

**A MODIFIED CASE STUDY EXAMINING THE EFFECTS OF SPECIFIC SCHOOL
GRADE-LEVEL ORGANIZATIONAL MODELS ON NINTH-GRADE LEARNERS**

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This doctoral dissertation represents a qualitative study employing a modified case study research design that is intended to assess the perspectives of school practitioners (i.e., principals, guidance counselors, and teachers) who work with ninth graders relevant to their perceptions of the developmental needs of those students, how their respective schools address those needs, and the effects their schools' grade-level organizational plans may have on grade nine. This study employs semi-structured interviews, document reviews, and direct observations for data collection. Two case sites were selected for this dissertation—one populated by students in grades nine through twelve (9-12) and another with pupils in grades seven through nine (7-9). Both sites were selected purposefully on the basis of their grade-level configurations, their contemporary and historical relevance to ninth-grade-level education, and their proximity to the principal researcher. Sample groups at each school included 10 practitioners who worked directly with ninth graders within a multitude of professional realms, particularly administration, counseling, and teaching. Upon site selection, building principals were recruited for participation in this study; henceforth, those subjects selected nine other participants of faculty rank based on their professional positions and affiliations with students at the ninth-grade level.

The data seems to indicate that practitioners at the grades 9-12 high school perceive ninth graders differently from that of their counterparts at the grades 7-9 junior high school. The high-school subjects generally describe ninth graders as being immature, whereas participants at the junior high school perceive them the opposite of that. It also appears that participants at the grades 9-12 site lack consensus on the attributes of ninth-grade developmental needs with some questioning the appropriateness and/or legitimacy of four-year high schools for educating students at that grade level, while others ardently support that construct. Conversely, practitioners at the grades 7-9 junior high school seem to be unified in their perspectives on ninth-grade-level development—contending that ninth graders are better educated in junior high schools versus senior high schools and that their school is developmentally appropriate and more suitable for ninth-grade learners.

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DEDICATIONS

In love and admiration...

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In memory of my father, I conclude this section with the acknowledgement he drafted for his dissertation titled, *The Establishment of Priorities in Career Education*

Objectives to Aid in a Developmental Program (Grades Nine Through Twelve) for a Suburban Secondary School (Frioni, 1982):

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Secondary education has been a subject of research since its inception. From the early 20th century when high-school reforms resulted in “secolarization” of grades seven and eight (Var, 1965, p. 188) and the establishment of junior high schools through contemporary time with the inception of stand-alone freshmen academies, adolescents have endured their share of educational change initiatives and instructional environments. Sometimes, placement of grade levels within respective institutional configurations is deliberate and with regard for their particular needs, both scholastic and social. Other times, their placement is a by-product of philosophical constructs beneficial to other grade levels.

My passion for secondary education—particularly ninth grade—stems from personal experience as a student in a traditional junior high school who questioned changes that occurred with implementation of a middle-level program, as well as my practical experience teaching freshmen in suburban and urban grades 9-12 high schools. As a practitioner, I perceived ninth graders generally unready for the challenges and vastness of most 9-12 schools. I sought to provide those students guidance and nurture essential to heightening their success. I found that supplying them a modicum of support coupled with a significant amount of sensitivity to their needs eased the transition. To my chagrin, it did not remedy all issues, as these freshmen continued to struggle both scholastically and socially.

My interest in secondary (or adolescent) education has escalated with the appearance of two recent educational movements that have gained momentum. One movement focused on the revitalization of K-8 elementary schools and the other created autonomous freshmen academies in many school districts. Both constructs either directly or indirectly affect freshmen, albeit from largely unknown parameters. Implementation of one or the other usually constitutes changes to grade-level organizational structures, hence potential influences over scholastic and social outcomes at the ninth-grade level.

Grade-level organizations (or plans) are generally defined in a similar fashion, where “grouping of grade levels by a school district [exist] for instructional and administrative purposes” (N.Y.S.E.D., 2009, n.p.). Such groupings might include school districts that utilize 6-3-3 structures, which operate elementary schools inclusive of grades 1-6, junior high schools with grades 7-9, and senior high schools populated by grades 10-12. Similarly, districts that operate on a 4-4-4 plan have elementary, middle, and high schools encompassing grades 1-4, 5-8, and 9-12, respectively. As a school practitioner, I am especially curious as to the effects grade-level organizational models have on ninth-grade students in relationship to their emotional, intellectual, and social development. An auxiliary interest of this study is why some grade-level organizational structures are perceived more effective than others in meeting the developmental needs of ninth graders.

At the onset of the 20th century, many educational stakeholders (i.e., school district leaders, teachers, etc.) perceived grades 7-9 junior high schools and the accompanying 6-3-3 grade-level organizational plan to be superior in educating ninth-grade learners (Briggs, 1920; Handley, 1982; Var, 1965). However, the grades 7-9 junior

high schools and the corresponding 6-3-3 grade-level organizational plan descended to near oblivion in the latter half of the 20th century, therefore placing most ninth graders within American school systems back in grades 9-12 high schools—a reversion back to customary secondary-level structure of the 19th century (Barton & Klump, 2012). This is extraordinary, given the fact that grades 7-9 junior high schools and grades 10-12 senior high schools were prevalent in the United States from the 1920s through the 1970s (Handley, 1982 Valentine, 2000). How does one explain this phenomenon, and what effects if any do school grade-level configurations have on ninth grade learners?

I intend to uncover possible rationales for these phenomena as they relate to ninth-grade learners by means of an empirical study that assesses the perceptions of principals, guidance counselors, and teachers who work in schools that house ninth-grade populations as they relate to the developmental needs of the students, how these needs are addressed by these practitioners, and the impact school grade-level configurations have on these students. This study employed a qualitative approach based on the methodological foundation of a modified case study conducted at multiple sites.

1.1 DEFINITION OF TERMS AND ACRONYM IDENTIFICATIONS

All professions possess a lexicon that distinguishes them from other fields; this includes education (A.S.C.D., 2013). Lexicon is defined as “the vocabulary of a particular language, field, social class, person, etc.” (Dictionary.com, 2013). “Education, like all other professions, has a specialized vocabulary that parents and others may have a

difficult time understanding” (A.S.C.D., 2013). Readers of this dissertation may benefit from a glossary of terminology that outlines words that may be unknown to them from either contextual and/or literal standpoints. Appendix A denotes some of this vocabulary.

Much like lexicons, acronyms can also pose difficulties for those who are unfamiliar with them. According to Great Schools Staff (2013), relevant to educational realms, “as [one sorts] through vast amounts of information, [one is more] likely to find many acronyms...[that can make it exceedingly] difficult to gain a full understanding [of the] material [one is] reading” (para. 1). In short, given the abundance of acronyms within all aspects of education, it is easier for lay persons of curriculum, pedagogy, and school codes to navigate educational data, literature, laws, polices, etc., when they are familiar with those expressions. Readers of this dissertation may profit from a listing of acronyms that are apparent within this work, alongside the organizations, terms, or words they represent. The following item (Table 1) decodes these expressions, including acronyms not necessarily associated with educational discourse and those found only in the bibliography of this document.

Table 1. Acronym Guide

<i>Acronym</i>	<i>The Entity, Term, or Words the Acronym Represents</i>
A.S.C.D.	Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development
E.L.A.	English Language Arts (Communications, English, and Reading)
ERIC	Educational Resources Development Center
I.R.B.	Institutional Review Board
L.G.B.T.	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender
M.R.I.	Magnetic Resonance Imaging
N.A.S.S.P.	National Association of Secondary School Principals
N.C.L.B.	No Child Left Behind
N.Y.S.E.D.	New York State Education Department
N.M.S.A.	National Middle School Association
Pitt I.R.B.	University of Pittsburgh Institutional Review Board
S.A.T.	Scholastic Aptitude Test

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The review of the literature presented in the following chapter examines the history of secondary education in the United States, the special developmental and educational needs of adolescent-age children, and the measures contemporary school systems are taking to address those needs via alterations of their grade-level organizational plans and corresponding philosophies. School systems often modify school grade-level configurations in hopes of better accommodating students—often with attention to particular grade levels and/or grade-level clusters. From the genesis of grades 7-9 junior high schools in the early 20th century (Briggs, 1920) through the contemporary incarnation of autonomous freshmen academies to offset arguable shortcomings of now predominant grades 9-12 high schools (Barton & Klump, 2012; Ellerbrock, 2012; Ellerbrock & Kieffer, 2010; Seller, 2004), stakeholders and students have endured their share of reform initiatives that deliberately or inadvertently affect ninth graders. Perhaps this is symbolic of difficulties associated with ninth-grade education. It may also be a byproduct of heightened school accountability in the modern age, compounded with genuine benevolence for young learners. Regardless of the reasons, sparse empirical resources often hamper the quest for optimal programs and organizational structures for young learners (Renchler, 2000). Clearly more information is needed on programs and structures that impact grade nine, hence justification for this study and the sample

population comprised of secondary-level principals, guidance counselors, and teachers who oversee ninth graders.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study assessed the perceptions of principals, guidance counselors, and teachers who work in schools that house ninth-grade populations as they relate to the developmental needs of ninth graders, how these needs are addressed by these practitioners, and the impact school grade-level configurations have on these students. These practitioners were selected for this study based on the criteria that they work both directly and/or predominantly with ninth-grade learners. At the core of this research is a curiosity of what select school practitioners perceive as the developmental needs of ninth graders, how these individuals within their respective professional contexts address those needs, and how these same individuals view school grade-level configurations (e.g., grades 9-12 high schools, grades, 7-9 junior high schools, grades 7-12 junior/senior high schools, etc.) in terms of accommodating the needs of ninth graders. In categorizing these perceptions, logical explanations for phenomena related to ninth-grade educational practices and policies as they relate to implementation of programs centered on school grade-level configurations might be identified. A qualitative study founded on a case-study-type methodology was used for gathering empirical evidence.

As a precursor, this study is bolstered by a comprehensive review of literature on secondary (or adolescent-level) education in the United States from pre-colonialism

through the present, which explores the foundations and history of secondary education in the United States, the special developmental needs of adolescent students, and the measures taken by contemporary American schools to meet the needs of adolescents via school organizational philosophies and structures. School systems often alter their grade-level organizational structures to accommodate specific grade-levels and/or groups of learners. This study hoped to uncover the rationale for such decisions, as well as the perceived utility of particular school grade-level configurations in meeting the developmental needs of ninth graders. Ideally, educational policymakers can use the empirical data compiled from this research to soundly guide their decision-making; therefore inspiring policies and programs most beneficial for ninth graders.

1.4 STUDY QUESTIONS

Educational practitioners seem to be determined in identifying the prevailing needs of adolescents and implementing optimal learning environments for them, regularly with consideration for the school's grade-level organizational plan (Barton & Klump, 2012; Bedard & Do, 2005; Dhuey, 2012; Dove, Hooper, & Pearson, 2010). Often, a focal point of discussions related to adolescent education is the ninth grade (Chmelynski, 2003; Coladarci & Hancock, 2002; Cooper, 2011; Isakson & Jarvis 1998; Styron & Peasant, 2010). As denoted in the second chapter of this dissertation, the placement of ninth grade within a respective school system's grade-level organizational structure depends largely on decisions made by policymakers, which are based presumably to some extent on

perceptions of that organizational structure's utility. The following research questions guided this study in determining these perceptions as they relate to the utility of organizational structures for educating ninth graders:

1. What do principals, guidance counselors, and teachers believe are the developmental needs of ninth-grade students?
2. How do principals, guidance counselors, and teachers in their specific professional roles address the developmental needs of ninth-grade students?
3. How do principals, guidance counselors, and teachers perceive the effectiveness of their respective schools' grade-level configuration on ninth-grade education?

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM

The importance of this study extends beyond identifying the perceptions of secondary-level stakeholders on issues related to the daily experiences of ninth grader and the grade-level organizational structures that impact that grade level. First, it lent itself to compiling and publishing valuable data on a topic for which little empirical evidence exists. Second, information garnered from this study can be used to inform stakeholders prior to them making decisions relevant to comprehensive educational programming and grade-level organizational plans that impact grade nine. Finally, educational stakeholders, namely those responsible for ninth graders and policymakers, can make use of this data for assessing the merits and weaknesses of existing programs and/or organizational plans, thus supplementing a framework for future evaluation.

Conceivably, the data compiled from this research may assist educational stakeholders in making sound decisions on behalf of ninth graders.

2.0 A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of literature as a precursor for this dissertation study on ninth grade education. It critically analyzes the history of secondary education in the United States of America, the developmental needs of adolescents, and common school grade-level configurations that accommodate adolescent-age learners. The purpose of this literature review in preface to the execution of empirical research is to accentuate the broad scope of discourse that encompasses the primary theme of this dissertation—ninth-grade education.

2.1 QUESTIONS FOR THE LITERATURE

This comprehensive review of the literature represents a thorough exploration of the evolution of secondary education in the United States, spanning pre-colonialism through the present, based on the following inquiries:

1. What is the history of secondary education in the United States of America in relation to foundational philosophies, institutional configurations, and adolescent development?
2. What are the special developmental and educational needs of adolescent-age children?

3. How have contemporary American schools altered their organizational structures to meet the needs of adolescents?

2.2 HISTORY OF SECONDARY EDUCATION IN THE U.S.A: FOUNDATIONS, CONFIGURATIONS, AND ADOLESCENTS

2.2.1 Foundations of secondary education in the United States

The history of secondary education in the United States of America is complex and intriguing. How educational stakeholders have perceived its genesis is often a function of prevalent educational philosophies characteristic of various reform initiatives mixed with individualistic approaches to pedagogy. To fully grasp the modern state of secondary education, one should comprehend its history, inclusive of its evolution from antiquity through the 20th century. A conceptual understanding of secondary education—a construct that predates 1900—is also paramount to this discussion.

By definition, “[secondary education] may be taken in general to denote education of a grade higher than that of elementary schools and lower than that of institutions authorized to give academic degrees” (Brown, 1897, p. 193). In this context, secondary education may be viewed as a stepping-stone toward advanced studies. Such a definition also implies linkage to adolescent age groups, for “the traditional view is that secondary education comprises educational experiences, usually during the years of adolescence, which follows completion of elementary school...[where] the emphasis is upon age of the

pupil, not upon the subjects” (French, 1957, p. 24). Though presumably much has changed in secondary education since the writings of these scholar-practitioners, one constant holds true: puberty is a prerequisite for high-school matriculation. This then begs the questions: When does puberty begin and at what grade level should students enter high school? Hypotheses founded on these inquiries have often resulted in delineation shifts between elementary and secondary schools. Consequently, the grade levels for which children transition to middle and/or secondary schools (both junior and senior high school) has changed frequently over the years, spanning all the way back to British colonialism in the New World (Butts & Cremin, 1953; Monroe, 1940 & Pulliam, 2003).

Secondary education is by no means an American incarnation but, rather, an embodiment of many ancient civilizations (French, 1957; Webb, Mertha, & Jordan, 2003). As illustrated in discourse, “the oldest known schools were those of Sumer, and are located between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in Mesopotamia. The schools date from the 3rd millennium, B.C.” (Webb, 2003, p. 126). These ancient schools were not necessarily formalized and typically provided children of the religious elite with instruction in fundamental writing and calculations; select students had access to advanced studies in arts, humanities, religion and sciences (Webb, 2003). According to Webb (2003), “after six to ten years a limited number of students went on to advanced studies...students were taught using an elaborate system of pictographic script known as hieroglyphics” (p. 126). Webb (2003) believes primary and secondary schooling manifested from early Mesopotamian and Egyptian traditions. Alongside French (1957), the scholars assert that foundations for modern, Western schools were born from the

Ancient Greeks. Also from this context, one can argue evidence of the earliest incarnations of secondary-level schools—albeit from what many contemporary practitioners and scholars would likely consider primitive.

The ancient Greeks established a formal, yet non-compulsory educational system for male and eventually female youth both at primary and secondary levels with no references to intermediate-level schooling. According to French (1957), “secondary education first began in ancient Greece” and was intended for adolescent youth. French (1957) continues: “when a child reached the age of puberty, he was thought ready to learn the ways of adult society...being introduced into the mysteries of adult behavior” (French, 1957, p. 26). Some also contend that the ancient Greeks intended more from their educational system, in general. Webb (2003) believes that the ancient Grecian rationale for education entailed the development of the self in conjunction with the embodiment of “common core knowledge, [inclusive of] reading, writing, music, and physical education [at multiple levels]” (pp. 128-129). Mastery of principle content within the noted subject areas would theoretically produce good citizens who are contributive to community and democracy (French, 1957; Pulliam & James, 2003; Webb, 2003; Robb, 1943). The ancient Greeks also provided for the equivalent of modern-day grade levels, which typically required pupils to be of certain ages (French, 1957; Webb, 2003). From primary-level instruction through advanced studies indicative of proficient core knowledge, age-based grade levels organizations, and pedagogy geared toward those with higher than average aptitudes and/or intelligence, the foundations of the American secondary education seem to be evident.

2.2.2 Enlightenment and revolution shape American secondary education

If individual Americans were to reflect upon their knowledge of British imperialism and colonization of the New World, they may remember the economic, personal, political, social, and religious strife of early colonists in context with their struggles against the Kingdom of Great Britain. Plausibly, they may even remember Paul Revere and the events leading up to the American War of Independence. But how many would be able to address the complexities of life on a new frontier prior to *the Enlightenment*—a movement directly impacting education and coinciding with the formation of colonial-era schools? As denoted by Butts and Cremin (1953), “the shape of education in any time and place is largely a function of the interaction of the institutionalized forms of behaving solidified or leavened by the dominant beliefs and ideas of the people who control the educative process” (p. 43). Germane to colonial America, enlightened thought coupled with British history—especially the conception of representative democracy—had a profound effect on the development and character of early American schools (Butts & Cremin, 1953; Pulliam & Van Patten, 2003). Interestingly, Pulliam and Van Patten (2003) defined the Enlightenment as follows: “A rational, liberal, humanistic, and scientific trend that vastly altered the climate of opinion in Europe...a protest against both the authority of Christian dogma and absolute monarchs. Its leaders sought a balanced social order free from the control of a single powerful class” (p. 108). Often, ideological variances among the Europeans and their satellite populations amid their empires, including American colonists, devolved into conflict—being the result of differing political and religious perceptions (Butts, 1960; Butts & Cremin, 1953). Couple

this with economic and regional variances from the homogenous and “reactionary” New England to the more diverse and secular Middle Atlantic region, (Urban & Wagner, 2009), and it becomes even more apparent that the complexities associated with early American education were more significant than other regional issues (Urban & Wagner, 2009). Despite this, public/secular elementary schools proliferated within the colonies and eventually a young, independent United States (Butts, 1953; Pulliam & Van Patten, 2003; Urban & Wagner 2009); however, the same cannot be said for secondary schools:

The public school system of America did not evolve as an integrated whole, with elementary school, secondary school, college, and university making parallel progress toward public acceptance and support...The early struggle to achieve free tax-supported publically controlled schools centered around the elementary school, and it was not until the last quarter of the nineteenth century that this battle was won (Raubinger, et al, 1969, pp. 1-2).

Though formalized secondary education was not the norm in the U.S. prior to the late 1800s, its presence was not entirely devoid of learning institutions reminiscent of contemporary (junior or senior) high schools (Butts & Cremin, 1953; Monroe, 1940; Norbert, 1943; Raubinger, et al, 1969).

Like most other historical domains, the history of secondary education may be delineated by eras. According to Brown, (1897),

The history of secondary education in [the United States] may be divided into three periods: (1) The [Latin] Grammar school period; (2) The Academy Period, extending from the Revolution to the time of the educational revival [of roughly the mid 1800s]; and (3) the High School Period, covering the [remainder of the 19th century] (pp. 194-195).

The first secondary schools founded in the British-American colonies were commonly referred to as Latin grammar schools, Latin schools, or just simply grammar schools—all

of which are synonymous with secondary schools (Brown, 1897). The first colonial-era secondary schools were established early in American colonial history. According to Engelhardt and Overn (1936),

It was in Massachusetts Colony that one must look for the beginning of secondary education in America. In 1635, only five years after the settlement of the town of Boston, the citizens met and agreed to support a public Latin school...thus began a school that did not teach rudiments of learning, but the selected subjects for advanced study (p. 72).

Others, including Pulliam (2003), Norberg (1943), Smith (1932) and Webb, et al (2003), generally agreed with this assertion from Engelhardt and Overn (2003). However, it is worth noting that Smith (1932) provides for some ambiguity by stating, “the Boston Latin School, founded in 1635, was one of the first [secondary schools] to be established” (p. 6). This implies other secondary schools unknown to historians may have predated the Boston Latin School. Before long, this prototype for secondary schools expanded beyond New England and could be found sporadically throughout the Middle Atlantic and southern colonies (Monroe, 1940).

Early secondary schools, much like their ancient and contemporary counterparts, focus more on advanced, pre-collegiate studies, and less on basic/elementary skills (Butts & Cremin, 1953; Engelhardt & Overn, 1937; Norberg, 1943; Pulliam & Van Patten, 2003; Raubinger, et al, 1969; Smith, 1932; Urban & Wagoner, 2009; Webb, et al, 2003). As noted by Norberg (1943), “the purpose of the Latin grammar school was preparation for college [generally focused on the study of Greek and Latin]” (p. 73). But who did these early secondary—or Latin grammar schools—really serve: the greater populace or bourgeois society? Secondly, what age group did these schools accommodate: children, adolescents, or young adults? Latin grammar schools, at least the few that emerged

within the colonial era, by and large provided educational opportunities for the financial, intellectual, and social elite—despite being predominantly public organizations (Butts & Cremin, 1953; Engelhardt & Overn, 1937; French, 1957; Monroe, 1940; Norberg, 1943; Pulliam & Van Patten, 2003; Raubinger, et al, 1969; Smith, 1932; Urban & Wagoner, 2009; Webb, et al, 2003; Wright, 2006). As for whom they served, much like the schools of ancient civilizations, Latin grammar schools most commonly served adolescents of various age ranges (Bent & Kronenberg, 1941; French, 1957). Despite rapid ascension to prevalence, the popularity of Latin grammar schools waned considerably after 1700, hence leading to an inconspicuously exclusive secondary education system founded upon inception of academies (Engelhardt & Overn, 1937; Smith, 1932).

2.2.3 American secondary educational institutions of the 18th and 19th centuries

The 1700s marked a period of upheaval throughout Europe, which perceivably extended into its colonial possessions, including the American colonies. With regard to education, particularly the Latin grammar schools, “discontent with the classical learning that was breaking out all over Europe in the latter seventeenth century paved the way for more liberal educational systems of the eighteenth [century]” (Engelhardt & Overn, 1937, p. 77). This change in educational philosophy entailed expansion of pre-collegiate curricula to include studies in “English, modern foreign languages, mathematics, philosophy, or history” (Engelhardt & Overn, 1937, p. 77). This, coupled with new economic and social demands of the eighteenth century—likely the result of enlightenment (one may reference Appendix A for the definition of this term) and early industrialization—

necessitated a shift away from Latin grammar schools and introduction of the liberal, yet predominantly private academies (Smith 1932; Urban & Wagoner, 2009; Webb, et al, 2003). According to Smith (1932), “Latin grammar schools continued to some extent during the eighteenth century...[yet] their maintenance became increasingly difficult” (p. 8). To that end, academies became the most prevalent form of secondary education in the latter half of the colonial period, all the way through the 1800s (Engelhardt & Overn, 1937; Norberg, 1943; Wright, 2006).

By the middle 1700s, the academy had become the prevalent institution for secondary education in the American colonies and, subsequently, the United States (Butts & Cremin, 1953; Webb, et al, 2003; Wright, 2006). According to Webb, et al (2003), “the real growth of the academy occurred after the Revolutionary War. The variation among the academies was great...[with] curriculum usually dependent in part on the students who were enrolled” (p. 163). For example, military academies may devote more instruction to military sciences as opposed to women academies, and vice versa. Notwithstanding differences, there were almost always unifying themes. According to Butts and Cremin (1953), the academies were founded on curriculum that “combined the values and content of Latin schools and [newer liberal] schools into one institution” (p. 126) regardless of their target goals/students. This means that academies embraced both classical languages—the hallmark of grammar schools—and newer discourse. Due to the comprehensive nature of the academies with multiple content offerings, they became organized around central thematic subjects. In other words, they were departmentalized by content and comparably more comprehensive than grammar schools (Butts and Cremin, 1953). Their inception and proliferation was due in large part to evolving

demands by humankind for universality, most of which manifested from dynamic social and economic conditions brought on by the Enlightenment and “the mercantile activities of the new middle class...and increased religious toleration” (Webb, et al, 2003, p. 147).

By the 1850s, there were over 6,000 academies in operation (Engelhardt & Overn, 1937; Webb, et al, 2003), serving an estimated population of 263,000 pubescent-aged youth (Webb, et al, 2003). This statistic can be construed as impressive, except for the fact that the United States population in 1850 numbered roughly 23.2 million amid prospect for rapid expansion via immigration—a by-product of industrialization (Webb, et al, 2003). To that end, “the number of private [academies] that catered to adolescents [continued] to be quite numerous” (Engelhardt & Overn, 1937, p. 89); yet they continued to serve too few children in relation to the burgeoning U.S. population (Engelhardt & Overn, 1937; French, 1957; Raubinger, et al, 1969; Webb, et al, 2003). Many members of American society believed this was unacceptable and that more students should be allotted secondary educational opportunities via publicly funded means, hence the birth of the common school or high school movement (Brown, 1897; Pulliam & Van Patten, 2003; Webb, et al, 2003).

The common school or high school movement of the middle to late 19th century marked a brisk and major turning point for secondary education in the United States. The common school ideal, as denoted by Webb, et al (2003), was the “the period that the American educational system as [American citizens knew] it...began to take form...publicly supported schools attended in common by all children” (p. 165). Furthermore, Pulliam and Van Patten (2003) emphasized that recent shifts in American thought had “made [the existence] of separate schools for the elite social classes

unacceptable” (p. 129)—the antithesis of the academy philosophy with some similarities to public grammar schools. According to French (1957), “by 1874, the public high school had been accepted as part of the public school system” (p. 99), which partially supplanted the four-year (grades 9-12) private academies that usually accepted only students of high socio-economic strata and, “in rare cases” (French, 1957, p. 25), gifted students of lower social and economic stock.

2.2.4 American secondary education in the 20th Century

At the dawn of the 20th century, adolescent learners in the United States were all technically educated in 9-12 high schools (Briggs, 1920; French, 1957; Wright, 2006). Unfortunately, because child-labor laws and compulsory education codes were paltry, few students made the transition from grades eight to nine, hence failing to ascend to high-school status (French, 1957). French (1957) also points out that this, coupled with the then common perception that “many a capable boy[s] and girl[s] regarded the eighth grade of elementary school as the termination of his education” (p. 99) only added to the problem. To farther complicate matters, French (1957) attributes other reasons for this phenomenon, which often extended beyond the control of community and school stakeholders. Such issues are listed below:

- Many communities did not have a high-school attendance tradition;
- Formalized education is possible only in a society where there exist surplus earnings after the basic needs have been met;
- Many sections of the country are without available schools;

- Hidden costs for students and their families;
- Being largely theoretical and academic, secondary education did not appeal to all boys and girls (pp. 101-102).

These reasons collectively inhibited most students from matriculating to high school. In 1900, roughly 20 years after large-scale establishment of public (9-12) high schools, only 630,048 of 9,233,341 eligible students were enrolled (French, 1957). Though this was a drastic improvement over secondary-level enrollment during the academy era, this still meant that only 6.8% of American citizens between the ages of 13 and 18 attended secondary schools, therefore indicating that a vast majority of adolescent-age youth residing in the United States at that time did not receive formal education. This trend of low enrollments in public, grades 9-12 high schools did not persist far into the 20th century (French, 1957). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, during the 1889-1890 academic year, approximately 203,000 of roughly 9,000,000 eligible adolescent-age pupils were enrolled in 9-12 high schools; by 1948-1949, that figure had swelled to approximately 6,000,000 pupils (Snyder, 1993). Moreover, the vast majority of eligible students who did not attend public high schools were enrolled in private institutions (Snyder, 1993, p. 53). This data implies that from the inception of the high school movement through the middle 20th century, the majority of pubescent students were educated in (junior and senior) high schools—both public and private. Concurrent to this expansion were reform movements that often called for the reorganization of grade levels and philosophical shifts founded on adolescent and educational research—the junior high school movement and the middle school movement

being most noteworthy in the 20th century (Allen, 1980; Briggs, 1920; Handley, 1982; Renchler; Wright, 2006).

2.2.5 Evolution of secondary education in the 20th Century—organizations and philosophies

Debates over school organizations models with attention to particular grade-level plans have been occurring for generations. Paglin and Fager (1997), as cited in Barton and Klump (2012), indicate that up until 1920, “most students attended K-8 schools, followed by grade 9-12 high school” (p. 1). According to those same authors, by the 1960s, a majority of students commenced secondary studies at grade seven; but this was only temporary, for the middle school movement invariably shifted the secondary threshold back to ninth grade (Barton & Klump, 2012, p. 1). At the onset of the twentieth century, many theorists questioned the validity of the then prevalent 8-4 plan, which defined grade (or elementary) school as grade 1-8 and high school as grades 9-12 (Allen, 1980; Wright, 2006). According to Briggs (1920), “the eight-four organization is not justified by (a) psychology, (b) comparative education, (c) historical development, or (d) results” (p. 4) and proclaims it a “historical accident, a compromise between the early contending elementary and secondary schools” (p. 6). Briggs, an opponent of the 8-4 model and ardent supporter of junior high schools, believed that secundarization of grades 7 and 8, inclusive of differentiated curriculum with greater choices, grade-level promotion by courses (credits earned), and departmentalization would academically and socially benefit young adolescence. Briggs (1920) further extols the virtues of junior high schools by

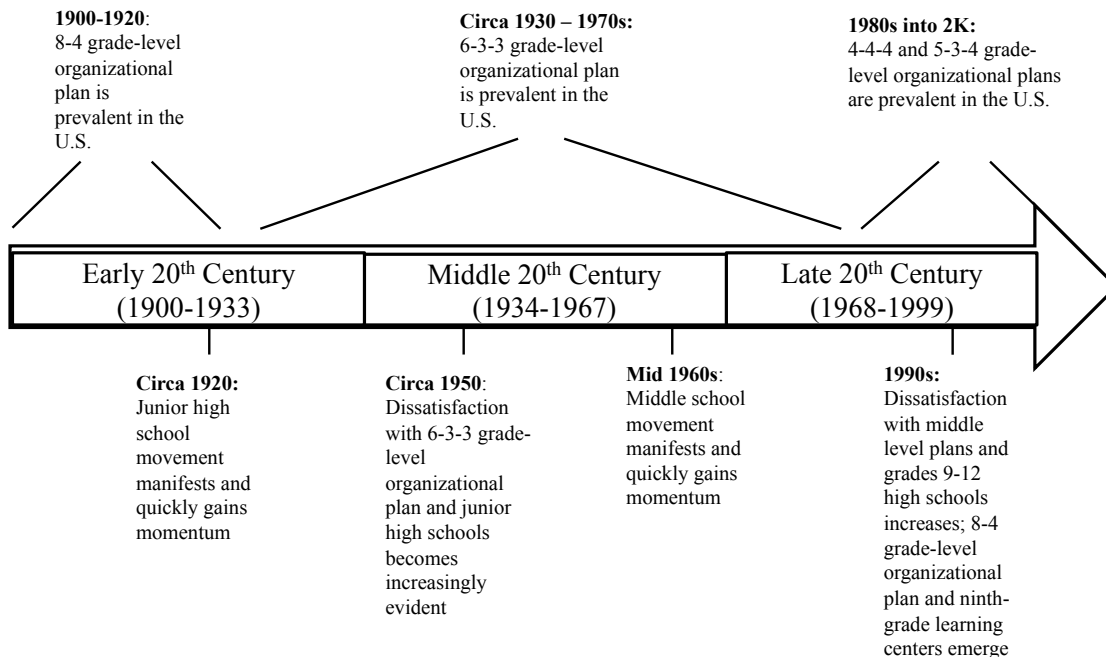
contending that they afford students greater access to extracurricular activities coupled with appropriate age-level accommodation mindful of individual abilities and gender differences, therefore providing scaffolds for inspiring self-actualization and maturity.

Briggs's (1920) perceptions are important, for they indicate the most fundamental tenets of grades 7-9 junior high schools, which ultimately resulted in wholesale abandonment of the 8-4 model and adoption of 6-3-3 organizations. Junior high schools profoundly affected seventh and eighth graders by making them wards of the secondary education system. Grade nine was also affected, for it was largely removed from four-year (grades 9-12) high school. Hence 6-3-3 became prevalent among American public school districts through the 1970s. Supporters of the 6-3-3 plan, specific to grades 7-9 junior highs, contend that secundarization of grades seven and eight provided for more challenging and age-appropriate curricula than elementary schools and accommodated a structure befitting of transition to (senior) high school (Handley, 1982, p. 1). Also, specific to grade nine, freshmen benefit from being the eldest grade: "ninth graders need a year of this leadership to fulfill some of the psychological needs of adolescents," plus their placement in the junior high alleviated problems they commonly experience when housed in (senior) high schools (Handley, 1982). Most importantly, the grades 7-9 configuration significantly decreased student attrition rates at those respective levels—a problem common to 8-4 organizations (Allen, 1980). Despite these claims, by the 1950s, dissatisfaction with junior high schools began to burgeon. According to Weiss and Kipnes, (2006), educational reformers, including William Alexander and Emmett Williams, known for their advocacy for middle-level (upper elementary/lower secondary reforms) believed that the grade-level composition of junior highs—inclusive of grade

nine—was incorrect. Weiss and Kipnes (2006) also contended that junior high schools insufficiently addressed adolescent needs and failed to bridge the gap between elementary and high schools (p. 242). Concurrent with this phenomenon were financial and social issues—particularly in urban settings—that called for system reorganizations of grade-level clusters in order to accommodate desegregation initiatives and to minimize overcrowding amid an influx of population resulting from the Baby Boom, especially in grades K-6 elementary schools (Klinge, 1985). Such perceptions resulted in yet another reform, one that again affected grades 7-9: the middle school movement.

Comprised of grades 5/6-8, middle schools—unlike junior highs—are less departmentalized and more team-orientated (Handley, 1982). Middle school proponents believed that instructional teams, unlike content-homogeneous departments, would truly bridge the gap to high school. According to Weiss and Kipnes (2006), middle schools would utilize flexible scheduling, ungraded programs, team teaching, and “a school within a school” (p. 242) or house structures to better accommodate the needs of young adolescent learners. The results of middle schools and the 4-4-4 or 5-3-4 organization plans are vague, for little data exists relevant to middle school outcomes in comparison to other options with the exception of data that suggests middle schools are detrimental to self-esteem (Weiss & Kipnes, 2006), achievement, and graduation rates (Bedard & Do, 2005). So what do many educational reformers suggest as an alternative to the still prevalent 5/6-8 middle school and subsequent 4-4-4 or 5-3-4 organizational models? It all seems to be coming full circle—back to the 8-4 plan. The following illustration (Figure 1) denotes this cyclical evolution within the confines of linear time through the 20th century.

Figure 1: 20th Century U.S. Secondary Education Timeline—Organizations and Philosophies



By the close of the 20th century, many American school systems started questioning the effectiveness of their middle school programs and eliminating them in favor of K-8 elementary schools and the subsequent 8-4 plan (Barton & Klump, 2012, p. 1). Since 2002, the number of public K-8/PreK-8 elementary schools has increased 31.5%, numbering approximately 6,000, nationwide (Barton & Klump, 2012, p. 1). The growth of these schools and the organization plan they necessitate directly affects middle-level grades. Students in grades 7 and 8 who grew accustomed to middle schools are now faced with a dilemma—one that entails what some may term the de-middlization or de-secondarization of their respective grade levels as they assimilate back to elementary settings. Proponents of K-8/PreK-8 elementary schools believe that “[eighth graders

from K-8 schools] whose only transition is to high school are less likely to experience a decrease in their trajectory than their peers who move to a middle school or junior high school in grade six or seven as well as transition to high school” (Barton & Klump, 2012).

Concurrent to the reemergence of grades K-8 schools in the late 20th century was the development of autonomous grade-nine-only schools, often referred to as ninth grade or freshmen academies. According to Seller (2004), who cites Paglin and Fager (1997), “the trend toward middle school rather than junior high configurations has resulted in the rising phenomenon of ‘grade nine only’ schools and/or campuses” (p. 8). Supporters of this movement believe that ninth graders’ needs cannot be sufficiently met in grades 9-12 high schools, especially in terms of dropout rates, substandard attendance, and pregnancy (p. 9). Like K-8 schools, the validity of freshmen academies is yet to be determined.

Grade-level configurations and appropriate placement of particular grade levels within school organizations can be contentious and complex. Every model has potential merits; however, each benefit is seemingly accompanied with drawbacks. This is highly apparent when assessing secondary schools and other types of schools inclusive of secondary grades (i.e., middle schools and grades K-8 elementary schools) for their effectiveness in educating adolescent learners. What does the literature say about the developmental needs of adolescents and what are contemporary school organizations doing now to accommodate those needs through their organization and programming; and what does it state about the environment most befitting of their academic and social development? These questions warranted attention and are addressed in the following sections.

2.2.6 Key points about the history of secondary education, as noted by the literature

The following conveys key aspects of the history of secondary education in the United States, as indicated by the literature:

- Secondary education predates the United States by approximately 5,000 years with evidence of its earliest incarnations in the Middle East (Southwest Asia).
- The ancient Greeks developed what can be considered the first modern or westernized system of secondary education, which was built upon development of a common core of knowledge, namely reading, writing, and mathematical inquiry.
- The early American education system—inclusive of secondary schools on a very limited scale—was borne of British schooling traditions and was highly influenced by the Enlightenment.
- The American public education system failed to develop as an integrated whole, for support for comprehensive and compulsory secondary schools was miniscule in comparison to the primary schools.
- The development of secondary education in the U.S.A. is divisible by three distinct periods: the first defined by Latin grammar schools, the second founded upon academies, and the third grounded on the contemporarily prevalent grades 9-12 high school.
- Grammar schools were designed to prepare students for college, whereas academies provided for more individualistic and/or specific aspirations that were

often non-collegiate in nature; these schools were among the first to embrace progressive curricula.

- High schools in many ways represented a philosophical amalgamation of both grammar schools and academies with both common and specialized curricula and programing—plus they were intended to be compulsory.
- By the late 1800s, grades 9-12 high schools became the prevalent mode of public secondary education, yet few (only 6.8% of) high-school-age children enrolled and/or completed studies at these institutions.
- By the early 1900s, public primary schools started to engage in secundarization of grades seven and eight, therefore advancing students at those grade levels into high schools inclusive of grades 7-12.
- By the 1920s, it became increasingly common for grades 7-12 high schools to divested into two distinct learning organizations, much of this being the result of the junior high school movement—hence the widespread development of grades 7-9 junior high schools and grades 10-12 senior high schools.
- The 6-3-3 organizational plan—inclusive of grades K-6 elementary-school systems, grades 7-9 junior high schools, and grades 10-12 senior high schools was the prevalent school grade-level plan in the U.S. for much of the 20th century.
- By the 1960s, many educational practitioners and theorists started questioning the merits of junior high schools and proposed alterations to them that eventually resulted in the middle school movement—a plan that called for restoration of grades 9-12 high schools and partial de-secdarization of grades seven and eight.

- By the close of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries, middle-school orientated grade-level organizational plans (typically 5-3-4 and 4-4-4) had become prevalent in the United States.
- In recent years, contentions and debates over grade-level configurations and appropriate placements for students within school systems have become increasingly commonplace and are often critical of the middle-school concept and ninth graders being housed in grades 9-12 structures.

2.3 DEVELOPMENTAL AND EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF ADOLESCENTS

2.3.1 Adolescence defined, studied, and disputed

Adolescence is quite possibly the most challenging time period of mortal life, which is “a uniquely human phenomenon...[that] appears to be a distinct phase of development, albeit a transitional one, with its own biological, social, and intellectual hallmarks” (McKinney, Fitzgerald, & Strommen, 1982, p. 5). The dictionary definition of adolescence is as follows: “to come of age...[or] to grow up” (Jaffe, 1998, p. 19). McKinney, Fitzgerald, and Strommen (1982) defined it as “the teenage years between childhood and adulthood” (p. 3). There appears to be agreement among researchers as to the general meaning of the word adolescence; however, that is where the consensus ends. The literature reveals a vast array of competing scientific approaches and theories pertinent to adolescent youth and their developmental needs. Moreover, cultures and

societies have a tendency to haphazardly define adolescence by age parameters and other norms without regard for scientific facts and findings (Bernstein, et al, 2012; Hazen, Schlozman, & Beresin, 2008; Jaff, 1998; Moshman, 1999; Sturdevant & Spear 2002). This in turn begs the following questions relevant to adolescence and human development: when do children become adolescents, and what are the special developmental needs of adolescent-age youth? The proceeding addresses these questions via an interdisciplinary review of literature focusing primarily on scientific principles with some references to socio-cultural constructs in correlation with cognitive development and formal education of adolescents.

The changes to the human body and mind derivative of adolescence are both profound and staggering (Ausubel, 1954; Jaff, 1998; Moshman, 1999; Wolman, 1998). Ironically, formal acknowledgement of its very existence and studies related to it are relatively recent (Frankel, 1998; Jaff, 1998; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). The causes and effects of adolescence are debatable: is it biological or is it psychological? Are there cultural and/or sociological ramifications for it? Does it even truly exist? Bernstein, et al (2012), Moshman (1999), and Wolman (1998) believe this transformation to be largely biological—centered on the brain and hormones. Conversely, other researchers, including Dommert (2011), Jones (2005) and Spano (2003), assert that the brain in terms of a neuroscientific perspective is the primary culprit. According to Moshman (1999), “one thing common to adolescents...is that they are engaged in a process of psychological development” (p. 1). He further posits that biological changes, such as puberty—the point of physiological sexual maturity—and other anatomical alterations are derivative of the brain, but not necessarily psychological. Moshman (1999) indicates,

“psychological development...is a vague notion based on a misleading biological metaphor” (p. 3). In contrast, Bernstein, et al (2012) believes that there are biological aspects of psychology that are interrelated:

The drastic changes in teenagers’ bodies are accompanied by significant changes in their brains, especially in parts of the frontal lobes known as the prefrontal cortex. These areas are vital to the ability to think flexibly, to act appropriately in challenging situations, and to juggle multiple pieces of information... These changes in the brain are reflected in changes in the ways that adolescents think (pp. 500-501).

Whether this phenomenon is biological, neurological, physiological, psychological, sociological, or an amalgamation of some or all of these disciplines remain a contentious topic of debate.

2.3.2 Adolescence and what it means for those coming of age

Researchers have toiled with questions regarding the onset and duration of adolescence for decades, if not centuries, and often the answers to these inquiries are products of the following: seemingly logical assumptions about ages and grade levels made in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, scientific investigations regarding transition from childhood to adulthood that occurred concurrent to those assumptions, and/or theorizations made in antiquity (Frankel, 1998; Jaffe, 1998; McKinney, et al, 1982). To further confound this idea, the superimposition of cultural and social norms to this phenomenon yields significant challenges to defining adolescence (Wolman, 1998). How adolescence is perceived can be contingent upon academic, cultural, and scientific standpoints. Cultures and societies often rely on age, grade-level, and other criteria for determining

actualization of adolescence (Jaffe, 1998; Hazen, et al 2008). Wolman (1998) believes that the degree, extent, and timing of this acute phase of human existence “[is] an uneven, often disharmonious process of biological maturation, complicated by sociocultural factors...with a great many inevitable, related problems” (p. 5). Furthermore, according to Bernstein, et al (2012), adolescence is associated with “significant changes in size, shape, and physical capacities. Many also experience big changes in their social lives, reasoning abilities, and their views of themselves” (p. 500). As Hazen, et al (2008) note with regard to adolescence and developmental norms in relationship to culture, “normal development from one cultural perspective may appear aberrant when viewed through the lens of another culture” (p. 161). This means that how adolescence is fathomed varies among civilizations and cultures—often ignorant of scientific approaches and/or findings related to it.

With regard to age and grade-levels, Klein (1990, as cited by Jaffe 1998), believes that existence of a distinct period between childhood and adulthood was recognized during the 19th century, thanks in large part to schools: “In the first schools, children of all ages were taught together, but eventually they were segregated by age. Age-related grading was but one of many factors that led to the recognition (or invention) of adolescence” (p. 12). The acknowledgement of adolescence as a distinct life phase is perhaps indicative of another phenomenon that led to its conceptualization: industrialization and its greater impact on the human condition (Frankel, 1998; Hunter & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003). As denoted in Hunter & Csikszentmihalyi (2003), with reference to Aries (1965) and Gillis (1974),

Not until the 1880s, when a middle class could afford to systematically educate their children, did youth issues come

into awareness as something deserving of attention. Instead of being sent out to learn a trade, middle class children were sent to school. This new circumstance of elongated dependence and removal from the cycles of production led to the 'discovery of adolescence' and established, more or less, the pattern that most youth in the industrial and post-industrial world follow today (p. 27).

Though industrialization, the establishment of the middle class (or the *proletariat*), and demand for compulsory education may have led to adolescence defined in terms of age and grade-level intervals, it is important to point out that Jaffe (1998) vehemently rejects the validity of equating age to adolescence: "[people often] define adolescence as the second decade of life...spanning ages 13 to 19 years...[and defining it] in terms of one's age or grade is that, like physical growth and sexual maturation, age and grade are not very good predictors" (p. 21).

Hazen (2008) also posits that age was irrelevant to adolescence, for "[it] is marked by the onset of puberty... [and] hormones" (162). Blakemore (2008), Jaffe (1998) and Hazen, et al (2008) believe that age is arbitrary to adolescence, for it is far more complex than the age of a being. Plus, as indicated in the former, its onset can be unpredictable. Schlozman and Beresin (2008) concur with Jaffe's assertion regarding age in relationship to adolescence: "determining the exact onset and conclusion of adolescent development can be difficult, with complex biologic, psychological, and social paradigms all playing roles. Cultural factors also must be considered in determining the developmental norms of adolescence" (p. 161). So if age and/or grade levels are not legitimate determiners of adolescence, then what are the leading catalysts for this phenomenon? Perhaps the answers rest in theories drawn from scientific inquiry, or do they?

2.3.3 Applied and social scientific theories on adolescence

Frankel (1998) references Kaplan (1986) in tracing the invention of adolescence as an offshoot of scientific discourse: “the invention of adolescence as a distinct phase of life back to two sources: Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s allegorical novel, *Emile*...and G. Stanley Hall—the American psychologist responsible for bringing Freud and Jung to America” (Kaplan, 1986 as cited in Frankel, 1998, p. 13). The alleged influence of Rousseau is ironic, given his acclaim as a philosopher and not a scientist; however, C. G. Jung’s influence seems logical, given his work in developmental psychology. One of the cornerstones of Jung’s view of adolescent development was analysis of human sexuality—anything ranging from convention through deviance to include incest, fantasy, and maternal relations (Frankel, 1998). Other aspects of Jung’s theories involve personality, socialization, the common adolescent desire to extend beyond their families (Bernstein, et al, 2012; Frankel, 1998), which can be attributable to adolescence.

Sigmund Freud believed sexuality to be integral to human development as it extends into adolescence (Ausubel, 1954; McKinney, et al, 1982). As noted by Ausubel (1954), Freud focused primarily on the following aspects of adolescence as it affected personality within the context of his hypothesized psychosexual phases: “(1) the relationship between sex repression and anxiety and emotional stability; (2) the achievement of a desirable balance between the expression of sex urges and the demands of conscience; (3) the establishment of heterosexuality” (p. 26). Besides what appears to be blatant disregard for members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender

(L.G.B.T.) communities, Freud believed that adolescents' "newly intensified sex drives caused anxiety, hence a "common peril of disregarding [of] ethical considerations" (Ausubel, 1954, p. 26). As McKinney, et al (1982) explained, "Freud believed that every individual went through a series of psychosexual stages and that excitations arising from various regions of the body were especially characteristic of each of these stages...Freud called these excitations libido" (p. 46). Freud contended that adolescents' abrupt pre-occupation with desires to fornicate and/or procreate makes them behave irrationally.

Jung and Freud, especially, placed significant emphasis on sexuality in correlation with adolescent development—possibly as a means for explaining this phenomenon. Yet other classical theories do exist related to this topic that do not necessarily discount sexuality but, rather, extend beyond it. Gallagher (1999), via a citation of Piaget (1973), believed that generally, "classical theorists of adolescent development focus on the progress of the adolescent through the states they have elucidated...for Piaget (1973), the significant development is cognitive, and the adolescent must proceed through the state of formal operations, which is characterized by the ability to reason logically about abstract ideas" (p. 254). Like Freud, Jean Piaget's theory of development acknowledged a series of phases; however, Piaget focused more on cognition (Jaffe, 1998; McKinney, 1982). Piaget theorized the existence of "Four Stages of Cognitive Development," inclusive of what he termed the sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational states (p. 124). Piaget believed that human beings progress into adolescence upon transition from the concrete operational to the formal operational stages (Bernstein, 2012; Gallagher, 1999; Jaffe, 1998; McKinney, et al, 1982; Moshman, 1999). According to Bernstein, et al (2012), "the formal operational stage...is marked by

the ability to engage in hypothetical thinking, including the imagining of logical consequences...they can question social institutions...they can think logically and systematically about symbols and propositions” (p. 476). Furthermore, as stated by McKinney, et al (1982), “adolescents can decenter...and deduce laws from operations which need not be concrete (p. 72). This means that adolescents are capable of critical thought, and this equates to a capacity to solve and make sense of complex problems and draw questions upon those hypothetical and real scenarios. If one were to reflect upon his/her personal development, one can conclude the plausibility of Piaget’s theories regarding developmental stages as they relate to adolescents.

Thus far, sexuality and cognition have been examined, which are perceivably apposite to adolescence and human development; but what about the personal and social conception of it? Do these play important roles in adolescence? Steinberg and Morris (2001) believe that “adolescence...is characterized as a time when individuals begin to explore and examine psychological characteristics of the self in order to discover who they really are, and how they fit in the social world in which they live” (p. 91). Renowned psychologist Erik Erikson thinks that teenage metamorphosis is accompanied by yearning for self-identify and understanding of it within a social context as it relates to their roles in society (Bernstein, 2012; Moshman, 1999; Steinberg & Morris, 2001; Sturdevant & Spear, 2002; Wolman, 1998). According to Erikson (1998), as referenced by Gallagher (1999), “the adolescent must develop his or her identify and avoid the pitfalls of role confusion” (p. 254). Steinberg and Morris (1998), point out that Erikson’s “Theory of the Adolescent Identify Crisis” asserted that teens struggle to understand their identity within a larger social context (p. 91). This essentially means that they yearn to

define and/or develop their personalities concurrent to realizing their roles within societies. Often this phase in human development lends itself to “individuals [developing] more abstract characterizations of themselves...[in relation] to their own personal beliefs and standards...[eventually evaluating] themselves both globally and along several distinct dimensions—academics, athletics, appearance, social relations, and moral conduct” (Steinberg & Morris, 2001, p. 91). Steinberg and Morris (2001) assert that cliques manifest from this, hence “[placing] adolescents in a social network and [that contributes] to identify development by influencing the ways in which adolescents view themselves and others...[therefore affecting] adolescents’ self-esteem” (p. 93). This idea ties to the Jungian school of developmental thought through (as noted earlier in this review of literature) the notion that adolescents systematically seek out their personalities and define them within a greater social context. According to Jung (as cited by Frankel, 1998), “[individualization] is the process by which individual beings are formed and differentiated...the development of the psychological individual as being distinct, in general, collective psychology...therefore [it] is a process of differentiation, having for its goal the development of the individual personality” (p. 115). At the core of this assertion is adherence to the notion that adolescence is ultimately a function of psychology with sociological implications. Of course, biology (namely with reference to hormones) and physiology also seemingly contribute to adolescent transitions. Yet not until recently have some theorists posited that neuroscience is integral to this life-altering metamorphosis (Dommett, 2011; Jones, 2005; Spano, 2003).

Whether it is a legitimate theory or simply a cliché for explaining the abrupt and unpredictable nature of adolescent behaviors, hormones—a biological construct—are

often blamed (Jaffe, 1998 & Jones, 2005). However, some theorists believe that hormones may actually be more the symptom and less the cause of all aspects of adolescence. According to Jones (2005), “until recently, [people] blamed erratic teen behavior on raging hormones, but scientific research in the last decade has revealed that it’s not hormones, but the brain itself that is the entire culprit” (p. 37). Therefore, adolescence may be the result of neuro-scientific phenomena. Defined, neuroscience is “the scientific study of all levels of the nervous system, including neuroanatomy, neurochemistry, neurology, neurophysiology, and neuropharmacology” (Bernstein, et al, 2012, p. 11). As Bernstein, et al (2012) notes, neuroscience is interrelated to other applied sciences, yet is distinct in its particular attention to the brain and nervous system. In advancing her position, Jones (2005) references the work of Jay Giedd, a neuroscientist with the National Institutes of Health, near Washington, D.C. Credited with being among the first to conduct long-term studies of the adolescent brain, Giedd “used magnetic resonance images to scan the brains of 145 teens over two-year intervals. The scans revealed [that adolescent] brains are still in transition...revealing a spurt of growth in the prefrontal cortex just before puberty” (p. 37). From the neuro-scientific standpoint, changes to the prefrontal cortex increase the vulnerability of teens for this region of the brain is responsible or “involved in self-regulating behaviors—that is, stopping an individual acting on every impulse” (Dommett, 2011, p. 8).

Blakemore (2008) concurs with Dommett and Jones (and perceivably Giedd) regarding behavioral and neurological conceptions associated with adolescence. In reference to M.R.I.-based imaging studies that examined the anatomical and neurological

development of the brains of adolescents of various primate species with overarching emphasis on human development, she stated,

behavior that is related to social cognition changes dramatically during human adolescence. This is paralleled by functional changes that occur in the social brain during this time, in particular in the medial prefrontal cortex...[this] indicates that... parts of the social brain undergo structural development, including synaptic reorganization, during adolescence (p. 267).

Blakemore (2008) also notes that “neuroimaging studies...suggest that activity in the prefrontal areas increase between childhood and adolescence and then decrease between early adolescence and adulthood” (p. 275), hence insinuating both starting and termination points for adolescence. She—unlike Jones (2005)—does not necessarily believe that these changes affect hormone production. Conversely, she believes that brain development during adolescence “is probably influenced by multiple factors, including changes in hormone levels and changes in the social environment” (Blakemore, 2008, p. 267).

2.3.4 Adolescent development: Distinct stages or a distinctly congruent phenomenon?

This review of literature has thus far examined theories related to the causes and effects of adolescence from multiple standpoints, including those that are biological, psychological, sociological, and neurological in nature. Numerous redundancies are apparent among the disciplines—all in an attempt to decipher the catalysts for adolescence and to ascertain the particular developmental needs of pubescent-adolescent youth. Regardless of one’s school of thought pertinent to adolescence, development

and/or developmental needs of adolescents transcend this topic. According to Thornburg (1980), “the word development represents what changes occur in an individual due to age” (p. 1980). This strikes stark contrast to Jaffe (1998), who passionately argues against the notion that any aspect of adolescence can be defined by age. Regardless, Thornburg (1980), in reference to early adolescents, denounces the notion that adolescence is unimportant and unworthy of study and asserted, “due to increased developmental and sociological characteristics of individuals, [early adolescence]...must be given more attention and concern in the future than it has been given in the past” (p. 213). Thornburg’s statement calls attention to two key facts: first, developmental needs are central to the study of adolescence. Second, his reference to early adolescence signifies the possible existence of adolescent phases. It is important to note that many classical and contemporary researchers and/or theorists did not formally acknowledge distinct adolescent phases (Ausubel, 1954; Bernstein, 2012; Jaffe, 2012; Moshman, 1998; Wolman, 1998); however, their works of literature often allude to their existence. This only compounds the already daunting task of determining the exact developmental needs of adolescents. Apparently, these needs can vary from year to year, in addition to person-to-person and/or community-to-community—perhaps all overlapping in accordance with multiple schools of thought.

Sturdevant & Spear (2002) claimed that adolescence is divisible to three distinct phases: early, middle, and late. Sturdevant & Spear (2002) describe early adolescence as a phase “characterized by respect for adult authority, discomfort with the physical changes of puberty, lack of future time perspective...and concrete reasoning strategies” (p. 30). Sturdevant & Spear (2002) described middle adolescence as being “characterized

by recurrent challenges to family or parental authority and belief systems, reliance on peers for standards in appearance and behavior, increasing capacity for abstract reason, and experimentation in dating and sexual behavior (p. 30). Finally, “late adolescence is characterized by a greater reliance on internalized values; fewer challenges to adult authority; less reliance on peer standards, future planning for career and lifestyle; increased capacity to solve complex life problems; and increased capacity for intimate, long-term romantic relationships” (Sturdevant & Spear, 2002, p. 30). Given these descriptions, it appears that these proposed adolescent phases are exclusive; however, the themes of profound transformation and development transcend each. The question now expands to address both the general developmental needs of all adolescents, as well as those that are phase and/or age specific. The remainder of this piece examines adolescent needs in order from early to late, eventually concluding with generalizations regarding all levels of development.

Early-adolescent development is associated with the onset of adolescence or puberty. Defined, puberty is “the condition of being able, for the first time, to reproduce” (Bernstein, et al, 500). Puberty is often signified by biological, psychological, and physiological changes to the external and internal body, that indicate adulthood and the ability to procreate (Ausubel, 1954; Caissy; 1994; Frankel, 1998; Jaffe, 1998; McKinney, et al, 1982; Moshman, 1999; Steinberg & Morris, 2001; Wigfield, Lutz, & Wagner, 2005; Wolman, 1998). According to Caissy (1994), “the onset of puberty cannot be exactly predicted for each individual child. There is great variability among children in age of onset of puberty, the rate of development, and the sequence of development once it begins” (p. 10). She also notes that though age is not reliable for determining the start of

puberty, “[it] begins sometime between the ages of 10 and 14, although it can begin as early as nine and as late 16 in girls and as early as nine and as late as seventeen in boys” (p. 10). Regardless of when pubescence begins, Jaffe (1998) asserts that it is marked with immediate “changes in hormone levels, bone structure, fat deposits, and sex organs...markedly altering the appearance of pubescent girls and boys” (p. 71). “The physical changes associated with pubescence result in psycho-biological consequences as soon as they affect the emotions, drives, behavior, or personality organization of the pubescent individuals” (Ausubel, 1954, p. 74). Together, all of these sudden changes often result in anxiety and stress (Caissy, 1994; Jaffe, 1998), which “may interfere with early adolescents’ focus on school, as it can impact their social relations and overall adjustments” (Wigfield, et al, p. 113), hence accounting for developmental needs specific to early adolescents. Given the vastness of these needs, one may question how parents and other stakeholders—including educators—can successfully address them. In the words of Caissy (1994), an expert on early adolescent development: “Try to be patient and persist with the struggles...the extra time and effort spent during these years will pay off in the long run...[just] don’t expect too much appreciation” (p. 125).

Middle adolescence, much like early adolescence, is presumably accompanied by circumstances and phenomena specific to individuals ages fourteen to sixteen (Kaltiala-Heino, Kosunen, & Rempela, 2003; Kaltiala-Heino, Marttunen, Rantanen, & Rimpela, 2003). Beyond developing greater cognitive capacities, developmental aspects of middle adolescence include preoccupations with appearance, experimentation, socialization, and a yearning for independence (Sturdevant & Spear, 2002, p. 30). This combination can be problematic, as is; yet other factors may further exacerbate development during middle

adolescences, including puberty or—more specifically—pubescent timing (Kaltiala-Heino, Marttunen, Rantanen, & Rimpella, 2003; Kaltiala-Heino, Koivisto, & Marttunen, 2011; Kaltiala-Heino, Koivisto, & Frojd, 2011). According to Kaltiala-Heino, et al (2003), “early pubertal timing associates with mental health problems in middle adolescence... among girls, internalizing problems also associate with early puberty, among boys, externalizing problems partially explain the association between early puberty and internalizing problems” (p. 1063). This statement accentuates the prevalence of mental illness brought on by complications possibly manifesting from premature pubescent development during early adolescence, as it possibly impacts teenagers. Presumably, if left untreated, these psychoses can lead to self-destructive and/or risky behaviors: “early puberty is associated with substance-use behaviors...the association between earlier pubertal timing and substance use behaviors is independent of emotional (depressive) and behavioral (delinquency and aggression) symptoms, even if delinquency and aggression are...common the earlier the puberty” (pp. 1299-1300). Beyond substance abuse, some middle adolescents become indiscriminant with their sexuality—again a possible result of pubescent complications, which can perplex individuals’ sense of identify and self-esteem (Kaltiala-Heino, Kosunen, & Rimpela, 2003). Conversely, others may seek intimacy—resulting in the same negative outcomes associated with promiscuity: “intimate sexual relationships in middle adolescent are likely to indicate problems in adolescent development rather than successful adolescent passage” (Kaltiala-Heino, Kosunen, & Rimpela, 2003, p. 531). Given the literature on middle adolescence, it is reasonable to assume that like early adolescence, it too is complex. Whether one subscribes to any of Kaltialo-Heino and her many collaborator’s perceptions and theories

of middle-adolescent development or one only views adolescence devoid of three distinct phases, “Professionals working with adolescents in health, and social services, and schools should pay attention to mental health needs of [all] adolescents...[for they] might benefit from tailored [psychological] health education and counseling” (Kaltiala-Heino, et al, 2003, p. 1063). This means that adult stakeholders must be attentive to and accommodating of adolescents’ complex and diverse developmental needs.

Late-adolescence, alternatively referred to as emerging adulthood, signifies the terminal phase of adolescence, which precedes adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Bronson, 1960; Duriez & Soenens, 2006; Kamptner, 1988; Parsons, Siegel, & Cousins, 1997; Sturdevant & Spear, 2002). This general definition lends itself to variance as to the exact age of onset for late adolescence. For example, Arnett (2000) believes it affects individuals “from the late teens through the twenties...eighteen to twenty-five” (p. 469). Kamptner (1988) considers late adolescents to be individuals between the ages of 18 and 21 (p. 493), and Parson, et al (1997) defines it by the age interval of “17 to 20” (p. 381). Despite these discrepancies, the literature reveals developmental commonalities—most of which are linked to the theories of Erik Erikson.

People in their late teens through early to mid twenties tend to struggle with their sense of identity (Duriez & Soenens, 2006; Kamptner, 1988; Sturdevant & Spear, 2002). Based on what Duriez & Soenens (2006) consider inspiration from Erikson (1968), “the main developmental task of [late] adolescence is the formation of an integrate personal identify” (p. 399). According to Erikson (1956, as cited by Bronson, 1960), late adolescence is a “period of ‘identify crisis’...the developmental age in which individuals are involved in a process of personal redefinition—sometimes with an intense self

awareness, sometimes on the level of less conscious processes” (p. 414). Bronson (1960) indicates that Erikson (1956) conceived this turbulent period of life, characterized by “fluctuating evaluations of [the] social environment and wide variations in [one’s] interpersonal behavior” is a function of identity crises—also called identity diffusion.

Duriez & Soenens (2006) also suggest that one’s personality and identity might evolve in part around reactions to authority and social environments. Similar to this, Kamptner (1988) with reference to Erikson (1968) claims that late-adolescent “identity formation is thought to proceed developmentally through a psychosocial moratorium, which is a period of time when the adolescent is expected to explore life alternatives, and finally make commitments and establish a clear definition of self” (p. 494). Building from Erikson’s (1968) proposition for late adolescent development, Kamptner (1988) asserts, “certain familiar and social factors may influence the developmental course of identity” (p. 494). Central to both Duriez and Soenens’s (2006) and Kamptner’s ideas is the concept societal and/or peer influences over identity and personality. In other words, peers and collective society influence the ways late adolescents and the adults they become behave and interact with their worlds. Compound the problems associated with identity and personality with the “prevalence of several types of risk behavior...during emerging adulthood” (Arnett, 2000, pp. 474-475), and late adolescence (or emerging adulthood) can be an extremely turbulent period of human development, not unlike earlier stages of adolescence.

As noted prior to examination of proposed phases of adolescence, the literature seems to indicate that most theories regarding adolescence construe this phase as one congruent period of human development that is both unpredictable and variable in nature.

Theorists who believe that adolescents are more closely aligned with adults can hold this idea contentious. Moshman (2011) asserts, “adolescents are a distinct group with respect to children but not with respect to adults” (p. 202). He also believes that “[people] cannot predict or understand how adolescents perceive, infer, think, feel, act, reason, or reflect by examining their brains...brain research is crucial for a full picture but it cannot replace psychological research and does not provide an ultimate explanation” (Moshman, 2011, p. 202). There are two implications here: first, adolescence cannot be explained without integration of multiple disciplines. Second, predicting nearly all aspects of human existence during adolescence is virtually impossible. Yet despite these implications, institutions—particularly schools and healthcare providers—strive to explain and address adolescents’ developmental needs (Baer, 1999; Comer, 2005; Gallagher, 1999; Hamilton, 1984; Hornbeck, 1991; Khan & Siraj, 2012; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). As Gallagher (1999) points out in reference to health services—inclusive school-based health services, “meeting the developmental needs [of adolescents] can protect [them] from the negative outcomes generally associated with very risky environments...[which] can lead to a dangerous misunderstanding of individuals stages of life and to a misinterpretation of some health adolescent behaviors” (p. 255). Gallagher (1999) asserts that not all adolescents are privileged with strong social support systems from families and that these individuals are put at a distinct disadvantage. However, this can be remedied by health services that are provided by “caring and trained adults” (p. 255), who focus on their “natural progression of cognitive and decision-making abilities, the importance of guidance...participation in families, communities, and peer groups...and opportunities for adolescents to develop a sense of competence and to make meaningful contributions

to their world” (Gallagher, 1999, pp. 255-256). To ensure that this occurs, adolescent children must have access to “free services, provision of educational and social [strata]” (Gallagher, 1999, p. 257). This basically indicates the necessity and urgency of adolescents having access to multiple levels of care—regardless of anything—to ensure their health and vitality amid mental and physical transformations.

2.3.5 Schools’ role in adolescent development and facilitation of their learning

Education is another critical piece in adolescent development. If facilitated correctly—with attention to adolescent developmental needs—it can heighten scholastic achievement (Baer, 1999; Comer, 2005; Kran & Siraj, 2012). Khan and Siraj (2012) believed that the key to adolescent success is educational encouragement. Defined, “educational encouragement is the positive feedback that focuses primarily on effort or improvement rather than outcomes” (p. 119), as well as “mutual respect and dignity” (p. 121). Central to this idea is positive reinforcement of students’ attributes and not their weaknesses: “encouragement from parents and teachers are considered...key factor[s] for social interest and academic achievement [that] increase social interest by enhancing a [students’] sense of belonging and connection. [Students] learn to focus on attempt and improvement, rather than perfect results...[therefore turning] so-called liabilities into assets” (Khan & Siraj, 2012, p. 120). Khan & Siraj (2012) ultimately hypothesize that “educational encouragement toward [adolescent-age learners] can positively affect [adolescents’] academic performance” (p. 123).

Beyond encouragement, adolescents need developmentally appropriate

educational support services that are committed to maintenance of a curricula and environments befitting of their needs (Baer, 1999; Comer, 2005; Hornbeck, 1991). Comer (2005) believes that too many schools fail to recognize and address child and adolescent develop—resulting in decreased success for these individuals. According to Comer, the dismal reality is that “many school leaders do not appreciate the fact that producing good school culture, fostering healthy child and adolescent development, and promoting sound academic learning are interactive and mutually facilitating processes” (p. 758). He blames much of this on educators not receiving adequate training to handle children and adolescents, or those who simply do not believe or deliver on programs that can benefit younger learners (Comer, 2005). He also blames “the widely held notion that performance in school and life is determined by one’s genetically fixed intelligence” (Comer, 2005, p. 763), rather than the notion that “learning is developmental” (Comer, 2005, p. 763). Comer (2005) notes, “broad and deep buy-in of an approach that gives centrality to the principles of child and adolescent development can improve academic learning for all students and, at the same time, encourage behavior that gives students a better chance for success in school and life” (p. 762).

The reality in many American schools—despite research supporting incremental intelligence over innate intelligence—is that many educational practitioners do not always believe that all students can learn, hence resulting in lower expectations for students (Baer, 1999; Comer, 2005; Hornbeck, 1991). To that end, curricula as it is delivered to adolescent-level learners often fails to capture the essence of that age group. Hornbeck (1991) underscores this notion by stating, “curriculum ought to be developmentally based...[to] include the issues found in the life sciences in human

biology” (pp. 563-564). Moreover, schools that house adolescent-age learners “should include a strong universal program of community services” (p. 564) and “small group advisories...[so that] every child have an advocate, somebody with whom to connect” (p. 563). Like Comer (2005), Hornbeck (1991) advocates for “a core academic program...[founded on] high expectations, high content, a strong emphasis on the sciences, on communication skills, and mathematics...[that crosscuts] skills such as problem solving or critical thinking or integration of knowledge” (p. 563). Implicit to Comer (2005) and Hornbeck’s (1991) ideas is the concept of teacher efficacy. According to Ashton & Webb (1986), as referenced by Baer (1999),

Teacher efficacy generally distinguishes between personal teaching efficacy and general teaching efficacy. Personal teaching efficacy is defined as the teachers’ belief in their ability to affect student learning...general teaching efficacy refers to the teachers’ belief that learning is influenced by effective teaching and includes a subset of ideas about whether student ability is highly stable or malleable and expanding (p. 4).

Baer (1999) noted that students educated in school environments where teacher efficacy was prevalent—typically elementary schools—experienced more success; and that adolescence may negatively impact teacher efficacy. This can prove problematic for adolescent learners relevant to their academic and social achievements. Though Baer (1999) believes many of these problems may be offset by “social workers [who can] shape the forces that will significantly affect the welfare of [adolescent students]” (p. 11), she also asserted that the schools environment/grade level orientation (e.g., grades 7-9, 6-8, K-8, etc.) and transitions from different learning environments (i.e., students transitioning from a grades K-5 elementary school to a middle school at grade six, students transitioning from a grades K-6 elementary school to a grades 7-9 junior high

school, etc.) can have a negative impact on teacher efficacy and student learning.

The study of adolescence as well as its acknowledgement as a distinct life phase is relatively recent (Frankel, 1998; Jaffe, 1998; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). At the turn of the 20th century, adolescence and the accompanying concepts of adolescent development were what many might consider to have been emerging domains. Even as late as 1931, as noted by Foster (1931) in critique of an article written by Professor Frederick E. Bolton regarding the then recent conceptualization of child psychology, “there is no other field of education concerning which more scientific knowledge is needed, and less is available, than in the field of adolescent education” (p. 479). Arguably, much more is known about adolescence today, thanks to advancements and insights developed over the course of the 20th and 21st centuries. Advancements have been made toward identification and comprehension of adolescents, including their developmental needs and how best to serve those needs. Schools are most often at the forefront of working with adolescent-age youth and the reasons for this are logical, for “[they] have more influence than other environments in four major areas of adolescent development” (Hamilton, 1984, p. 228). According to Hamilton (1984), the reason for this is fourfold:

First, a major purpose of schools is to teach academic knowledge and skills...Second, schools are formal organizations... [that help students develop skills and attitudes to behave in formal organizations...Third, schools propagate a set of beliefs and attitudes that constitute an important part of the national culture among adolescents...[Fourth]...schools are the principal arena within which adolescent peer groups form and operate, providing adolescents with an opportunity to develop social skills (p. 228).

Whether by coincidence or intention, schools are the primary entities that provide services accommodating of adolescents’ needs. As noted in the first sub-question, school

systems throughout the course of the 20th century often altered their organizational configurations and philosophies (i.e., the junior high school and middle school movements) in attempts to better assist and serve adolescent learners with regard to their many development needs—as outlined in the second sub-question. Taken in tandem, these questions beg a third: how have contemporary American schools altered their organizational structures to meet the needs of adolescents identified by sub-question 2? In having answered these questions, the literature provides thorough descriptions of various organizational plans, information pertinent to their guiding principles and philosophies as they relate to adolescents and adolescent development, and empirical data attesting to either the strengths or weaknesses of each respective organization.

2.3.6 Key points about adolescent development, as noted by the literature

The following conveys key aspects of adolescent development, as indicated by the literature:

- Adolescence can be defined a multitude of ways, ranging from relatively simple definitions related to age through statement of complex constructs that often denote and/or connote complex scientific principles.
- Changes experienced during adolescence profoundly affect adolescents in a multitude of ways—both scientifically and socially, which can pose difficulties for these individuals within educational realms.
- Scientists and theorists often debate whether adolescence is a biological, chemical, neurological, physiological, and/or psychological phenomenon.

- The concept of adolescences is relatively recent and largely dependent on academic, cultural, scientific, and social standpoints—its duration can be highly subjective, too, based on those factors.
- Debates regarding age, cognitive development, grade levels, hormones, identity, metamorphosis, physical impacts, and sex are characteristic of discourse on adolescence, yet consensus on these topics is relatively uncommon.
- There exists a wide range of applied and social scientific theories on adolescence, including theorems posed by Erikson, Freud, Jung, Piaget, and Rousseau—just to name a few.
- Much debate exists as to whether or not adolescence comprises distinct phases or if it is in fact a congruent phenomenon; and regardless of individual stances on this subject, most seem to agree that substantial changes impact those who experience it.
- Theoretically, adolescence is comprised of the following stages—again, not entirely agreed upon by the masses: early adolescence, middle adolescence, and late adolescence.
- Theoretically, the onset of adolescence at puberty ranges between ages 10 and 14 and for some may span all the way to age 25.
- Adolescence can be difficult to explain without mention of multiple disciplines, and making predictions about its effects on human beings is generally impossible—hence the arduousness of nature of studies related to that construct.
- Schools are critical in supporting adolescents; and with proper programs, they can substantially assist individuals through this transitional phase of life.

- Schools can also have adverse effects on adolescents, if their programs neglect to support the highly intricate needs of this vulnerable population.
- Adequate services founded on progressive principles, supportive learning environments, and teacher efficacy is critical in supporting the academic and social development of adolescents.
- Advancements have been made over the course of the 20th and 21st centuries to design and implement educational programs that meet the developmental needs of adolescents; this often entails alterations of school-system grade-level organizational models and corresponding philosophies—the junior high and middle school movements are indicative of this phenomenon.

2.4 MEETING ADOLESCENT NEEDS VIA ALTERATIONS TO SCHOOL GRADE-LEVEL CONFIGURATIONS/ORGANIZATIONAL MODELS

2.4.1 Introduction to grade-level organizations: 20th-century trends for a 21st-century context

American school systems have struggled for decades to develop, identify, and implement school organizational models and programs most befitting of adolescent and/or young-adult needs (Barton & Klump, 2012; Bedard & Do, 2005; Dhuey, 2012; Dove, Hooper, & Pearson, 2010; Smydo, 2006). Yet the pursuit of ideal organizational models is hampered by a general lack of empirical research related to grade-level organizations

Renchler, 2000). Consequently, according to Barton and Klump (2012), decisions relevant to school organizational plans are more often than not based on “potential gains in student achievement, budget considerations, better use of facilities, or enrollment and diversity issues” (p. 1). For example with regard to the middle school movement, an educational philosophy that most commonly embraces grade-level structures of K-5, 6-8, and 9-12 (or, excluding kindergarten, the 5-3-4 plan), Dove, Pearson, and Hooper (2010), believe middle schools were the result of well-intentioned educational stakeholders, who believed that middle schools would better accommodate adolescents’ educational and social needs concurrent to maximizing facility capacities.

The middle school is only one of many examples from the 20th century of educational movements that have manifested widespread changes in grade-level configurations. According to Paglin and Fager (1997), “in the early 20th century, most students attended a K-8 school followed by a grades 9-12 high school” (as cited by Barton & Fager, 1997, p. 1). However, shortly thereafter and all the way through the 1970s—the result of the junior high school movement and the secundarization of grades seven and eight (Var, 1965), “the dominant grade configuration was K-6, 7-9, and 10-12” (DeJong & Craig, 2002, p. 3). The junior high school’s prominence quickly descended in the latter half of the 20th century, leading to the rise of middle schools (Barton & Klump, 2000; DeJong & Craig, 2002; Dhuey, 2012; George 1988). Momentum for the middle-school concept and its accompanying grade-level organizational plan survived the 20th century into the 21st century and accounts for the prevalent methodology for educating (early and middle) adolescent youth (Barton & Klump, 2012; Elovitz, 2007). According to Elovitz (2007), “there is no question that middle school is currently the king [as of

2007], the overwhelming choice for middle level education” (p. 26). Despite this, as noted by Elovitz (2007), “this favored grade configuration is coming under question, [hence suggesting that] middle schools [are] about to go the way of their once-dominant precursor, the junior high school” (p. 26). This begs the question: what then might replace middle schools and their subsequent organizational structure in the 21st century?

Current trends suggest multiple answers. Some believe the answer rests in the past, the most common organizational structure of the late 19th and early 20th centuries: grades K-8 schools accompanied with grades 9-12 high schools—or the 8-4 plan (Alspaugh, 2010; Barton & Klump, 2012; DeJong & Craig, 2002; Elovitz, 2007; Erb, 2006; George, 1988; Jacob & Rockoff, 2011; Klingele, 1985; Renchler, 2000). Others assert that existing middle-school organizational structures are sufficient, but in need of key modifications related to improving student transitional programming, especially for students progressing from eighth grade to ninth grade in grades 9-12 high schools (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005; Fulk, 2003; Nelson, Fairchild, Grossenbacher, & Landers, 2007), hence a partial justification for alterations of organizational plans to include autonomous and/or distinct learning environments for ninth graders, often referred to as ninth grade or freshmen academies (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005; Fulk, 2003; McIntosh & White, 2006; Neild, 2009). Finally, some school districts—albeit only 20%—have defied trends by perpetuating 6-2-4 & 6-3-3 organizational structures inclusive of junior high schools (Elovitz, 2007). Perhaps this is due to the fact that as noted by Handley (1982) in a U.S. Department of Education commissioned report that juxtaposed junior high schools and middle schools in terms of merits and weaknesses, the junior high school does have some advantages over middle schools—especially with regard to academic rigor and ninth-

grade education. The following examines how contemporary American school systems have altered their organizational structures to meet the needs of adolescents with attention to grade-level plans inclusive of middle schools, middle schools complemented and/or supplemented with autonomous ninth-grade learning centers, systems inclusive of K-8 elementary schools and devoid of distinct intermediate schools, and finally junior high schools.

2.4.2 Middle schools: The 5-3-4 or 4-4-4 organizational plans

Few American educational reform initiatives have had as profound an effect as the middle schools movement (Barton & Klump, 2012; George, 1988). According to George (1988), “the middle school movement is American education’s longest-lived innovation...arguably the most widespread school improvement effort in American history” (p. 14). In this context, the middle school—usually inclusive of grades six, seven, and eight and sometimes extending down to grade five—evolved from the once prevalent junior high school model (Bedard & Do, 2005; George, 1988; Klingele, 1985). As noted by the National Middle School Association (N.M.S.A.) (1995), justification for middle school education and inclusion of elementary-level grades in this model were the result of wisdom related to the junior high school movement:

By the 1960s, middle school supporters were similarly arguing [as did supporters of the junior high schools] that sixth grade students would benefit from being separated from elementary school children...[believing that sixth-grade students’] social, psychological, and academic needs [are] distinct from young children and older youth (Bedard and Do, 2005, p. 660).

Along similar lines, middle-school proponents justified the exclusion of ninth graders from this new educational incarnation (Bedard & Do, 2005; George, 2000; Handley, 1982). According to George (2000), though ninth grade's movement back to high schools was largely the result of shifting educational philosophy, it was also the result of evolving enrollment patterns that necessitating changes to grade-level housing: "school-district decision makers and planners found that moving to middle schools [eased] the pain of closing schools and defending the viability of half-empty buildings...[moving] the ninth grade to the high schools...reduced the need to close high schools" (p. 15). Furthermore, Klingele (1985) asserts that most middle schools are founded on principles devoid of their the core contingencies of that construct. "The middle school has provided a practical and fashionable avenue for the implementation of alternative school system purposes" (Klingele, 1985, p. 335). Many middle schools were established for the following reasons: to alleviate overcrowded conditions in feeder elementary schools, to accommodate urban educational desegregation initiatives, or solely for financial reasons (Carter, 1993; Klingele, 1985). According to Alexander, et al, 1968, as referenced by Klingele (1985), "the middle school was established for the purpose of eliminating overcrowding in available facilities in 58 percent of cases [and] seven percent of middle schools were founded for the purpose of desegregation [therefore making them] educationally unjustifiable" (p. 335). While George (2000) and Klingele (1995) allude to the notion that the shift from junior high schools to middle schools resulted from philosophical and superficial phenomena, others contend that it is a viable system, whose contemporary survival is justifiable on the basis of its merits.

As noted by George (1988), middle schools emphasize a child's "social, psychological, and academic needs" (p. 660). To that end, Handley (1982) also emphasizes the fact that philosophically, middle schools "have the elementary schools' traditional concern for the *whole child* [and secondary characteristics that] stress on scholarship and intellectual development [combined to create a school] especially adapted to the needs of pre and early adolescent pupils" (p. 13). Handley also notes that the middle school's primary motivation is to "focus on the needs of the 11-14-year-olds and become a school for growing up [with emphasis on] school guidance" (p. 14). To successfully fulfill the middle school's mission of whole-child development, middle schools are traditionally organized in houses of small learning communities. As noted by Erb (2006), "interdisciplinary teams have been a part of the middle school concept for at least 40 years" (p. 6); and when they are implemented correctly, they positively affect adolescent learners. Erb (2006) notes that grade-level organizations are inconsequential to middle schools; rather, the important factor is "how people communicate, make decisions, deliver instruction, relate to students, and coordinate their work" (p. 6). Furthermore, effective middle schools ensure student success by realizing that "the education and health of young adolescents are inextricably linked" (Elovitz, 2007, p. 28). For middle schools to function properly, stakeholders must be committed to their work and the developmental needs of the children they serve (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005; Erb, 2006, p. 8; Elovitz, 2007), as well as their academic and instructional needs (Elovitz, 2007; Erb, 2006; Girod, Pardales, Cavanaugh, & Wadsworth, 2005). Erb (2006) adamantly asserts that middle schools are effective in meeting adolescent needs, but only if implemented fully with complete buy-in from stakeholders and without initiative

incriminations: “superficial understanding of elements of successful middle schools and of reform principles and failing to cultivate the involvement of people who will carry out the [mission] can lead to disappointing outcomes” (p. 8).

2.4.3 Middle schools, continued—contemporary critique and possible alternatives

Few can dispute the prevalence of middle schools and their accompanying grade-level organizational plans in contemporary America, yet many are critical of the construct—citing shortcomings and deficiencies worthy of investigation and criticism. Some educational practitioners and researchers claim that middle schools are a catalyst for decreased/lower scholastic achievement (Barton & Klump, 2012; Bedard & Do, 2005; Coladarci & Hancock, 2002; Holas & Huston, 2011), while others believe they yield no positive gains for learners, hence justifying wholesale reversions back to organizational plans supportive of K-8 elementary schools and/or junior high schools (Handley, 1982; George, 1988; Klingele, 1985; Rockoff & Lockwood, 2010). Coladarci and Hancock (2002) assert, “the segregation of adolescents in middle-grade schools does not necessarily translate into higher achievement” (p. 191). More so, Rockoff and Lockwood (2010) contend that operating either middle and/or junior high schools are not cost-effective given their outcomes: “[there is] little evidence that placing public school students into middle schools during adolescence is cost-effective” (p. 1051). Regardless of one’s position on middle-level educational programs and structures, it is clear that a vibrant debate exists on feasibility and validity of middle schools.

As noted above, some allege that middle schools may result in decreased academic achievement, therefore posing potentially harmful consequences for those who attend them (Bedard & Do, 2005; Coladarci & Hancock, 2002; Holas & Huston, 2011). An explanation for this phenomenon, as posited by Eccles, et al (1993) is as follows: “[there exists a] mismatch between middle school classrooms and the developmental needs of early adolescents” (Holas & Huston, 2011, p. 334). Moreover, research related to this proposition asserts, “middle schools...appear to lead students to feel less engaged with school” (Holas & Huston, 2011, p. 344). Very simply, both statements imply that middle schools—a philosophical construct built on accommodation of adolescent needs—are not fulfilling their mission of responsibly educating young teens to the extent they promised. Though Holas and Huston (2011) explicitly state, “middle schools are not inherently harmful” (p. 344), there are others who believe differently. Bedard and Do (2005) point out “that the movement [from a junior high school system] to a middle school system is associated with a one to three percent fall in the on-time high school completion rate [hence serving conducive to] negative economic implications” (p. 661), including incarceration and unemployment. Bedard and Do (2005) believe that some students may benefit from middle schools, but “it is also possible that [children who attend middle schools] are also hurt” (p. 681). As one might suspect, findings such as those noted above may cause some alarm among stakeholders.

There are many supporters of the middle-school concept, including Erb (2006) who asserts, “there is no evidence that middle schools are failing” (p. 4). However, there are many others who denounce it for various reasons. For instance, Alspaugh (2012) contends, “students attending middle schools experience a greater achievement loss in the

transition to high school than did the students making the transition from a K-8 elementary schools” (p. 24). Furthermore, “students placed in relatively small cohorts groups for long spans of time tend to experience more desirable educational outcomes” (Alspaugh, 2012, p. 25), hence justification of the grades K-8 and grades 9-12 (or 8-4) school organizational structure and a subsequent reform movement directly related to this construct (Alspaugh, 2012; Jacob & Rockoff, 2011; Look, n.d.; Renchler, 2012; Rockoff & Lockwood, 2010; Smydo, 2006). Concurrent to momentum for the renaissance of K-8 elementary schools is a push for establishment of autonomous learning environments for ninth graders—a grade level long associated with junior-high-level education (Allen, 1980; Barton & Klump, 2012; DeJong & Craig, 2002; Dove, et al, 2010; Handley, 1982; George, 1988; Styron & Peasant, 2010)—and now a grade more commonly associated with (senior) high schools: ninth grade or freshmen academies (Allen, 1980; Chmelynski, 2003; Cooper, 2011; Ellerbrock, 2011; Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010; McIntosh & White, 2006; Neild, Stoner-Eby, & Furstenberg, 2008; Styron & Peasant, 2010). These grade-specific, highly specialized learning environments are becoming increasingly common. Beyond their presumable impacts on ninth-grade learners, they also serve conducive to alterations in system-wide organizational structures by influencing middle-level transitional programming (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005; Fulk, 2003; Nelson, et al, 2007; Neild, 2009; Neild, et al, 2008) and de facto resurrection of once prevalent grades 10-12 senior high schools (DeJong & Craig, 2003; Dove, et al, 2010; Handley, 1982; Wright, 2006). Ironically, amid the rise of freshmen academies, DeJong and Craig (2002) declare that “the debate is over: most school districts have chosen to include the ninth grade in the high school rather than the junior high school” (p. 3).

Clearly the debate is far from over, if contemporary theorists alongside droves of public school districts are advocating for changes akin to ninth grade. Albeit largely marginalized over several decades and exceedingly rare, grades 7-9 junior high schools still exist and account for four percent of school organizational structures found today in the United States (Elovitz, 2007). Given the fact that public K-8 elementary schools—the most prominent school structures at the dawn of the 20th century—are currently coming back from near oblivion, one cannot discount junior high schools. Therefore, junior high schools, and the organizational structures that commonly accompany them, are worthy of attention, too. The following examines the schools and grade-level configurations noted throughout the former as alternatives for grades 5/6-8 middle schools.

2.4.4 K-8 elementary schools: The 8-4 organizational plan

Over the past decade, many school districts have altered their grade-level organizational plans to include K-8 elementary schools, often at the expense of existing middle and/or junior high schools (Alspaugh, 2010; Barton & Klump, 2012; DeJong & Craig, 2002; Dove, et al, 2010; Elovitz, 2007; Erb, 2006; Jacob & Rockoff, 2011; Look, n.d; Renchler, 2000; Rockoff & Lockwood, 2010). The resurgence of the K-8 schools, sometimes referred to by the moniker *elemiddles* (Dove, et al, 2010), has largely been the result of dissatisfaction with student performance, school climate, and problems that allegedly manifest from grade-level transitions between buildings (Alspaugh, 2010; Dove, et al, 2010; Eccles, 1999; Elovitz, 2007; Rockoff & Lockwood, 2010). According to Eccles

(1999), “transition from elementary school...can cause problems in young people; [for] when adolescents are in settings...that are not attuned to their needs...they can lose confidence in themselves and slip into negative behavior patterns such as truancy and school dropout” (p. 30). Dove, et al (2010) believes the rise of elemiddles was also born of necessity, especially among urban school district that struggle to succeed amid the achievement provisions of No Child Left Behind (N.C.L.B.); foundationally, urban school districts—notably Philadelphia and Pittsburgh (Dove, 2010; Smydo, 2006)—have adopted K-8 schools (Dove, 2010; Smydo, 2006). The reason for this is quite practical. According to Dove (2010) in reference to adolescents educated in K-8 elementary schools, “research has demonstrated an improved rate of student performance on standardized tests” (p. 278). Given the disproportional pressures applied to urban school systems by N.C.L.B. and the inherent urgency of educating all learners regardless of their backgrounds and/or conditions, it is no wonder that urban school systems like the School District of Philadelphia and the Pittsburgh Public Schools, the first and second largest school districts in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, have largely supplanted middle schools with K-8 elemiddles (Smydo, 2006). As noted by Alspaugh (2010) Dove, et al (2010), and Smydo (2006), empirical evidence proves that students in grades 6-8 housed in K-8 structures outperform their counterparts at middle schools, but why? Perhaps the answer is a bit ironic, for it is founded on elementary principles and attention to the whole child—hallmarks of the middle school concept (Handley, 1982).

Hough (2003, as cited by Elovitz, 2007), believes the superiority of elemiddles is a function of environments and staffs that are inherently more nurturing and, therefore,

devoid of secondary-level-trained teachers and other elements related to that construct—the same ones many blame for the demise of middle schools:

elemiddles are supported by many [public school] districts because they are more nurturing and child-centered, are staffed by elementary or middle certified teachers who are perceived to be more committed than their secondary peers, have higher levels of parent involvement, are usually smaller in size, and eliminate one school transition (p. 29).

Along these lines, Klingele (1985) noted that upon inception of junior high schools, elementary-level practitioners rejected the inclusion of seventh and eighth graders within secondary environments: “it is argued that elementary educators were correct in their concern for taking [adolescent-age] youngsters from the elementary school and placing them into a predominantly high-school program” (p. 334). Klingele (1985) also points out that the middle school movement was partially meant to restore a more elementary-like scheme to the educational environments of seventh and eighth graders; however, much of these reversions were never fully realized; for these “[innovations were] largely confined to organizational changes and rhetoric” (p. 335). This translates to the following: middle schools operated as secondary schools for a younger clientele—a superficial change at best. Whereas middle schools have failed to capitalize on their own tenets, grades K-8 schools, as noted by David Hough (2005) in Elovitz (2007), “are the [schools] buying into [the middle school concept] most fully...and that’s why their test scores are high, their attendance rates improved, and discipline referrals reduced...bona fide elemiddle schools adhere to the middle-level philosophy to a greater degree than any other school type” (p. 29). It appears that K-8 schools embody middle school philosophy better than middle schools, hence a plausible explanation for higher student achievement alongside other benefits. “The Philadelphia Education Fund said research as late as 2004

confirmed that K-8 schools...outperform middle schools and that K-8 schools had stronger student-teacher bonds, less faculty turnover, and fewer discipline problems than middle schools” (Smydo, 2006, p. 4). Despite these benefits, there are those critical of K-8 or elemiddle schools.

Though Hough (2005) provides accolades for K-8 elemiddle schools, he is also quick to point out that they too are prone to secondary-level influences—the same ones responsible for the downfall of junior high schools and present-day misgivings about middle schools. Hough (2005), as cited in Elovitz (2007), denotes the reality that “just as a grades 6-8 school may be a middle school in name, adding [grades six, seven, and eight to an elementary school does not automatically make an elemiddle” (p. 29). This implies that some K-8 elementary schools do not adhere to the middle school concept, therefore posing potential risks to students. Elovitz attributes this to both the prevalent shortcomings of junior high schools and “elementary [philosophies that do not provide adequate preparation in] higher level math, science, and world language” (p. 29). Erb (2006), an ardent supporter of middle schools and critic of the K-8 movement, believes K-8 schools are indicative of a “panacea for what ails some school districts” and that K-8 schools—as opposed to middle schools—can rob students “of resources and curriculum” (p. 10). Look (n.d.) also notes that K-8 schools can cause “inequities associated with resource allocations...such as professional development and capital expenditures (p. 4). Erb (2006) further asserts via citation of Lounsbury and Clark (1990) that eighth graders “have more positive educational experiences in 6-8 settings” (p. 10), as opposed to those housed in K-8 structures. Other drawbacks, as evidenced from K-8 school implementation in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Baltimore, Maryland are as follows:

decreased funding on the basis of funding protocols that systematically allocate fewer subsidies to elementary schools (Look, n.d.); fewer faculty members who are specialized in core subject content (Bowie, 2007; Erb 2006); and an alleged tendency that K-8 practitioners may ignore the developmental needs of adolescents—namely students in grades 6, 7, and 8—by lumping them together with younger, pre-pubescent children (Bowie, 2007). Despite these claims, the momentum for K-8 or elemiddle schools is highly apparent in contemporary America. Whether or not elemiddle schools supplant middle-level programs much like middle schools replaced junior high schools in the latter decades of the 20th century is to be determined.

2.4.5 Ninth grade or freshmen academies

As indicated in the previous subsections, proponents of middle schools and K-8 or elemiddle schools tend to believe that their respective models best accommodate the needs of adolescent age learners. Implicit with these perceptions are notions that one concept (or type of school) is superior to the other in preparing students for matriculation of coursework in 9-12 high schools, despite the fact that there is “limited evidence regarding grade-span configuration effects on academic achievement and other outcomes” (Coladarci & Hancock, 2002, p. 189). Moreover, as noted by Isakson and Jarvis (1998), “although much research exists regarding the transition into [intermediate or lower-secondary-level schools], surprisingly few studies have focused on the move into high school” (p. 1). Does this mean that hypotheses related to the benefits and utilities of given grade-level plans are inherently suspect, especially with regard to high-

school transition? Perhaps this is the case, yet that has not stopped stakeholders from diagnosing problems related to shortcomings of pre-high-school programs—alleging that junior high schools, middle schools, and K-8 elementary schools fall short of adequately preparing students for high school (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005; Coladarci & Hancock, 2002; Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010; Holas & Huston, 2011; Jacob & Rockoff, 2011; McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010; McIntosh & White, 2006; Neild, 2009; Neild, et al, 2008; Styron & Peasant, 2010). According to Cooper (2011), “more students fail ninth grade than any other grade...[therefore resulting] in what is called the ninth grade bulge” (p. 26), which is the result of course failures leading to grade-level retentions, hence an comparably larger ninth-grade class in comparison to grades 10, 11, and 12. This, too, can be attributable to increased high-school dropout rates (Chmelynski, 2003; Cooper, 2011; Styron & Peasant, 2010).

Students who transition from eighth grade to traditional grades 9-12 high schools often fall through the cracks—the victims of programs that fail to address their needs. According to Styron and Peasant (2010), “countless ninth grade students struggle with the transition...to high school because of higher expectations from teachers, additional homework, and the freedom of selecting the most appropriate classes and activities to prepare them for life after high school” (p. 3). Moreover, according to research by middle school and de facto ninth-grade experts Lounsbury and Johnston (1985), there exists “a disturbing discrepancy between school policies and practices and the developmental needs of 14-year-old students” (Styron & Peasant, 2010, p. 2). This, coupled with tracking, ability grouping, inflexible scheduling, and inadequate guidance services impedes ninth graders’ academic and social development, nevertheless making

them more vulnerable to lower academic performance and other adversities (Styron & Peasant, 2010).

Solutions to the problems associated with transitions to high school rest not in pre-high-school learning environments, but in the programming housed within the 9-12 high-school structure. According to Chmelynski (2003), “because ninth grade is such a tough year for many students, some districts have created special academies or other programs to provide special attention to students in the first year of high school” (p. 48). Butts and Cruziero (2005) assert, “a full transition program is needed to address the areas necessary for new ninth-grade students to be successful in the transition to high school...with complete support” (p. 74), hence the rationale and inception of small learning communities focused exclusively on ninth grade students—ninth grade or freshmen academies.

Freshmen academies are autonomous learning centers either housed within existing 9-12 structures or in distinct locations separate from the main high school campus, intended to provide ninth graders with transitional programming befitting of their needs as they transition to high school, therefore offsetting problems and elevating academic and social success (Chmelynski, 2003; Cooper, 2011; Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010; McIntosh & White, 2006; Styron & Peasant, 2010). More formally, Cooper (2011) defines them as “a school within a school that connects students with peers, teachers, and community partners in a place that nurtures academic success and improved mental and emotional health” (p. 27). This begs the question: what are the defining features of freshmen academies? The answers, much like those justifying K-8 schools, are often reminiscent of constructs related to the middle school concept.

At the heart of freshmen academies are school communities that care about their students (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010; McIntosh & White, 2006). McIntosh and White (2006) coin this aspect of freshmen academies “a *caring environment*: a school home environment that promotes ownership, care, connection, and accountability that will translate into improved student learning, academic success, attendance, and connection to the institution” (p. 43). Furthermore, McIntosh and White (2006) emphasize the importance of the physical environment inclusive of wide, bright hallways adorned with student work and “classrooms [that] have folding walls so that teachers can co-teach, team-teach, and do project-based learning” (p. 43). To meet the developmental needs of ninth graders, McIntosh and White (2006) and Ellerbrock and Kieffer (2010) emphasize the importance of interdisciplinary teaming built upon the small learning communities or—in middle-school terms—*houses*. As stated by Ellerbrock and Kieffer (2010), ninth-grade houses are beneficial, for the increase “personalization, belongingness, connectedness, and care...personalizing the learning environment around students’ developmental needs in an effort to help students gain the skills necessary to transition into the [remaining, 10-12] high school” (p. 395).

Freshmen academies are intended to provide ninth graders with a developmentally responsive environment. According to Ellerbrock (2012) with reference to a report by the U.S. Department of Education (2001) on ninth-grade learning centers, developmentally responsive education is accomplished via “interdisciplinary teams with common planning, proximity of team classrooms, developmentally appropriate curriculum and teaching strategies, ninth-grade-only support personnel, academic and support services, eighth-to-ninth grade transition programs, and freshman transition

courses” (p. 35). Theoretically, freshmen academies provide ninth graders with a support system conducive to successful transition to high school. The literature indicates that the crux of freshmen academies are their highly specialized, interdisciplinary-team orientated, house organized learning structure that are devoted to the development of the whole child via attention to their age-specific and/or adolescent needs. As noted in previous sections by many sources, including Butts and Cruzeiro (2005), Erb (2006), George (1988), Handley (1982), Nelson, et al, (2007), these account for the most fundamental tenets of middle schools—perhaps an indication of the middle school’s philosophical potential beyond its core grade levels of five, six, seven, and eight. Such as, Erb (2006) asserts, “evidential research...supports the middle school concept as a powerful means to improve student behavior and achievement when it is implemented [correctly and without fidelity]” (p. 10). Accordingly, Erb (2006) posits that highly specialized smaller learning environments, as well K-8, 6-8, and 7-12 organizational structures that house adolescents, can be greatly enhanced by the tenets of the middle school concept. Reference to smaller learning communities and adolescents alludes to the importance of the middle-school tenets applied at all learning levels, including freshmen academies.

Though data related to the effectiveness of freshmen academies is limited in scope, there are some indications that they may benefit ninth graders. Styron and Peasant (2010) conducted a study that assessed standardized test results for ninth graders housed at six different schools in Mississippi. All participants were ninth graders housed in predominantly African-American schools. Roughly half of the subjects were educated in autonomous freshmen academies; the other half were enrolled in traditional four-year,

grades 9-12 high schools. Based on results from the Mississippi's standardized Subject Area Tests (S.A.T.) for Algebra 1 and Biology 1, Styron and Peasant (2010) found that "students enrolled in ninth grade academies outperform students in traditional high schools in Algebra 1 by more than 15 points...[and] 25 points in Biology 1" (p. 7). Though their research indicates a positive correlation between freshmen academies and student performance, they failed to assess other important factors, including attendance, discipline, and longitudinal effects on graduation rates. Ellerbrock (2012) also suggests attributes related to ninth grade academies via citation of her own qualitative research related to that topic in conjunction with the infusion of interdisciplinary teaming and other middle-school constructs within the ninth-grade learning environment. Based on her observations, Ellerbrock (2012) concludes that freshmen academies that incorporate interdisciplinary team frameworks supportive of other middle-school constructs, serve conducive to "a family-like...environment [essential to] meeting students' basic and developmental needs throughout the secondary experience and beyond" (p. 60). Ellerbrock and Kieffer (2010) cite qualitative findings that essentially assert the same thing: "freshmen small learning [communities] serve as a primary vehicles to the establishment of caring relationships that help promote a community of care for ninth-grade students" (p. 403). Again, the recurring theme of middle-level-inspired educational practices is noted here. Despite growing interest in autonomous learning centers for ninth graders, much like the grades K-8 elementary schools noted in the previous section, the effectiveness of freshmen academies is to be determined and worthy of more investigation.

2.4.6 Junior high schools: 6-3-3 and other junior-high orientated models

It may be hard to believe, but there was an era in the not-so-distant past when most students educated in the United States did not commonly matriculate (senior) high school until tenth grade. This was an era largely defined by prominence of the grades 7-9 junior high school and the accompanying 6-3-3 organizational plan (Allen, 1980; Barton & Klump, 2012; Bedard & Do, 2005; DeJong & Craig, 2002; George, 2000; Handley, 1982). At its height in the 1960s, “four out of five high school graduates attended K-6 [elementary] schools, followed by a grades 7-9 junior high [schools] and a grades 10-12 high schools” (Barton & Klump, 2012, p. 1). In 1970, as noted by Heding and Myers (1970), “80 percent of [adolescents were] educated in a 6-3-3 or 6-6 organizational plan [or model]” (p. 2), which in both cases are inclusive either of autonomous structures for grades 7-9 or junior-high programs embedded within grades 7-12 schools. Today, as noted by Barton and Klump (2012) and echoed by numerous other sources—as noted in Question 1, there are less than 400 junior high schools comprised of grades 7-9. In short, the vast majority of public school districts in the United States have abandoned junior high schools alongside other variations of the concept—including grades 7-8 junior high schools and grades 7-12 junior/senior high schools, where the junior-high programs for either grades seven through eight or grades seven through nine are embedded within a contiguous learning environment for secondary-level students—grades seven through twelve (Heding & Myers, 1970; Tulsa 2011).

At the core of the junior high school’s demise was the middle school concept, a model that called for the removal of ninth grade from intermediate school environments

and infusion of upper-elementary and lower-secondary grades within a common environment (Allen, 1980; Barton & Klump, 2012; DeJong & Craig, 2002; George, 2000). This was only exacerbated by initiatives calling for the elimination of overcrowding and racial segregation that coincidentally accompanied the middle school movement (Klinge, 1985). The junior high school's demise was so profound, that DeJong and Craig (2002), actually declared the so-called "debate" over junior high schools and the placement of ninth grade within them to be over (p. 3). Yet, if individuals ponder the resurrection of the once-near defunct K-8 and 8-4 organizational models and the phenomenon that is the ninth grade/freshmen academy, they might question whether or not the debate over junior high schools is completely over. As George (2000) posed in a piece that questioned the validity and long-term vitality of middle schools, as well as the unfocused programming and commonly overcrowded conditions of grades 9-12 high schools in the new millennium, "could a new generation of junior high schools grow from some deviation in enrollment" (p. 15), amid a dysfunctional middle school system? George's (2000) response: "yes, I think it might" (p. 15).

The rise of the grades 7-9 junior high school was largely a result of stakeholders at the dawn of the 20th century responding to what they deemed inadequacies with the 8-4 school organizational plan—a model that houses grades 1-8 in elementary schools and grades 9-12 in high schools (Allen, 1980; Handley, 1982; Heding & Myers, 1970). Allen (1980) claimed that junior high schools were intended to remedy the following issues associated with the 8-4 plan: "inadequate preparation of students for high school and college and...the high rate of student drops-outs during grades 7-9" (p. 229).

Furthermore, as Allen (1980) points out, the junior high school provides ninth graders with a protective, developmentally appropriate environment that “fosters an academic context, which would provide for the earlier introduction of subject matter” (p. 229). As for seventh and eighth graders, they too can benefit from this environment via increased opportunities afforded to them via higher-level curriculum and programs supportive of their age-specific needs (Briggs, 1920; Handley, 1982; Var, 1965). General to grades seven, eight, and nine, according to Handley’s (1982) government-commissioned comparative report on junior high schools and middle schools, the junior high school has merits, inclusive of the following:

- A. [It] provides a framework that encourages transition from elementary to secondary studies.
- B. [It] provides for some needs of the preadolescent better than eight-grade elementary schools [and] more regimented high schools.
- C. There is less danger of imitating adolescents who tend to grow up too rapidly...[minimizing] trauma or trepidation.
- D. Ninth graders [in] the junior high...[they] need a year of... leadership to fulfill some of the psychological needs of adolescents.
- E. Ninth graders achieve as well or better than they do in four-year high schools.
- F. Most studies indicate that the greatest proportion of pupils are pubescent in graders seven, eight, and nine (pp. 1-6).

Given the strengths of junior high schools noted above, some may wonder why this type of school and/or the philosophy has almost entirely disappeared from the K-12 educational landscape. Others may ponder whether or not stakeholders would be receptive to their return, especially in light of contemporary educational phenomena that has impacted American public education in recent years, including a reduction in the number of middle schools coupled with the rise of freshmen academies and de facto grades 10-12 senior high schools. Also factor in research that suggests that sixth graders

underperform in middle schools as opposed to their counterparts in elementary schools (Tulsa, 2011), and one can further adduce the shortcomings of middle schools. This prompts the question: is it possible for the junior high school, a school that dominated the American education system for generations, to make a comeback? To reiterate George's (2000) response to this question: "yes, I think it might" (p. 15). Yet regardless of a school's grade-level organization and/or philosophy, Coladarci and Hancock (2002) point out that there exists little evidence to suggest that specific types of schools and/or particular grade-level plan either positively or negatively affect academic outcomes. In other words, there is little evidence and supporting literature that definitely identifies optimal learning environments and grade-level organizational plans for students. Perhaps this suggests the possibility that debates over grade-level organizational structures is just an exercise in futility and bears no relevance to scholastic performance and other definitive school outcomes. Regardless of this reality, the debate over grade-level plans and school types shall likely persist, as long as variable opinions on this topic continue to exist.

2.4.7 Key points about school organizational models, as noted by the literature

The following conveys key aspects of school organizational models, as indicated by the literature:

- School districts in the United States often identify and implement grade-level organizational plans with the intention of better accommodating adolescents.

- There is a general lack of empirical evidence that suggests that school grade-level organizational structures impact student learning and development; however, this does not prevent school districts from altering their grade-level plans in attempts to developmentally acclimatize particular cohorts of students.
- The junior high and middle school movements were founded by in large by the notion that particular grade-level groupings (e.g., 7-9, 6-8, 9-12, etc.) are best for certain grade levels and/or learners.
- In the contemporary U.S.A., middle-school orientated organizational plans, exclusively the 4-4-4 and 5-3-4 models, have dominate the American public education scene since the 1980s; yet many practitioners and theorists are starting to challenge these structures.
- The 5-3-4 or 4-4-4 grade-level plans are indicatory of school systems inclusive of middle schools and represent the organizational norm for most school systems in the U.S.A.
- Middle school purport to educate the whole child, which is a somewhat abstract construct related to comprehensive educational programming founded not only on intellectual growth but, also, meeting the emotional and social needs of learners.
- It is indisputable that the middle school is a prevalent part of American public education; however, some doubts have been cast in recent years challenging its effectiveness and utility in parameters related to accommodating adolescent needs and preparing pupils for matriculation into high school.

- In recent years, some U.S. school systems—especially urban ones—have abandoned middle-school orientated systems in favor of the 8-4 organizational model.
- 8-4 organizational models are comprised of grades K-8 elementary (or elemiddle) schools and grades 9-12 high school, and are clearly devoid of intermediate-school structures.
- Supporters of the 8-4 organizational plan believe that K-8 elementary schools more effectively educate the whole child, therefore improving their academic performance, emotional stability, and sociability, alongside better preparing them for future endeavors—including matriculation to high school.
- Ninth grade or freshmen academies have in recent years become increasingly popular as a supplemental component of grades 9-12 high-school program.
- Whether freshmen academies are housed within their respective grades 9-12 structure or autonomous from them, they are intended to assist ninth graders with transitioning to secondary schools by means of what is termed caring environments: programs similar to that of theoretical middle schools, with attention to the whole child, interdisciplinary teaming, development responsiveness, etc.
- There is little evidence that supports the effectiveness of freshmen academies in assisting adolescents in transitioning to high school, therefore connoting a need for more research related to this topic.
- The 6-3-3 organizational plan, which is indicative of grades 7-9 junior high schools, was prevalent in the U.S. from the 1920s through the 1970s, yet rapidly

declined in popularity in the latter 20th century in favor of middle-school orientated models.

- Much like middle schools, junior high schools purported to support adolescent learning by means of curricula and programs befitting of young teenagers, which included advanced academic subjects elective course offerings, and guidance services.
- Advocates of the junior high school movement argued that K-8 elementary schools inadequately prepared students for high school and college, the basic curriculum of elementary schools stifle intellectual curiosities among seventh and eighth graders, and it is beneficial to ninth graders on the premise that it provides them with a year of leadership that supports their emotional and social needs.
- Though few theorists argue in favor of junior high schools today, that does not imply that the concept is devoid of interest and/or potential resurrection—much like that of K-8 elementary schools and to a lesser extend grades 7-12 junior/senior high schools of the modern era.

2.5 RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS AND INSPIRATIONS DRAWN FROM THE LITERATURE

2.5.1 Implications for additional research on ninth grade education

The shift away from junior high schools to middle schools was prompted by assumptions “that students [would] receive a better education and develop more positive attitudes in the middle school than in the junior high school” (Wood, 1973, p. 355). Based on Wood’s (1973) research, he concludes that grades 6-8 middle schools had no tangible advantages over grades 7-9 junior high schools; and, based on these findings, he posited, “middle school may be another fad based upon assumptions which cannot be substantiated” (p. 360). This is complemented by Bedard and Do’s (2005) findings that correlatively suggest the following: school systems that shift from grades 7-9 junior high schools to grades 6-8 middle schools actually “decreases on-time high school completion by approximately one to three percent” (p. 660). Perhaps this explains to some extent the renewed interest in K-8 schools; the development of ninth-grade-only learning centers; and to a lesser extent, renewed interest in junior-high programs embedded within grades 7-12 junior/senior high schools (Tulsa, 2011).

As K-12 school systems aspire to best accommodate the needs of adolescents, it is imperative they take into consideration all details pertinent to their education. These include environmental, pedagogical, psychological, and sociological factors applied in tandem with consideration for the school’s grade-level organizational plans. Though the grades 7-9 junior high have largely faded away, their revival in contemporary American is by no means inconceivable. Like K-8 elementary schools and other educational constructs that have fallen out of favor in previous eras, 7-9 junior high schools may too persevere beyond oblivion and resurface as a viable option for meeting the needs of adolescent learners, including and especially ninth graders. A subsequent inquiry related to this idea has been inspired by this comprehensive review of literature, hence the

catalyst for more personal research on this topic in pursuit of answers to the following questions: In terms of environmental, pedagogical, psychological, sociological factors, is it appropriate to educate ninth graders in four-year (grades 9-12) high schools? Also with regard to those factors, are grades 7-9 junior high schools viable for meeting the needs of ninth graders in comparison to other school models/philosophies? Is it possible for one organizational construct to be superior to the other? Answers to these questions provide objective, unbiased insights as to the feasibility and utility of particular grade-level configurations for educating ninth-grade students, namely grades 9-12 high schools and grades 7-9 junior high schools.

2.5.2 How life and literature has inspired the researcher

I have been interested in discourse related to ninth-grade education since literally when I was a secondary-level student in the late 1980s and early 1990s. At that time, the public school district I attended was embarking on a plan to modify its intermediate school programs by eliminating its junior high school and replacing it with a middle school. Perhaps my father, who was a building-level principal in a neighboring school district with strong sentiments on this topic, exacerbated this curiosity. He was adamant in his position that the shift from junior high schools to middle schools was a bad idea, particularly for ninth graders who he believed were better instructed in junior-high orientated learning environments. As I perceived it, the middle school did nothing more than baby students—gone were credit requirements based on Carnegie Units, comprehensive midterm and final examinations, and the clang of loud electric class-

exchange bells and in their place in addition to the elimination of midterms and finals were exploratory courses, activity periods, recess, and soft bell tones played over the public address system. I actually found it insulting that the standards had seemingly been lowered for students, but I suppose my juvenile sensibilities may have been misguided and uninformed at that time in my life; after all, what did I know about ninth-grade education? I was only a student and a teenager, at that.

As years progressed beyond high school and college graduations and I found myself in my first year of teaching at an urban grades 9-12 high school, I realized that my interest in ninth-grade education was hardly fleeting. As a secondary-level teacher, I realized that there were, as I perceived it, two types of teachers in 9-12 high schools: those who liked teaching ninth graders and those who did not. Despite this dichotomy, there seemed to be a consensus among those I associated with on both sides of the issue—ninth graders are generally unready for high school and middle schools do not sufficiently prepare incoming high-school freshmen. More tenured colleagues with experience in the defunct (since the mid-1970s) grades 7-9 junior high schools of that system often spoke fondly of those schools—especially when it came to ninth grade. These discussions only rekindled my passion and inspired me to read literature on the topic. The only problem was that few educational journals and publications at that time addressed topics related to ninth grade and grade-level plans. If anything, it appeared that conversations on intermediate and secondary-level education germane to grade-level configurations and grade nine were mute. This became a source of frustration for me. Ninth grade is a pivotal year; for in most instances, it signifies the beginning of cumulative student grade/quality point averages and starting point of the all-important

four-year transcript. How can the literature ignore such an important subject? Thankfully as the 2000s progressed, more literature apposite of ninth-grade education manifested, hence implying heightened colloquy on the topic and making my comprehensive review of the literature possible to the scope that I had intended.

The literature I read and analyzed transcended a multitude of themes, ranging from the history of secondary education in the United States, to popular theories on adolescent development, through historically and contemporarily common grade-level organizational models employed by school systems to accommodate student learning. Pertinent to ninth graders, much of the literature focuses on the contemporary momentum of K-8 elementary schools in lieu of middle schools and the inception of freshmen academies as an answer to the transitional ills that allegedly plague ninth-grade learners at four-year high schools. Authors of these works appear to be passionate about ninth-grade education and deciphering what works best for freshmen in terms of their emotional, scholastic, and social development. This literature review validates my perception that ninth-grade education is complex and riddled with caveats, namely those that prescribe theories for the masses without taking into account individual learners. In other words, what works for one student may not work for others; and hypotheses that seemingly apply to one or a particular cohort of people may not be generalizable to others. Initially upon embarking on the review of literature, I realized that analyzing and synthesizing information was important for enhancement of my knowledge base on adolescence, secondary education, and ultimately ninth grade; however, it would not fully fulfill my curiosity. As an educational leader, practitioner, and scholar, I learn by conversing and interacting with others, so as to delving deeper into subject matter and

better comprehending it. As stated by B. A. Ferko, a graduate-level instructor of school leadership and long-time superintendent of schools, “educational leaders must be willing to take on the roles of anthropologists and historians to better understand the context they have entered” (class lecture, August 28, 2010). This equates to one being agreeable with discussion and exploration of educational phenomena in order to better understand it. Ferko’s viewpoint in tandem with the literature I examined heavily influenced my decision to develop a research methodology founded on a modified case-study approach. It shall garner data from semi-structured interviews, artifact/document reviews, and direct observations—thus catalysts for discussions and fact finding founded on anthropological and historical principles and a means for finding answers to my study questions.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This chapter features the methodology of this dissertation. The study employed a modified case study research design that was focused and limited in scope with a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis. The following sections include an introduction to the problem statement, the study questions, and extensive information on the instruments used and manner by which data was analyzed.

3.1 RATIONALE FOR CASES

The review of the literature presented in the previous chapter examined the history of secondary education in the United States, the special developmental and educational needs of adolescent-age children, and the measures contemporary school systems are taking to address those needs via alterations of their grade-level organizational plans and corresponding philosophies. School systems sometimes modify their grade-level organizational plans in hopes of better accommodating students—often with attention to particular grade levels and/or grade-level clusters housed within schools (Barton & Klump, 2012; Dove, Hooper, & Pearson, 2010). For over a century, American school systems have struggled to determine what can be considered ideal organizational plans for adolescent learners (Bedard & Do, 2005; Dhuey, 2012; Dove, Hooper, & Pearson,

2010). This strife often extends to ninth grade (Barton & Klump, 2012; Nield, 2009; Styron & Peasant, 2010). From inception of grades 7-9 junior high schools in the early 20th century (Briggs, 1920) through the more contemporary incarnation of autonomous freshmen academies to offset arguable shortcomings of now predominant grades 9-12 high schools (Barton & Klump, 2012; Ellerbrock, 2012; Ellerbrock & Kieffer, 2010; Seller, 2004), stakeholders and students have encountered their share of reform initiatives related to school organizational structures that either deliberately or inadvertently affect ninth graders. Perhaps this is indicative of difficulties associated with ninth-grade education. It may also be a byproduct of heightened school accountability in the modern age, compounded with genuine compassion for young learners. Regardless of the reasons, sparse empirical data hamper efforts to identify and implement organizational structures optimal to particular learners (Renchler, 2000). Clearly more empirical data is needed in order to better inform policy and practice as it relates adolescent-level education—inclusive of grade nine—and the effects particular grade-level organizational plans have on learners.

As indicated by Coladarci and Hancock (2002), there is little evidence to support the notion that grade-level organizational plans affect student outcomes; however, school systems frequently alter their configurations with aspirations for enhancing student performance (Barton & Klump, 2012; Bedard & Do, 2005; Dhuey, 2012; Dove, Hooper, & Pearson, 2010). Ninth graders are often at the focal point of this discussion (Barton & Klump, 2012; Nield, 2009; Styron & Peasant, 2010). If stakeholders have a better understanding of the merits and weaknesses of grade-level organizational plans in relationship with grade nine, than they can make informed decisions about policies and

practices for students at that grade level. Beyond this, these perceptions can inform future research on this topic. It is with this gap in discourse that I find the rationale for this study. The next section highlights the specific questions I aim to answer through this modified case study.

3.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As a reminder for the reader, this case explored stakeholders' perceptions through the exploration of the following research questions:

1. What do principals, guidance counselors, and teachers believe are the developmental needs of ninth-grade students?
2. How do principals, guidance counselors, and teachers in their specific professional roles address the developmental needs of ninth-grade students?
3. How do principals, guidance counselors, and teachers perceive the effectiveness of their respective schools' grade-level configuration on ninth-grade education?

3.3 STUDY DESIGN

This modified case study commenced with an introduction that “defined the problem to be examined and explains the parameters or limitations of the situation” (Millar, 1999, p. 12). For this research, the problem space is denoted as the perceived effects of grade-

level organizational structures on the development of ninth-grade learners; therefore the introduction reflects this. The individual cases sites—detailed in *Chapter 4*—are introduced to readers via overviews, termed in this dissertation as site profiles. An “overview provides a scenario of the situation and offers more detail about the various players in the scenario, including the organization, its employees, or other people involved with the issue in question. It may also mention professional, technical, or theoretical issues that arise from the situation” (Millar, 1999, p. 10). Each case site profile exemplifies the issues encountered by various school practitioners—principals, guidance counselors, and grade-nine teachers—as they relate to the utility of their respective schools’ grade-level organizational structure for educating ninth graders, as well as key attributes of both schools’ cultures and physical structures.

Information synthesized from this modified case study provides readers with rich personal and contextual data as to what principals, guidance counselors, and teachers believe to be relevant to the development of ninth-grade students with regard to their school’s organizational structures. This, coupled with the notion that perceptions are likely founded upon personal beliefs and philosophies forged by experiences, provide justification for a multiple-site modified case study approached from a qualitative perspective. Qualitative analysis is defined as “the non-numeric examination and interpretation of observations for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships” (Babbie, 2013, p. 390). It is highly appropriate for examining phenomena that can be construed as subjective—based on personal conjectures of situations and/or surroundings developed through experiences and situated within their senses (Merriam, 2009; Stake 2008; Yin, 2009).

Educational practitioners forge perceptions of their surroundings based upon their experiences; yet how individuals describe and/or interpret their surroundings often varies from person to person (Bernhardt, 2004). This notion can be applied to personnel within schools. How they perceive phenomena is influenced by their functions within schools, as well as their awareness and experience (Bernhardt, 2004). Even more, as noted by Bernhardt (2004), cognitive dissonance can also affect perceptions. Defined, cognitive dissonance “is the discomfort one feels when holding two thoughts, opinions, or ideas that are inconsistent” (p. 55). These conflicting viewpoints can undermine educational programs and compromise the intended purpose of school organizational structures, assuming these actually exist (Bernhardt, 2004). Assessing, evaluating, and basing informed decisions upon perceptual data from educational personnel critical for maintaining effective schools (Bernhardt, 2004). Though it appears that perceptual studies are common, especially in the realms of qualitative and survey research (Babbie, 2013; Mertens, 2010), the fact remains that little empirical data exists relevant to the effects of organizational structures on learners and their utility (Coladarci & Hancock, 2002; Renchler, 2000). This is ironic, given the fact that historically American school systems often alter their organizational plans to meet the needs of learners (Barton & Klump, 2012; Bedard & Do, 2005; Dhuey, 2012; Dove, Hooper, & Pearson, 2010). This implies a lack of data related to the perceptions of educational professionals within those domains.

This study allotted selected school stakeholders—in this case, principals, guidance counselors, and teachers—opportunities to express their individual perspectives based on their experiences (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2009). Since participants were drawn from different

schools with different grade-level organizations (i.e., grades 9-12 high schools and grades 7-9 junior high schools). Mertens (2010) conveys that a case study research design “is an approach in which several cases are selected to study because of a desire to understand the phenomenon in a broader context” (p. 342). This approach enables researchers a means for better comprehending the broader field as it applies to specific cases and to provide a legitimate basis for formulating theories on the basis of evidence (Mertens, 2010; Stake, 2006). For this study, the researcher intends to juxtapose and examine the perceptions of school stakeholders of various ranks in relationship to the impact school organizational structures have on students in ninth grade—particularly in meeting their developmental needs. The qualitative data can underscore the most pressing issues for ninth graders as they relate to their educational experiences. It can also identify the perceivable affects and utility of various grade-level organizational structures on these students. This information constitutes empirical data that can be used by policymakers in pursuit of the best educational programming for ninth-grade students.

This modified case study, as with most qualitatively orientated research, revealed patterns and themes as they related to study participants’ perceptions of experiences within respective domains (Babbie, 2013; Stake, 2006). Lofland (2006, as cited in Babbie, 2013) indicates that these patterns and themes allow researchers to decipher frequencies, magnitudes, structures, processes, possible causes, and consequences associated with phenomena. Outlying patterns and themes may also be revealed and can be equally pertinent to the problem space; therefore, they too should be analyzed (Stake, 2006). Data from this study may enlighten the reader as to the experiences of ninth graders and the utility of certain grade-level organizational structures for educating these

students from the perspectives of practitioners. The empirical data may also assist policymakers and practitioners in making sound decisions on behalf of ninth-grade learners, provided they understand that case-study contexts may not always be applicable to all realms. Mertens (2010) and Stake (2006) indicate that data yielded from case studies are not always applicable to all situations; therefore, they are not necessarily generalizable to all contexts. Mertens (2010) notes that in relationship to qualitative studies to include case studies, “the researcher emphasizes the total context in which the research takes place to enable readers to make judgments as to the transferability of the study’s results to their own situations [or populations]” (p. 4). The contexts for each case noted in this study are not inherently transferable to all domains; however, their implications can be used to inform school stakeholders prior to enacting initiatives that impact ninth graders and other facets of school systems as they relate to grade-level organizational structures.

3.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Perceptions represent an integral feature of this modified case study at multiple sites. For Bernhardt (2004), the concept of perception is central to the notion that all individuals harbor a capacity to observe phenomena and to formulate opinions upon experiences. These interactions with environments constitute a means for making judgments and forming convictions on the basis of what one construes as the truth (Bernhardt, 2004). Bernhardt (2004) asserts that “all [individuals] have perceptions of the way the world

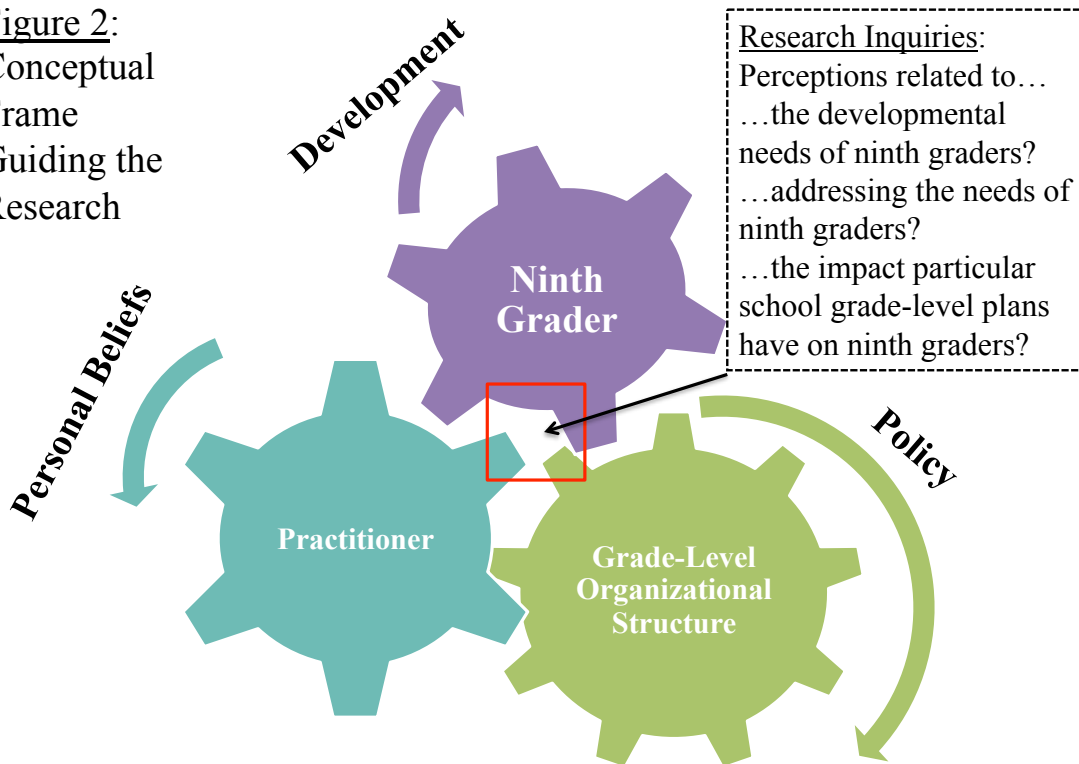
operates” (p. 54); and for organizations—including schools—to reach their highest potential, they must “know the perceptions of the people who make up the organization” (p. 54). To further complicate matters, perceptions are dynamic: “awareness and experience can lead to basic shifts in opinions...attitudes, and beliefs (Bernhardt, 2004, p. 55). In other words, the cohesiveness and strength of organizational structures is largely contingent on knowledge of stakeholders’ perceptions—their opinions, views, convictions, and sentiments.

The conceptual framework for this study is based on Bernhardt’s (2004) groundwork on perception in correlation with constructive research paradigm. Bernhardt’s arguments focus on the impact of individual perspectives of school phenomena on the effectiveness and utility of those learning institutions in conjunction with the notion that perceptions of reality are ever changing. These belief systems manifest within schools, which by all accounts are social entities. Constructivists believe reality to be socially constructed, therefore a conception of one’s interpretation of socially constructed phenomena that can vary vastly from person to person (Mertens, 2010). Constructivists typically “opt for more personal, interactive modes of data collection [in order to formulate assumptions and hypotheses on the basis of] data, interpretations, and outcomes rooted in contexts” (Mertens, 2010, p. 19). Bernhardt (2004) not only suggests qualitative methods for assessing perceptions, she also implicates the constructivist paradigm throughout her work by emphasizing that teachers’ interactions with phenomena are shaped within social contexts—schools.

This study is interested in the utilization of a frame that accentuates structural mechanisms within school environments in conjunction with the students of interest for

this research, as those mechanisms contribute to outcomes at various levels, including formation of perceptions. Figure 2 highlights how the study functioned within the conceptual frame, based on the constructivist paradigmatic notion that perceptions are socially construed from interactions with phenomena in conjunction with Bernhardt's theories.

Figure 2:
Conceptual
Frame
Guiding the
Research



The frame signifies systemic sets of gears that are composed of three major elements that one can argue are endemic of most schools: organizational plan, practitioners, and students. These components ideally work in tandem to ensure student development. Each gear is driven by different mechanisms: grade-level organizations by policy, practitioners by personal beliefs, etc., and ninth graders by those other two components.

The three gears converge at the center of the frame, therefore signifying the point of interest for this study, with a general question that reads: how are organizational structures affecting the perceptions of practitioners concerning the utility of ninth-grade education to aid in the development of ninth graders? It is at the point of convergence where stakeholders' perceptions are formed and the research questions are answered.

The intention of this study was to collect practitioners' perceptions of the driving forces behind student development at the ninth-grade level in order to garner empirical data that can be applied toward evidence-based decision making, forming/evaluating, organizational policy, and enhancing programs that can possibly benefit ninth graders. As stated by Bernhardt (2004), "we need to know the perceptions of the people who make up the organization" (p. 54) in order to fully realize what is possible within it. The frame of this research explores environmental constructs in formulating perceptions as it relates to the utility of organizational structures and how they affect the development of ninth graders, which can foster the development of purposeful theories for enhancing ninth-grade learning.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

3.5.1 Site and subject selection

Potential participants for this modified case study were drawn purposefully from public school districts in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, as listed in the *Pennsylvania*

Education Directory 2011-2012 (2010). According to that publication, as of the 2011-2012 academic year, Pennsylvania comprises 500 public school districts with 498 of them possessing secondary-level institutions (i.e., intermediate high, junior high, and senior high schools). The aggregate number of intermediate-level schools (i.e., middle schools) was 848 during the 2011-2012 school year. From that number, the researcher could identify only 10 junior high schools exclusively composed of grades seven through nine and nearly 700 senior high schools inclusive of various combinations of grade-interval nine through 12.

The decision to draw subjects from the *Pennsylvania Education Directory 2011-2012* (2010) rests in the researcher's personal and professional familiarity with secondary schools and intermediate-level educational programs within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, as well as reasonable proximity to possible case sites within that geographic domain. Relevant to grades 9-12 structures that are exceedingly common in Pennsylvania, reasonable proximity is defined subjectively by the principal researcher as the 20-mile radius surrounding that individual's home near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Conversely and given the low number of grades 7-9 junior high schools in Pennsylvania, the researcher defines reasonable (or close) proximity as the entire contiguous Commonwealth of Pennsylvania—inclusive of 67 counties, a seemingly endless list of municipalities, and—to reiterate—500 public school districts.

Initial contacts were made via telephone cold-call correspondence with the building principals of all 10 of Pennsylvania's grades 7-9 junior high schools and 10 purposefully selected grades 9-12 (senior) high schools within a 20-mile radius of the researcher's residence. These cold calls enabled the researcher to gauge the interest of

those building principals and, also, to determine the governing research policies of respective school districts. Based on the information gathered from these calls, the researcher identified two schools that meet the criteria for selection—one that houses grades 9-12, another with grades 7-9, and both conspicuously inclusive of grade nine. At this juncture, he sought informal permission from those respective principals to conduct research at their sites. Upon receipt of casual permission from the principals, he petitioned the appropriate officials within their school districts (typically a designated central administrator) for formal consent to conduct research.

This study commenced upon approval of the University of Pittsburgh Institutional Review Board (Pitt I.R.B). Upon receipt of notice of I.R.B. authorization, the principal researcher initiated organizational coordination and participant selection with both site principals via email, telephone, and/or—if feasible—in-person communications. The principals and all selected subjects at both sites received personalized formal participation verification letters via U.S. Mail. These recruitment scripts are denoted in Appendices B and C.

Concurrent with this, a pilot test of the research instruments was conducted in collaboration with peers in doctoral study and professional practice in order to assess the reliability and validity of all components of the study design, including the ease of use to participants. According to Babbie (2013), “reliability is a matter of whether a particular technique, applied repeatedly to the same object, yields the same result each time” (p. 148). Similarly, he asserts that validity is “the extent to which an empirical measure adequately reflects the real meaning of the concept under consideration” (p. 151).

Collectively, both account for accuracy and precision, which are perceivable requisites of quality research that readers can trust.

3.5.2 Data collection

Data was collected from principals, guidance counselors, and eight teachers of various areas of expertise, who within their professional capacities are responsible for ninth-grade learners. The case sites are the following: one grades 9-12 high school and one grades 7-9 junior high school. As indicated in Section 2.4, these types of schools represent only a sampling of existing grade-level organizational structures utilized by school systems for educating ninth-grade students.

Semi-structured interviews were administered on site and in person to each subject. Participants were asked to disclose demographical information, including facts about their academic and professional background—including years of service in education, as well as time spent educating ninth graders. The latter was compiled and reported as descriptive statistics. Numerical data sets were computed for central tendency (mean, median, and mode) and standard deviation in order to provide readers with a clearer understanding of the sample groups, as well as how these groups compare to each other in terms of their professional tenure and experience with ninth-grade learners. The researcher used Stata 12 for these computations. For those unfamiliar with Stata, “[it] is a powerful tool for analyzing data...for it does so much of the tedious work for [those who utilize it]” (Acock, 2006, p. 5). It also assists researchers with creating

tables and figures that can be used for clarifying and enhancing data, hence making information more tangible for readers (Acock, 2006).

The principal researcher proceeded to pose questions that gauged perceptions of ninth-grade developmental needs, how practitioners meet those needs, and the impact of school grade-level organizational plans have on the students in question. Base questions were drawn from standardized scripts developed by the researcher; however, the orders for which these questions are posed are left to the discretion of the study facilitator. Interview prompts may be accompanied with followed-up probes that elicit deeper, more detailed responses. As with all semi-structured interview framework, impromptu modifications of this sort are essential for obtaining richer, potentially more valuable data (Yin, 2009). Scripted interview questions were developed on the premise of answering the three study questions driving this research. Table 2 accentuates these questions in addition to the general data collection methodology for this study.

Table 2. Data Collection Methodology

Questions	Evidence	Data	Data Collection
<p>Question 1</p> <p>What do principals, guidance counselors, and teachers believe are the developmental needs of ninth-grade students?</p> <p>Semi-structured interview questions 8-12 & 21—found in Appendices E and F</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practitioners' perceptions of developmental needs at the ninth-grade level • School climate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-depth interviews with school practitioners (principals, counselors, and teachers) • Audio recordings • Direct Observation • Artifact / document review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured interviews with principals, counselors, and teachers • Direct observation looking at appearance, climate, physical space and structure, student work, and other relevant aspects of the site • Artifact/document review to include course-curricula catalogs, daily bulletins student handbooks, etc.

<p>Question 2</p> <p>How do principals, guidance counselors, and teachers in their specific professional roles address the developmental needs of ninth-grade students?</p> <p>Semi-structured interview questions 13-16 & 21—found in Appendices E and F</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practitioners’ professional interactions with ninth-grade students • School climate • Student work displays indicative of development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-depth interviews with school practitioners (principals, counselors, and teachers) • Audio recordings • Direct observation • Artifact / document review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured interviews with principals, counselors, and teachers • Direct observation looking at appearance, climate, physical space and structure, student work, and other relevant aspects of the site • Artifact/document review to include course-curricula catalogs, daily bulletins student handbooks, etc.
<p>Question 3</p> <p>How do principals, guidance counselors, and teachers perceive the effectiveness of their respective schools’ grade-level configuration on ninth-grade education?</p> <p>Semi-structured interview questions 17-20 & 21—found in Appendices E and F</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practitioners’ perceptions of the effects and utility of grade configurations on ninth-grade education • School climate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-depth interviews with school practitioners (principals, counselors, and teachers) • Audio recordings • Direct observation • Artifact / document review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured interviews with principals, counselors, and teachers • Direct observation looking at appearance, climate, physical space and structure, student work, and other relevant aspects of the site • Artifact/document review to include course-curricula catalogs, daily bulletins student handbooks, etc.

As indicated by the table above, other data measures include school artifacts, field notes, and if plausible observations of participants engaged in their professional practice. These items may enhance contextual understanding of subjects’ professional surroundings and their stated perceptions. Specifically, the researcher sought to uncover more detailed facts about curricula and programs related to ninth-grade education at both sites. Do the schools facilitate specialized programs for ninth graders that are distinguishable from programs intended for other or all grade levels? Are ninth graders entitled to privileges and services unique to their grade level? Are there aspects of ninth-grade education at

both sites that are inconspicuous, even upon data collection from the semi-structured interviews? Answer to these questions, as well as others that may have not yet been formulated by the researcher may be answered via artifact/document review—therefore providing a means for gathering valuable data conducive to better contextual understanding of each case site.

Similarly with regard to artifact/document reviews, direct observations were utilized with the intent of gathering potentially valuable data on the ninth-grade student experience concurrent with heightening contextual understanding of each school site. The researcher recorded descriptive notes on the appearance, climate/culture, physical setting, and physical structure of both schools. He also made notations about student work displays. Do such displays exist, and what does it imply about the academic and instruction components of the institutions? Reflections were also be noted, specifically concerns, ideas, and questions that may manifest from the direct observations. The instrument for which descriptive and reflective notes were recorded is found in Appendix G of this document.

Research instruments were tested prior to commencement of the study in order to identify potential breaches of reliability and validity, hence a catalyst for improving deficient components of the study design. Moreover, the use of multiple instruments provides higher probability for data triangulation. As noted by Mertens (2010), “triangulation involves checking information that has been collection from difference sources or methods for consistency of evidence across sources of data” (p. 258). In qualitative designs, triangulation can be accomplished by utilization of multiple data sources coupled with diversified perspectives and are essential for high quality research

(Babbie, 2013; Mertens, 2010; Stake 2006), therefore bolstering the legitimacy of the data and its relevance to the problem space. For this modified case study, the researcher utilized three distinct data collection means in order to ensure triangulation—semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and artifact/document reviews.

3.5.3 Data collection timetable

This dissertation study research spanned three months, having commenced in July 2013 and concluded in September of that same year. Site profiling took place upon confirmation of subject schools alongside initiation of document review. Document review was ongoing throughout the course of this study. Upon agreement with school building principals, initial site visits took place in July 2013. Each school was visited a minimum of two times, hence allotting for acclimation by both the researcher and building principals. These visits were applied toward the direct observational component of this research. Site-based semi-structured interviews—the capstone of this study—took place between mid July 2013 and mid September 2013. Upon compilation and categorization of data from all noted sources, thorough analysis of the findings occurred and conclusion were made—hence accounting for the fourth and fifth chapters of this dissertation. The following illustration, Table 3, summarizes the study timetable by concisely disclosing the dates, sites, and activities encompassed in this research:

Table 3. Study Timetable

DATES	SITES	ACTIVITIES
July 2013: Initial	-Grades 9-12 High School -Grades 7-9 Jr. High School -Principal researcher's home -University of Pittsburgh	-Site profiling -Document review, commenced -Data categorization and analysis, commenced
July 2013	-Grades 9-12 High School -Grades 7-9 Jr. High School -Principal researcher's home -University of Pittsburgh	-Piloting study instruments -Site visits – direct observations, commenced -Site visits – semi-structured interviews -Document review, continued -Data categorization and analysis (ongoing)
August 2013 – Sept. 2013	-Grades 9-12 High School -Grades 7-9 Jr. High School -Principal researcher's home -University of Pittsburgh	-Site visits – direct observations, continued -Site visits – semi-structured interviews -Data categorization and analysis (ongoing)
Sept. 2013 – Nov. 2013	-Principal researcher's home -University of Pittsburgh	-Intensive data analysis -Drafting of 4 th and 5 th chapters of dissertation -Final dissertation defense

3.6 POPULATION AND SAMPLE

3.6.1 Description of participants

This study assessed the perceptions of principals, guidance counselors, and eight teachers of predominantly ninth-grade-level courses at two school sites of differing grade-level organizational structures and inclusive of grade nine: a traditional high school comprised of grades nine through 12 and a traditional junior high school inclusive of grades seven through nine. The rationale for selection of these sites is simple and based largely on the

concept of contemporary and historical prevalence. Grades nine through 12 high schools presently represent the most common grade-level educational structure for ninth graders (Alspaugh, 2012; Barton & Klump, 2012); however, in recent years, many public school districts have instituted ninth-grade-only learning centers, which either partially or completely removes ninth graders from high-school environments (Barton & Klump, 2012; Handley, 1982; Seller, 2004; Styron & Peasant, 2010). This phenomenon implies possible problems within nine through 12 structures pertinent to ninth graders, hence a key point of interest for this research.

Similarly from the 1930s through the 1970s, grades seven through nine junior high schools were the predominant grade-level school structures for ninth-grade learners (Allen, 1980; Barton & Klump, 2012; George 1988; Styron & Peasant, 2010). Their abrupt demise—largely the result of the middle school movement—supplanted most ninth graders across the United States to four-year (nine through 12) high schools (Barton & Klump, 2012; Elovitz, 2007). Today, traditional junior high schools that are inclusive of ninth grade are uncommon and nationwide only number in the three hundreds (Barton & Klump, 2012; Elovitz, 2007). Despite their near fall to oblivion, some educators and scholars deem the junior high school construct as viable for educating ninth graders (Bedard & Do, 2005; George 2000; Handley, 1982; Wood, 1973). They often claim that junior high schools were successful in addressing the developmental, emotional, and social needs of adolescent learners, including ninth graders, hence another key point of interest for this research.

School sites and their building principals were selected for participation in this study from the *Pennsylvania Education Directory 2011-2012* (2010), based on their

professional relevance to the study in relationship to their respective schools' configurations and proximity to the principal researcher. Potential guidance counselor and teacher subjects were referred to the researcher by their principals based on the criteria that they work mostly with ninth-grade students. If for any reason no one individual works predominantly with ninth graders, then the researcher defaulted to those who interact professionally with ninth graders on either a partial or semi-regular basis. Once the sites have been selected and confirmed, each was profiled in terms of their locations, grade-level configurations, staffing, student demographics, standardized test scores, and public information assessable via the schools' respective websites and via net browser information inquiries. Data compiled from this preliminary phase provided the principal researcher with a contextual foundation and understanding for each site and verification of its appropriateness for the study.

The teacher group was representative of distinct content specializations typical of comprehensive learning environments (Cremin, 1953; Handley, 1982). This translated to one teacher participant from each of the following content areas—eight total: humanities (English language arts or social studies), analytical disciplines (mathematics or science), and elective disciplines (i.e., family and consumer sciences, fine arts, industrial arts, etc.). A diverse teacher group ensures that faculty samples are representative of comprehensive educational structures and capture potential variations that may exist among content areas/departments. For both counselors and teachers, final subject selection was contingent upon mutual agreement among the researcher, building principal, and practitioners. Appendix D denotes the school sites and participants to be included in this study, in addition to corresponding rationales for each.

Given the nature of this research, a modified case study defined conceptually by constructivist paradigm, the researcher opted for purposeful sampling that is intended to gather data-rich responses that allows for intensive analysis. As noted by Mertens (2010), “researchers working within the constructivist paradigm typically select their samples with the goal of identifying information-rich cases that will allow them to study a case in-depth” (p. 320). Mertens (2010) also asserts, “it is important that the researcher make clear the sampling strategy and its associated logic to the reader” (p. 321). Case study research entails acquisition of broad comprehension of phenomena and is not necessarily fixated on generalizability (Babbie, 2013; Mertens, 2010; Stake, 2006). To that end, participants were selected pertinent to their professional capacities in proximity to ninth graders, their schools’ grade-level organizational plans, and their relevance to the problem space. Information collected from participants was used for the sake of making sense of distinct cases in hopes of better understanding them and for providing a means for posing legitimate theories that can enhance policies to the benefit of students. Though the principal researcher is knowledgeable all study participants’ professional titles and primary functions prior to implementation of the semi-structured interview protocols, two key unknown variables were as follows: time spent in the education profession and years of service to ninth graders. Upon conducting all interviews, this information was compiled into data sets and calculated for central tendency and standard deviation with Stata 12, hence providing the principal research and readers with descriptive statistics essential for both context and comparative analysis.

3.6.2 Participant and site confidentiality

The principal researcher ensured confidentiality of participants and their entities of employment. Beyond inspiring candor by subjects, this protects them from dissenting third parties and maintains their privacy (Babbie, 2013; Mertens, 2013). Defined, confidentiality is “when the researcher can identify a given person’s responses but essentially promises not to do so publicly” (Babbie, 2013, p. 66). Disclosure of this detail was provided to subjects prior to commencement of the study via verbal correspondence and formal recruitment letters. Recruitment letters for administrators participating in this study are denoted in Appendix B, and equivalent letters for counselors and teachers are found in Appendix C.

3.7 INSTRUMENTS

3.7.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews signify the predominant means for attaining data for this modified case study. According to Yin (2009), “one of the most important sources of case study information is the interview” (p. 106). Rubin and Rubin (1995), as cited by Yin (2009), assert that the nature of case study lends to inquiries that are “fluid rather than rigid” (p. 106), therefore implying a semi-structured framework for questioning. The interview process for most case-study research entails following a standard line of conventional/scripted questioning; yet these questions can and should be supplemented

with conversational probes that elicit elaboration conducive to rich information (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The researcher utilized a focused interview framework, which according to Merton, Fiske, and Kendall (1990) as cited by Yin (2009), involves a standard line of questions enhanced by flexibility to extend beyond those questions within an open-ended, yet still time restricted framework. Appendices E and F provide the question-specific interview protocols for principals and guidance counselors/teachers—both of which are comprised of 21 standardized questions, respectively. This single script was administered to all study participants, regardless of their professional positions at their respective sites. Each conventional question may be followed up by open-ended conversational prompts that are intended to press for broader, richer information. These base questions evoked factual data, whereas the follow-up inquiries went deeper to uncovering the basis for study participants' perceptual standpoints.

All interviews were audio-electronically recorded with Audacity 2.0. Audacity 2.0 is both a computer-based audio recorder and editor, which enable individuals to capture and edit sound media. The recordings can be password-protected. Transcriptions taken during the interviews were cross-referenced with audio recordings to ensure accuracy, minimized misunderstandings, and to provide for triangulation by means of repetitious data collection (Stake, 2006). Transcriptions were then entered and thematically organized by means of Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Word applications. Also, descriptive statistics were incorporated into this work. Data compiled from interviews specific to years of service in education and with ninth graders was computed with Stata 12 for central tendency (mean, median, and mode) and standard deviation.

This information provides clarity to readers, as it also assists the principal researcher with comparative analysis of both sample groups.

3.7.2 Direct observations

Direct observations signify another source of evidence for this modified case study. According to Yin (2009), “a case study should take place in a natural setting of the case, [therefore] creating opportunities for direct observations” (p. 109). This observational approach often entails notations on visual stimuli at respective sites, which can include an array of factors, including behaviors, climate, environment, organization, structure, etc. in conjunction with or outside formal interviews (Yin, 2009). Furthermore, as noted by Mertens (2010), observations enable opportunities for gathering “accurate information about how a program actually operates, particularly about processes, [which provides a means for viewing] operations of a program as they are actually occurring” (p. 352). Yin (2009) asserts that direct observation can be formalized through development of an instrument or conducted more casually. For this study, I have opted for formality via an instrument that directs descriptive annotations relevant to the following aspects of each case site: building appearance, climate, evidence of student learning, physical setting, and physical structure—all of which can be construed as indicators of prevalent themes transposed from the interviews. This form also provides a means for recording reflective notes on concerns, questions, ideas, and questions based on the interviews and observations. Direct observation also enables the researcher to enhance data collected from initial site profiling, therefore ensuring heightened accuracy relevant to school

descriptors and facts unveiled during the profiling phase. Appendix G explicates this instrument entitled, Direct Observation Field Notes Form.

3.7.3 Article/document review

Data was also compiled by means of an artifact/document review. As per Mertens (2010), “all organizations leave trails composed of documents and records that trace their history and current status...such as memos, reports, plans, computer files, tapes, and other artifacts” (p. 373). Such items can provide insights that can be useful in garnering more in-depth, rich information on respective cases, as well as provide organizational context (Mertens, 2010; Yin, 2009). Specifically, the principal researcher is looking for data specific to ninth-grade education (e.g., curricula, pedagogical methods, policies, programs, special events, etc.) that impact that grade level and that may be pertinent to details compiled from the semi-structured interviews and direct observations. Artifact/document review encompassed the following items, pending their availability: course catalogs, daily announcement bulletins, school (district) websites, student handbooks, and like sources. These resources may be access online or attained upon initial site visitations. As noted by Yin (2009), artifact/document reviews within the context of case studies enable investigators “to develop a broader perspective...far beyond that which could be directly observed in the limited time of a field visit” (p. 113). In short, it allots opportunities for deeper analysis beyond field visits, therefore enhancing the study via more relevant data and triangulation.

3.7.4 Pilot testing study instruments

Mertens (2010) provides commentary concerning the importance of pilot testing study instruments prior to implementation of research, hence ensuring they are ergonomic, purposeful, and useful. Mertens (2010) also contends that the significance of piloting extends beyond mere functionality of research tools to methodological validity. “Methodological validity concerns the soundness or trustworthiness of understandings warranted by...methods of inquiry, particularly with reference to the measurement instruments, procedures, and logic of inquiry” (p. 83). In order to ensure methodological validity, as a precursor to formal research, all instruments—including the semi-structured interview scripts and observational field notes forms—were piloted by means of administration of those items to a study group comprised of professional and scholastic colleagues. This collaborative helped the principal researcher to assess and evaluate research instruments for clarity, practicality, and utility in addition to grammatical and semantic correctness. Their feedback guided the principal researcher in making adaptation conducive to improving those research instruments and, subsequently, enhancing the overall quality of the research.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

For this modified case study, data analysis entailed a three-step process, as prescribed by Hesse-Biber and Levey (2006) and noted in Mertens (2010). Though one may perceive a

step-by-step approach to qualitative data analysis to be counterintuitive given the complexity and vastness of most qualitative data sets, Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006), as cited in Mertens (2010), believe it is necessary. The following denotes each step as listed in Mertens (2010) and provides disclosure as to what each one entailed specific to this study:

- “Step 1: Preparing Data for Analysis: This step assumes that the researcher has been reviewing and reflecting on the data as it is collected...how it is done depends to some degree on the type of data collected and the method of collecting and recording the data” (Mertens, 2010, p. 424). As noted in Appendix D, study participants engaged in semi-structured interviews. The researcher transcribed responses both from live remarks and from electronic audio recordings. These transcriptions were then be entered and thematically organized by means of spreadsheets furnished by Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Word. Additionally, noteworthy data compiled from document review and field notes were manipulated in a similar manner. This step ultimately ensures that compiled data well organized, therefore ensuring accuracy and validity (Mertens, 2010).
- “Step 2: Data Exploration Phase: Reading, thinking, and making notes about [one’s] thoughts (called memoing by the qualitative research community” (Mertens, 2010, p. 425). This step essentially equates to researchers delving deeper into the data by means of critical analysis and graphic depictions, therefore ensuring that critical statements and other such elements are not lost amid copious information (Mertens, 2010). This step, coupled with Step 1,

enhances the likely accuracy and validity of the findings. At this juncture, the principal researcher created datasets based on demographical information related to professional service and time spent educating ninth graders. This data was manipulated with Stata 12 for central tendency and standard deviation namely for the purposes of assisting readers in visualizing the subject groups and enhancing comparative analysis of these groups and the schools they populate.

- “Step 3: Data Reduction Phase: [This step] occurs as [one] selects parts of the data for coding, [therefore] assigning a label to excerpts of data that conceptually hang together (Mertens, 2010, p. 425). As noted by Babbie (2013), “research often involves collecting large masses of data...analysis [of vast quantities of data] involves the reduction of data from unmanageable details to manageable summaries (p. 460). Given this study’s methodology—one founded on qualitative analysis of transcribed interviews, document reviews, and field notes, there is a likelihood of information that can be discounted from the analysis. As with the steps one and two, this third step enables the researcher to omit insignificant and/or unnecessary verbiage that may prove cumbersome or distracting to the analysis, hence heightening prospect for accurate, purposeful data.

By means of the three steps noted in the former, as well as assistance from Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Word, I devised categories that signified emergent concepts and themes. This assisted in organizing copious information for analysis and synthesis. These themes were conjured from attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs explicated

by study participants and evidenced by artifacts, and documents, which lent themselves to plausible assertions (Stake, 2006), of ninth-grade education in relationship to school grade-level organizational structures. Babbie (2013) asserts that coding is “the key process in the analysis of qualitative social research...classifying or categorizing individual pieces of data” (p. 396). Codes were not defined until data collection was complete and were developed in tandem with the following three-step process, as denoted by Babbie (2013):

1. “Open coding: The initial classification and labeling of concepts in qualitative data analysis...[when] the codes are suggested by the researchers’ examination and questioning of the data” (p. 397).
2. “Axial coding: The reanalysis of the results of open coding...aimed at identifying the important, general concepts” (p. 398).
3. “Selective coding: [The process of building] on the results of open coding and axial coding to identify the central concept[s] that organize[s] the other concept[s] that have been identified in a body of textual materials” (p. 398).

The three steps noted above provide a logical means for managing and organizing vast amounts of qualitative data. Ultimately, the themes that were identified through this process served conducive to meaningful insights in the following chapters that account for individual voice in juxtaposition with colleagues both within and outside their schools and cross-referencing of information between both sites—hence a final step toward drawing comparisons and contrasts between the ninth-grade experience at grades 9-12 high schools and grades 7-9 junior high schools.

Findings from this modified case study are intended to inspire discourse conducive to informing educational policymakers, so as to assisting them in making sound decisions on behalf of ninth-grade learners. Moreover, I hope that readers of this study—especially policymakers and practitioners—can identify with the cases and transfer to them to their respective schools. As Mertens (2010) suggests, “in qualitative research, the researcher emphasizes the total context in which the research takes place to enable readers to make judgments as to the transferability of the study’s results to their own situations” (p. 4). As with all case studies, the intent is not necessarily to generalize, but rather to provide readers a basis for transfer from case-study contexts to practical applications within their respective domains and realities—otherwise referred to as transferability (Mertens, 2010; Stake, 2006).

3.9 RESEARCH BIAS AND PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE

This research is intend to generate valuable qualitative data pertinent to the perceptions of select school practitioners in relationship to the how particular school grade-level organizational structures impact the ninth-grade learners relevant to their developmental needs. By no means does this study aspire to substantiate preconceived notions and/or to promote the perceptions and positions of the researcher. Yin (2009) asserts that studies formulated with bias upon the intent of substantiating one’s personal beliefs of preconceived notions negate research findings. In short, bias-latent methodologies compromise research integrity, therefore resulting in results that are misleading or

incorrect (Babbie, 2013; Mertens, 2010; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2009). Though I have developed opinions and insights amid my professional practice and scholarship, this base of professional knowledge does not translate into bias.

The principal researcher is presently the principal of a small, rural junior/senior high school in southwestern Pennsylvania, in addition to being a doctoral student at the University of Pittsburgh School of Education. He was previously a vice principal, curriculum coach, and secondary-level English and social studies teacher in two other school systems in Pennsylvania—one suburban and the other urban. Most of his professional experiences centered on interactions with adolescent learners, including ninth graders, hence his research interests and this dissertation study. His professional experience provided him with contextual and fundamental understandings of the scenarios related to each case site, ergo enhancing his ability to comprehend, analyze, and report findings objectively.

3.10 METHODOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS

This study examined the perceptions of principals, guidance counselors, and teachers on the impact school grade-level organizational structures have on ninth-grade students at various schools (or sites). Both sites are accredited educational institutions, committed to the welfare of young learners. Participants were selected based on their school assignments, professional positions, and proximity to ninth-grade student populations. Semi-structured interviews are a central feature of this research and account for a

significant proportion of composite data. The researcher believes that all study participants provided honest answers, based on their professional experiences and interactions with ninth-grade learners. Participants will be ensured confidentiality, which should also inspire candid responses. As noted by Mertens (2010), Stake (2006), and Yin (2009), case studies provide for rich, detailed information on phenomena. Furthermore, their contents can be transferrable to multiple locales (Mertens, 2010; Stake, 2006). This information may inspire insights that are applicable to one's respective domain and/or practice, provided that cases resonate with readers.

3.11 ETHICAL ASSURANCES

This modified case study was conducted at multiple sites. It intends to illuminate secondary-level school practitioners' perceptions of the ninth grade educational experience, the effectiveness of their school's respective grade-level organizational plans for meeting ninth graders' developmental needs, and usefulness of grade-level organizational plans different from those utilized by their respective school for accommodating ninth-grade learners. This entailed direct communications and/or interactions with study subjects. The principal researcher conducted this dissertation study in full compliance with the Institutional Review Board (I.R.B.) of the University of Pittsburgh. Documented proof of I.R.B. review and exemption is noted in Appendix H.

3.12 SUMMARY OF PROCEDURES

3.12.1 Site and subject selection overview

1. I referenced the *Pennsylvania Education Directory* (2010) in order to identify potential case sites that meet the following criteria: inclusion of grade nine students within grades 9-12 (high school) or grades 7-9 (junior high school) frameworks.
2. I compiled a list of potential case sites that house grades 9-12 and grades 7-9, respectively. Both lists comprise 10 schools selected on the basis of proximity to the principal researcher and inclusion of grade nine within its program/structure. Note: Since only 10 grades 7-9 junior high schools exist in Pennsylvania, I took the liberty to redefine close proximity in accordance with this fact as it pertains to junior high schools. For this type of school, close proximity equates to the entire Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.
3. From the compiled list of schools noted in each category, I instituted cold calls (via telephone and/or email communications) in order to make initial contacts with building principals as a means of gauging their interest in participating in my study, as well as identifying procedures and protocols germane to conducting research within their respective districts.
4. Based on information gathered from the cold calls noted above, I identified two schools that meet the criteria for selection: one that holds grades 9-12 and another that accommodates students in grades 7-9 with both obviously housing grade

- nine. At this point, I sought preliminary/informal permission to conduct research at those locales through contact with school principals. Upon receipt of this approval, I then petitioned central administrative personnel at each district for formal affirmation of consent to conduct my study.
5. Upon receipt of formal permission to conduct my research at both sites, I submitted an application to the University of Pittsburgh Institutional Review Board (Pitt I.R.B.) asking for authorization to execute this study with exempt status.
 6. Once the Pitt I.R.B. certified my study, I mailed all research subjects formal notifications of their participation by means of recruitment letters (Appendices B and C). Participants at each site included the following individuals who work with ninth graders on a regular basis: the building principal, a guidance counselor, and teachers from multiple content areas. Especially provocative here is the diversity of faculty participants, inclusive ideally of one person from each of the following departmental or instructional teams: E.L.A., fine arts, mathematics, practical (hands-on) skills, science, and social studies, as well as two special education teachers, for an aggregate of eight teachers. This eclectic range of teacher participants allotted me ample opportunities for focusing on perceptual variances among instructors from different content areas both internally and externally across opposing case sites. Moreover, these multifarious standpoints can be compared and contrasted with that of principals and guidance counselors, hence providing for captivating data about agreements and discrepancies among these practitioners.

3.12.2 Data collection overview

1. Upon securing permission from the Pitt I.R.B. to conduct my study, I commenced coordination of initial site visits with both building principals with the intent of profiling their schools and collecting artifacts and/or documents related to ninth graders. The principals and I planned for facilitation of semi-structured interviews, first by selecting counselor and teacher subjects and finally by establishing dates and times for conducting interviews with those participants.
2. Based on schedules mutually agreed upon by the building principals and me, I conducted my initial site visits. Concurrently, I profiled both sites (separately) by means of direct observations. Descriptive notes accompanied this process and were recorded on the basis of the following site attributes: appearance, climate/culture, evidence of student learning, physical setting, and physical structure. Reflections were amalgamated with descriptive notes, hence indicating concerns, ideas, and questions related to each site. The Descriptive Observation Field Notes Form (Appendix G) was used to outline both descriptive and reflective jottings. Also at this time, I sought final declaration of the dates, times, and subjects for the next phase of data collection: the semi-structured interviews.
3. Based on schedules mutually agreed upon by the building principals and me, I visited both sites a second (or, if necessary, a third) time to facilitate semi-structured interviews. These interviews assessed the perceptions of the [one] principals, one guidance counselors, and eight teachers—including two from the

humanities (one English Language Arts [E.L.A.] and one social studies), two from the analytical disciplines (one mathematics and one science), two from elective subjects (one fine arts and one practical [hands-on] skills), and two with expertise in special education. These individuals work predominately with ninth graders. These semi-structured interviews were designed to take between 30 and 60 minutes to complete and to allow for intermittent conversations amid structural formalities. Interviews protocols are denoted in Appendices E and F.

3.12.3 Data analysis and reporting overview

Data Analysis and Reporting: All data compiled from this study was analyzed using the three-step process for qualitative data analysis, as suggested by Mertens (2010). This approach is summarized previously in Section 3.8 (Data Analysis, pages 109 through 113) and below:

1. The first step of this process requires preparation of the data for analysis. Raw information compiled from artifact/document reviews and direct observation was organized and transcribed and onto Microsoft Excel spreadsheets and Microsoft Word documents. Information recorded and noted from semi-structured interviews were also organized and transcribed onto Microsoft Excel spreadsheets and Microsoft word documents. All semi-structured interviews were recorded using Audacity 2.0, an electronic recording medium.
2. The second step involves exploration of the data. This means critically analyzing and, if necessary, graphically illustrating the information as an initial phase of

data categorization and organization. Semi-structured interviews were administered on site and in person to each subject in order to achieve verbally articulated data. These interviews elicited information pertinent to subjects' demography, namely their professional and scholastic backgrounds. The researcher then inquired into their viewpoints on ninth-grade developmental, meeting needs of ninth graders, and how school grade-level organizational plans effect ninth graders. Via exploration, recordings and transcriptions from these interviews were carefully reviewed and organized into categories and subcategories (likely on the basis of professional positions and content expertise) as a precursor to data reduction (noted below). Semi-structured interview scripts for administrators and non-administrative personnel are denoted in Appendices E and F. Artifact/document reviews and direct observations were used in order to compile potentially rich information on ninth-grade student experiences and to elevate my contextual understanding of both case sites. Upon conducting site visits, I recorded notes pertinent to each school's appearance, climate/culture, physical setting, physical structures, and regard for student work. In a similar fashion to the semi-structured interviews noted in the former, I will conscientiously examine my notes for recurring themes and organize this information into categories as an antecedent to data reduction (noted below). Notes derived from direct observations were documented on a researcher-developed field notes form (Appendix G).

3. The third step involves what is termed data reduction. At this point, data from all sources of information was coded, labeled, and organized into categories and

subcategories on the basis of antitheses, commonalities, outliers, and recurring themes that manifest from the research. As part of this step, I eliminated irrelevant data and verbiage that I deemed inconsequential to the study. Upon identifying the prevalent themes expressed by the participants, I juxtaposed them across content areas and organizational structures. Moreover, I compared and contrasted them among professional positions both within and between respective sites. Lastly, I analyzed data collected—particularly from the semi-structured interviews—with the intention of ascertaining meaning from each individual’s voice in order to draw definitive conclusions and possibly to develop hypotheses about distinguishing qualities between educating ninth graders in grades 9-12 high schools versus educating them in grades 7-9 junior high schools.

This final step is crucial, for it provides a means for making the data more manageable. But even more importantly, as indicated above, raw information compiled from data sources were organized into categories and subcategories (i.e., professional positions, schools, etc.) and tested for commonalities and variances among administrators, counselors, and teachers of multiple content areas both within and across domains. This information not only accentuated the complexities and intricacies characteristic of ninth-grade education, but it also revealed insights that may be beneficial to practitioners and policymakers who educate ninth graders and aspire to meet their many challenges in a developmentally appropriate and responsive manner within optimal settings.

3.12.4 Anticipatory set for subsequent chapters

Chapters 4 and 5 present results, explanations, and commentary on phenomena as they relate to ninth-grade learners by virtue of empirical data that appraises the viewpoints of principals, guidance counselors, and teachers who work in schools that house ninth-grade populations in relationship to the developmental needs of students at the ninth-grade level, how these needs are addressed by the subjects, and the perceived effects school grade-level configurations (particularly grades 9-12 and grades 7-9 plans) on ninth graders. Synthesized information, hypotheses, and conclusions reminiscent of the data is presented and analyzed in the following chapters.

4.0 RESULTS

This chapter reports information accrued from the data collection methods outlined in the previous chapter. Descriptive statistics, direct quotes, and field-note annotations—often enhanced by appendices, figures and tables—are cited throughout this chapter in order to accentuate several emergent themes evidenced by the study. This chapter is sequenced as follows: a reminder of the participant sample; general observations of the participant sample; impressions of the infrastructure, climate/culture, and programs; detailed analysis pertinent to the individual study questions; and a chapter summary.

4.0.1 Reminder of the participant sample with unique codes

Subjects were drawn from grades 9-12 and 7-9 schools: 10 participants per site (n = 10) for an aggregate of 20 (n = 20). The following list confidentially indicates participants who engaged in this study (with unique codes noted in parentheses):

- Principals (P): 1 per site—2 total;
- Guidance Counselors (GC): 1 per site—2 total;
- English Language Arts Teachers (ELA.T): 1 per site—2 total;
- Fine Arts Teachers (FA.T): 1 per site—2 total;
- Mathematics Teachers (M.T.): 1 per site—2 total;
- Practical Skills Teachers (PS.T): 1 per site—2 total;
- Science Teachers (SCI.T): 1 per site—2 total;
- Social Studies Teachers (SS.T): 1 per site—2 total;
- Special Education Teachers (SE1.T and SE2.T): 2 per site—4 total.

4.0.2 Observations of the participant samples

Subjects at each site were asked to disclose their total number of years working in education. Grades 9-12 site participants reported the following in years: 3, 11, 12, 13, 14, 14, 14, 17, 17, and 23. For this sample, three (3) years represents a statistical outlier. It deviates vastly from other numbers within the dataset, hence having a profound effect on the calculated mean and standard deviation (Huck, 2012; Treiman, 2009). Outliers can prove misleading, often resulting in inaccurate assumptions (Huck, 2012). Defined, central tendency is a measure of central values (i.e., means, medians, and modes); standard deviation is a numeric indication of dispersion or variation from an arithmetical mean (Huck, 2012). High standard deviations are indicative of data points dispersed over wide ranges of values; low standard deviations signify the opposite (Huck, 2012; Treiman, 2009). Table 4 explicates the previously noted data—inclusive of the outlier.

Table 4. High School – Years of Professional Experience with Outlier

Variable	Observations	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
q06	n = 10	13.8	15.5	13	5.1	3	23

The next table (Table 5) expresses the same descriptive data, minus the outlier.

Table 5. High School – Years of Professional Experience without Outlier

Variable	Observations	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
q06	n = 9	15	14	14	3.6	3	23

Total experience among subjects at the grades 7-9 junior high school spanned 14 years, as indicated by the following dataset: 8, 12, 15, 16, 16, 18, 19, 20, 20, and 21. The standard deviation is equal to 3.6, which is considerably low (Huck, 2012; Treiman, 2009). Table 6 highlights this data.

Table 6. Jr. High School – Years of Professional Experience

Variable	Observations	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
q06	n = 10	16.5	17	16 & 20	4.1	8	21

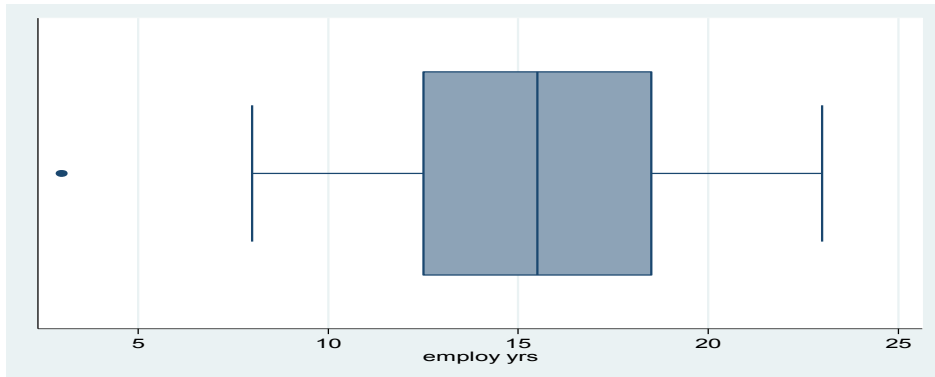
The composite samples equal 20 participants (n = 20). Their range of tenures spans 21 years from the least experienced at three to the most at 23, as noted in Table 7.

Table 7. Combined High School and Jr. High School – Years of Professional Experience

Variable	Observations	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
q06	n = 20	15.15	15.5	14	4.7	3	28

To assist readers in conceptualizing this data, the following figure (Figure 3) provides a graphic depiction of the information noted on the previous table.

Figure 3. Combined Jr. and Sr. High Schools – Years of Professional Experience



The previous boxplot discloses the variability of the aggregate dataset for total years of professional experience—the shaded rectangle (determined by a range between the 25th and 75th percentiles) symbolizes where the majority of experience rests and the dot indicates the statistical outlier.

Subjects at the high school reported a range spanning 23 years: 8, 11, 14, 15, 17, 17, 18, 23, 24, and 30. The standard deviation is equal to 6.5, which is low given the wide array experience compounded by pronounced variances from the arithmetical mean (Huck, 2012; Treiman, 2009). Table 8 summarizes this information.

Table 8. High School – Years Working with Grade 9

Variable	Observations	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
q07	n = 10	17.7	17	17	6.5	8	30

Participants at the grades 7-9 junior high school indicated the following span of experiences with ninth graders (in years): 8, 12, 14, 14, 15, 18, 18, 19, 20, and 27. The standard deviation is equal to 5.2, which is considerably low. Table 9 clarifies this data.

Table 9. Jr. High School – Years Working with Grade 9

Variable	Observations	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
q06	n = 10	16.5	16.5	14 & 18	5.2	8	27

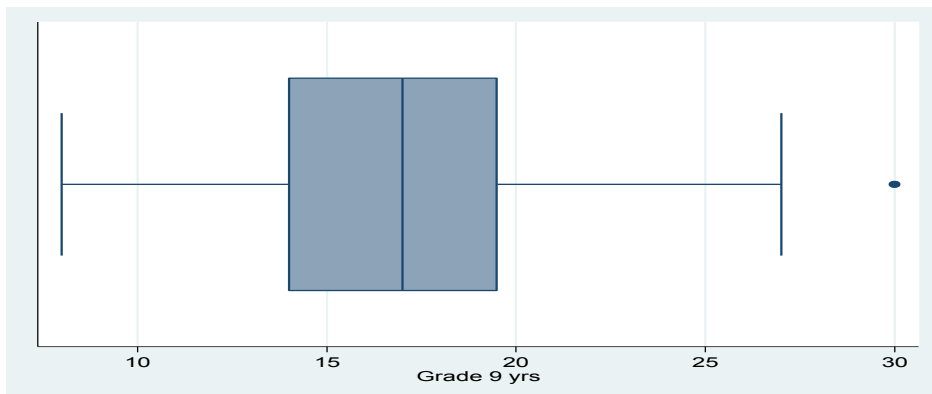
As for the composite sample, the range of individual experiences in educating ninth graders spans 23 years. Table 10 provides a visual representation of this data with reference to central tendency and standard deviation.

Table 10. Combined Jr. and Sr. High Schools – Years Working with Grade 9

Variable	Observations	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
v07	n = 20	17.1	17	14 & 18	5.7	8	30

To further support readers' conceptually understanding of this information, Figure 4 is illustrative of the same information noted above.

Figure 4. Combined Jr. and Sr. High Schools – Years Working with Grade 9



The previous boxplot indicates the variability of the composite) dataset. The shaded rectangle (ranging from the 25th and 75th percentiles) shows where the majority of experience working with ninth graders lies with a dot situated to the right of the point of delineation for the 90th percentile indicating the statistical outlier.

4.1 IMPRESSIONS OF SCHOOL CLIMATE, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND PROGRAMS

The grades 9-12 high school is a medium-sized suburban school, populated by approximately 850 students, and spanning four grade levels (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2013). It was built in the early 1960s and dedicated in 1963. Though this structure is 50 years old, its appearance can be construed as modern, especially given its many amenities—including state-of-the-art laboratories, interactive whiteboards, etc. The interior building is maintained in a very clean and orderly fashion. Student-produced artwork, murals, and packed trophy cases adorn the structure.

The grades 7-9 junior high school is a large urban school situated in a rural area. Approximately 1,900 students spanning three grade levels populate the school (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2013). It was constructed in the middle to late 2000s and dedicated in 2008. By virtue of age, this site can be considered state-of-the-art. Its appearance is decidedly modern. Artwork and murals created by students enrich many areas of the school, as do plaques and trophies. Both schools are more similar than they are different when it comes to facilities and infrastructure; however, there are some

striking differences that may affect instruction and learning. Appendix I provides readers with a more a more detailed look at both schools’ aesthetics and setting.

Both schools appear to be inviting and well maintained. These characteristics may correlate with what the researcher construed as positive climates/cultures. This conclusion was drawn on the basis of data compiled from direct observations and semi-structured interviews. This observational statement is by no means intended to definitively characterize the schools’ climates/cultures; however, based on first and second impressions, the general feel of both sites appears to be positive with students representing the focal point of professional practice. Table 11 explicates these commonalities.

Table 11. Climate Site Descriptions of School Sites

Attribute	High School Site (9-12)	Junior High School Site (7-9)
Climate-Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendly atmosphere • Inviting • Warm reception from staff • Stakeholders within structure appeared to be content and happy • Focused and seemingly productive workforce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendly atmosphere • Inviting • Warm reception from office staff • Stakeholders within structure appeared to be content and happy • Focused and seemingly productive workforce

Pertinent to programs, both sites share similarities and differences; however, there are few detectable variances when it comes to disciplinary guidelines and other operating procedures. The schools are comprehensive and departmentalized. As indicated by the course catalogs of both sites (*9-12 h. s. course catalog, 2013 & 7-9 j. h. s. course catalog, 2013*), curricula address the four core contents (i.e., E.L.A., mathematics, science, and

social studies) with elective-course accompaniments in multiple subject matters (e.g., business, fine arts, foreign languages, etc.). Students at each school—commencing with grade nine—must schedule courses in fulfillment of graduation requirements, including four credits of E.L.A., mathematics, science, and social studies, respectively, plus a half credit of physical education, a half credit of specialized coursework that differs at both sites, and electives. One caveat exists as it relates to elective courses. The grades 9-12 high school offers roughly 60 electives—nearly double the amount offered by the junior high school: 35. Yet ninth graders enrolled in the 9-12 building have access only to 15 of those offerings. Conversely, ninth graders in the 7-9 building have access to all 35 available electives. At both schools, ninth graders may select courses reflective of their ability levels. At the 9-12 school, most courses are offered at three distinct levels, ranging from more to less rigorous: honors, academic, and traditional. Likewise, the junior high school offers courses at four rigor levels: honors, academic, core academic, and co-taught.

The course catalogs (*9-12 h. s. course catalog, 2013 & 7-9 j. h. s. course catalog, 2013*) for both schools provide some specific references to ninth graders—with the junior high school’s being a little more grade-level specific in scope. Generally, they address students collectively in all grades spanning their respective structures. The same can be stated about the student handbooks (*9-12 h. s. student handbook, 2013; 7-9 j. h. s. student handbook, 2013*) that mainly outline procedures and policies that govern students regardless of their grade levels. There are few differences in how each school administers discipline and the methods by which noncompliance is addressed.

The junior high school seems to place more of an emphasis on transitioning between grade levels and physical school structures than does the high school. This assertion results from language found in the junior high school course catalog (7-9 *j. h. s. course catalog*) and an informational brochure published by its school district on a yearly basis. A major goal of the junior high school with regard to its freshmen is assimilation to the senior-high-school program by means of departmentalization—a construct diluted to some extent by the team approach executed in grades seven and eight. This aspect of the junior high’s ninth-grade program is formalized via documentation that conveys district-approved policies and is evidenced by its execution. Comparably, the high-school program does not seem to emphasize transitions from grade level to grade level or from building to building. As with other aspects of the school, that does not mean that purposeful transitioning does not take place in the 9-12 structure. The grades 9-12 site principal (HS.P) confirmed this fact:

Our ninth graders enjoy a thorough program of transitioning starting in [middle school] and carrying over to [high school] ...class meetings, small group sessions with counselors, tours, and mentoring by upperclassmen assist students moving up to high school...plus we match them with teachers with temperaments and expertise best suited for incoming freshmen...these teachers are the ones who really make the difference (personal communication, July 17, 2013).

When viewing artifacts and documents, at least with respect to this study, the idiom *there is more than meets the eye* appears to be applicable. As indicated by the artifact and document reviews, the grades 9-12 high school does not place a premium on any one particular grade level—certainly in comparison to the grades 7-9 junior high school. Yet verbal communications often indicate different realities not addressed in print. Such scenarios are disclosed in subsequent sections. Table 12 explicates major themes

revealed during data collection that are relevant to course offerings and disciplinary procedures and that may influence the perceptions of practitioners.

Table 12. Summary of Course Offerings and Procedures

Aspect/Theme	9-12 High School	7-9 Junior High School
Course Requirements for Grade 9	Based on an eight-period day, students must select courses in all core content areas, plus business, electives, and physical education totally a minimum 7.5 Carnegie Units	Based on an eight-period day, students must select courses in all core content areas, plus electives, fine arts, and physical education totally a minimum 7 Carnegie Units
Curriculum	Comprehensive in scope with three (3) distinct levels (ability groups or tracks): advanced/honors, academic, and traditional. Co-taught sections exist, but are not formally mandated by school-district policy.	Comprehensive curriculum with four (4) distinct levels (ability groups or tracks): honors, academic, core academic, and co-taught. All four levels are formalized and mandated by school district policy.
Discipline	General expectation for compliance with consequences denoted for non-compliance—no profound difference between school sites	General expectation for compliance with consequences denoted for non-compliance—no profound difference between school sites
Elective Courses	Approximately 60 total with 15 available to ninth graders	35 total with all of these courses being available to ninth graders
Guidance Services	Three (3) full-time guidance counselors with student assignments spanning all four (4) grade levels	Six (6) full-time guidance counselors with two (2) assigned to each grade level: two (2) ninth-grade counselors
Professional Organizational Structure	Departmentalization—a traditional secondary school framework	Departmentalization in grade nine—a traditional secondary school framework; teaming in grades eight and seven
Transitional Programming	Not formalized, yet existent within the structure—particularly for grade nine	Highly formalized and based vastly on a departmentalized approach that replicates a high-school-like program

As noted in the previous matrix, there are notable similarities and differences between the case schools. This information alone is insufficient for answering the primary study questions—hence the rationale for examining the perceivable effects of school grade-level organizational structures on ninth-grade learners via administration of semi-structured interviews to practitioners at both schools. Data compiled from these interviews are the focus of subsequent sections of this chapter.

4.2 PRACTITIONER PERCEPTIONS—THE DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS OF NINTH GRADERS

This section presents data collected from semi-structured interviews administered to subjects at the grades 9-12 high and grades 7-9 junior high school schools pertinent to the first study question: **What do principals, guidance counselors, and teachers believe are the developmental needs of ninth graders?** As indicated by that overarching question, school personnel who participated in these interviews included building principals, guidance counselors, and teachers of multiple disciplines. Study participants responded to a series of prompts clustered by pertinence to the general question noted above. These prompts are evidenced in the second sections under Letter A of both semi-structured interview protocols featured in Appendices E and F. The following highlights the commonalities and differences across roles and sites with attention to recurring themes and, if applicable, outliers revealed by study participants. This section is sequenced as follows as it relates to the first study question: the perceptions of the high-

school practitioners, the perceptions of junior-high-school practitioners, and cross-referencing of similarities and differences across roles and sites.

4.2.1 Perceptions of high school staff on ninth-grade developmental needs

Subjects at the grades 9-12 site indicated an array of ideas pertinent to their perceptions of the developmental needs of ninth graders, based on a series of questions related to this topic, as indicated by the semi-structured interview protocols noted in Appendices E and F. Emergent themes revealed by participants are as follows: **adolescence**, **age**, **immaturity**, and **impulsiveness**. Appendix J provides an itemized list of grades 9-12 subjects, the concepts they articulated, key quotations related to those themes, and the frequency by which they were reported.

All participants (100%) at the grades 9-12 high school believe that ninth graders are immature. HS.P exemplified this theme with the following statement (personal communication, July 17, 2013):

It is my believe that ninth graders have a unique psychological position that requires them to be dealt with in a different manner than how one would address sixth grade and twelfth-grade students. I think that the 13, 14, and 15 age range where students are addressing puberty for the first time really creates some unique aspects for [educators].

Similarly, another participant stated,

[Ninth graders] are at that mysterious age where they cannot be the people they want to be. When they supposedly do things wrong, they don't always realize it. They are not bad; they're 14. It's like frying a piece of chicken and hoping it turns into steak. It can't happen. We can't make them grownups when they are only 14-years-old. Developmentally they are not in a position to make legitimate decisions...it's their being; they're 14, and we can't make

them be 16” (HS.SS.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).

In some instances, participants attributed this immaturity to either adolescence or age; however, three participants asserted that age and adolescence are irrelevant factors. Also with the exception of two individuals, subjects at the high school identified adolescence as a major factor pertinent to ninth-grade development. Another prevalent theme reported among this group was impulsiveness. A majority perceived ninth graders as impulsive. According to HS.GC (personal communication, September 5, 2013), “ninth graders are more affected by peer pressure than other grades...not able to be actively introspective; they are more apathetic and impulsive.”

With the exception of immaturity, consensus eludes the other common themes. Most provocatively with regard to adolescence/puberty, a majority (70%) views it as integral to ninth graders. This does not mean that the remaining three participants did not reference that construct. As a matter of fact, two of them believe that adolescence is completely irrelevant to ninth-grade development. HS.PS.T, “I think [ninth graders] learn just as easily as upperclassmen do. I don’t think it hurts their learning, whatsoever.” Likewise, HS.SCI.T (personal communication, September 5, 2013) asserted the following: “the whole puberty stuff is a non-issue—its just immaturity.” Almost conversely, HS.SS.T not only referenced adolescence as an important factor, but also cited the importance of reading literature related to it: “a good ninth-grade teacher doesn’t stop researching student development. I think for ninth graders, student development comes first and content follows...[one has] to know [about] adolescent development.” Still one individual indicated nothing pertinent to adolescence in

relationship to ninth-grade development—perhaps an implication of non-relevance or simply a missed opportunity for disclosure of a position on this matter.

In terms of outliers, the two participants noted in the previous paragraph, as well as HS.GC.T, believe that fear and intimidation may be characteristic of age variances between ninth graders and upperclassmen (10th, 11th, and 12th graders) and may actually benefit high-school freshmen. HS.GC in context with the ninth-grade transition from middle school to high school and exposure to upperclassmen role models asserted, “I also see value in throwing them to the wolves.” HS.PS.T perceives ninth graders as easily intimidated by adults and upperclassmen and construes this as an important aspect of their development. Finally, HS.SCI.T believes fear is a positive factor of ninth-grade growth and development. In context with the transition to high schools, this same participant believes, “[ninth graders being] scared to death...that’s always a good thing.”

4.2.2 Perceptions of junior high school staff on ninth-grade developmental needs

Subjects at the junior high school also expressed their perceptions of the developmental needs of ninth graders, based on the same questions posed to high-school participants (Appendices E and F). Emergent themes revealed by grades 7-9 site practitioners are as follows: **adolescence, confidence, leadership, maturity, and opportunity**. Appendix K details the contexts by which these constructs were revealed, key quotations related to these themes, and the frequency by which they were reported.

All participants (100%) at the junior high school indicated that ninth graders are developmentally mature relative to seventh and eighth graders. To exemplify this point,

JHS.P (personal communication, July 16, 2013) asserted, “ninth graders are truly the leaders in our school...they are the leaders in terms of academics, athletics, extracurricular [activities]...that is certainly an important role ninth graders play within this school.” Seven of 10 or 70% of participants at the junior high school perceive adolescence significant to ninth-grade development; however, unlike the high school, none of the grades 7-9 site participants expressed that adolescence/puberty is irrelevant to ninth-grade development. In support of the idea that adolescence is critical to ninth-grade development, JHS.SCI.T (personal communication, September 13, 2013) stated, “being 14 to 15 years old, biologically, [ninth graders’] hormones are all over the place, so that certainly affects their development through adolescence.” Seven of 10 or 70% of subjects at the grades 7-9 site perceive leadership integral to ninth grade development. As noted by JHS.SE2.T (personal communication, September 13, 2013), “I think that [ninth graders] are role models to the seventh and eighth graders. This helps them become confident in themselves, as well as developing them into leaders.” This quote is also relevant to the next statistic regarding confidence. Six of 10 or 60% believe confidence building and five of 10 or 50% cite opportunities as important to ninth-grade development. Also with the exception of two participants, subjects at the grades 9-12 site identified adolescence as a major factor pertinent to ninth-grade development.

As for data outliers, one statement stood out. According to JHS.SE2.T (personal communication, September 13, 2013), “I think students are being over tested...I think adding more tests for these kids [to include grade-nine students] is burning them out and some concepts and things they actually need to learn are now neglected.” Perhaps this statement can be linked to opportunities or, perhaps more appropriately, the lack thereof.

4.2.3 Developmental needs: Key similarities and differences across sites and roles

At the grades 9-12 school, six of 10 or 60% of participants indicated that age is key to ninth-grade development. Seven of 10 or 70% construed adolescence as critical to ninth-grade development. Five of 10 or 50% believe that impulsiveness characterizes high-school freshmen and is therefore pertinent to their development. Finally, 10 of 10 or 100% of those sampled indicated that immaturity is central to ninth-grade developmental needs. Appendix J explicates these findings.

Of those sampled at the junior high school, five of 10 or 50% identified opportunity as relevant to ninth-grade development. Six of 10 or 60% believe that confidence building is important to ninth graders. Seven of 10 or 70% non-congruent stated explicitly that adolescence and leadership are integral to the freshmen experience. Lastly, 10 of 10 or 100% indicated that maturity is central to ninth-grade development, regarding them as more mature than so-called underclassmen. Appendix K summarizes this information.

Adolescence was the only commonly reported theme at each site. As for differences, the most striking one presents itself as a dichotomy between what the junior-high teachers perceive as maturity versus what high-school faculty deem as immaturity. Is this discrepancy a result of relativity to other grade levels housed within the respective structures, or is it a function other phenomena unbeknown to the researcher? Bernhardt (2004) would likely assert that these variances are contingent on environmental factors, hence a potential explanation for this finding. Regardless, this key difference may

explain why the junior-high sample overwhelmingly perceives ninth graders as leaders and high-school personnel do not.

Also notable are similarities and differences among the professionals between sites. Subjects at each school appear unified in their perceptions of ninth-grade development. However, the same cannot be stated for participants across locales. For example with regard to the site principals, HS.P indicated that age, adolescence, and immaturity are indicative of ninth-grade developmental needs, whereas JHS.P believes that leadership, maturity, and opportunities are paramount to this. Likewise with the guidance counselors, HS.GC reported that adolescence, immaturity, and impulsiveness emblemize ninth graders; conversely, excluding adolescence, HS.GC perceives confidence, leadership, and maturity to be key developmental factors. This opposing pattern repeats itself across roles with arguably the most notable variance resting amid the biology teachers. HS.SCI.T (personal communication, September 5, 2013), who ironically does not acknowledge adolescence as a factor in human development, asserted that immaturity and impulsiveness exemplify ninth-grade developmental needs: “the whole puberty stuff is a non-issue—[it is] just immaturity.” JHS.SCI.T (personal communication, September 13, 2013) steadfastly believes the opposite: “biologically [ninth graders’] hormones are all over the place, so that certainly affects their development through adolescence.” In summary, the viewpoints of practitioners across roles and sites appear to be almost uniformly contrary.

4.3 PRACTITIONER PERCEPTIONS—ADDRESSING THE DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS OF NINTH GRADERS

This section presents data collected at both school sites germane to the second study question: **How do principals, guidance counselors, and teachers in their specific professional roles address the developmental needs of ninth-grade students?** As indicated by that overarching question, school personnel who participated in these interviews included building principals, guidance counselors, and teachers of multiple disciplines. Participants responded to a series of prompts clustered by pertinence to the general question noted above. These prompts are listed under Letter B of the interview protocols featured in Appendices E and F. The following highlights commonalities and differences by roles and sites, recurring themes, outliers in the following sequence: the perceptions of the high-school practitioners, the perceptions of junior-high-school practitioners, and a cross-referencing of similarities and differences across roles and sites.

4.3.1 Perceptions of high school staff on addressing grade nine developmental needs

Subjects at the grades 9-12 site voiced their perceptions on how their school addresses ninth-grade developmental needs. Emergent themes conveyed by these professionals are as follows: **class meetings, orientation, structure**; albeit, a majority of subjects believe that **the school does not facilitate programming specific to address the developmental needs of ninth graders**. Appendix L provides an itemized list of

subjects at this site, alongside the prevalent themes they expressed, quotations related to those concepts, and the frequency by which they were reported.

Eight of 10 or 80% of grades 9-12 subjects indicated that either individual teachers or the school utilize structure in order to accommodate grade-nine development. For example, HS.ELA.T (personal communication, September 5, 2013) declared, “I try to give [ninth graders] a structure and expectations to help them move through the transition [to high school].” Likewise, HS.FA.T (personal communication, September 5, 2013) also asserted regard for structure in supporting ninth graders: “I structure my lessons...so that [students] have minimal downtime. I try to teach organizational skills within my lesson. I will hand out procedural sheets.” Beyond this, there appears to be a dichotomy between subjects who believe that the school addresses freshmen developmental and those who do not. For instance, five of 10 or 50% acknowledged their school’s freshman orientation program, and four of ten or 40% expressed that class meetings support ninth-grade developmental needs. According to HS.P (personal communication, July 17, 2013),

We do have specific grade-level assemblies for ninth graders. As we conduct assemblies, I think the tone of those assemblies [for ninth graders] is much more serious and forceful than it is with the [upperclassmen] which tend to be more laid-back.”

Conversely, 7 of ten or 70% indicated that their school provides no formalized programs for addressing ninth-grade development. As HS.M.T (personal communication, September 5, 2013) stated, “I don’t know that we really as a school community address ninth-grade developmental needs...there isn’t really anything established for the [ninth-grade] group...I’m not lying.” Also, HS.SS.T (personal communication, September 5,

2013) shared a similar perception: “I do not know. I only know what I do. I don’t know of a wider event. Teachers do what they do, but there is no connectedness...resistance and isolation hampers unity in addressing ninth graders.” These statements allude to the notion that the grades 9-12 site is devoid of programs, such as grade-specific class meetings and orientation programs. This represents a contradiction, for 50% and 40% respectively acknowledge and deny their school’s facilitation of orientation and class meetings.

4.3.2 Perceptions of junior high school staff on addressing grade nine developmental needs

Grades 7-9 site participants responded to the same questions posed to their high-school colleagues. This cohort conveyed the following themes: **assemblies, communications, extracurricular activities, and internal and external student support systems.** Appendix L outlines these constructs alongside evidential quotations, outliers, and the frequency by which they were reported.

Eight of 10 or 80% of sampled junior-high practitioners believe that grade-nine-specific assemblies are key to the school’s effectively accommodating ninth-grade development. As stated by JHS.ELA.T (personal communication, September 13, 2013), “there are many different things the school uses to address [ninth-grade] development. We have general assemblies, and then we have more specific [grade-level] assemblies throughout the year that address topics that wouldn’t apply to [all] students [at the

school].” JHS.FA.T (personal communication, September 13, 2013) confers with the previous statement—at least as it applies to assemblies:

I think [ninth graders] are treated differently, because they are more mature; and when they have assemblies, [presenters] address issues of a more mature nature...[to support] progression to high school. There are several [of these] sessions in anticipation of transition to high school.

Moreover, seven of ten or 70% cite internal and external support services (i.e., in-house guidance/school counseling services, interdisciplinary supports for academically-challenged students, involvement by outside agencies that provide mental health and teen support services, and the student assistance program). As noted by JHS.P (personal communication, July 16, 2013),

I think academically there is a broad spectrum of programs available to students; we help them identify which programs are best for them. We go on to provide a wide array of electives and extra-curricular [activities] for them to select and activities to get involve in. Plus we have an array of outside agencies that meet with students and families with our own administrators and local district justices to work with students who have issues.

JHS.SCI.T’s perspectives are generally similar to that of JHS.P, for both participants believe that their grades 7-9 junior high schools support ninth-grade development:

We have a student assistance team for students who struggle emotionally. Physically if we think there’s any sort of abuse problems, the support team provides for a whole range of problems that kids might have. We have a good hands-on approach from year-to-year assemblies to meetings with individuals...our counselors are also available for struggling students (JHS.SCI.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).

Five of 10 or 50% cite communications as critical for meeting grade-nine needs. For instance, JSH.ELA.T (personal communication, September 13, 2013) asserted,

Working with students struggling with anything. Making myself available before and after school...holding their hand and letting

them know, hey, I'm here if you need anything. If you're having difficulties...making them comfortable enough to talk...to allow them to rectify that situation.

Likewise with regard to communication, JHS.SS.T (personal communication, September 13, 2013) believes that “it about forging relationships with students, being concerned about them, talking with them...see me before school, after school, or on a one-on-one basis.” In short, communication with ninth graders is crucial for helping them develop.

Lastly, half or 50% of grades 7-9 sites participants contend that extracurricular involvement is essential to freshman development. JHS.PS.T (personal communication, September 13, 2013) confirms the availability and emphasis of extracurricular activities for ninth graders: “[ninth graders] through high school visitations and the activities fair are introduced to curricular and extracurricular opportunities, including a tour of the [regional] technical center.” More poignant is a statement that JHS.P (personal communication, July 16, 2013) made on that same topic: “we tell students—almost preach it—to get involved. Don't just be here to go to classes. The more you're involved in school and what it has to offer, the better off they're going to be.”

4.3.3 Addressing developmental needs: Key similarities and differences across sites and roles

At the grades 9-12 site, eight of 10 or 80% of participants identified structure as important for addressing ninth graders' developmental needs. Five of 10 or 50% acknowledge their school's orientation program for new ninth graders as a means for supporting freshmen's development. Similarly, four of 10 or 40% believe that grade-

level class meetings aid in this development. Seven of 10 or 70% do not believe that their school facilitates formalized programming for ninth graders. This data hints at a dichotomy between participants relevant to how they and their school handle ninth graders, particularly in reference to development. Even more, the guidance counselor (HS.GC) expressed ideas thematically inconsistent with that of all other practitioners at that site. This information is detailed in Appendix L.

Data compiled at the grades 7-9 junior high school revealed the following: eight of 10 or 80% of participants construe assemblies as a means utilized by the school for addressing ninth-grade development. Seven of 10 or 70% acknowledge their school's internal and external support services (i.e., contracted services with outside agencies, in-house guidance/school counseling, etc.). Similarly, four of 10 or 40% believe that grade-level class meetings support ninth-grade developmental needs. Half or 50% indicate that communications and extracurricular involvement are crucial to meeting those needs. Unlike the grades 9-12 high school, zero subjects reported that their school addresses freshman development. This data alludes to the idea that the grades 7-9 site does facilitate formalized programming geared toward ninth graders and preparing them for senior high school. Appendix M explicates this.

Between the sites, the only common theme—though articulated in different terms—is utilization of grade-level class meetings (at the grades 9-12 structure) or grade-level-specific assemblies (at the grades 7-9 building) for addressing grade-nine development. Otherwise, the data indicates that practitioners between sites view ninth-grade development with different lenses. Even more interesting is the fact that subjects at the high school appear to be almost equally divided on whether or not their school

addresses student needs. Conversely, participants at the junior high school unanimously agree that their school supports ninth-grade development.

Similarities and differences across roles between and within sites were also examined. As a general observation, the differences were stark among teachers, except in instances for which they reported that their schools utilize grade-level assemblies and class meetings. Sharp contrasts were also apparent between the school principals. HS.P indicated that class meetings, (ninth-grade) orientation, and structure are integral for addressing ninth-grade development. Seemingly from an opposing perspective, JHS.P reported utilization of extracurricular activities and support systems for handling those same needs. Even more interesting was the contrast between the counselors. JHS.GC believes that extracurricular activities play an important role in developing ninth graders. HS.GC makes no mention of this; however, both counselors agreed that support services are key for supporting freshmen developmentally. In this sense, the high-school counselor's perspective appears to be congruent with not only the JHS.GC, but also the entire junior-high-school sample. Perhaps this finding can be explained in part by the conceptual framework for this dissertation, as noted in Section 3.4. Presumably, HS.GC by virtue of professional role interacts with ninth graders differently than that of others sampled at the grades 9-12 site. Likewise, the lens this individual views ninth graders through may also affect his/her perceptions. Variances in the counselor's perspectives may indicate manifestations of environmental forces that influence viewpoints (Bernhardt, 2004).

4.4 PRACTITIONER PERCEPTIONS—THE EFFECT OF SCHOOL GRADE-LEVEL CONFIGURATIONS ON NINTH GRADERS

This section presents data collected from semi-structured interviews administered at each site relevant to the third study question: **How do principals, guidance counselors, and teachers perceive the effectiveness of their respective schools' grade-level organizational configuration on ninth-grade education?** As indicated by that overarching question, school personnel who participated in these interviews included building principals, guidance counselors, and teachers of multiple disciplines. Participants responded to a series of prompts clustered by pertinence to the question noted above. These prompts are noted under Letter C of both interview protocols (Appendices E and F). This section indicates commonalities and differences across roles and sites, recurring themes; and, if applicable, outliers. It is sequenced as follows: the perceptions of 9-12 practitioners, the perspectives of 7-9 personnel, and similarities/differences across roles and sites.

4.4.1 Perceptions of high school staff on the effects of the grades 9-12 organizational plan on ninth-grade learners

Nearly all grades 9-12 subjects—nine of 10 or 90%—indicated **awareness of their school's grade-level plan (9-12), knowledge of their school system's grade-level organizational model (4-4-4), and familiarity with alternative grade-level plans for educating ninth graders** (i.e., grades 7-12 junior/senior high schools, grades 7-9 junior

high schools, grades 6-8 middle schools that feed into four-year high schools, etc.). There also appears to be a dichotomy between subjects who believe that their school's grade-level organizational model is appropriate and effective for ninth graders versus those who do not. Four of 10 or 40% participants expressed **positive regard for the grades 9-12 plan**; these same individuals also indicated that they **would not alter their school's grade-level plan or its programs**—they expressed satisfaction. For instance, HS.PS.T (personal communication, September 5, 2013) stated, "I don't believe I would change a thing." HS.ELA.T (personal communication, September 5, 2013) concurred: "I think it's working. I wouldn't make any major changes." Contrarily, five of 10 or 50% of that same sample **perceive the effects of the grades 9-12 structures as negative to freshmen**. These same individuals also reported that they **would prefer either alteration to their school's grade-level plan** (i.e., establishment of an in-house freshmen academy) or a **wholesale shift of ninth graders to a junior high school**). HS.M.T (personal communication, September 5, 2013) asserted, "If we were to stay nine to 12, which I don't see changing soon, I would love to see something like a freshmen academy." Similarly, HS.SS.T (personal communication, September 5, 2013) indicated that if given the choice, "[the study participant] would not integrate grade nine into a high school. [The participant] likes [grades] seven through nine...our freshmen get booed at pep assemblies. What else can I say"? Like HS.SS.T, HS.P also believes that ninth graders would be better served in junior high schools:

In a perfect world, in my opinion, I would rather see [secondary educational institutions] structured as grades seven through nine and 10 through 12 in separate buildings...I just believe this based on my experience as an educator and coach (HS.P, personal communication, July 17, 2013).

Many 9-12 participants also expressed a need for systemic changes that would entail less departmentalization, hence an implication of **support for interdisciplinary teaming**. As noted by HS.SE1.T (personal communication, September 5, 2013), “collaboration and a more team-orientated approach and less isolation would benefit ninth graders.” Building on that point, five of 10 or 50% explicitly stated explicitly that teaming would be beneficial to ninth graders. As HS.P (personal communication, July 17, 2013) construes it, “[high schools] have restrictions on being able to team. [The participant] thinks in many ways the traditional middle school [concept] would be beneficial when working with ninth graders.”

4.4.2 Perceptions of junior high school staff of the effects of the grades 7-9 organizational plan on ninth-grade learners

All participants at the junior high school indicated **awareness of their school’s grade-level plan (7-9), knowledge of their school system’s grade-level organizational model (6-3-3), and familiarity with alternative grade-level plans for educating ninth graders** (i.e., grades 9-12 high schools, grades 7-12 junior/senior high schools, grades 6-8 middle schools that feed into four-year high schools, etc.). For instance, all or 100% expressed **positive viewpoints on the grades 7-9 structure**. These same individuals also reported that they **would not alter their school’s grade-level plan or programs**—they expressed satisfaction. JHS.SE1.T firmly believes that junior high schools are developmentally appropriate environments for ninth graders:

Personally, I am 100 percent behind the junior-high model... helps support learning and leadership through opportunities

with a mix of grade levels that works given [ninth graders'] stage of life (JHS.SE1.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).

Furthermore, JHS.SE1.T's professional counterpart JHS.SE2.T (personal communication, September 13, 2013) asserted, "[the school's impact on ninth graders] is absolutely positive! [The participant] thinks the ninth graders are where they need to be right now."

Though amid this complacency, there was one notable critique. JHS.SS.T would prefer more integration and interactions among grade levels:

I like this structure, but would prefer the older model once used with more integration of grades seven through nine as to supporting more encompassing relationships with students and other teachers in a smaller setting [like was the case] in the former junior high schools (JHS.SS.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).

Despite this critique, JHS.SS.T still believes that ninth graders belong in junior high schools and not senior high schools: "I think ninth graders definitely benefit from being outside the [grades] 10 through 12 high school" (JHS.SS.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013). To that end, JHS.ELA.T (personal communication, September 13, 2013) stated, "I really am a proponent of the [grades] seven through nine [model]. I don't think ninth graders are ready to be walking around with 18-year-olds."

Departmentalization is another prevalent theme expressed by grades 7-9 site participants. Eight of 10 or 80% believe that this construct benefits ninth graders, for they perceived it as necessary for preparing them for senior high school—an environment that is characteristically departmentalized and usually devoid of interdisciplinary teaming (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010). JHS.ELA.T (personal communication, September 13, 2013) asserted that departmentalization is critical to "gradually transitioning [ninth graders to high school]" and other subjects alike regularly concurred with this idea.

4.4.3 School grade-level plans: Key similarities and differences across sites and roles

Most grades 9-12 site participants (90%) expressed an awareness of their school's grade-level organizational plan, their school district's K-12 organizational model, and alternative organization structures for educating ninth graders. There appears to be a division between those who either perceived grades 9-12 schools positively or negatively. Likewise, those with positive standpoints ardently oppose alterations to their school's grade-level configuration and programs. Contrarily, those who expressed negativity believe that the grades 9-12 plan insufficiently addresses ninth graders' developmental needs and proposed either freshmen academies and/or junior high schools to remedy this issue. Appendix N graphically details this information, alongside emergent themes and evidential quotations related to those concepts.

At the grades 7-9 junior high school, 100% of subjects are aware of their school's grade-level organizational plan, system-wide organizational model, and alternatives to those configurations. All (100%) perceive their school as positive for ninth graders. They support the grades 7-9 model and oppose major alterations to their school's grade-level configuration and programs. The rationale for this can be summarized in the words of JHS.SE2.T (personal communication, September 13, 2013), "we're doing well here—none," and JHS.GC (personal communication, September 13, 2013), "I don't think I would change anything. I think it works well." Appendix O graphically details this data, alongside emergent themes and evidential quotations related to those concepts.

With the exception of the high school guidance counselor (HS.GC), practitioners sampled at both sites were fully aware of their schools' grade-level plans, their school systems' grade-level organizational structures, and alternatives to those for educating ninth graders. In short, 95% of those sampled between sites are aware of models and practices different from those utilized by their respective schools and school systems. Practitioners at the junior high school uniformly voiced contentment for the grades 7-9 model and 6-3-3 plan for educating ninth graders. The same cannot be stated for those sampled at the high-school site. Again, it appears that a dichotomy exists among practitioners at that school with roughly half supporting the grades 9-12 (high-school) model and the subsequent 4-4-4 plan for educating freshmen and the other half voicing dissatisfaction. Ironically half of the grades 9-12 participants believe that their school would better address ninth graders developmentally, if they implemented interdisciplinary teaming. Conversely, 80% of participants at the junior high school believe that departmentalization better supports ninth graders. As stated by JHS.GC (personal communication, September 13, 2013) asserting, "I don't think it would be good to team ninth graders."

Why is this data ironic? High schools are customarily departmentalized institutions (Briggs, 1920; Ellerbrock & Kieffer, 2010; Handley, 1982; Seller, 2004; Weiss & Kipnes, 2006). Middle schools—arguably more akin to junior high schools than senior high schools—are philosophically interdisciplinary (Barton & Klump, 2012; Ellerbrock & Kieffer, 2010; Handley, 1982). Presumably one—including the principal researcher—would have thought that the high-school sample would have overwhelmingly favored departmentalization, and that junior-high practitioners would

have extolled the theoretical virtues of interdisciplinary teaming. The data suggests otherwise; yet at the same time, traditional junior high schools are founded upon secondary-level doctrines subscribed of departmentalization (Briggs, 1920; Handley, 1982). Perhaps this finding should not be construed as astonishing, except for the fact that the case junior high school represents a hybrid educational institution with the seventh and eighth grade components organized by interdisciplinary teams with hints of departmentalization and the ninth-grade components indicative of the inverse. Conceivably this information can be partially explained via Bernhardt (2004) and the conceptual framework of this dissertation—as noted in Section 3.4—that asserts that environment, policies, and interactions with those realms influence perceptions. Maybe this data supports assertions made by junior-high proponents such as Briggs (1920) and Var (1965), who believed that departmentalization benefitted all secondary-level learners—including ninth graders.

This research also examined similarities and differences among professionals across sites. With the exception of the high-school guidance counselor, nearly all participants were knowledgeable of grade-level organizational plans at the local and system-wide levels. Given the fact that 100% of grades 7-9 site teachers articulated satisfaction with their school and school system's grade-level plans and roughly half of the sampled teachers at the grades 9-12 site voiced dissatisfaction, clearly variances exist among teachers across sites. The same cannot be stated for the guidance counselors, for both expressed complacency with their school and school districts' organizational structures. The site principals evidenced the most conspicuous and provocative differences. Foremost, the high school principal (HS.P) believes that ninth graders would

benefit from interdisciplinary teaming; the junior high school principal contends that departmentalization is essential to developmentally supporting that same grade level. Secondly, HS.P perceives grades 9-12 plans negatively pertinent to ninth graders. For that same grade level, JHS.P perceives grades 7-9 positively, hence insinuating that each principal agrees that the grades 9-12 model does not best suit ninth graders. Finally and most explicitly, HS.P (personal communication, July 17, 2013) articulated, “I would rather see [secondary education] structured as grades seven through nine and 10 through 12 in separate buildings.” JHS.P (personal communication, July 16, 2013) appears to agree with this statement: “I am very much for the set up (of grades 7-9) that we have...I believe we have a program that truly does work well for our ninth graders.” Again, both principals agree that the grades 7-9 junior high school works better for ninth graders—just arguably from different contextual lenses.

4.5 CHAPTER REVIEW

This chapter reported data compiled via the following collection methods, as denoted in *Chapter 3*: document reviews, direct observations, and semi-structured interviews. The initial sections (4.0 and 4.1) remind readers of this study’s purpose and the nature of the sample groups. An identical number of subjects were drawn from each site: 10 per school ($n = 10$) for an aggregate of 20 ($n = 20$). The samples were similar in correlation with their functions, professional tenures, and years of experience working with ninth graders. Descriptive statistics inclusive of central tendency (mean, median, and mode)

and variance (standard deviation) help to support this assertion. Both sites' infrastructures are comparable, hence implying the schools' physical plants are neither inferior nor superior to the other. Educational programs and requirements also appear to be comparable, less their contrasts in grade-level configurations (9-12 and 7-9).

The latter sections (4.2, 4.3, and 4.4) were framed by the three primary research questions and provide readers with focused and detailed analyses of the findings. Based on information compiled from semi-structured interviews (Appendices E and F), sharp perceptual contrasts exist between subjects at the grades 9-12 senior high school and the grades 7-9 junior high school. Differences were also often evidenced among practitioners within the high school. The proceeding chapter (*Chapter 5*) further details this information via exhibit of implications deduced from the data.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH, AND CLOSURE

This final chapter reflects on data yielded from this research and implications drawn from those findings. Central to this are the emergent themes revealed in tandem with practitioners' perspectives on ninth graders and the policies that affect them in reference to the scholarly literature presented in *Chapter 2*. The sequence of this chapter is as follows: implications related to the literature, limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and closing discussion.

5.1 IMPLICATIONS RELATED TO THE FINDINGS AND LITERATURE

Data yielded from this research revealed an array of emergent themes; however, these concepts are not congruent between both sites depending upon the specific issue. Despite comparability between the climates and infrastructures at both schools as denoted in Table 11 of *Chapter 4* and Appendix I, practitioners at grades 9-12 building perceive ninth graders differently than their colleagues at the grades 7-9 school. Notably, a pronounced dichotomy exists among subjects at the grades 9-12 site with half supporting their school's organizational plan and programs for ninth graders and 40% opposing

them. The following cross-references these variances in correlation with the policies that define ninth-grade-level programming at each school.

5.1.1 Site juxtaposition: Perceptions of ninth-grade developmental needs

There are many differences between what was revealed by practitioners at both sites pertinent to ninth-grade development. Adolescence/puberty accounts for the only common theme. Subjects at the high school believe that age, adolescence/puberty, and immaturity are critical aspects of ninth-grade-level developmental needs. More often than not, the typical age range of 14 to 15 years for most ninth graders and adolescence/puberty are attributed to that grade level's perceived immaturity and impulsiveness, though some contend that adolescence/puberty is irrelevant to ninth-grade development.

Practitioners at the junior high school generally identified adolescence/puberty, confidence, leadership, and maturity as definitive attributes of ninth-grade development. Whereas high-school subjects perceive ninth graders as immature, the junior high practitioners consider them to be mature and for the most part did not reference the age range for ninth-grade student cohorts. They also referenced confidence building and leadership roles as important to aspects of ninth graders' development—a construct referenced in a different context by only one participant at the high school: “you can get ninth graders into their routine before they become too familiar with the [school], before they get too much confidence. That's what leads to bad behaviors” (HS.SCIT, personal communication, September 5, 2013). This perspective is provocative and defies many of

the theories on adolescence outlined in the review of literature (*Chapter 2*) of this document. Eccles (1999), attributes confidence and self-worth to positive behaviors and favorable outcomes for all learners. Likewise Handley (1982) believes that leadership and the confidence it inspires is essential to ninth-grade-level development. Obviously not all secondary-level school practitioners see it that way. What this means for ninth graders instructed by individuals of this mindset may be a viable topic for research.

Clearly subjects at the high school perceive ninth graders' developmental needs differently than that of their professional colleagues at the junior high school. This calls into question relativity. Perhaps the subjects' perceptions are forged by comparison with other grade levels within their respective schools. Is it unreasonable for a so-called ninth-grade teacher to perceive their students within a grades 9-12 structure as immature in comparison with their upperclassmen counterparts? Is it reasonable to assume that ninth graders in junior high schools are going to appear to be more mature than the seventh and eighth graders? Bernhardt (2004), as noted in Section 3.4, Conceptual Framework, believes that personal beliefs are influenced by environment and often the policies that define them. High-school practitioners seem to construe ninth graders' developmental needs negatively, and subjects at the junior high school have a more positive outlook on students at that same grade level. This general tone seems to influence how practitioners address ninth graders' developmental needs, as noted in the next subsection. How much of these perspectives are a function of environment, policies, and experience? The answer to this question is unknown based on the intent and scope of this study, though it may be plausible to assume that environment can influence one's outlook on reality—including how they perceive ninth graders.

5.1.2 Site juxtaposition: Perceptions on addressing ninth graders' developmental needs

There were some significant distinctions between what was reported by practitioners at the grades 9-12 high school versus those at the grades 7-9 junior high school relevant to the means by which ninth-grade developmental needs are addressed. Use of assemblies for enlightening and/or informing ninth graders about rules, procedures, and topics relevant to them represents a commonality between both schools. Staff members at the grades 9-12 site placed more emphasis on the rules and procedures; whereas subjects at the grades 7-9 site described them more like class meetings for addressing issues that may affect their lives. Subjects at the high school also cited ninth-grade orientation and structure (in general) as measures for addressing ninth-grade development. Those sampled at the junior high school indicated the importance of communications, extracurricular activities, and internal/external services for supporting the development of ninth-grade students.

The most significant difference between the two sites rests in the frequency by which the themes were noted by the respective samples. In other words, high-school practitioners appear to be conflicted in their perceptions of accommodating ninth-grade developmental needs. A majority articulated that there are no formalized programs for ninth graders, therefore implying perhaps that they are treated the same as students in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades; however, a sizable number identify class meetings

and ninth-grade orientation as facets of ninth-grade-specific programming. This data implies that the grades 9-12 site likely orchestrates some (formal and informal) programs for ninth graders, yet facilitation thereof may be devoid of shared commitment and vision by the practitioners of that school.

Once again, it appears that the practitioners and both school communities address ninth graders' developmental needs differently. The grades 7-9 junior high school emphasized communications, extracurricular activities, grade-level assemblies, and support services as central aspects in assisting ninth graders as they develop. In contrast with the junior high school, aside from heightened structure, the grades 9-12 practitioners reported that their school does not administer formalized programming geared toward ninth-grade development. That does not mean that the school neglects them entirely. The school orchestrates annual ninth-grade orientation programs at the onset of new school years and sometimes facilitates grade-level meetings. This data begs the question: what are potential catalysts for the variances between both schools? Perhaps it is a matter of philosophy and the policies that support it.

Styron and Peasant (2010) and Chmelynski (2003), critics of grades 9-12 high schools and proponents of freshmen academies (or ninth-grade-only learning centers) believe that the secondary philosophy indicative of most grades 9-12 high schools serves conducive to marginalizing ninth graders both academically and developmentally. Ironically, middle-school proponents made the same claims about grades 7-9 junior high schools (Allen; 1980; Barton & Klump, 2012; DeJong & Craig, 2002; George, 2000). According to Lounsbury and Johnston (1985), high schools tend to ignore the developmental needs of ninth-grade-age children: "a disturbing discrepancy [exists]

between school policies and practices and the developmental needs of 14-year-old students” (Styron & Peasant, 2010, p. 2). Unlike the junior high school featured in this study, the grades 9-12 high school seems to exemplify this notion—at least some of the practitioners sampled by this study. This prompts the next question examined in the proceeding subsection: what are the effects of particular grade-level organization plans on ninth graders?

5.1.3 Site juxtaposition: Perceptions on the effects of grade-level plans on ninth graders

There are relevant commonalities and variances between what was disclosed by practitioners at the grades 9-12 site versus those at the grades 7-9 site significant to the effectiveness of their respective schools’ grade-level organizational models in meeting the developmental needs of ninth graders. Generally, subjects at both sites are aware of their schools’ grade-level plans, their school systems’ grade-level organizational model, and the existence of grade-level configurations and programs different than theirs. As for the contrasts, half of the study participants at the high school reported that they favor formalized interdisciplinary teaming to support ninth-grade development. Ironically, a vast majority of subjects at the junior high school believe departmentalization is essential of effectively educating ninth graders. This idea is provocative, given the literature on the topic. Ellerbrock and Kieffer (2010) asserted that interdisciplinary teaming built upon the small learning communities or—in middle-school terms—*houses*, specifically ninth-grade houses, are critical to promoting their aptitude, self-esteem, and readiness of

transition to high school; hence they deem departmentalization—an opposing construct—as counterproductive to the effective education of ninth graders. Presumably, based on the data when juxtaposed with the literature, subjects at the case junior high school disagree with this assertion.

Another key difference is how the respective samples construe the effectiveness of their schools' in addressing the developmental needs of ninth graders. At the grades 9-12 site, half of those sampled believe their school adversely affects freshmen and those same individual expressed a desire for changes to either their grade-level configuration and/or programming (and policies) to better support ninth graders. Conversely, a significant minority of that same sample perceives their school as having a positive effect on ninth graders and would prefer to maintain the status quo. In short, the sample group at the high school is divided on whether or not their school's grade-level plan and programs are appropriate for ninth-grade learners. Unlike the high school, all or 100% of participants at the junior high school indicated positive perceptions of the grades 7-9 organizational model, the programs their school supports, and its effectiveness for enhancing ninth-grade development.

Subjects at the junior-high site believe that their school's grade-level configuration is optimal for educating ninth graders. This defies assertions made by early proponents of the middle school concept—the primary demise catalyst for grades 7-9 junior high school who believed that ninth graders were better educated in four-year high schools (George, 2000; Handley, 1982). However, this finding would probably not surprise Briggs (1920) and Var (1965), who were ardent supporters of junior high schools and believed wholeheartedly in their suitability for ninth-grade learners. This data would

probably not stun contemporary proponents of freshmen academies, who perceive four-year high schools as inadequate for educating ninth graders. By no means does this data prove that grade-level organizational plans affect educational outcomes of ninth graders or developmental programs intended to serve them. So educational theorists, including Coladarci and Hancock (2002) believe that grade-level configuration have little or no affect on students at any grade level. Regardless of one's beliefs, this data suggests implications relevant to grade-level organizational models worthy of additional research.

5.1.4 How this study has influenced the researcher

In the initial chapter of this dissertation, I stated that empirical data garnered from my efforts would support other educational practitioners in developing policies and programs beneficial to ninth graders. I approached this study with a passion and desire to grow both intellectually and professionally. In short, I learned a lot about ninth-grade education—a topic for which I perceive myself well versed. This study has inspired me to delve deeper into phenomena that impact ninth-grade pupils. This shall entail additional research on adolescent developmental theories as they pertain to freshmen, the effects of grade-level configurations beyond those of focus for this study to include grades 7-12 junior/senior high schools and grade-nine-only freshmen academies, and comparative studies that examine the perspectives of ninth-grade students across multiple school configurations. Moreover within my current professional realm—a grades 7-12 junior/senior high school, I shall continue to intently monitor ninth-grade educational policies, programs, and practices. I will make sure that all of my students—including

ninth graders—are not proverbially “thrown to the wolves,” hence ensuring they receive educations that are developmentally responsive to their emotional, social, and scholastic needs.

As a school principal, I am committed to providing all students with opportunities conducive to optimization of their citizenship and scholarship. I also believe that school grade-level configurations do in fact affect learners to varying degrees. Pertinent to grade ninth and based on my findings, the literature I explored, and my practical experiences, I steadfastly believe that ninth graders are better suited for junior high schools rather than senior high schools. Indeed, this perception defies contemporary convention and may be construed as misguided and/or provocative (in all the wrong ways); however, given what I have presented in this study, I consider my assertions to be both reasonable and respectable. I intend to convey this message via scholarly discourse, forums, and publications, therefore heightening advocacy for ninth graders and promoting the once-prevalent grades 7-9 junior high schools for their benefit. This dissertation is only the beginning.

5.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Qualitative research, particularly case studies, produces rich, highly descriptive data that can be transferrable to practical domains (Mertens, 2010; Stake, 2006). However, transferability does not necessarily equate to generalizability. Defined, “generalizability is a concept that...technically refers to the ability to generalize results of research

conducted with a sample to a population that the sample represents (Mertens, 2010, p. 430). This modified case study focused on two case sites. Semi-structured interviews were administered to 20 participants ($n = 20$) with document and field analysis limited to those participants' sites. By no means does this study purport the potential for generalizability of findings, given its limited range of localities and subjects; however, in lieu of generalizable data, this research is intended to provide readers with information that is both engaging and potentially applicable to their professional practices and settings.

Another limitation of this study rests in the participants and what one may construe as unfortunate facet of human nature. Though the researcher assumed that participants would respond honestly to interview prompts, he also realized that it was impossible to ensure that all responses are accurate and reflective of the participant. To reconcile for this limitation, the researcher incorporated other data sources into the study, including document review and observation. This approach allowed for internal validity checks alongside triangulation.

Pertinent to specific methodological applications, each source of data was marked with challenges that posed problems for the principal researcher. Interviews, though conducive to depth and flexibility, they can be time consuming, difficult to analyze, and subject to imposed bias from interviewer (Mertens, 2010). This proved to be true on multiple occasions. Observations are adaptable; but they too can be exceedingly complex and laborious (Mertens, 2010). Document reviews, like the methods noted in the former, require copious time commitments and can also be inflexible (Mertens, 2010). Of course all of this encompassed a case-study-orientated approach to research, whose

administration was at times arduous and cumbersome. Regardless of these challenges, the researcher was fully committed to utmost ethics and integrity in administering each instrument.

Participants of this study were selected purposefully and not randomly. The researcher-selected sites on the basis of their grade-level plans and whether or not they include grade nine. The intent was to examine the perspectives of these stakeholders within the contemporary norm (a grades 9-12 high school) versus the once prevalent paradigm (a grades 7-9 junior high school). Subsequently, both building-principals were selected for participation by default of their schools. The principals upon mutual agreement with the researcher then selected the remaining subjects, hence defining the sample for their school. Were subjects selected on a premise of favoritism and/or other extenuating criteria? The answer to this question cannot be determined; therefore, the means by which they selected these individuals remains unknown, hence potentially compromising the reliability of the data.

The principal researcher has been an educational practitioner and scholar for well over a decade—a career that has spanned from novice-level intern teaching to building-level administration. His personal experiences within public schools and at the university level have forged his perceptions—arguably a natural byproduct of human existence. He is committed to gaining impartial, objective answers to his research inquiries. Admittedly, personal actualities, if left unchecked, can be detrimental to research (Babbie, 2013; Mertens, 2010, Stake, 2006; Yin, 2009). At the same time, it can be used constructively in understanding and accurately reporting data (Yin, 2009). The principal researcher's experiences and standpoints did not interfere with this research and was only

utilized for the purpose of comprehending and effectively analyzing case contexts and the data compiled from them.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As a foundational study intended to inspire discourse on the topic of ninth grade education and the possible effects of particular grade-level organizational plans on that grade level, the principal researcher provides readers with the following recommendations for future research, inspired by this study's findings and limitations inherent to its methodology:

1. Execution of a more refined, non-modified case study: Defined, a case study is “an approach that involves an in-depth exploration of a single case, or example, of the phenomenon under study” (Mertens, 2010, p. 233). This method entails extensive observations and data collection often spanning large intervals of time (Mertens, 2010; Millar, 1999). This term modified was applied to this study, for it examined phenomena over an abbreviated period of time. A more extensive study akin to traditional case-study approaches would likely yield richer data.
2. Execution of a larger-scale study, founded on survey research methodology: The findings of this study were highly localized and should not be construed as generalizable. To rectify for this, a companion study based on survey research can be developed and disseminated to a larger sample of practitioners. Findings from this study would likely to be generalizable to the schools and school

systems the sample is intended to represent well beyond the researcher's local vicinity. Finding from this type of study may also be stratified, hence allowing for comparative analysis of generalizable data across professions.

3. Comparative studies on students assessing pupil perceptions: Whether by means of quantitative or qualitative methods, arguably the most important perspectives on education come from the students themselves. This type of study can measure how ninth graders perceive their schools, the program their schools support for inspiring development, and what they consider to be ideal learning environments for them.
4. Execution of a quantitative study examining ninth-grade student performance at comparable schools with differing grade-level organizational plans: This would account for a highly objective study based on pre-existing dataset compiled and maintained by reputable institutions. Data compiled from this type of study can provide insights into potential relationships between the academic performance of ninth graders and the type of schools they attend. Correlations and statistical significance on the basis of testing null and alternative hypotheses may be ascertained via regressions.
5. Execution of this same study, except with non-ninth-grade orientated subjects: Clearly the perceptions of practitioners who work with ninth graders on a regular basis is integral to research relevant to that grade level; however, as noted by the Conceptual Framework of this study in Section 3.4, environmental factors (including school and system-wide grade-level plans) would also influence perspectives of those who work outside grade nine. It would be interesting to

gauge the perceptions of those stakeholders. Would so-called seventh-grade teachers be as enthusiastic about ninth graders being housed in a grades 7-9 junior high school? Similarly, would those specializing in high-school seniors have mixed feelings on ninth graders? Answers to these questions can provide more insights to this complex topic.

The proposals above represent only a small sampling of research possibilities germane to ninth grade developmental needs, the best ways to address those needs, and the types of schools that are best for students at that grade level.

5.4 CLOSING DISCUSSION

The conclusions drawn from the data appears to indicate that practitioners at the grades 9-12 high school perceive ninth graders differently than their professional counterparts at the grades 7-9 junior high school. This insight applies to their perspectives on ninth graders' developmental needs, the means by which these needs should be addressed, and the optimal learning environment for these students. Generally, the big takeaways of this dissertation are as follows:

- Question 1: Practitioners sampled at the grades 9-12 high school seem to construe ninth graders developmental needs in negative terms with emphasis on what they deem as immaturity; participants at the grades 7-9 junior high school regard grade-nine development in more positive terms with emphasis on maturity

and accommodation of their needs by means of leadership opportunities, extensive support services, and extracurricular activities.

- Question 2: Subjects at the grades 9-12 high school appeared divided on how to address the developmental needs of ninth graders and whether or not those needs are worthy of special attention. Personnel sampled at the junior high school appeared unified in their commitment to accommodating grade-nine needs by means of programs and structures indicative of whole-child educational approaches. Defined, whole-child educational approaches emphasize “scholarship and intellectual development [combined to create a school] especially adapted to the needs of pre and early adolescent pupils” (Handley, 1982).
- Question 3: Stakeholders sampled at the high-school site appeared to be divided on their satisfaction with the grades 9-12 configuration and subsequent 4-4-4 plan with some supporting and others opposing it; conversely, participants at the junior high school unanimously support the grades 7-9 configuration and subsequent 6-3-3 plan.

Additionally, a dichotomy seems to exist among subjects at the high school regarding with some believing that their school provides ninth graders with an environment and programs befitting of their needs. Other at that same site vehemently disagreed with that assertion and contended otherwise. Conversely, subjects at the junior high school voice positive regard for ninth graders and considered the grades 7-9 configuration and programs embedded within it optimal for supporting ninth-grade-level development;

whereas many of the grades 9-12 subjects voiced either indifference or negativity toward ninth graders.

The ultimate purpose of this research was to assess the perceptions of principals, guidance counselors, and teachers who work in schools that house ninth-grade populations as they relate to the developmental needs of ninth graders, how these needs are addressed by these practitioners, and the impact school grade-level configurations have on these students at two distinctly different schools without claim of generalizability. That does not mean that the case sites may not be applicable to particular schools and the professional who populate them. Though the yielded data seems to imply that the once common grades 7-9 junior high school may be a better learning environment for ninth graders than the now prevalent grades 9-12 high school, more information is needed before a canon assertion of this sort can be made. The method by which this study was implemented was never intended to forge definitive, universally applicable results; rather, it was meant to serve as a catalyst for discussion and a foundation for future inquiry. Conceivably, the data compiled from this research can also assist educational stakeholders in making sound decisions on behalf of ninth graders.

In recent years, there has been renewed interest in ninth-grade-level education (Barton & Klump, 2012). As noted by Seller (2004), who cites Paglin and Fager (1997), “the trend toward middle school rather than junior high configurations has resulted in the rising phenomenon of ‘grade nine only’ schools and/or campuses” (p. 8). Beyond pointing out the growing popularity of ninth-grade-only learning centers, Paglin and Fager’s statement also implies the pronounced effect that educational policies can have

on students—whether intentional or unintentional. Starting in the 1960s, the middle school movement and the policies it inspired displaced ninth graders to four-year (grades 9-12) high schools, but at what cost to individuals at that grade level? As noted by Briggs (1920) and Handley (1982), ninth graders benefited from junior high schools. As George (2000) asked, “could a new generation of junior high schools grow from some deviation in enrollment” (p. 15), amid a dysfunctional middle school system? His response: “yes, I think it might” (George, 2000, p. 15). Given the results of this study compounded with modern trends and what is known today about adolescent development, perhaps it is time to rethink the utility and validity of grades 7-9 junior high schools for educating ninth graders.

APPENDIX A

GLOSSARY OF TERMINOLOGY

<i>Term</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Source</i>
4-4-4 School System Grade-Level Organizational Structure/Plan	A school grade-level system in which elementary schools are inclusive of grades one through four, middle schools are comprised of grades five through eight, and high schools are inclusive of grades nine through 12.	N.Y.S.E.D., 2009
5-3-4 School System Grade-Level Organizational Structure/Plan	A school grade-level system in which elementary schools are inclusive of grades one through five, middle schools are comprised of grades six through eight, and high schools are inclusive of grades nine through 12.	N.Y.S.E.D., 2009
6-2-4 School System Grade-Level Organizational Structure/Plan	A school grade-level system in which elementary schools are inclusive of grades one through six, junior high schools (or lower secondary schools) are comprised of grades seven and eight, and senior high schools (or upper secondary schools) are inclusive of grades nine through 12.	Briggs, 1920; N.Y.S.E.D., 2009
6-3-3 School System Grade-Level Organizational Structure/Plan	A school grade-level system in which elementary schools are inclusive of grades one through six, junior high schools (or lower secondary schools) are comprised of grades seven through nine, and senior high schools (or upper secondary schools) are inclusive of grades 10 through 12.	Briggs, 1920 N.Y.S.E.D., 2009
6-6 School System Grade-Level Organizational Structure/Plan	A school grade-level system in which elementary schools are inclusive of grades one through six and junior/senior high schools (or combined lower and upper secondary schools) are comprised of grades seven through 12.	N.Y.S.E.D., 2009
8-4 School System Grade-Level Organizational Structure/Plan	A school grade-level system in which elementary schools are inclusive of grades one through eight and high schools are inclusive of grades nine through 12.	Allen, 1980; Briggs, 1920; N.Y.S.E.D., 2009
Academies	The most common secondary school of 18 th and 19 th century America, these private secondary institutions featured comprehensive curricula coupled with central thematic subjects.	Butts, and Cremin, 1953
Adolescence	1. "A uniquely human... [transitional] phase of development with its own biological, social, and intellectual hallmarks"	1. McKinney, Fitzgerald, & Strom-men, 1982, p. 5 2. Jaffe, 1998, p. 19

	<p>2. “To come of age...to grow up”</p> <p>3. “The teenage years between childhood and adulthood”</p>	<p>3. McKinney, Fitzgerald, & Strom-men, 1982, p. 3</p>
Caring Environment	<p>Coined for ninth-grade learning centers (or freshmen academies), this references a “school home environment that promotes ownership, care, connection, and accountability that will translate into improved student learning, academic success, attendance, and connection to the institution.”</p>	<p>McIntosh & White, 2006, p. 43</p>
Carnegie Unit (High-School Credit)	<p>“[This] unit was developed in 1906 as a measure of the amount of time a student has studied a subject. For example, a total of 120 hours in one subject—meeting 4 or 5 times a week for 40 to 60 minutes, for 36 to 40 weeks each year—earns the student one <i>unit</i> of high school credit. Fourteen units were deemed to constitute the minimum amount of preparation that could be interpreted as <i>four years of academic or high school preparation.</i>”</p>	<p>Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2013, para. 3</p>
Common School	<p>A common 19th century-era idiom and synonym for high school</p>	<p>Webb, et al, 2003</p>
Elementary School	<p>A type of school founded on elementary educational principles and intended for pre-adolescents—it usually houses any combination of grades one through six and sometimes one through eight and exist within an array of school system grade-level organizational structures, including 4-4-4, 5-3-4, 6-2-3, 6-3-3, 6-6, and 8-4 plans.</p>	<p>Barton & Klump, 2012 Baer, 1999 French, 1957 N.Y.S.E.D., 2009</p>
Elemiddle School	<p>A contemporary idiom and synonym for K-8 elementary schools. Elemiddle schools are indicative of an 8-4 school system grade-level organizational structure/plan.</p>	<p>Dove, et al, 2010</p>
Enlightenment	<p>An intellectual and social movement that challenged common mores of the middle ages, including those related to educational programs.</p>	<p>Butts and Cremin, 1953</p>
Grade House (House)	<p>Typically associated with middle schools and ninth grade/freshmen academies, this semi-autonomous learning environment purports to foster personalized educational opportunities for particular groups of students via interdisciplinary teaming and regard for the whole child.</p>	<p>Ellerbrock & Kieffer, 2010</p>
High School	<p>A type of school founded on secondary educational principles that usually houses grades nine through 12, but can also be expanded to include lower secondary grades (7-8 or 7-9) as a junior high school, upper secondary grades (9-12 or 10-12) as a senior high school, or lower and upper secondary grades (7-12) as a junior/senior high school.</p>	<p>Barton & Klump, 2012 Briggs, 1920 N.Y.S.E.D., 2009</p>
High School	<p>An American educational movement of late</p>	<p>Webb, et al, 2003;</p>

Movement	19 th and early 20 th centuries that challenged the academy system and called for publicly supports comprehensive secondary education, typically for students in grades nine through 12.	Pulliam and Van Patten, 2003
Junior High School	A type of school founded on secondary educational principles and intended for adolescents, it usually houses grades seven through nine and sometimes seven through eight. Theoretically, this school ensures academic autonomy and rigor within an environment responsive to adolescent needs. Junior high schools are typically indicative of 6-2-3 and 6-3-3 school system grade-level organizational plans.	Barton & Klump, 2012 Briggs, 1920
Junior High School Movement	An American educational movement of the early 20 th century that challenged K-8 elementary and 9-12 high schools, it was one of two primary catalyst for secondarization of grades seven and eight, as well as the removal of ninth grade from (senior) high schools. It is also symbolic of the demise of grades 7-12 junior/senior high schools.	Allen, 1980; Briggs, 1920; Handley, 1982; Renchler; Wright, 2006
Junior/Senior High School	A type of school founded on secondary educational principles, it is intended for adolescents and young adults. It was one of two primary catalysts for secondarization of grades seven and eight. It usually houses grades seven through twelve and is typical of 6-6 school system grade-level organizational plans.	Barton & Klump, 2012 Briggs, 1920
Latin Grammar Schools	Colonial era secondary-level schools of Great Britain and the American British Colonies that emphasized advanced studies in select content areas, namely ancient languages, for collegiate preparation.	Norberg, 1943
Middle School	A type of school geared toward adolescents, which combines upper elementary-level grades and lower secondary-level grades within a framework that emphasizes basic skills, exploratory curricula, and team-orientated instruction. Middle schools are typical of 4-4-4 and 5-3-4 school system grade-level organizational plans.	Barton & Klump, 2012 Handley, 1982
Middle School Movement	An American educational movement of the middle and late 20 th century that challenged the secondary education system and called first for reforms to junior high schools and later their complete demise in favor of schools more responsive to adolescent learners.	Allen, 1980; Handley, 1982; Renchler; Wright, 2006
Ninth Grade/Freshman Academy	A program that assists ninth graders in academic and social transitioning to high school. These developmentally responsive programs can be housed within high schools or completely autonomous of those environments. Small and caring learning communities coupled	Chmelynski, 2003 Cooper, 2011; McIntosh & White, 2006

	with teaming instructional frameworks are hallmarks of this model.	
Ninth-Grade Bulge	A phenomenon that often occurs in grades 9-12 high schools that results from a disproportionately large number of course failures by ninth-grade students, hence leading to grade-level retentions and larger ninth-grade cohorts in comparison to counterparts in grades 10, 11, and 12.	Cooper, 2011
School Grade-Level Organizational Model, Plan, or Structure	A grouping of grade levels by a school district for instructional and administrative purposes.	Briggs, 1920 N.Y.S.E.D., 2009
Secundarization	The phenomenon of reclassifying and shifting grade levels that were previously considered elementary-level to the secondary level. Secundarization is commonly associated with junior high schools and junior/senior high schools.	Var, 1965
Secondary Education	Education of a grade levels higher than that of elementary [or middle] schools and lower than that of colleges or universities.	Brown, 1897
Whole Child	An educational philosophy commonly associated with elementary and middle schools that emphasize “scholarship and intellectual development [combined to create a school] especially adapted to the needs of pre and early adolescent pupils.”	Handley, 1982, p. 13

APPENDIX B

STUDY PARTICIPANT VERIFICATION LETTER TO PRINCIPALS

DATE
HEADING

Dear _____:

Please regard this letter as formal verification of your participation in a study titled, *A Modified Case Study Examining the Effects of Specific School Grade-Level Organizational Models on Ninth-Grade Learners*. My name is Robert E. Frioni, and I am a doctoral candidate with the University of Pittsburgh School of Education and principal researcher for this study. You were selected to participate in this research, because of your expertise in educating ninth-grade learners.

One of the purposes of this study is to gauge the perceptions of school practitioners as they relate to the following: the developmental needs of ninth graders, how educational stakeholder such as yourself address those needs, and the effects of your school's grade-level configuration (i.e., grades 9-12, grades 7-9, etc.) on ninth-grade-student development. I will engage you in a semi-structured interview that shall ask you to disclose information pertinent to your background, professional status, and perceptions on the topics noted in the former.

There are no risks or direct benefits associated with this research. Though as a token of gratitude, you will be provided snacks and refreshments for your participation. Your interview responses will not be identifiable, therefore ensuring confidentiality. The University of Pittsburgh Institutional Review Board (I.R.B.) has critiqued this study.

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from this study at any time. I will conduct the semi-structured interview in person at your school: _____, in _____, Pennsylvania, starting at _____ o'clock. If you have questions regarding any aspects of this research, contact me at xxx.xxx.xxxx (mobile) or at username@xxxx.xxx.

Best,

Robert E. Frioni, M.A.T.
Doctoral Candidate, Administrative and Policy Studies
University of Pittsburgh School of Education

APPENDIX C

STUDY PARTICIPANT VERIFICATION LETTER TO PRINCIPAL-SELECTED GUIDANCE COUNSELORS AND TEACHERS

DATE
HEADING

Dear _____:

Please regard this letter as formal verification of your participation in a study titled, *A Modified Case Study Examining the Effects of Specific Grade-Level Organizational Models on Ninth-Grade Learners*. My name is Robert E. Frioni, and I am a doctoral candidate with the University of Pittsburgh School of Education and principal researcher for this study. You were selected by your principal to participate in this research, because of your expertise in working with ninth-grade learners. Your participation in this study is contingent upon mutual agreement of the school principal, subject, and researcher.

One of the purposes of this study is to gauge the perceptions of school practitioners as they relate to the following: the developmental needs of ninth graders, how educational stakeholder such as yourself address those needs, and the effects of your school's grade-level configuration (i.e., grades 9-12, grades 7-9, etc.) on ninth-grade-student development. I will engage you in a semi-structured interview that shall ask you to disclose information pertinent to your background, professional status, and perceptions on the topics noted in the former.

There are no risks or direct benefits associated with this research. Though as a token of gratitude, you will be provided snacks and refreshments for your participation. Your interview responses will not be identifiable, therefore ensuring confidentiality. The University of Pittsburgh Institutional Review Board (I.R.B.) has critiqued this study.

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from this study at any time. I will conduct the semi-structured interview in person at your school: _____, in _____, Pennsylvania, starting at _____ o'clock. If you have questions regarding any aspects of this research, contact me at xxx.xxx.xxxx (mobile) or at username@xxxx.xxx.

Best,

Robert E. Frioni, M.A.T.
Doctoral Candidate, Administrative and Policy Studies
University of Pittsburgh School of Education

APPENDIX D

MODIFIED CASE STUDY SITE AND PARTICIPANT SUMMARY

Site	Rationale for Site	Participants	Rationale for Participants
<p>Code: HS</p> <p>Grades 9-12 (Sr.) High School →</p>	<p>-Contemporarily the most common school configuration employed for educating ninth graders in the United States</p> <p>-Recent manifestation of ninth-grade only learner centers implies problems with grades 9-12 structures in meeting the needs of ninth graders</p> <p>-Comparative analysis of present and past predominant school organizational plans for educating ninth graders (grades 9-12 high schools versus grades 7-9 junior high schools)</p>	<p>Code: HS.P</p> <p>High School Principal →</p>	<p>Principal’s perspective: this individual oversee all aspects of the grades 9-12 learning environment, inclusive of curriculum, programs, and other aspects of grade-nine education.</p>
		<p>Code: HS.GC</p> <p>High School Guide. Counselor →</p>	<p>Counselor’s perspective: this individual provides services to ninth graders related to their academic, emotional, and social development, as well as career development.</p>
		<p>Code: HS.ELA.T</p> <p>High School E.L.A. Teacher</p> <p>(Humanities) →</p>	<p>E.L.A. teacher’s perspective: this individual facilitates instruction in content mostly driven by language and creative literature, hence a perspective unique to that scholastic area.</p>
		<p>Code: HS.SS.T</p> <p>High School Social Studies Teacher</p> <p>(Humanities) →</p>	<p>Social studies teacher’s perspective: this individual facilitates instruction in content mostly driven by language, empirical studies, and expository literature, hence a perspective unique to that scholastic area.</p>
		<p>Code: HS.M.T</p> <p>High School Math Teacher</p> <p>(Analytical Disc.) →</p>	<p>Math teacher’s perspective: this individual facilitates instruction in content mostly driven by logic and numbers, hence a perspective unique to that scholastic area.</p>
		<p>Code: HS.SCLT</p> <p>High School Science Teacher</p> <p>(Analytical Disc.) →</p>	<p>Math or science teacher’s perspective: this individual facilitates instruction in content mostly driven by application and experimentation, hence a perspective unique to that scholastic area.</p>

		<p>Code: HS.FA.T</p> <p>High School Fine Arts</p> <p>(Elective Area) →</p>	<p>Fine arts teacher's perspective: this individual facilitates instruction in content areas outside common core subjects, hence a perspective unique to areas outside the instructional mainstream.</p>
		<p>Code: HS.PS.T</p> <p>High School Practical Skills Teacher</p> <p>(Elective Area) →</p>	<p>Practical skills teacher's perspective: this individual facilitates instruction in content areas outside common core subjects, hence a perspective unique to areas outside the instructional mainstream.</p>
		<p>Code: HS.SE.1</p> <p>High School Special Education Teacher</p> <p>(Spec. Education) →</p>	<p>(1st) Special education teacher's perspective: this individual facilitates specialized programs for students with exceptionalities both within and outside of common core subjects, hence a perspective unique to their professional practice.</p>
		<p>Code: HS.SE.2</p> <p>High School Special Education Teacher</p> <p>(Spec. Education) →</p>	<p>(2nd) Special education teacher's perspective: this individual facilitates specialized programs for students with exceptionalities both within and outside of common core subjects, hence a perspective unique to their professional practice.</p>
<p>Code: JHS</p> <p>Grades 7-9 Jr. High School →</p>	<p>-Historically from circa 1920 through the 1970s the most common school configuration employed for educating ninth graders in the United States</p> <p>-Recent manifestation of ninth-grade only learner centers implies problems with grades 9-12 structures in meeting the needs of ninth graders—an area for which some believe the junior high school was effective</p> <p>-Comparative analysis of present and past predominant school organizational plans for educating ninth graders (grades 9-12 high schools versus grades 7-9 junior high schools)</p>	<p>Code: JHS.P</p> <p>Jr. High School Principal →</p>	<p>Principal's perspective: this individual oversee all aspects of the grades 7-9 learning environment, inclusive of curriculum, programs, and other aspects of grade-nine education.</p>
		<p>Code: JHS.GC</p> <p>Jr. High School Guide. Counselor →</p>	<p>Counselor's perspective: this individual provides services to ninth graders related to their academic, emotional, and social development, as well as career development.</p>
		<p>Code: JHS.ELA.T</p> <p>Jr. High School E.L.A. Teacher</p> <p>(Humanities) →</p>	<p>E.L.A. teacher's perspective: this individual facilitates instruction in content mostly driven by language and creative literature, hence a perspective unique to that scholastic area.</p>
		<p>Code: JHS.SS.T</p>	<p>Social studies teacher's perspective: this individual facilitates instruction in content</p>

		<p>Jr. High School Social Studies Teacher</p> <p>(Humanities) →</p>	<p>mostly driven by language, empirical studies, and expository literature, hence a perspective unique to that scholastic area.</p>
		<p>Code: JHS.M.T</p> <p>Jr. High School Math Teacher</p> <p>(Analytical Disc.) →</p>	<p>Math teacher's perspective: this individual facilitates instruction in content mostly driven by logic and numbers, hence a perspective unique to that scholastic area.</p>
		<p>Code: JHS.SCI.T</p> <p>Jr. High School Science Teacher</p> <p>(Analytical Disc.) →</p>	<p>Math or science teacher's perspective: this individual facilitates instruction in content mostly driven by application and experimentation, hence a perspective unique to that scholastic area.</p>
		<p>Code: JHS.FA.T</p> <p>Jr. High School Fine Arts</p> <p>(Elective Area) →</p>	<p>Fine arts teacher's perspective: this individual facilitates instruction in content areas outside common core subjects, hence a perspective unique to areas outside the instructional mainstream.</p>
		<p>Code: JHS.PS.T</p> <p>High School Practical Skills Teacher</p> <p>(Elective Area) →</p>	<p>Practical skills teacher's perspective: this individual facilitates instruction in content areas outside common core subjects, hence a perspective unique to areas outside the instructional mainstream.</p>
		<p>Code: JHS.SE.1</p> <p>Jr. High School Special Education Teacher</p> <p>(Spec. Education) →</p>	<p>(1st) Special education teacher's perspective: this individual facilitates specialized programs for students with exceptionalities both within and outside of common core subjects, hence a perspective unique to their professional practice.</p>
		<p>Code: JHS.SE.2</p> <p>High School Special Education Teacher</p> <p>(Spec. Education) →</p>	<p>(2nd) Special education teacher's perspective: this individual facilitates specialized programs for students with exceptionalities both within and outside of common core subjects, hence a perspective unique to their professional practice.</p>

APPENDIX E

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR PRINCIPALS

Hello, (Participant):

My name is Bob Frioni, and I am a doctoral candidate with the University of Pittsburgh School of Education and the principal investigator of a dissertation study titled, *A Modified Case Study Examining the Effects of Specific Grade-Level Organizational Models on Ninth-Grade Learners*. You were selected to participate in this study because of your expertise in educating 9th graders. You will be engaged in a semi-structured interview that gauges your perceptions of ninth-grade education on multiple levels. This interview should take between 30 minutes to one hour to complete. Your participation is contingent upon mutual agreement between the researcher and you.

There are no risks or direct benefits associated with this research. Though as a token of gratitude, you have been provided snacks and refreshments. Confidentiality is assured. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from this study at any time. If you have questions regarding any aspects of this research, you may ask me now or contact me at xxx.xxx.xxxx or at username@xxx.xxx. If you are ready, let us begin.

- I. Demographical Information: The following questions pertain to your professional background. Demographical data compiled from this portion of the semi-structured interview will be used for summary analyses. Some descriptions may not be reported, if they risk one's confidentiality.
1. What is your contractual/official title?
 2. Prior to becoming an administrator, what grade level(s) did you counsel, and/or what grade level(s) did you teach?
 3. Prior to becoming an administrator, what department(s) and/or interdisciplinary teams did you belong to?
 4. Prior to becoming an administrator, what courses or subjects did you teach?
 5. How many professional educationally related certifications do you hold and for what content/professional area(s)?
 6. How long have you been a principal, and what other administrative positions have you held?
 7. What would you say is the total number of years you have worked with ninth graders, including time in your current position and in professional roles prior to that?

II. Perceptual Information: This portion of the semi-structured interview, I will ask you questions regarding your perceptions of the following:

- A. The developmental needs of ninth graders;
- B. How your school and you address ninth graders' developmental needs;
- C. How your school's grade-level configuration impacts ninth-grade education.

These items are open-ended and are intended for unrestricted responses. Additional probes may be utilized for inspiring conversation and/or garnering additional data.

Note: Bullet points denote possible probes that may supplement questions.

Topic A: Developmental Needs of Ninth Graders

8. Tell me about your experience and interactions with ninth graders.
 - Ability groups or tracks
 - Courses and subjects
 - Most pivotal moment(s)
9. In comparison to students at other grade levels housed within your school, how do ninth graders differ developmentally from those students?
 - Emotionally
 - Psychologically
 - Socially
10. Based on your experience, what do you consider to be critical aspects of ninth-grade development?
 - Academic/scholastic issues
 - Adolescence and/or puberty
 - Discipline
 - Psychological development
11. Tell me how the distinct life phase of adolescence impacts ninth-grade learners?
 - Emotionally
 - Intellectually
 - Sexually
 - Socially
12. Is there anything else I need to know about the developmental needs of ninth graders?

Topic B: Addressing the Developmental Needs of Ninth Graders

13. Tell me how you address the developmental needs of ninth graders.
 - Curriculum
 - Direct interactions with students
 - Disciplinary procedures
 - Promotion of particular classroom management or general strategies
14. What measures does your school employ for addressing ninth-grade developmental needs?
 - Assemblies and/or class meetings

- Correspondence with parents and/or community stakeholders
 - Counseling services
 - Curriculum
 - Literature, pamphlets, etc.
15. From your professional perspective, describe the plans, practices, and programs utilized by practitioners in your school for meeting the specialized needs of ninth graders.
- Departmentalization
 - Involvement by outside agencies
 - Team-orientated structure
16. Is there anything else I need to know about addressing the developmental needs of ninth graders?

Topic C: The Impact of Grade-Level Configuration on Ninth Graders

17. Describe your school's grade-level configuration and state your familiarity with grade-level organizational models different than that of your school.
- Grades 9-12 high schools fed by middle schools
 - Grades 7-9 junior high schools with 10-12 senior high schools
 - Grades 7-12 (or 8-12) junior/senior high schools
 - School systems with freshmen academies
18. What impact does your school's grade-level organizational plan have on ninth graders?
- Beneficial or positive to students – how?
 - Unbeneficial or negative to students – how?
 - Receptiveness to different organizational structure
19. From your professional perspective, what alterations if any would you make to your school's grade-level organizational structure to better accommodate ninth-grade learners?
- Keep ninth grade where they are?
 - Move ninth grade to different environment?
 - Modify programming for ninth graders?
20. Is there anything else I need to know about the impact of your school's grade-level configuration on ninth graders?

III. General Summary Question

21. Is there anything else you would like to state about ninth grade education that was not addressed in this interview?

APPENDIX F

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR GUIDANCE COUNSELORS AND TEACHERS

Hello, (Participant):

My name is Bob Frioni, and I am a doctoral candidate with the University of Pittsburgh School of Education and the principal investigator of a dissertation study titled, *A Modified Case Study Examining the Effects of Specific Grade-Level Organizational Models on Ninth-Grade Learners*. You were selected by your principal to participate in this study because of your expertise in educating 9th graders. You will be engaged in a semi-structured interview that gauges your perceptions of ninth-grade education on multiple levels. This interview should take between 30 minutes to one hour to complete. Your participation is contingent upon mutual agreement of your principal, the researcher, and you.

There are no risks or direct benefits associated with this research. Though as a token of gratitude, you have been provided snacks and refreshments. Confidentiality is assured. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from this study at any time. If you have questions regarding any aspects of this research, you may ask me now or contact me at xxx.xxx.xxxx or at username@xxx.xxx. If you are ready, let us begin.

- I. Demographical Information: The following questions pertain to your professional background. Demographical data compiled from this portion of the semi-structured interview will be used for summary analyses. Some descriptions may not be reported, if they risk one's confidentiality.
1. What is your contractual/official title?
 2. What grade level(s) do you counsel, or what grade level(s) do you teach?
 3. What department(s) and/or interdisciplinary teams do you belong to?
 4. What courses do you currently teach? (This may apply to counselors, too).
 5. How many professional educationally related certifications do you hold and for what content/professional area(s)?
 6. How long have you been a guidance counselor, or how long have you been a teacher?
 7. How long have you been counseling ninth graders, or how long have you been teaching ninth graders?

II. Perceptual Information: This portion of the semi-structured interview, I will ask you questions regarding your perceptions of the following:

- A. The developmental needs of ninth graders;
- B. How your school and you address ninth graders' developmental needs;
- C. How your school's grade-level configuration impacts ninth-grade education.

These items are open-ended and are intended for unrestricted responses. Additional probes may be utilized for inspiring conversation and/or garnering additional data.

Note: Bullet points denote possible probes that may supplement questions.

Topic A: Developmental Needs of Ninth Graders

8. Tell me about your experience and interactions with ninth graders.
 - Ability groups or tracks
 - Courses and subjects
 - Most pivotal moment
9. In comparison to students at other grade levels housed within your school, how do ninth graders differ developmentally from those students?
 - Emotionally
 - Psychologically
 - Socially
10. Based on your experience, what do you consider to be critical aspects of ninth-grade development?
 - Academic/scholastic issues
 - Adolescence and/or puberty
 - Discipline
 - Psychological development
11. Tell me how the distinct life phase of adolescence impacts ninth-grade learners?
 - Emotionally
 - Intellectually
 - Sexually
 - Socially
12. Is there anything else I need to know about the developmental needs of ninth graders?

Topic B: Addressing the Developmental Needs of Ninth Graders

13. Tell me how you address the developmental needs of ninth graders.
 - Classroom management or general strategies
 - Curriculum
 - Prevalent individual and/or team-based procedures and/or themes
14. What measures does your school employ for addressing ninth-grade developmental needs?
 - Assemblies and/or class meetings
 - Correspondence with parents and/or community stakeholders

- Counseling services
 - Curriculum
 - Literature, pamphlets, etc.
15. From your professional perspective, describe the plans, practices, and programs utilized by practitioners in your school for meeting the specialized needs of ninth graders.
- Departmentalization
 - Involvement by outside agencies
 - Team-orientated structure
16. Is there anything else I need to know about addressing the developmental needs of ninth graders?

Topic C: The Impact of Grade-Level Configuration on Ninth Graders

17. Describe your school's grade-level configuration and state your familiarity with grade-level organizational models different than that of your school.
- Grades 9-12 high schools fed by middle schools
 - Grades 7-9 junior high schools with 10-12 senior high schools
 - Grades 7-12 (or 8-12) junior/senior high schools
 - School systems with freshmen academies
18. What impact does your school's grade-level organizational plan have on ninth graders?
- Beneficial or positive to students – how?
 - Unbeneficial or negative to students – how?
 - Receptiveness to different organizational structure
19. From your professional perspective, what alterations if any would you make to your school's grade-level organizational structure to better accommodate ninth-grade learners?
- Keep ninth grade where they are?
 - Move ninth grade to different environment?
 - Modify programming for ninth graders?
20. Is there anything else I need to know about the impact of your school's grade-level configuration on ninth graders?

III. General Summary Question

21. Is there anything else you would like to state about ninth grade education that was not addressed in this interview?

APPENDIX G
DIRECT OBSERVATION FIELD NOTES FORM

Site Code Name: _____ **Grade Level Plan:** _____ **Date:** _____

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES

Appearance	
Climate/Culture	
Evidence of Student Learning	

Physical Setting	
Physical Structure	

REFLECTIVE NOTES

Concerns	
Ideas	
Questions	

APPENDIX H



University of Pittsburgh *Institutional Review Board*

3500 Fifth Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
(412) 383-1480
(412) 383-1508 (fax)
<http://www.irb.pitt.edu>

Memorandum

To: Robert Frioni
From: Christopher Ryan, PhD, Vice Chair
Date: 7/3/2013
IRB#: PRO13050085
Subject: A Modified Case Study Examining the Effects of Specific School Grade-Level Organizational Models on Ninth-Grade Learners

The above-referenced project has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board. Based on the information provided, this project meets all the necessary criteria for an exemption, and is hereby designated as "exempt" under section 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2).

Please note the following information:

- If any modifications are made to this project, use the "**Send Comments to IRB Staff**" process from the project workspace to request a review to ensure it continues to meet the exempt category.
- Upon completion of your project, be sure to finalize the project by submitting a "**Study Completed**" report from the project workspace.

Please be advised that your research study may be audited periodically by the University of Pittsburgh Research Conduct and Compliance Office.

APPENDIX I

PHYSICAL AND STRUCTURAL DESCRIPTIONS OF SCHOOL SITES

Attribute	High School Site (9-12)	Junior High School Site (7-9)
Appearance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yellow brick exterior with windows • 3 floor levels • Large interior courtyards with door and window access with botanical gardens and a greenhouse • Very clean and orderly • Modern amenities, including interactive whiteboards in half of the standard classrooms • Terrazzo flooring system in corridors with vinyl tile and wall-to-wall carpeting in classrooms and offices and hardwood floors in gymnasiums • Neutral off-white paint scheme in classrooms and hallways • Student-produced artwork and murals in interior corridors, main gymnasium, and stairwells • Plaques and trophies on display, which highlight student accomplishments • Older structure, 1963; building was renovated and rededicated in 2000 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red brick exterior with windows • 4 floor levels in the academic building; 3 levels in athletic complex • Large interior courtyards with door and window access • Very clean and orderly • Modern amenities, including interactive whiteboards in all classrooms, excluding shops • Terrazzo flooring system in corridors with vinyl tile and carpet squares in classrooms and offices and hardwood floors in gymnasiums • Neutral off-white paint scheme in classrooms and hallways • Student-produced artwork and murals in interior corridors • Plaques and trophies on display, which highlight student accomplishments • Modern structure, 2008
Evidence of Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mounted artwork/murals in corridors produced by students • Plaques and trophies that emphasize academic accomplishments • In some classroom bulletin boards reserved for student work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mounted artwork/murals in corridors and stairwells produced by students • Plaques and trophies that emphasize academic accomplishments • In most, classroom bulletin boards reserved for student work
Physical Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campus with significant green space • School exclusive to campus and accompanied by athletic fields and field houses • Suburban setting with suburban sprawl visible around the periphery of the school grounds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campus with limited green space—cityscape • School part of a secondary-level campus, that includes a companion high school, technical school, central offices, athletic amenities • Urban setting with row houses, streets, and sidewalks contiguous with the school

<p>Physical Structure</p>	<p><u>GENERAL</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yellow brick façade • Numerous exterior windows • Large interior courtyards • One building organized by wings • 3 floor levels, all with distinct and sprawling floor plans—the 3rd floor being the largest and most populated of the three levels • Color scheme of neutral off-white in classrooms and corridors • Locker banks in 2nd and 3rd floor corridors—all dark blue • Terrazzo flooring system in corridors with tile or wall-to-wall carpeting in classrooms and hardwood in gymnasiums • Cafeteria (1) anchored by 1 kitchen • Offices: athletic, guidance, main, and nurse (4 suites) • Restroom facilities for adults and students (male and female) • Partially air conditioned <p><u>INSTRUCTIONAL FACILITIES</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Auditorium and stage • Biology labs: 2 • Botanical gardens: 2 • Business education labs: 4 • Chemistry lab: 1 • Computer labs: 8 • Greenhouse: 1 • Gymnasiums (2) with 4 locker rooms: main and auxiliary—both competition size • Core subject classrooms: 38 • Family-Consumer Science Lab: 1 • Fine Arts room: 1 • Industrial Arts/Technology shops: 2 • In-school suspension center: 1 • Library media center: 1 • Music classrooms/labs: 2 • Physics lab: 1 • Planetarium with seating • Special Education rooms: 6 	<p><u>GENERAL</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red brick façade • Numerous exterior windows • Large interior courtyards • Two distinct buildings connected by an interior corridor bridge • 4 floor levels in the academic building, arranged around a large, square interior courtyard with near-identical layouts; 3 floor levels in the athletic building with floor layouts unique to each floor • Color scheme of neutral off-white in classrooms and corridors • Locker banks in 2nd, 3rd, and 4th floor corridors—different colors symbolic of each floor and grade levels • Terrazzo flooring system in corridors with tile or carpet squares in classrooms and hardwood in gymnasiums • Cafeterias (2) anchored by 1 kitchen • Offices: athletic, guidance, main, nurse, and special education (5 suites), plus 6 mini-suites for counselors and vice principals • Restroom facilities for adults and students (male and female) • Fully air conditioned <p><u>INSTRUCTIONAL FACILITIES</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Auditorium and stage • Biology labs: 4 • Business education labs: 2 • Computer lab: 1 • Gymnasiums (2) with 4 locker rooms: main and auxiliary—both competition size • Core subject classrooms: 60 • Family-Consumer Science Labs: 2 • Fine Arts room: 3 • General Science classroom-labs: 8 • Health classrooms: 2 • Industrial Arts/Technology Shops: 4 • In-school suspension centers: 2 • Library media center: 1 • Music classrooms/labs: 4 • Special Education rooms, inclusive of specialized programs: 17 • Swimming pool—competition size with 2 locker rooms • Wrestling room: 1
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APPENDIX J

SUMMARY OF THEMES AT 9-12 SITE—PERCEIVED 9th GRADE NEEDS

Unique Code	Key Themes	Evidence/Key Quotation(s)
HS.P	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Adolescence/Puberty • Immaturity 	<p>“It is my belief that ninth graders have a unique psychological position that requires them to be dealt with in a differently...I think ninth graders have a lower maturity level. I think that the 13, 14, and 15 age range where students are addressing puberty for the first time really creates some unique aspects for an educator” (HS.P, personal communication, July 17, 2013).</p>
HS.GC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adolescence/Puberty • Immaturity • Impulsiveness 	<p>“[Adolescence] is such a confusing time for ninth graders...tumultuous” (HS.GC, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>“Ninth graders are more affected by peer pressure than other grades...not able to be actively introspective; they are more apathetic and impulsive [than upperclassmen counterparts]” (HS.GC, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p>
HS.ELA.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Immaturity • Impulsiveness 	<p>“I think [ninth graders]...when they come to high school are ready to be treated as adults, but are not quite ready for the responsibilities that entails...they’re too young, but then that’s not all of them” (HS.ELA.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>“The upper grades of 11 and 12...are focused on college, career choices, grade-point average, [and] fulfilling the requirements for graduation. Ninth graders—I’m not sure if they thought that far ahead or if they are planning ahead...they’re still living in the moment” (HS.ELA.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p>
HS.FA.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adolescence/Puberty • Immaturity • Impulsiveness 	<p>“Maturity: [ninth graders’] ability to think thing through. Their ability to disseminate information, to organize things, to following directions—[the teacher] has to attend to these [things] in order to assist them” (HS.FA.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>“[Adolescence] is a growing process...it is a challenge for them” (HS.FA.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p>

HS.M.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Adolescence/Puberty • Immaturity 	<p>“I think it’s a maturity thing. There is definitely a difference between a ninth-grade student and a 12th-grade student. They are not in tune with what they need to do academically. Socially, there is a difference. Ninth graders seem like kids. They’re kids” (HS.M.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>“Adolescence, well, again, maturity...they go through the shift in middle school...they are not ready to be adults. They’re still kids and not adults” (HS.M.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p>
HS.PS.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Immaturity 	<p>“Ninth graders are of course more immature, younger, physically smaller, for the most part more well behaved...easily intimidated and timid” (HS.PS.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p>
HS.SCI.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immaturity • Impulsiveness 	<p>“Still immature, still playing games—playing tag, not ready...the whole puberty stuff is a non-issue—it’s just immaturity” (HS.SCI.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p>
HS.SE1.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adolescence/Puberty • Immaturity 	<p>“Quite frankly, [ninth graders] are a lot more immature compared to sophomores, juniors, and seniors...they don’t accept responsibility” (HS.SE1.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>“Adolescence affects cognitive development, emotions, and socialization” (HS.SE1.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p>
HS.SE2.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Adolescence/Puberty • Immaturity 	<p>“My feeling is that ninth graders aren’t quite as mature as 10th, 11th, and 12th graders. I think at their age, they’re still kind of finding their way. I guess you can say socially, developmentally, and in some cases emotionally, they can be difficult, because they’re a little bit immature” (HS.SE2.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p>
HS.SS.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Adolescence/Puberty • Immaturity • Impulsiveness 	<p>“[Ninth graders] are at that mysterious age where they cannot be the people they want to be. When they supposedly do things wrong, they don’t always realize it. They are not bad; they’re 14. It’s like frying a piece of chicken and hoping it turns into steak. It can’t happen. We can’t make them grownups when they are only 14-years-old. Developmentally they are not in a position to make legitimate decisions...it’s their being; they’re 14, and we can’t make them be 16” (HS.SS.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>“You have some students that have barely reached puberty and others that look older...a range of developmental phases of adolescence at [the ninth-grade] level” (HS.SS.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p>

APPENDIX K

SUMMARY OF THEMES AT 7-9 SITE—PERCEIVED GRADE 9 NEEDS

Unique Code	Key Themes	Evidence/Key Quotation(s)
JHS.P	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership • Maturity • Opportunities 	<p>“Ninth graders are truly the leaders in our school...they are the leaders in terms of academics, athletics, extracurricular [activities]...that is certainly an important role ninth graders play within this school” (JHS.P, personal communication, July 16, 2013).</p> <p>“[Ninth graders] understand the importance of education as they grow and the coursework they see is becoming harder” (JHS.P, personal communication, July 16, 2013).</p> <p>“[Ninth graders] are getting a broad experience to have the opportunity to learn what they like, what they don’t like, and to mold the direction they want to take in high school and after high school” (JHS.P, personal communication, July 16, 2013).</p>
JHS.GC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adolescence/Puberty • Confidence • Leadership • Maturity 	<p>“I would say ninth graders [have grown to be familiar with] adolescence...some of them have been in relationship, they are dating, and then they just seem more self-aware, and self-confident [than underclassmen]” (JHS.GC, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>“Since [our ninth graders are] very familiar with how things work [in this school] and are very comfortable in taking on leadership roles...more maturity and more confidence is what I’ve experienced” (JHS.GC, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p>
JHS.ELA.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adolescence/Puberty • Confidence • Leadership • Maturity 	<p>“Ninth graders [start] to act more like adults and make more informed decisions...[they] start to express their leadership skills. They really start to come out of their shells—start building confidence” (JHS.ELA.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>“Ninth graders start to figure out adolescence, start figuring out the hormonal changes, and are better able to manage them” (JHS.ELA.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p>

		<p>“I think in general that ninth grade is a year of transition...they’re still kids...but they start to evolve and start creating independence” (JHS.ELA.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p>
JHS.FA.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adolescence/Puberty • Confidence • Leadership • Maturity • Opportunities 	<p>“By ninth grade, I think students are a little bit more comfortable with the changes that they got going on...they start to get more comfortable, and they feel more at ease with themselves” (JHS.FA.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>“[Ninth graders] keep track of thing on their own and balance many things at the same time. These kids are more serious [than the underclassmen]...leadership” (JHS.FA.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>“Ninth graders find their voices...they are much more mature that the seventh and eighth graders” (JSH.FA.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>“[Ninth graders] need the opportunity to be able to be more responsible before going to high school” (JHS.FA.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p>
JHS.M.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence • Leadership • Maturity 	<p>“I think [ninth graders] develop more maturity and leadership roles...interpersonal relationships and things like that” (JHS.M.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>“Ninth graders are the most mature [of the school’s three] grade levels...top dogs, so confident and the leaders [of the school]” (JHS.M.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p>
JHS.PS.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maturity • Opportunities 	<p>“[Ninth graders are] definitely more mature, so there’s a little more responsibility on their behalf...they’re able to go through the problem-solving process and work through activates that achieve results...a maturity level higher than that of eighth graders” (JHS.PS.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>“Appealing to [ninth graders’] interest and maturity and providing them an opportunity to spread their wings” (JHS.PS.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p>
JHS.SCI.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adolescence/Puberty • Maturity 	<p>“I think that being 14 to 15 years old, biologically [ninth graders’] hormones are all over the place, so that certainly affects their development through adolescence” (JHS.SCI.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>“A lot of [ninth graders] are having a role of being</p>

		<p>an adult outside of school...so that's a struggle in addition to the biological changes [for many]" (JHS.SC1.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p>
JHS.SE1.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adolescence/Puberty • Maturity • Opportunities 	<p>"[Adolescence] is awfully difficult...they're at an age where there's a lot of socialization and learning how to fit into society often supersedes their academics. They're trying to learn who that are as people...which is normal" (JHS.SE1.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>I think they begin to start feeling as if they are becoming adults, and I see a lot of maturity between ninth and tenth grade...development of 14, 15, and even 16—they have a lot of fog" (JHS.SE1T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>"I interview students about their career choices, and we get them to think about what to look for after high school graduation" (JHS.SE1.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p>
JHS.SE2.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adolescence/Puberty • Confidence • Leadership • Maturity 	<p>"Ninth grade students are still trying to figure out who they are...I think as adolescents, [ninth graders] are influenced by their peers" (JHS.SE2.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>"I think that they are role models to the seventh and eighth graders. This helps them become confident in themselves, as well as developing them as leaders" (JHS.SE2.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>"Between eight and ninth grade, the ninth graders somehow mature and they provide good role models for the lower grades" (JHS.SE2.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p>
JHS.SS.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adolescence/Puberty • Confidence • Leadership • Maturity • Opportunities 	<p>"Adolescences are tough years in terms of physiological changes for all grades in the junior high school, including ninth grade" (JHS.SS.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>"The junior high provides ninth graders with leadership opportunities by enabling them to get involved" (JHS.SS.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>"Ninth graders are so much more mature than the seventh and eighth graders...a better school environment for them in terms of enthusiasm, school spirit, opportunities for involvement in extracurricular activities, and building confidence within themselves" (JHS.SS.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p>

APPENDIX L

SUMMARY OF THEMES AT 9-12 SITE—ADDRESSING GRADE 9 NEEDS

Unique Code	Key Themes	Evidence/Key Quotation(s)
HS.P	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class Meetings • Orientation • Structure 	<p>“We do have specific grade-level assemblies for ninth graders. As we conduct assemblies, I think the tone of those assemblies [for ninth graders] is much more serious and forceful than it is with the [upperclassmen] which tend to be more laidback” (HS.P, personal communication, July 17, 2013).</p> <p>“I think one of the items I should talk about is transition between eighth and ninth grade...[there is an] orientation program is in place to support [ninth-grade-level transition to the high school” (personal communication, July 17, 2013).</p>
HS.GC	N/A	N/A
HS.ELA.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No knowledge of formalized programs for ninth graders • Structure 	<p>With regard to addressing ninth-grade development, subject responded, “not sure” (HS.ELA.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>“I try to give them a structure and expectations to help [ninth graders] move through the transition [to high school]” (HS.ELA.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p>
HS.FA.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class meetings • Orientation • No knowledge of formalized programs for ninth graders • Structure 	<p>“We have some meetings for ninth graders when they come to the high school” (HS.FA.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>With regard to addressing ninth-grade development, subject responded, “to be honest, I am not aware of anything...I’m not really aware of much we do” (HS.FA.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>“I structure my lessons...so that [students] have minimal downtime. I try to teach organizational skills within my lesson. I will hand out procedural sheets” (HS.FA.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p>
HS.M.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No knowledge of formalized programs for ninth graders • Structure 	<p>“I don’t know that we really as a school community address ninth-grade developmental needs...there isn’t really anything established for the [ninth-grade] group...I’m not lying” (HS.M.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p>

		<p>“I think whenever I get my ninth graders coming in...they are more susceptible to routine and organization” (HS.M.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p>
HS.PS.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class meetings • Orientation • Structure 	<p>“[The school] holds class or grade-level introductory meetings every year in the auditorium to tell [all students] what the rules are and what is expected of them” (HS.PS.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>“I make sure they are aware of what they need to do, make sure they’re aware of time frames and being on time, and being responsible” (HS.PS.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p>
HS.SCI.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class meetings • No knowledge of formalized programs for ninth graders • Orientation • Structure 	<p>“[The school does] set up the orientation—grade level meetings at the beginning of the year to go over rules, regulations, dress code...not anything really set up” (HS.SCI.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>“I think [ninth graders] need structure, and they need to know what they’re supposed to do. They need structure” (HS.SCI.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p>
HS.SE1.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No knowledge of formalized programs for ninth graders 	<p>With regard to addressing ninth-grade development, subject responded, “I think we meet with colleagues...I can’t think of anything else right now” (HS.SE1.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p>
HS.SE2.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No knowledge of formalized programs for ninth graders • Orientation • Structure 	<p>With regard to addressing ninth-grade development, subject responded, “there is no real program for addressing ninth graders” (HS.SE2.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>“This school does run an orientation for ninth graders” (HS.SE2.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>“My students benefit from routine” (HS.SE2.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p>
HS.SS.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No knowledge of formalized programs for ninth graders • Structure 	<p>With regard to addressing ninth-grade development, subject responded, “I do not know. I only know what I do. I don’t know of a wider event. Teachers do what they do, but there is no connectedness...resistance and isolation hampers unity in addressing ninth graders” (HS.SS.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>Subject alludes to structure via this statement: “I set up my lessons using 10-minute chunks—that’s about the extent of [ninth graders’] attention—manipulating things to give them immediate feedback” (HS.SS.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p>

APPENDIX M

SUMMARY OF THEMES AT 7-9 SITE—ADDRESSING GRADE 9 NEEDS

Unique Code	Key Themes	Evidence/Key Quotation(s)
JHS.P	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extracurricular activities • Internal and external support services 	<p>“We tell students—almost preach it—to get involved. Don’t just be here to go to classes. The more you’re involved in school and what it has to offer, the better off they’re going to be” (JHS.P, personal communication, July 16, 2013).</p> <p>“I think academically there is a broad spectrum of programs available to students; we help them identify which programs are best for them. We go on to provide a wide array of electives and extra-curricular [activities] for them to select and activities to get involve in. Plus we have an array of outside agencies that meet with students and families with our own administrators and local district justices to work with students who have issues” (JHS.P, personal communication, July 16, 2013).</p>
JHS.GC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assemblies • Extracurricular activities • Internal and external support services 	<p>“We always bring the [ninth graders] over to the high school for the [senior high] drama club does a nice [assembly] for them...we have an activities fair...different things like that...site visitation, activities fair, and coordinated meetings with the junior high and high school counselors to help [ninth graders] better transition to high school” (JHS.GC, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>“Our school coordinates services with outside agencies to address issues that individual students may be facing” (JHS.GC, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p>
JHS.ELA.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assemblies • Communications • Internal and external support services 	<p>“There are many different things the school uses to address [ninth-grade] development. We have general assemblies, and then we have more specific [grade-level] assemblies throughout the year that address topics than wouldn’t apply to [all] students [at the school]. We have a student assistance program that actually works to identify the students that might need additional help” (JHS.ELA.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p>

		<p>“Working with students struggling with anything. Making myself available before and after school...holding their hand and letting them know, hey, I’m here if you need anything. If you’re having difficulties...making them comfortable enough to talk...to allow them to rectify that situation” (JHS.ELA.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p>
JHS.FA.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assemblies 	<p>“I think [ninth graders] are treated differently, because they are more mature; and when they have assemblies, [presenters] address issues of a more mature nature...[to support] progression to high school. There are several [of these] sessions in anticipation of transition to high school” (JHS.FA.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p>
JHS.M.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assemblies • Extracurricular activities 	<p>“We have an activities fair...with a tour of the high school” (JHS.M.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>“There are special assemblies where [presenters] just talk about ninth-grade events like the dances and other activities they are not involved in during seventh and eighth grades. We have assemblies to address rules and stuff like that” (JHS.ELA.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p>
JHS.PS.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assemblies • Extracurricular activities • Internal and external support services 	<p>“At the beginning of the year, introductory assemblies, discipline assemblies, role expectations [programs take place] throughout the [school] year. There are sessions with the ninth graders where counselors go over [information] for the upcoming high school years and the high-school counselors come over [to the junior high school] and meet with ninth graders” (JHS.PS.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>“[Ninth graders] through high school visitations and the activities fair are introduced to curricular and extracurricular opportunities, including a tour of the [local] career and technical center” (JHS.PS.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p>
JHS.SCI.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assemblies • Communications • Internal and external support services 	<p>“I know they need to feel comfortable. I know that they need to be able to talk to me” (JHS.SCI.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>“We have a student assistance team for students who struggle emotionally. Physically if we think there’s any sort of abuse problems, the support team provides for a whole range of problems that kids might have. We have a good hands-on approach from year-to-year assemblies to meetings with individuals...our counselors are also available for struggling students” (JHS.SCI.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p>

JHS.SE1.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assemblies • Communications • Internal and external support services 	<p>“Our school] helps [ninth graders] understand the responsibility of what it means to be a citizen. I think that’s just something that we need to instill in them. There are assemblies, guidance counselors, career planning and transition services...and special educational support services” (JHS.SE1.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>“Frequent communications with students is key to assisting [ninth graders] in transition to high school” (JHS.SE1.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p>
JHS.SE2.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications • Internal and external support services 	<p>“A lot of my students come with baggage and they have a lot of family issues—broken-down families...I have to be a guidance counselor, a shoulder to cry on, and academic tutor, mostly someone they can talk to, someone who can support them emotionally, no matter what” (JHS.SE2.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>“We have a lot of programs in place...student assistance, counselors” (JHS.SE2.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p>
JHS.SS.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assemblies • Communications • Extracurricular activities • Internal and external support services 	<p>“We start every September off with assemblies, which is our kickoff for the year...counselors provide support and outside agencies also assist students [at the ninth grade level]...we do a good job not letting students fall through the cracks” (JHS.SS.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>“It about forging relationships with students, being concerned about them, talking with them...see me before school, after school, or on a one-on-one basis” (JHS.SS.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>“This is a good school environment for students to show enthusiasm and school spirit...opportunities both in the classroom and on the field” (JHS.SS.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p>

APPENDIX N

SUMMARY OF THEMES AT 9-12 SITE—GRADE LEVEL PLAN

Unique Code	Key Themes	Evidence/Key Quotation(s)
HS.P	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of school’s grade-level structure and other aspects of the school district’s grade-level plan • Familiarity with grade-level plans other than grades 9-12 for educating ninth graders • Negative perception of grades 9-12 structure on ninth-grade learners • Favors changes to school organization/grade-level configuration to better support 9th graders • Team approach 	<p>“Our high school has grades nine through 12; our [middle school] has grades five through eight; our elementary schools have grades K through four” (HS.P, personal communication, July 17, 2013).</p> <p>“In some ways, the [grades 9-12] structure forces [ninth graders] to grow up—confirming to [upperclassmen]. But in other ways, it hinders [ninth graders’] growth with less access to leadership roles, because traditionally those are the property of students in grades 10, 11, and 12” (HS.P, personal communication, July 17, 2013).</p> <p>“In a perfect world, in my opinion, I would rather see [secondary education] structured as grades seven through nine and 10 through 12 in separate buildings...I just believe this based on my experience as an educator and coach” (HS.P, personal communication, July 17, 2013).</p> <p>“We have restrictions on being able to team. I think in many ways the traditional middle school [concept] would be beneficial when working with ninth graders” (HS.P, personal communication, July 17, 2013).</p>
HS.GC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive perception of grades 9-12 structure on ninth-grade learners • Favors maintaining current 9-12 structure • Team approach 	<p>“I guess the impact of our organizational model is that it puts [ninth graders] in with upperclassmen...more autonomy, more responsibility, more freedom and more exposure to upperclassmen” (HS.GS, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>“My whole experience in working with ninth graders has been with nine through 12. I see a theoretical value to other arrangements for ninth graders, but I can’t speak to that practically” (HS.GS, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>“[Ninth graders are] a tough crew to educate. I’m pretty sympathetic with ninth-grade teachers...toughest grade to educate. I don’t</p>

		<p>necessarily think a seven through nine junior high would be necessarily better for ninth graders. I see some value in it, but I also see value in throwing [ninth graders] to the wolves” (HS.GS, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>“Our different departments do things working together to address issues like hygiene and study skills” (HS.GS, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p>
HS.ELA.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of school’s grade-level structure and other aspects of the school district’s grade-level plan • Familiarity with grade-level plans other than grades 9-12 for educating ninth graders • Positive perception of grades 9-12 structure on ninth-grade learners • Favors maintaining current 9-12 structure 	<p>“I went to a high school with [grades nine through 12], a six-seven-eight middle school, and elementary schools with grades lower than that...I like the nine through 12 [high school]” (HS.ELA.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>“I think [grades 9-12 high school] affects [ninth graders] in that they get to see upperclassmen in the building, and they interact to an extent with them” (HS.ELA.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>In response to a question regarding changes that practitioners may want to see at their schools, the subject responded, “I think it’s working. I wouldn’t make any major changes to it” (HS.ELA.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p>
HS.FA.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of school’s grade-level structure and other aspects of the school district’s grade-level plan • Familiarity with grade-level plans other than grades 9-12 for educating ninth graders 	<p>“Certain classes are strictly ninth grade, but most are a mix of grades nine, 10, 11, and 12. I worked at [another school] that had grades seven through twelve...[this school district] has elementary schools with grades K through four, and then [a middle school] that’s [grades] five through eight, and then high school” (HS.FA.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>In response to a question regarding changes that practitioners may want to see at their schools, the subject responded, “I don’t know what can be done” (HS.FA.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p>
HS.M.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of school’s grade-level structure and other aspects of the school district’s grade-level plan • Familiarity with grade-level plans other than grades 9-12 for educating ninth graders • Negative perception of grades 9-12 structure on ninth-grade learners 	<p>“We have grades nine through 12 here at the high school. They go to the [middle school] prior to high school. Our [elementary schools] have grades K through four” (HS.M.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>“We don’t have much organized for our ninth graders, so I would say they are impacted very little” (HS.M.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>“If we were to stay nine to 12, which I don’t see changing anytime soon, I would love to see</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Favors changes to school organization/grade-level configuration to better support 9th graders Team approach 	<p>something like a freshmen academy where kids would have their own community” (HS.M.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p>
HS.PS.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge of school’s grade-level structure and other aspects of the school district’s grade-level plan Familiarity with grade-level plans other than grades 9-12 for educating ninth graders Positive perception of grades 9-12 structure on ninth-grade learners Favors maintaining current 9-12 structure 	<p>“We have grades nine through 12 at this school, which I think works fine. Ninth graders are not too drastically younger...[students] come from the [middle school] that [has] grades five through eight” (HS.PS.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>“In some instances, I think [the grades nine through 12] structure can be good for [ninth graders]. I have some ninth graders in my classes with upperclassmen...decent upperclassmen are good role models for good behaviors” (HS.PS.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>In response to a question regarding changes that practitioners may want to see at their schools, the subject responded, “I don’t believe I would change a thing” (HS.PS.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p>
HS.SCI.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge of school’s grade-level structure and other aspects of the school district’s grade-level plan Familiarity with grade-level plans other than grades 9-12 for educating ninth graders Positive perception of grades 9-12 structure on ninth-grade learners Favors maintaining current 9-12 structure 	<p>“[This school] has nine through 12 in the same building. I was at a school...with seven to 12 with seven and eight semi-separated. Where I went to high school, it was [grades] six through twelve with six to eight separated...our ninth graders come from the [middle school] that has [grades] five to eight” (HS.SCI.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>“[Grades ninth through 12 structure] makes ninth graders the youngest, which makes them scared, which helps with their behaviors” (HS.SCI.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>In response to a question regarding changes that practitioners may want to see at their schools, the subject responded, “I like our school structure...you can get ninth graders into their routine before they become too familiar with the building, before they get too much confidence. That’s what leads to bad behaviors” (HS.SCI.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p>
HS.SE1.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge of school’s grade-level structure and other aspects of the school district’s grade-level plan Familiarity with grade-level plans other than grades 9-12 for educating ninth graders 	<p>“[This school] has students in grades nine through 12. I’m familiar with other schools and [school] districts with different configurations...six to eight middle schools, K to six elementary schools” (HS.SE1.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>“There are some positive impacts on ninth graders, but there are many negative ones, particularly with student transitioning” (HS.SE1.T, personal</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Negative perception of grades 9-12 structure on ninth-grade learners Team approach 	<p>communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>“Collaboration and a more team-oriented approach and less isolation would benefit [ninth graders]” (HS.SE1.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p>
HS.SE2.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge of school’s grade-level structure and other aspects of the school district’s grade-level plan Familiarity with grade-level plans other than grades 9-12 for educating ninth graders Negative perception of grades 9-12 structure on ninth-grade learners Favors changes to school organization/grade-level configuration to better support 9th graders 	<p>“We have students in grades nine through 12; our middle school has grades five through eight...I know of other [structures] out there...I went to a [grades] nine through 12 high school similar to this one” (HS.SE2.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>“I can see some benefits of [grades] nine through 12; I think I like the idea of something different for nine graders...immaturity an issue” (HS.SE2.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>“I think having ninth graders separate from [grades] 10 through 12 might be a good idea...for helping them to mature and to remove them from some negative influences of upperclassmen” (HS.SE2.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p>
HS.SS.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge of school’s grade-level structure and other aspects of the school district’s grade-level plan Familiarity with grade-level plans other than grades 9-12 for educating ninth graders Negative perception of grades 9-12 structure on ninth-grade learners Favors changes to school organization/grade-level configuration to better support 9th graders Team approach 	<p>“This school has grades nine through 12. I was a student [in this school district] when it was grades seven through nine and 10 through 12. Freshmen were gradually assimilated into this school in the mid 1980s. Now elementary schools have grades K through four, the [middle school] is grades five to eight, and [the high school] is grades nine through 12” (HS.SS.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>“The [grades] nine through 12 high school model is not good for ninth graders” (HS.SS.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>“I would not integrate grade nine into a high school. I like [grades] seven through nine. Ninth graders need a year of leadership that can benefit them. Our freshmen get booed at the pep assemblies—what else can I say!” (HS.SE1.T, personal communication, September 5, 2013).</p> <p>“I support teaming. We are isolated [as teachers], and don’t get to discuss our students...ninth graders would benefit if [the teachers] collaborated and were more team orientated.”</p>

APPENDIX O

SUMMARY OF THEMES AT 7-9 SITE—GRADE LEVEL PLAN

Participant Code	Key Themes	Evidence/Key Quotation(s)
JHS.P	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of school’s grade-level structure and other aspects of the school district’s grade-level plan • Familiarity with grade-level plans other than grades 7-9 for educating ninth graders • Positive perception of grades 7-9 structure on ninth-grade learners • Favors maintaining current 7-9 structure • Departmentalization 	<p>“Our configuration is grades seven through nine and it’s a junior high school, but not a traditional junior high school, however. Seventh and eighth graders are housed on their own separate floors and it is the teaming concept, whereas ninth grade is on a separate floor and it is departmentalized...our seventh graders [feed into this school] from the elementary schools” (JHS.P, personal communication, July 16, 2013).</p> <p>“We designed [a school] that we thought was the best educational environment for our students...being able to take our seventh grade, eighth grade, and ninth grade students and separate them from each other...the seventh-grade floor that’s more the middle school concept and moving to the eighth grade and the ninth grade that is more departmentalized” (JHS.P, personal communication, July 16, 2013).</p> <p>“I am very much for the setup that we have at this point in time...I believe that we have a program that truly does work well for our ninth graders” (JHS.P, personal communication, July 16, 2013).</p> <p>“We have a drama department. We have a very large musical production. The list of electives and the opportunities to take leadership roles is just endless...with opportunities that [ninth graders] wouldn’t have if they moved to a [grades] nine through 12 high school” (JHS.P, personal communication, July 16, 2013).</p>
JHS.GC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of school’s grade-level structure and other aspects of the school district’s grade-level plan • Familiarity with grade-level plans other than grades 7-9 for educating ninth graders 	<p>“[This school] has grades seven, eight, and nine. Grades seven and eight are not departmentalized...they’re teamed, and the ninth-grade floor is departmentalized...[the school district] has [grades] K to six elementary schools and a [grades] 10 through 12 high school” (JHS.GC, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive perception of grades 7-9 structure on ninth-grade learners • Favors maintaining current 7-9 structure • Departmentalization 	<p>“I am aware of schools where ninth graders are in the high school...this school helps ninth graders develop their leadership with scholastic opportunities, interscholastic opportunities, and the responsibility of being positive role models for the seventh and eighth graders” (JHS.GC, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>In response to a question regarding changes that practitioners may want to see at their schools, the subject responded, “I don’t think I would change anything. I think it works well. I don’t think it would be good to team ninth graders...I think everything works well” (JHS.GC, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p>
JHS.ELA.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of school’s grade-level structure and other aspects of the school district’s grade-level plan • Familiarity with grade-level plans other than grades 7-9 for educating ninth graders • Positive perception of grades 7-9 structure on ninth-grade learners • Favors maintaining current 7-9 structure • Departmentalization 	<p>“The junior high has grades seven, eight, and nine, with ninth grade being departmentalized...our high school is [grades] 10 through 12. I know that most high schools include ninth grade” (JHS.ELA.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>“I really am a proponent of the [grades] seven through nine [model]. I don’t think ninth graders are ready to be walking around with 18-year-olds” (JHS.ELA.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>In response to a question regarding changes that practitioners may want to see at their schools, the subject responded, “I think [the school] is organized well. I like how we gradually transition [ninth graders]” (JHS.ELA.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p>
JHS.FA.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of school’s grade-level structure and the school district’s grade-level plan • Familiarity with grade-level plans other than grades 7-9 for educating ninth graders • Positive perception of grades 7-9 structure on ninth-grade learners • Favors maintaining current 7-9 structure 	<p>“Well, this school has grades seven, eight, and nine; and the high school has grades 10, 11, and 12. I know that other [school districts] include ninth grade in the high school” (JHS.FA.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>“[This school] allows [ninth graders] to feel like they are the leaders, young adults with opportunities” (JHS.FA.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>In response to a question regarding changes that practitioners may want to see at their schools, the subject responded, “I don’t think I would change anything...it is important to have [ninth graders] here [in the junior high school] and not at the high school, where they wouldn’t have the chance to have a lead or to participate” (JHS.FA.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p>
JHS.M.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of school’s grade-level structure and the school district’s 	<p>“The junior high has grades seven, eight, and nine, and the high school is [grades] 10, 11, and 12. Our elementary schools run through sixth</p>

	<p>grade-level plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarity with grade-level plans other than grades 7-9 for educating ninth graders • Positive perception of grades 7-9 structure on ninth-grade learners • Favors maintaining current 7-9 structure 	<p>grade...I am familiar with other types of schools with grades six through eight and nine through twelve” (JHS.M.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>“Ninth grade [in the junior high] does offer [students] the chance to evolve, to demonstrate leadership skills. I think it also given them confidence as they begin their high-school courses and course loads in a familiar setting, rather than being thrown into a high school where everything is brand new” (JHS.M.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>In response to a question regarding changes that practitioners may want to see at their schools, the subject responded, “I really don’t think [the school district] should change anything. What we have is working” (JHS.M.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p>
JHS.PS.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of school’s grade-level structure and the school district’s grade-level plan • Familiarity with grade-level plans other than grades 7-9 for educating ninth graders • Positive perception of grades 7-9 structure on ninth-grade learners • Favors maintaining current 7-9 structure • Departmentalization 	<p>“We at our building, we have seventh and eight grades are broken down into teams, and they do have a couple elective-type classes...ninth grade for the most part is departmentally structured. They do travel to other areas of the building for elective classes” (JHS.PS.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>“[This school district] has elementary schools that are kindergarten to sixth grade. We have grades seven, eight, and nine; the high school is [grades] 10, 11, and 12” (JHS.PS.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>“[Ninth graders] are definitely the top-dogs of the building, so I think that helps in the developmental process, as well as easing that transition into the high school. They’re able to get a good solid groundwork for their high-school studies without being thrown in the shuffle” (JHS.PS.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>In response to a question regarding changes that practitioners may want to see at their schools, the subject responded, “no changes to the grades, but would like to see more time for courses” (JHS.PS.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p>
JHS.SCI.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of school’s grade-level structure and the school district’s grade-level plan • Familiarity with grade-level plans other than grades 7-9 for educating ninth graders 	<p>“The school has grades seven, eight, and nine. The [school district] has elementary schools with sixth grade...the high school is [grades] 10 through 12” (JHS.SCI.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>“Ninth grade is organized by departments; I’m not sure how much you know about the (ability)</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive perception of grades 7-9 structure on ninth-grade learners • Favors maintaining current 7-9 structure • Departmentalization 	<p>levels; but since I teach (the most challenged) ability group, I belong to [this team]" (JHS.SCI.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>"[This school] is positive for meeting [ninth graders] needs and helping them transition to high school" (JHS.SCI.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>In response to a question regarding changes that practitioners may want to see at their schools, the subject responded, "I don't know if I would. I think we are accommodating [ninth graders] well. We are providing them a lot of opportunities to fit in somewhere" (JHS.SCI.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p>
JHS.SE1.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of school's grade-level structure and the school district's grade-level plan • Familiarity with grade-level plans other than grades 7-9 for educating ninth graders • Positive perception of grades 7-9 structure on ninth-grade learners • Favors maintaining current 7-9 structure • Departmentalization 	<p>"The school educates students in grades seven through nine...seventh and eighth grade are teamed and ninth grade is departmentalized...most ninth graders are in high school, but ours don't go [to high school] until 10th grade" (JHS.SE1.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>"Personally, I am 100 percent behind the junior-high model...helps support learning and leadership through opportunities with a mix of grade levels that works given [ninth graders'] stage of life" (JHS.SE1.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p>
JHS.SE2.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of school's grade-level structure and the school district's grade-level plan • Familiarity with grade-level plans other than grades 7-9 for educating ninth graders • Positive perception of grades 7-9 structure on ninth-grade learners • Favors maintaining current 7-9 structure • Departmentalization 	<p>"The junior high includes grades seven to nine. Seventh and eighth grade is run more like a middle school and ninth grade more like a high school. Our [elementary schools] house grades kindergarten to six...our high school is grades 10 through 12...I realize a lot of [school districts] are organized to include grade nine in high school" (JHS.SE2.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>"[The school's impact on ninth graders] is absolutely positive! I think the ninth graders are where they need to be right now" (JHS.SE2.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>In response to a question regarding changes that practitioners may want to see at their schools, the subject responded, "We're doing well here—none!" (JHS.SE2.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p>
JHS.SS.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of school's grade-level structure and the school district's grade-level plan • Familiarity with grade- 	<p>"We used to have two junior high schools—both with grades seven, eight, and nine that fed to one high school. Those schools were integrated—seventh, eighth and ninth graders mixed together. Now at [the current site], the grades are</p>

	<p>level plans other than grades 7-9 for educating ninth graders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive perception of grades 7-9 structure on ninth-grade learners • Favors maintaining current 7-9 structure • Departmentalization 	<p>separate... we have always had ninth graders outside the high school” (JHS.SS.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>“I think ninth graders definitely benefit from being outside the [grades] 10 through 12 high school. Not having that leadership aspect of their education at their age and point of development would likely hurt them” (JHS.SS.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p> <p>In response to a question regarding changes that practitioners may want to see at their schools, the subject responded, “I like this structure, but would prefer the older model once used with more integration of grades seven through nine as to supporting more encompassing relationships with students and other teachers in a smaller setting [like was the case in the former junior high schools]” (JHS.SS.T, personal communication, September 13, 2013).</p>
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