, students from schools with higher levels of poverty, lower overall school performance, and higher diversity are significantly more concerned than schools with opposite demographics. While this study did not investigate the causes, one may conclude that students from schools with similar demographics to school A may require additional transitional activities and resources.

Finally, the study found significant differences between students who had an older sibling attend high school and students who were the first in their family to go through the transition to high school. Students who had older siblings blaze the trail to high school before them were significantly less concerned in all five areas of concern than students without an older sibling. This finding presents two conclusions that could assist schools in transition planning. First, it

may be preferable to do separate and more detailed transition activities for students who do not have an older sibling who attended high school. This targeted practice could be more efficient and effective in planning and use of resources. The second conclusion is supportive of transition activities that use older students as mentors or student leaders to staff programs targeting students who do not have an older sibling.

**Recommendations for Future Study**

1. The importance students placed on academic nuts and bolts requires a more in depth examination of this area of concern. Identifying what best practice strategies schools have used or could use in transition programming should be explored. Methodology that results in student understanding of the items addressed in this area should be tested, studied, and measured for effectiveness and positive results for students transitioning to high school.

2. Teacher relationships and instruction was another significant area of concern for students that should be examined. Prior research points to messages students are receiving from middle school teachers that may be alarming and causing concern for students transitioning to high school. A study of the root causes for these concerns is needed and articulation meetings between the sending and receiving faculties could also be a rich area for future study.

3. The lower priority that the area of social relationships received ran counter to how students in this developmental stage would be expected to respond. Previous research indicates that social relationships can be disrupted during the freshman year that could have a negative effect on student success. Further study of students during their freshman year might yield some important information to determine if more social support is needed for students to get off to a good start in high school.

4. The study found a clear significant finding that students from a low performing, high poverty setting with high ethnic diversity showed a higher level of concern than students from a high performing, and low poverty setting with lower ethnic diversity. A study to find the root causes of this finding is essential to addressing the complex issue of the dropout crisis. While the study determined students ranked their concerns in a similar fashion the intensity of concern was clearly greater for the student population found to be of greater risk in our nation’s schools. This finding presents an important area of study that could play key role to the benefit of students in more difficult educational settings.

5. The study scratched the surface on two particular gender differences in the areas of logistics and social relationships. Further study is needed to determine if

separate transition activities for male and female students would be more effective and beneficial for students.

6. Since students with older siblings who attended high school before them had significantly lower levels of concern across all five areas, further examination of targeted transition activities might yield better results for students who are the first in their families to make this transition.

7. Further study and research in refining the survey instrument used in the study could prove beneficial for use in schools to gather data to target the needs of students during this important transition. Schools could potentially use the information gleaned from the instrument to tailor transition activities that students identify as their biggest concerns. The means of getting primary source information from students is critical to development of proper supports for students during this critical transition to high school.

**Summary**

Students in eighth grade have significant concerns about the transition to high school. Primary source data gathered from the students themselves indicate that students across all sub-groups are most concerned about being academically successful. They are concerned about earning credits, grade point averages, and taking the proper classes to graduate. They are concerned about their skills level being adequate to be successful at the ninth grade level and beyond.

The study identified student's second biggest concern as focusing on teacher relationships and instruction. Students are concerned about the classes being harder, the teachers being less friendly or invested and whether they can handle the work load.

Student concerns about logistics and social relationships were of high concern, but did not surface near the level of the previously mentioned areas. While concerns about logistics seem to disappear after the first few days of entering high school, concerns about social relationships may be more prevalent during the freshman year than indicated by the study of students in eighth grade.

Student safety, while a concern, was perceived as a very low concern of all students across the study.

Students in low performing, diverse, high poverty school setting and students in high performing, low poverty, low diversity school setting, share the same concerns and stressors, but the study found that students in more difficult school settings have higher levels of concern.

Females tend to be more concerned than males, especially in the areas of logistics and social relationships, but not significantly in the other areas.

Students who have had an older sibling have significantly lower concerns about this transition than students who are the first student in the family to face the transition to high school.

The study supports many of the previous findings of researchers, while adding some new and important findings to the body of research that can be used to develop effective programming to help students be successful as they journey through the high school freshman transition.

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# Appendix A

## Juried Panel of Experts

Dr. Ann Kring is professor of psychology at the University of California at Berkeley and former director of the Clinical Science Program and Psychology Clinic. She received a B.S. from Ball State University and her M.A. and Ph.D. from the State University of New York at Stony Brook. Her current research focus is on emotion and psychopathology, with a specific interest in the emotional features of schizophrenia. She has received numerous awards, including a Young Investigator award from the National Alliance for Research on Schizophrenia and Depression, the Joseph Zubin Memorial Fund Award, and a Distinguished Teaching Award from UC Berkeley. She is currently a member of the Executive Board for the Society for Research in Psychopathology and the International Society for Research in Emotion. She is also Associate Editor for the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, and a member of the editorial board for the journals *Emotion*, and *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*,. She is the author /editor of two books and the author of several scholarly papers in the top journals in the field.

Dr. Charlene Alexander is the director of the School Counseling program at Ball State University; she is also a past president of the Indiana School Counselor Association. Dr. Alexander's research interests are in the areas of multicultural counseling, school counseling, and international psychology. She is the co-editor of the Handbook of Multicultural Education, currently in its 3rd edition, and has published several articles, book chapters and national presentations related to multicultural and school counseling. Dr. Alexander has received the Outstanding Diversity Advocacy Award from Ball State University, the Hurley Goodall Distinguished Faculty/Staff Award, the Trailblazer Award from the Education Trust, the Exemplary Counselor Educator award from the Indiana School Counselor Association, and the

Visionary Leadership Award, presented by the National Multicultural Conference and Summit Division 45 of the American Psychological Association. Dr. Alexander serves on the advisory board for the National Office of School Counselor Advocacy and the Education Trust's Transforming School Counseling Board. Dr. Alexander has developed study abroad school counseling programs in Trinidad West-Indies and St. Lucia.

Mrs. Nancy Herndon serves as the guidance director of Hamilton Southeastern High School in Fishers, Indiana. She supervises a staff of eight school counselors who serve over 3000 students. She is in her 19th year as a guidance counselor/director. She has also served as an assistant principal and teacher totaling 33 years in the field of education. She graduated from Indiana State University in 1979, earning a bachelor's degree in social studies and earned a master's degree in school counseling from Butler University in 1983. She is a member of the Indiana Association for College Admissions Counselors, National Association for Counseling and Development, National Association for College Admissions Counselors, and is a College Board Delegate.

Mrs. Linda Brown serves as the guidance director of Fishers High School in Fishers, Indiana. She supervises a staff of eight school counselors who serve over 2800 students. She has been a guidance counselor for 14 years and has been the director of guidance at FHS for the past 8 years. She graduated from Indiana University with a bachelor's degree in Math Education in 1989. She earned her master's degree in School Counseling in 1998. Prior to serving as a counselor she taught high school math for 9 years where she was twice nominated for "teacher of the year." She served this year on the "Counselor Evaluation Rubric" committee and was an "Above and Beyond the Call of Duty" award winner and was chosen by a high school senior to receive "Top Twenty" recognition as being an influential educator.

Mrs. Jackie Wolf serves as the Guidance Director of Fishers Junior High School in Fishers, Indiana. She supervises guidance services for approximately 1000 seventh and eighth grade students. She earned her bachelor's degree from Ball State University in Secondary Education Business and her master's degree from IUPUI in Secondary Education. She earned her certification in school counseling from IUPUI. She has served for 20 years as a guidance counselor with 19 of those years at the junior high level. She has been the guidance director at FJH for 13 years.

Mr. Chris Graves serves as the Guidance Director of Riverside Junior High School in Fishers, Indiana. He supervises guidance services for approximately 1000 seventh and eighth grade students. Mr. Graves has been in education for 21 years. He has served as a junior high guidance director for 7 years, 8 years as counselor, and 6 years as a math teacher. He has earned a bachelor degree with distinction from Purdue University, a master degree in school administration from Ball State, and a counseling certification from IUPUI. He is currently a member of the American School Counselor Association. Mr. Graves is also active on many committees within the school like the PBIS committee, RTI committee, and the school safety committee to name a few. He has received training in ASIST, a suicide prevention program, and CPI for crisis interventions.

## Appendix B

### The High School Freshman Transition Questionnaire

| |
|---|
| Gender?<br>⬭ Male<br>⬭ Female |
| Do you have an older brother or sister who attended high school?<br>⬭ Yes<br>⬭ No |

| **Student Survey**<br>**Please place a mark in the box that comes closest to how you feel about each question regarding the transition to high school. Make one response to each question.** | Not Concerned | Somewhat Concerned | Very Concerned |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Are you concerned about being in high school classes with students that you don't know? | | | |
| | | | |
| 2. Are you concerned that you have the study skills needed to succeed in high school such as note-taking, preparing for tests, and writing papers? | | | |
| | | | |
| 3. Are you worried about getting lost at the high school? | | | |
| | | | |
| 4. Are you worried about the high school classes being harder than junior high? | | | |
| | | | |
| 5. Are you concerned that older students will bully you in high school? | | | |
| | | | |
| 6. Do you worry that you and your friends won't be as close when you move on to high school? | | | |
| | | | |
| 7. Do you think most 8th grade students are worried about having the academic skills to succeed in high school such as note-taking, preparing for tests, and writing papers? | | | |
| | | | |
| 8. Are you concerned about getting through the lunch lines and finding a seat to have lunch with your friends? | | | |
| | | | |
| 9. Do you think most 8th grade students are worried about the high school classes being harder than | | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| junior high? | | | |
| | | | |
| 10. Do you think most 8th grade students are concerned that older students will bully them in high school? | | | |
| | | | |
| 11. Are you concerned about having someone to sit with at lunch? | | | |
| | | | |
| 12. Are you concerned about important tests you take in high school like the graduation exam, or college entrance tests like the ACT or SAT? | | | |
| | | | |
| 13. Do you think most 8th grade students are worried about getting through the lunch lines at high school and finding a seat to eat with friends? | | | |
| | | | |
| 14. Are you concerned that the high school teachers will be meaner or less friendly than the junior high teachers? | | | |
| | | | |
| 15. Are you concerned about fights and getting hurt at the high school? | | | |
| | | | |
| 16. Are you concerned about fitting in with other social groups or cliques at high school? | | | |
| | | | |
| 17. Are you concerned about high school credits, such as earning enough credits for graduation, or earning the correct credits in each area to earn a diploma, Core 40, or academic honors diploma? | | | |
| | | | |
| 18. Are you worried about having enough time to get to your locker and on time for class? | | | |
| | | | |
| 19. Do you think most 8th grade students are worried that the high school teachers will be meaner or less friendly than the high school teachers? | | | |
| | | | |
| 20. Are you afraid of violence at the high school? | | | |
| | | | |
| 21. Do you think most 8th grade students are worried about how they will fit in socially in a big high school? | | | |
| | | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 22. Do you think that most 8th grade students are worried because they aren't sure of what high school classes they need to graduate? | | | |
| | | | |
| 23. Are you concerned about the high school being crowded and the hallways being difficult to get through? | | | |
| | | | |
| 24. Are you worried that the homework load at the high school will be too much to handle? | | | |
| | | | |
| 25. Are you concerned that the high school might not be as safe as the junior high school? | | | |
| | | | |
| 26. Are you concerned that you will be pressured to drink, smoke, and/or do drugs in high school? | | | |
| | | | |
| 27. Are you concerned about taking the correct classes to meet the requirements for college? | | | |
| | | | |
| 28. Are you worried about getting into trouble because you're not sure of the rules or which rules are enforced and which rules are not enforced? | | | |
| | | | |
| 29. Do you think most 8th grade students are worried that they won't be able to handle the homework load at the high school? | | | |
| | | | |
| 30. Do you think most 8th grade students are concerned that high school might not be as safe as the junior high school? | | | |
| | | | |
| 31. Are you worried that your friends will be pressured into smoking, using or abusing alcohol or other drugs in high school? | | | |
| | | | |
| 32. Are concerned about your grade point average and class rank? | | | |
| | | | |
| 33. Are you worried about knowing how to get help if you have questions or problems at the high school? | | | |
| | | | |
| 34. Are you worried that high school teachers won't help you the way they did in junior high? | | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 35. Are you concerned that the high school teachers won't watch over the students as closely as the junior high teachers? | | | |
| | | | |
| 36. Are you concerned that the amount of high school work will affect your social life? | | | |
| | | | |
| 37. Are you concerned about making sure you take classes as a freshman that will get you into classes you want or need to take your junior/senior year? | | | |
| | | | |
| 38. Do you think most 8th grade students are worried that they don't know how to get help if they have questions or problems at the high school? | | | |
| | | | |
| 39. Are you concerned that you won't be in teams at the high school? | | | |
| | | | |
| 40. Do you think most 8th grade students are concerned that the high school teachers won't watch over them as closely as the junior high teachers? | | | |

**Appendix C**

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY EDUCATION REDEFINED

*March 4, 2013*

*Dear Parents,*

*I am currently working on a research project for an advanced degree at Ball State University. The topic of my research is focused on the transition that 8th grade students experience as they enter high school. I have created a questionnaire to get "first hand" information from the students themselves to find out how they perceive the transition to high school.*

*I was hoping your student could assist me in this endeavor by taking the questionnaire. It is a survey that should take a maximum of 15 to 20 minutes to complete. The survey consists of 40 questions that students respond to by choosing one of the following: "Not concerned," "Somewhat concerned," or "Very concerned" for each item.*

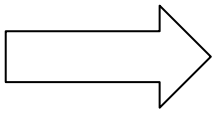
*I have attached some information about the study and I hope that you will allow your student to participate. For your student to participate, simply return the signed permission slip at the bottom of the form.*

*If you have questions or concerns please feel free to contact me by phone at (317)570-3314 or via email at mjberesford@bsu.edu*

*Thank you for your consideration and help with this study,*

*Michael Beresford*

**More Information and permission slip on back**



**Study Title**: The High School Freshman Transition

**Study Purpose and Rationale**
The purpose of this research project is to examine eighth grade students' perceptions of high school prior to entering high school. Findings from this research may help create more effective transition programs that increase student success the freshman year.

**Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria**
To be eligible to participate in this study, your student must be in 8th grade and able to read and understand the questionnaire.

**Participation Procedures and Duration**
For this project, your child will be asked to complete a questionnaire focused on his or her perceptions of high school. It will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

**Data Confidentiality or Anonymity**
All data will be maintained as anonymous. No identifying information such as names will appear in any publication or presentation of the data.

**Storage of Data**
The data will also be entered into a software program and stored on the researcher's password-protected computer for three years and then deleted. Only members of the research team will have access to the data.

**Risks or Discomforts**
The only anticipated risk from participating in this study is that your child may not feel comfortable answering some of the questions. Your child will be informed during the process that he or she may choose not to answer any question that makes him/her uncomfortable and he/she may quit the study at any time.

**Voluntary Participation**
Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your permission at any time for any reason. Please feel free to ask any questions of the researcher at any time during the study.

**IRB Contact Information**
For questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact Director, Office of Research Integrity, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306, (765) 285-5070, irb@bsu.edu.

**Researcher Contact Information**

Principal Investigator:

Michael Beresford, Graduate Student
Educational Leadership
Ball State University

Faculty Supervisor:

Dr. William Sharp
Educational Leadership
Ball State University

Muncie, IN 47306
Telephone: (317) 570-3314
Email: mjberesford@bsu.edu

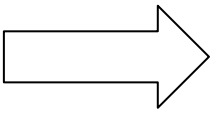
Muncie, IN 47306
Telephone: (765) 285-8488
Email: bsharp@bsu.edu

---

I, _____, give my permission for _____
(Please print) (Please print)
to participate in the research project entitled, "The High School Freshman Transition." I have read the description of this project and give my consent for my student to participate. I have received a copy of this informed consent form to keep for future reference.

_____ _____
Parent / Guardian Signature Date

**Parent Letter on front**



**Appendix D**

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY EDUCATION REDEFINED

**The High School Freshman Transition Student Permission Form**

My name is Mr. Beresford and I am doing a research project on the transition from eighth grade to ninth grade. I'm trying to get first-hand information from students about what you are concerned about in moving from junior high to high school. I would really appreciate your participation in the study.

Although the questionnaire is not intended to upset students, it does ask your opinion on several issues that previous research has found to be of concern for kids entering high school. The only anticipated risk from participating in the study is that you may not feel comfortable answering some of the questions. If at any time you feel uncomfortable with a question you can skip it or quit the survey at any time you wish. The benefit of participating in the study is that I'll be sharing my findings with schools and it's my hope that by gathering you and your classmate's opinions, the junior high and high schools can put together better programs so students can have a great transition to high school.

Your participation in the questionnaire is anonymous, so no personal information about you will be gathered. Your answers will be added to other student responses, so no one can tell what opinions came from you. When I share my research, I will not use names or identify anyone in any way.

You must have parent or guardian permission to be in the study. If your parent gives permission, then you get to choose if you want to participate. If you don't want to be in the study, it's not a problem so don't worry about any issues about not participating. Also if you decide to be in the study now and change your mind later, that's OK. You can quit at any time.

My telephone number is (317) 570-3314 and my email is mjberesford@bsu.edu . You can call me or email me if you or your parents have questions about the study. You can also contact my Ball State University advisor, Dr. Willam Sharp at (765) 285-8488 or email him at bsharp@bsu.edu if you have questions or concerns about the study.

Mark "Yes" if you want to participate in the study and you will be directed to the questions. Mark "No" if you do NOT want to participate in the study and you will be finished.

Thank you for considering to participate in the study.

⬭ **Yes, I want to take the survey even though I know I don't have to participate.**

⬭ **No, I do not want to take the survey or participate in the study**

## Appendix E

**Project Overview**

**[404136-2] The High School Freshman Transition**

| **You have Full access to this project.** (Edit) | |
|---|---|
| **Research Institution** | Ball State University, Muncie, IN |
| **Title** | The High School Freshman Transition |
| **Principal Investigator** | Beresford, Michael |
| **Keywords** | Transition, High School, Freshman |
| **Sponsor** | Dr. William Sharp |

The documents for this project can be accessed from the **Designer**.
Project Status as of: 05/06/2013

| Reviewing Board | Initial Approval Date | Project Status | Expiration Date |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ball State University IRB, Muncie, IN | 01/04/2013 | Active | 01/03/2014 |

**Package 404136-2 is: Locked - Revisions Complete**

Package 2 of 2 |Jump|

| Submitted To | Submission Date | Submission Type | Board Action | Effective Date | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ball State University IRB, Muncie, IN | 02/03/2013 | Amendment/Modification | Approved | 02/04/2013 | \| Review Details \| |

## Appendix F

### CITI Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI)

**RCR FOR SOCIAL, BEHAVIORAL & EDUCATIONAL RESEARCHERS Curriculum Completion Report**
**Printed on 5/6/2013**

**Learner:** Michael Beresford (username: mjberesford)
**Institution:** Ball State University
**Contact Information**

105 Chippenham Lane
Fishers, IN 46038 USA
Department: Educational Leadership
Phone: 317=796-0050
Email: mberesford@hse.k12.in.us

**RCR FOR SOCIAL, BEHAVIORAL & EDUCATIONAL RESEARCHERS:** This course is for investigators, staff and students with an interest or focus in **Social and Behavioral** research. This course contains text, embedded case studies AND quizzes.

**Stage 1. RCR Passed on 07/15/12** (Ref # 7589439)

| Required Modules | Date Completed | Score |
|---|---|---|
| Ball State University | 03/04/12 | no quiz |
| Introduction to the Responsible Conduct of Research | 03/04/12 | no quiz |
| Research Misconduct 2-1495 | 03/04/12 | 4/5 (80%) |
| Data Acquisition, Management, Sharing and Ownership 2-1523 | 03/04/12 | 4/5 (80%) |
| Publication Practices and Responsible Authorship 2-1518 | 03/04/12 | 4/5 (80%) |
| Peer Review 2-1521 | 03/05/12 | 5/5 (100%) |
| Mentor and Trainee Responsibilities 01234-1250 | 07/14/12 | 5/5 (100%) |
| Using Animal Subjects in Research 13301 | 07/14/12 | 7/8 (88%) |
| Conflicts of Interest and Commitment 2-1462 | 07/14/12 | 5/6 (83%) |
| Collaborative Research 2-1484 | 07/15/12 | 4/5 (80%) |
| Human Subjects 13566 | 07/15/12 | 5/5 (100%) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| The CITI RCR Course Completion Page | 07/15/12 | no quiz |

**For this Completion Report to be valid, the learner listed above must be affiliated with a CITI participating institution. Falsified information and unauthorized use of the CITI course site is unethical, and may be considered scientific misconduct by your institution.**

Paul Braunschweiger Ph.D.
Professor, University of Miami
Director Office of Research Education
CITI Course Coordinator

## Appendix G

### CITI Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

**Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher Curriculum Completion Report**
**Printed on 5/6/2013**

**Learner:** Michael Beresford (username: mjberesford)
**Institution:** Ball State University
**Contact Information** 105 Chippenham Lane
Fishers, IN 46038 USA
Department: Educational Leadership
Phone: 317=796-0050
Email: mberesford@hse.k12.in.us

**Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher:** Choose this group to satisfy CITI training requirements for Investigators and staff involved primarily in Social/Behavioral Research with human subjects.

**Stage 1. Basic Course Passed on 12/10/12** (Ref # 7589438)

| Required Modules | Date Completed | Score |
|---|---|---|
| Belmont Report and CITI Course Introduction | 12/05/12 | 3/3 (100%) |
| Students in Research | 12/05/12 | 6/10 (60%) |
| History and Ethical Principles - SBR | 12/05/12 | 4/5 (80%) |
| Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBR | 12/05/12 | 4/5 (80%) |
| The Regulations and The Social and Behavioral Sciences - SBR | 12/06/12 | 5/5 (100%) |
| Assessing Risk in Social and Behavioral Sciences - SBR | 12/06/12 | 5/5 (100%) |
| Informed Consent - SBR | 12/06/12 | 5/5 (100%) |
| Privacy and Confidentiality - SBR | 12/07/12 | 5/5 (100%) |
| Research with Prisoners - SBR | 12/10/12 | 4/4 (100%) |
| Research with Children - SBR | 12/10/12 | 3/4 (75%) |
| Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools - SBR | 12/10/12 | 4/4 (100%) |
| International Research - SBR | 12/10/12 | 2/3 (67%) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Internet Research - SBR | 12/10/12 | 5/5 (100%) |
| Research and HIPAA Privacy Protections | 12/10/12 | 4/5 (80%) |
| Vulnerable Subjects - Research Involving Workers/Employees | 12/10/12 | 4/4 (100%) |
| Conflicts of Interest in Research Involving Human Subjects | 12/10/12 | 3/5 (60%) |
| Unanticipated Problems and Reporting Requirements in Social and Behavioral Research | 12/10/12 | 3/3 (100%) |
| Ball State University | 03/04/12 | no quiz |

**For this Completion Report to be valid, the learner listed above must be affiliated with a CITI participating institution. Falsified information and unauthorized use of the CITI course site is unethical, and may be considered scientific misconduct by your institution.**

Paul Braunschweiger Ph.D.
Professor, University of Miami
Director Office of Research Education
CITI Course Coordinator