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TRANSITION ACTIVITIES AND THEIR EFFECTS  
ON MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

by

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness that transitional activities have on student achievement and attendance when students moved from elementary school to middle school.

The data were gathered from two school districts that are demographically similar. Data included average daily attendance rates, Terra Nova Achievement Scores from social studies in grades five, six, and seven, as well as math in grades five, six, and seven. There were 187 students in the Treatment Group and 147 in the Control Group for a total of 334 students.

Comparison of means for demographic equivalency of the groups (t-test) and a MANCOVA with repeated measures analysis of seventh grade Math and Social Studies test scores were run. The results indicated no significant differences in rates of attendance from students transitioning from elementary to middle school whether they have experienced transitional activities or not. In addition, there were no significant differences in Terra Nova Social Studies or Math Achievement Test scores between students transitioning from elementary to middle school whether they have experienced a comprehensive transition program or not ( $F = .003$ ,  $p = .960$  for seventh grade Math,  $F = .947$ ,  $p = .331$  for seventh grade Social Studies).

There was a drop in both attendance and achievement test scores for both the control and treatment groups. While this study determined there is no reason to believe the interventions made any difference in the overall attendance and achievement test

scores, the literature and other studies have shown positive results. Programs of this sort need further study and analysis to gather additional data on transitional activities and their effectiveness on students entering middle school.

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## CHAPTER 1

During the course of a child's education, it is likely that he or she could attend three or more school buildings within the same school district. Many parents of young adolescents worry about their children's' move from elementary to middle school or junior high school (Mizelle, 2000). Both students and parents worry about adjusting to a new environment, new social situations, peer pressure, and increased academic rigors. Simmons and Blyth (1987) have pointed to many factors that contribute to the stress of the transition to middle school, including increased academic demands and social comparisons, exposure to unfamiliar peers and teachers, and practices that fail to meet early adolescents' developmental needs for autonomy and self-management. The effects of transition to a new school or building will vary from student to student; however, most students will be faced with the challenge at one point or another.

Prior to the 1980's, little research had been done on the effects of transition from one school to another. As the research evolved in the 1980's and 1990's, educators became increasingly aware of the need for transitional activities for students to ease the period of adjustment upon entering a new facility. In addition, research found that when elementary school students took part in a middle school transition program with several diverse articulation activities, fewer students were retained in the transition grade (Mac Iver, 1990).

Alspaugh (1998) found a statistically significant achievement loss associated with the transition from elementary school to middle school at sixth grade. The transition loss in achievement was larger when students from multiple elementary schools were merged into a

single middle school during the transition. The middle school years are critical to students and their academic and social successes. The middle level years form the basis for the high school years by providing an experience that will help shape the future.

Students make many transitions during their years of schooling: from home to school, elementary to middle school, middle to high school, and high school to college or work. These transitions are usually major events in the lives of students and parents. The stresses created by these transitions can be minimized when the new environment is responsive to each particular age group (Anderman & Kimwel; 1997, Arowosafe & Irvin, 1992; Odegaard & Heath, 1992). Student comments and behaviors give insight into their concerns as they move to a new school. Students, when asked about their concerns in facing a school transition, mentioned the following worries: (1) getting to class on time, (2) finding lockers, (3) keeping up with “materials,” (4) finding lunchrooms and bathrooms, (5) getting on the right bus to go home, (6) getting through the crowded halls, and (7) remembering which class to go to next (Weldy, 1991). In addition to these concerns, other studies noted personal safety (aggressive and violent behaviors or other students) as a prominent concern of students (Anderman & Kimweli, 1997; Arowosafe & Irvin; 1992, Odegaard & Heath, 1992).

Teachers have also listed specific challenges to students making the transition from a sixth-grade elementary to a middle level school (Weldy, 1991, pp. 84-85): (1) changing classes; (2) reduced parent involvement; (3) more teachers; (4) no recess, no free time; (5) new grading standards and procedures; (6) more peer pressure; (7) developmental differences between boys and girls; (8) cliquishness; (9) fear of new, larger, more impersonal school; (10) accepting more responsibility for their own actions; (11) dealing with older children; (12) merging with students from multiple elementary schools; (13) unrealistic parental expectations; (14) lack of experience

in dealing with extracurricular activities; (15) unfamiliarity with student lockers; (16) following the school schedule; (17) longer-range assignments; (18) coping with adolescent physical development, and for some, (19) social immaturity, and (20) a lack of basic skills.

Students' perceptions of the quality of school life decline as they progress from elementary to secondary school, with the largest decline occurring during the transition to a middle level school (Diemert, 1992). Meeting social needs during the transition from an elementary to a middle level school is a major consideration because most programs focus more on academics and regulations. In Diemert's survey of 23 fifth-graders in a middle level school, of the top 11 (out of 23 possible) needs identified by boys, six were social, two were academic, two were procedural, and one was academic and procedural. Of the top ten needs identified by girls, five were social, two were academic, and three were procedural.

Students who move into middle level schools from elementary grades that rotate students between classes at least part of the day reported feeling better prepared to enter a middle level school. Waggoner (1994) investigated transition concerns and the self-esteem of 171 sixth-graders. Students from teamed settings in elementary schools demonstrated a stronger affiliation in school activities and fewer concerns about the transition to junior high school than students in self-contained sixth-grade classrooms. Teachers in teamed settings felt their students exhibited fewer indicators of stress related to progressing to junior high school than teachers of students in self-contained sixth-grade classrooms. Sixty-six percent of all students surveyed believed they would be better prepared for seventh grade if they had more than one sixth-grade teacher (Waggoner, 1994).

In middle level schools, it is important to emphasize mastery and improvement rather than relative ability and social comparison. Empirical evidence suggests that middle schools



tend to stress relative ability and competition among students more, and effort and improvement less, leading to a decline in task goals, ability goals, and academic efficacy. Working in groups, focusing on effort and improvement, and being given choices all support a more positive task-focused goal structure (Anderman and Midgley, 1998).

Alspaugh (1998) states that the goals of elementary schools tend to be task oriented, meaning students learn the skills of multiplication and reading, whereas the goals of middle schools tend to focus on academic performance, or showing the teacher what they have learned. Middle school teachers tend to have many students for short periods of time; therefore, the student-teacher relationship changes from elementary to middle school. No longer are students with a single teacher for the day, they must deal with multiple teachers each day. Associated with the change in student-teacher relationships is a change from small-group and individual instruction to whole-class instruction in the intermediate level schools (Alspaugh, 1998). Significant and extensive research on early adolescent school transition currently is lacking (Fenzel, 2000).

### The Problem

Currently few studies have investigated the effectiveness of differing types of activities utilized by schools to ease the transition for students entering a new building. Some districts have few or no activities for students, while others have elaborate plans for acclimation. Several districts report using some types of transition activities; however, very little data addressing the effectiveness of such activities are available.

### Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness that transitional activities have on student achievement and attendance when moving from two elementary schools to one

middle school. Research indicates that receiving support from important others in stressful times or during difficult transitions, or knowing that others are available if needed, provides protection from distress (Fenzel, 2000). More specifically, the study will attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent does the use of transitional activities for elementary students entering middle school result in increased attendance?
2. To what extent does the use of transitional activities for elementary students entering middle school result in increased achievement? The nationally norm referenced Terra Nova test results will serve as the indicator of achievement for this research question.

Students make many transitions during their years of schooling; from home to school, elementary to middle school, middle to high school, and high school to college or work. In addition there are transitions associated with relocation, mobility, family transitions such as more single parent and blended families, and transfers both in childhood and adolescence. These transitions are usually major events in the lives of students and parents. The stresses created by these geographical and socio-emotional transitions can be minimized when the new environment is responsive to each particular age group (Schumacher, 1998). In order to obtain data relative to the statement of the problem and the major questions, the following hypotheses were developed:

1. There is no difference in rates of attendance from students transitioning from elementary to middle school whether they have experienced transitional activities or not.
2. There is no difference in Terra Nova Social Studies Achievement Test scores between students transitioning from elementary to middle school whether they have experienced a comprehensive transition program or not.

3. There is no difference in Terra Nova Math Achievement Test scores between students transitioning from elementary to middle school whether they have experienced a comprehensive transition program or not.

### Significance of the Study

Comments from middle school staff members and information from other teachers, parents and students suggest that many students undergo a considerable amount of stress and anxiety during this transition. Providing students with transition activities at either the elementary or middle level, or both, has proven to greatly reduce their apprehension and increase their sense of belonging (Hertzog and Morgan, 1997). Student comments and behaviors give insight into their concerns as they move to a new school. Students in an elementary school building in rural Missouri, when asked about their concerns in moving to a middle school mentioned apprehensions such as getting to class on time, getting lost in a larger building, eating lunch with the older students, physical concerns about their safety, opening combination locks, and the amount of homework.

While the related literature goes into depth with suggestions for transitional activities, limitations are evident in follow-up studies regarding tracked achievement and attendance. Data need to be gathered to determine the significance of the activities to measure these areas. A limited body of research exists regarding the effects of making the transition from elementary to middle school and the development of adolescents in general education (Vaughn, 2000). Vaughn also states that this period of school transition often leads to declines in their self-perceptions, academic performance, school-related behaviors, and grade-point average. Alspaugh and Harting (1995) established that there is a consistent student achievement loss associated with the transition from self-contained elementary schools to intermediate-level

schools. The achievement loss in reading, mathematics, science, and social studies occurred when the transition was at grade 5, 6, 7, or 8. Student achievement scores tended to recover to their pretransition levels in the year following transition; however, the literature shows a loss of achievement does occur during transition and there could be many factors related to the loss. The study also looked at the size and organization of the school districts to see if those factors might be related to the transition loss (Alspaugh, 1998). Other researchers suggest that the achievement loss does not return. According to Forgan and Vaughn (2000), “Academic competence tends to decrease from sixth grade to the beginning of seventh grade for students in general education. By the end of seventh grade, these students’ academic performance rebounds after the elementary to middle school transition, but does not return to prior levels (p. 34).”

#### Limitations of the Study

Limitations of this study include the following:

1. Maturation of students when studied at the fifth grade level as compared to the sixth grade level may influence the data rather than transition activities themselves.
2. Transition activities may vary from district to district or school to school depending on each individual program utilized.

#### Delimitations to the Study

Delimitations to the study include the following:

1. Participation in transitional activities is voluntary for the school district.
2. The expectations on the part of both teachers and schools for achievement and attendance are different.

## Definition of Terms

**Early adolescence** is the period of time when a young person has a mature reproductive system, is dependent economically upon adults, whose chief source of need gratification is his or her peers, who has an open interest in the opposite sex, and for whom status and roles as defined for children and adults in his or her culture are confused (Wattenberg, 1974; as cited in Smith, 1997).

**Teamed settings** refer to a group of students who are served by a group or team of teachers. The students will see a different teacher in their team for the core classes of English, history, math, science and reading. These interdisciplinary teams of teachers share the same students and coordinate their instructional programs across subjects (Duffy, 1999).

**Transition** is defined as the act or process of passing from one condition, form, or place to another (Morningstar & Kleinhammer-Tramill, 1999).

**Middle School** is defined as an educational setting for young adolescents wherein they must apply previously learned skills and understanding; learn new school rules and routines; make new friends; function in different physical and social environments; work more independently; and conform to greater teacher expectations ( Perkins and Gelfer, 1995). Typically, middle school incorporates grades six, seven, and eight.

**Transition activities** are defined as those strategies and procedures that schools can use to ensure the smooth adjustment of students as they move from one grade and building to another (Huntinger, 1981). The most common transition activities include meetings with incoming students and their parents, and student visits to the new middle school. Transitional activities used in this study are as follows:

1. Elementary students visit the middle school.

2. Elementary students eat lunch at the middle school.
3. Middle school administrators visit the elementary classrooms.
4. Middle school counselors explain the middle school schedule to elementary students.
5. Parent breakfasts are held at the middle school.
6. Elementary students' parents are encouraged to write letters about their children to the middle school principal who answers each letter personally.
7. Middle school students visit the elementary classrooms.
8. Orientation day is held one week prior to the opening of school. Transitioning students ride the bus to school, get all necessary paperwork, go through a mock day of school, learn to open combination locks, have lunch, and then attend a social event that evening.

*Feeder Schools* refer to multiple elementary schools within a single district that have students all attend the same middle school as a sixth or seventh grade student.

*Terra Nova tests* are nationally normed criterion referenced tests.

### Summary

This chapter includes the following components: (1) an introduction to the study, (2) the purpose of the study, (3) the research question, (4) the importance of the study, (5) limitations and delimitations of the study, and (6) definition of terms. Literature related to the effectiveness of transitional activities over the past fifteen years provides information that activities are present in schools, but may be limited in their effectiveness.

In Chapter II a historical review of the literature will be examined focusing on the availability of transitional activities as well as the effectiveness of those plans being implemented. It will examine the change from the traditional school setting to one of the junior

high and the rather recent middle school. Studies of student achievement from researchers focusing on transitional activities will be reviewed as well as the various aspects of middle level transition that are of particular interest to students and school administrators.

The transition from elementary school to middle school or junior high school can be both exciting and scary for students. The stress of this transition can either be diffused or augmented by school procedures for introducing these students to the school. Chapter II will examine the stressors of transition as well as the ways to eliminate them according to the most recent research and practice of schools and researchers focusing on these issues. The literature will be reviewed for data to answer the question of whether or not transition activities are important to the academic achievement and attendance of students in a transitional year.

## CHAPTER II

### RELATED LITERATURE

The transition to middle school or junior high is a time of diverse changes for students. The transition from elementary to middle school, which roughly coincides with the transition from childhood to early adolescence, offers greater opportunities for students to interact with and rely on their peers. There is a correspondingly “dramatic increase in the amount of unsupervised age-mate contact during this developmental period” (Higgins and Parsons, 1983). Adolescents are able to spend more time in “relationships that are likely to be more symmetrical in terms of interpersonal power and authority” (Higgins & Parsons, 1983). The intellectual changes expected as students enter middle school require preparation by the students, teachers and parents in order to ensure a successful experience. The transition from elementary to middle school is an important time for a student and his or her family. During this transition, it is imperative to help students acclimate to the new school environment (Perkins and Gelfer, 1995). The early adolescents (ages 10-14) in middle school are undergoing rapid physical growth and experiencing many new emotions. They are moving from concrete to abstract thinking as they progress in their studies. They are acquiring a self-concept and social skills. They are developing lasting attitudes about learning, work, and other adult values. Finally, they are learning to take responsibility for their education (Schwartz, 1998).



Prior to the 1980's, little research was completed on the effects of transition from one school to another. As the research evolved in the 1980's and 1990's, educators became increasingly aware of the need for transitional activities for students to ease the period of adjustment upon entering a new facility. In addition, research found that when elementary school students took part in a middle school transition program with several diverse articulation activities, fewer students were retained in the transition grade (Mac Iver, 1990).

Transition practices need to be in place to provide accommodations and activities that schools can use to assist students in the adjustment from one school to another. A team of teachers must plan for any problems that may arise when students enter a new school. Problems must be identified and goals should be set. Once the plan is written, implementation should include a model for evaluation of the program. A program evaluation would be useful in examining any transition program that is in place. An examination of the program evaluations would lead to a predictor as to the effectiveness of any program. This study will seek to ascertain whether transitional activities provided to students entering middle school or junior high do have a positive effect on student attendance and achievement during the following school year.

Chapter II will examine the history of the middle school and junior high and the reported effects of transitional activities on students as reviewed in the literature. It will also examine the problems associated with transition to another level of school. Studies show a loss of attendance and achievement as well as social maladies that can be a result of poorly planned transition for students. Finally, the effectiveness of transitional activities on students will be reviewed. Chapter II reviews the transition from elementary

to middle/junior high school, and examines the challenges for students, families and teachers. It reviews the data and seeks to determine if the previously learned skills and understandings of students have enabled them to work independently and conform to greater teacher and school expectations, and if planned transitional activities will be of benefit to the student's attendance and achievement.

### Review of Related Literature

Available research shows a marked decline in student achievement when entering the next phase of education. While the studies show a statistically significant achievement loss (Alspaugh, 1998) there is a lack of evidence as to which activities are the most useful in a transition plan.

More than a century ago, educators began to perceive an imbalance in the continuum of education. In 1872, concern over the average age of entering freshmen at Harvard prompted Charles W. Eliot, president of the college, to initiate an investigation of ways to improve and reduce the total program of elementary and secondary education prior to college admission. He pursued this issue throughout his chairmanship of the famous Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies (George, Stevenson, Thomason and Beane, 1992).

The Committee of Ten recommended, in 1893, that the secondary school program should begin two grades earlier, with six years of elementary and six years of secondary education. This issue of correct balance between elementary and secondary styles of education became the subject of discussion for the next twenty years. Eventually, the Committee on Economy of Time in Education, reporting in 1913, made the first specific mention of a separate junior division of secondary education. In the years to come,

school districts all over the nation experimented with either a 6-6 or 6-3-3 programmatic division of the schools (Gruhn and Douglas, 1947).

Plans for the first junior high schools were filled with suggestions that would be similar to the components of today's middle schools. Foremost was the basis for the characteristics of the young adolescents' growth and development. The development of previously learned skills and the concept of more detailed objectives would be stressed. Commonly used terms such as guidance and exploration, independence and responsibility were first used and are still used today. The junior high school would provide the final portion of general education and offer a transition to the high school years (Tye, 1985).

According to A. O. White (1989; as cited in George, Stevenson, Thomason, and Beane, 1992), "Even at the time the earliest junior high schools were established, however, there were factors, other than ideas about what would constitute the most effective program, that significantly influenced the design of the system. In many less populated states, for example, the junior high school became a substitute for the high school. That is, if a particular community had a small enrollment of students of high school age, then they were likely to be designated as a junior high school district, and the few students who did go on to high school had to do so at the county seat, where sufficient student enrollment could be assembled" (p. 34).

By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, following World War II, the junior high school reached the height of its popularity, in terms of numbers. Dramatic growth occurred. The number of junior highs soared from a few hundred in the first two decades of the century to well over 5,000 by 1960 (Howard and Stoumbis, 1970). By that same year, 80 percent of America's high school graduates had gone through an elementary-junior-

senior high school organization (Alexander and McEwin, 1989). The influence of higher education, the need to deal with growing masses of immigrants, and burgeoning school enrollments following the two world wars all contributed to the increasing number of junior high schools (Lounsbury, 1960).

At the same time, programmatically, many a junior high school became more and more a little high school in virtually every way. Teachers were organized in academic departments (as they were in the high schools and the universities and at Harvard), rather than in the interdisciplinary core curriculum groups that the literature of the junior high school recommended (George, Stevenson, Thomason, and Beane, 1992). Students were promoted or retained on a subject-by-subject basis. Elective programs focused on specialization that would lead to quasi-majors at the high school rather than the exploration envisioned by other early junior his school educators. Rigid grouping patterns based on perceived ability (measured by I. Q.) or prior achievement became characteristic fo the junior high school in many districts (George, Stevenson, Thomason, and Beane, 1992).

As research continued to be developed, discrepancies appeared between the vision of the ideal junior high and the realities thereof. The middle school concept was quite similar to the original vision as developed by the Committee of Ten. Researchers and educators embraced the middle school concept as the cure for the ailments of the current junior high schools.

One of the social forces that contributed to the great increase in the number of middle schools in the 1960s and 1970s was the movement toward racial desegregation of the schools (George, Stevenson, Thomason, and Beane, 1992). In many districts,

particularly in the South, the move to desegregation was developed by moving the ninth grade out of the junior high and into the high school. The sixth grade, and occasionally the fifth grade, was moved into the middle school. Students were bused from the inner city to areas of predominately white students in an effort to achieve the goals of desegregation as mandated by the court system.

More recently, a new wave of middle schools has swept forth as a result of the national attention on education during the 1980s. Alexander and McEwin (1980), in a major national study found that important changes in middle school organization and curriculum have accompanied the dramatic increase in numbers. For example, interdisciplinary team organization has increased tremendously in the last twenty years. Whereas in 1968 fewer than ten percent of the schools reported interdisciplinary team organization, in 1988 approximately one-third did so (Alexander and McEwin, 1989). Alexander and McEwin (1989) go on to find that in 1988, nearly 400 reported having advisor-advisee programs, while the likelihood of these programs being in place in 1968 was so slight that the question was not even asked.

The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development presented the findings of its Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents in *Turning Points: Preparing Youth for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (1989). The task force made a number of recommendations that powerfully reinforce the directions in which the Alexander and McEwin study indicated middle level education had been moving (George, Stevenson, Thomason and Beane, 1992). The Carnegie report (1989) urged schools to provide young adolescents with:

1. *Small communities for learning within the larger school buildings.* In its first recommendation, the commission urged schools to create “smallness

within bigness,” a concept that has been an important aspect of the middle school lexicon for decades.

2. *A core academic program for all learners.* The commission spelled out a very general set of curriculum goals similar to programs advocated by many middle school educators.
3. *Success experiences for all students.* The commission urged the elimination of tracking and between-class ability grouping, promotion of cooperative learning, and other experiences likely to broaden the range of students experiencing success in the average middle school.
4. *Empowerment for teachers and administrators in making decisions about the experiences of middle grades students.* The organization of schools into academic teams and shared decision making are central components of the middle school concept; the research indicates that middle schools have been moving in this direction for the last twenty years and that 6-8 middle schools are much more likely to employ these practices than the 7-9 junior high school.
5. *Teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents.* The attempt to develop programs to prepare and certify such teachers has been at the top of the middle school agenda.
6. *Improved academic performance fostered through health and fitness.*  
Here the commission moved out in front of typical middle school practices, although not out of line with typical middle school philosophy.

7. *Families reengaged in the education of young adolescents.* The commission recommended giving families meaningful roles in school governance and other concepts that are not currently the vogue in American middle schools, but which would find support among middle school educators.
8. *Schools that are reconnected with their communities.* The group recommended service projects, partnerships, and other collaborative efforts that would enhance any middle school program (George, Stevenson, Thomason, and Beane, 1992).

The National Middle School Association, at its 1988 annual conference, adopted several resolutions highlighting the uniqueness of a middle level program focusing on the characteristics and needs of young adolescents, affirming the interdisciplinary team organization as the most appropriate arrangement for middle level teachers and students, urging the preservation of exploration in the curriculum, and condemning common tracking and rigid ability grouping (George, Stevenson, Thomason, and Beane, 1992).

Concerns about middle level education began early in the twentieth century. In the 1920's, as the junior high school was gaining acceptance, major statements identifying important characteristics of this new institution were put forth, including those by two of the major founders, Leonard Koos (1920) and Thomas Briggs. Briggs stated: "In its essence the junior high school is a device of democracy whereby nature may cooperate with nature to secure the best results possible for each individual adolescent as well as for society at large." In the 1940's and 1950's, as efforts were made to bring about the renaissance of the junior high school, some writers described

what these schools ought to be like. Gruhn and Douglass (1947) developed the most influential statement. They proposed and described six major functions: integration, exploration, guidance, differentiation, socialization, and articulation. These functions remain today as a foundational framework for defining effective middle level education.

In the 1960's, under the leadership of the late William Alexander, a middle school of grades 5-8 or grades 6-8 was advanced as an alternative to the 7-9 junior high school that had shown itself to be rather intransigent, dominated by the senior high school, and not what Koos and Briggs had envisioned as a democratic exercise (Lounsbury, 1960). Attracting immediate interest, the middle school idea became the focus of a reform movement, especially among those who earlier sought to reform the junior high school. A consensus definition of key characteristics emerged in 1982 when the young National Middle School Association published a position paper entitled "This We Believe." Included in the document were ten "essential elements of a 'true' middle school." Those were: (1) educators knowledgeable about and committed to young adolescents, (2) a balanced curriculum based on student needs, (3) a range of organizational arrangements, (4) varied instructional strategies, (5) a full exploratory program, (6) comprehensive advising and counseling, (7) continuous progress for students, (8) evaluation procedures compatible with the nature of young adolescents, (9) cooperative planning, and, (10) positive school climate. This list became a commonly cited standard for defining a middle school (Lounsbury, 1960).

Eccles and Midgley (1989) argue that there are developmentally inappropriate changes at the traditional junior high or middle school for early adolescents in a cluster of classroom organizational, instructional, and climate variables, including task structure,



task complexity, grouping practices, evaluation techniques, motivational strategies, focus of responsibility for learning, and quality of teacher-student and student-student relationships. Junior high schools and most middle schools have more rigid authority relationships than elementary schools; less positive affective relationships between teachers and their students; lower cultures of efficacy; more social comparison based grading systems, more performance goal orientation, and less individualized instruction (Lounsbury, 1960). These changes may be lessened when comprehensive transitional activities are provided for students. When students are familiar with their surroundings, are able to recognize and associate names with faces, and have a sense of belonging, the negative effects of the transition will not have such a severe impact on achievement.

In addition to rigid school cultures, there are marked psychological changes in the learner. The switch from elementary school to junior high school coincides with several major changes for young adolescents. Most are in the throes of puberty; they are becoming more self-aware and self-conscious, and their thinking is growing more critical and complex. At the same time, parents and junior high teachers complain that their students are flagging both in motivation and performance (Azar, 1996).

On average, children's grades drop dramatically during the first year of middle school, compared to grades in elementary school. After moving to junior high or middle school, children become less interested in school and less self-assured about their abilities (Azar, 1996). Mac Iver and Epstein (1991; as cited in Duffy, 1999) advocate "responsive practices" for all the middle school grades, which include:

- 1) teacher advisory, homeroom, or group programs,

- 2) interdisciplinary teams of teachers who share the same students and coordinate their instructional programs across subjects,
- 3) special remedial activities for students who fall behind or learn more slowly than other students, and
- 4) transition or articulation activities with students, parents, and school staff to ease students' transitions from one level of schooling to the next.

In different districts there may be differences in the level of middle school philosophy. There has been a substantial push to reform middle level education to include mentoring relationships, advisory groups, and other activities designed to foster relationships between adults and students.

The social environment of the junior high/middle school can be vastly different from that of the elementary depending upon the level of middle school philosophy adopted by an individual school district. The switch from a single teacher to multiple teachers can be daunting for many young adolescents. The elementary teacher usually knows the student very well and can focus on his or her academic strengths and weaknesses. When a student sees multiple teachers each day the intimate relationship shifts to one of solely academic. There is little interaction on a personal or social level. The literature points to a decrease in a student's self-worth and academic performance. The two issues are surely interrelated, as increased academic performance will enhance the self-worth of the learner. Conversely, if a student is uneasy about surroundings or the inability to relate on a personal level with teachers, the sense of belonging and self-worth will ultimately affect academic performance.

In middle level schools, it is important to emphasize mastery and improvement, rather than relative ability and social comparison. Empirical evidence suggest that middle schools tend to stress relative ability and competition among students more, and effort and improvement less, leading to a decline in task goals, ability goals, and academic efficacy. Working in groups, focusing on effort and improvement, and being given choices all support a more positive task-focused goal structure (Anderman and Midgley, 1998). Anderman and Midgley, 1998, also found that grades decrease more for middle school students who had been low achievers in elementary school than those who had been high achieving students at the elementary level. By the year after the transition, high achievers seemed to have bounced back from first year grade declines while low achievers failed to rebound. For low achievers, the transition to the new environment sparks a downward spiral from which they cannot seem to recover (Anderman, 1996).

Alspaugh and Harting (1995) established that there is a consistent student achievement loss associated with the transition from self-contained elementary schools to intermediate level school. The achievement loss in reading, mathematics, science, and social studies occurred when the transition was at grade 5, 6, 7, or 8. As in Anderman's study in 1996, Alspaugh and Harting (1995) found that student achievement scores tended to recover to their pretransition levels in the year following the transition, or grade seven. According to Forgan and Vaughn (2000), "Academic competence tends to decrease from sixth grade to the beginning of seventh grade for students in general education. By the end of seventh grade, these students' academic performance rebounds after the elementary to middle school transition, but does not return to prior levels (p. 34)." In Alspaugh and Harting, it appeared that the size and organization of school

districts might be related to the transition loss. That research produced the following results as published in the Journal of Educational Research in 1998.

**Table 3.—Mean Achievement Levels and Gains and Losses in Achievement From Grade 5 to Grade 6 (Alspaugh and Harting, 1998).**

Legend for Chart:

- A – School group
- B – Academic area: Reading
- C – Academic area: Math
- D – Academic area: Science
- E – Academic area: Social Studies
- F – Academic area: Average

	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b><u>K-8</u></b>						
Grade 5		292.5	290.25	300	289.31	293.02
Grade 6		300	300.63	302.38	298.69	300.42
Gain (loss)		7.50	10.38	2.38	9.38	7.40
<b><u>Linear MS</u></b>						
Grade 5		300.06	303	316.38	309.06	307.13
Grade 6		299.19	301.38	306.94	301	302.13
Gain (loss)		(.87)	(1.62)	(9.44)	(8.06)	(5.00)
<b><u>Pyramid MS</u></b>						
Grade 5		303.38	306.63	311.44	307.06	307.13
Grade 6		299.50	301.69	301.00	298.06	300.06
Gain (loss)		(3.88)	(4.94)	(10.44)	(9.00)	(7.07)
Average						
Achievement		299.11	300.60	306.35	300.53	301.65
Average						
Gain (loss)		.92	1.27	(5.83)	(2.56)	(1.55)

Note. MS = middle school

**Table 4.—Comparison of the Mean Achievement Gain (Loss) Associated With the Transition to Sixth Grade Against Zero (Alspaugh and Harting, 1998).**

School	n	M	SD	t	p[a]
K -8	16	7.40	19.05	1.56	.141
Linear MS	16	(5.00)	14.64	(1.37)	.192
Pyramid MS	16	(7.06)	12.49	(2.26)	.039
Combined	48	(1.55)	16.60	(0.65)	.520

Note. MS = middle school, a Two-tailed test.

The data represents the average achievement gain or loss as measured in three settings. In the K – 8 schools where students remain in the same building for nine years there was no loss in achievement from grade five to grade six. In the linear setting where all students in the elementary grade five setting go to the same middle school there was a drop in all areas of achievement; however, when students came from a pyramid setting where more than one elementary building feeds into a middle school the loss in achievement was even more significant.

For the at-risk student the loss in achievement can trigger a course that is almost impossible to overcome. The most common indicators of at-risk students are attention problems, retentions, poor grades, absenteeism, behavior problems, and lack of confidence (Queen, 2002). A student's decision to drop out of high school is often the end result of a long series of negative school experiences. Academic failure, grade retention, or frequent suspensions that begin before ninth grade are all precursors to dropping out of school. Dropout prevention strategies, therefore, must be targeted at the middle school grades, when the stresses of schooling related to a more complex curriculum, a less personal environment, and the growing need for peer acceptance pose

grave danger to already disadvantaged students (Massachusetts Advocacy Center, 1998). Transition activities that are comprehensive and well planned may aid in easing negative school experiences for those students who are at-risk of dropout. Much of the research on improving middle and junior high schools is aimed at making them look less like large, impersonal high schools, and more like caring, nurturing elementary schools, while still offering students a challenging, subject-specific curriculum (Wells, 1989).

Effective middle level transition programs establish a sense of belonging among the multiple constituencies involved, appropriately respond to the needs of the incoming students, and provide multiple opportunities for all parties to develop a meaningful role during the transition process as well as maintain that role throughout the school year.

#### Transition to Middle School/Junior High

Moving from an elementary school to a middle school is experienced by more than 88 percent of public school students as they begin the middle grades. This time of transition evokes a wide variety to emotions, behaviors, and concerns for both young adolescents and their parents. For many students it is considered a major stepping-stone on the road to becoming an adult. For teachers and principals, it is an opportunity to have a fresh start with students and to introduce them to the culture and expectations of their new school in a way that promotes positive behavior and involvement (Arowosafe, 1992).

Transition to middle school is marked by several changes in educational expectations and practices. The interaction with many peers and teachers, along with the intensified expectations for both performance and individual responsibility come at a difficult time. Social, developmental, and academic experiences are affected, requiring

them to adjust to what they see as new settings, structures, and expectations. All of this comes at a time when they are also experiencing a host of changes associated with the transition from childhood to adolescence. They are beginning to mature physically, and to think of themselves as individuals outside of their families. The atmosphere at home may become strained as both parents and children struggle with redefining roles and relationships. This complicated period of transition has often been associated with a decline in academic achievement, performance, motivation, and self-perceptions (Arowosafe, 1992).

Few educators would argue with the premise that student motivation is an important influence on learning. Motivation is of particular importance for those who work with young adolescents. Considerable research has shown a decline in motivation and performance for many children as they move from elementary school into middle school (Eccles and Midgley, 1989). Eccles and Midgley (1989) argue that decline in motivation during early adolescence is neither inevitable nor uncontrollable. The central point of the current thinking is that “some of the negative psychological changes associated with adolescent development result from a mismatch between the needs of developing adolescents and the opportunities afforded them by their social environment” (Eccles and Midgley, 1993).

Midgley and Urdan (1992) identify the period of adolescence as a time when attitudes toward learning change. They highlight causes as being attributable primarily to social pressures and needs, family influences, and physiological changes. Positive self-concept is integral to healthy development, and students who harbor positive self-concept

in more than one domain (academic, physical, social, emotional) are less susceptible to acute loss of self-esteem in the face of school failure (Ingraham, 1985).

Queen, (2002) states that students moving from one school to another anticipate having more choices. Along with this anticipation comes a concern about teasing by older students, making lower grades, getting lost in a larger unfamiliar school, and having more difficult work. For many students, this change can become an unpleasant experience quickly. The achievement losses associated with the transition to middle school at sixth grade were consistent with the achievement losses found by Alspaugh and Harting (1995). Often it has been assumed that this decline is largely caused by physiological and psychological changes associated with puberty and, therefore, is somewhat inevitable. This assumption has been challenged by research that demonstrates that the nature of motivational change on entry to middle school depends on characteristics of the learning environment in which students find themselves (Midgely, 1993).

According to Arowosafe (1992), “A well-designed transition plan can restore the strong sense of belonging the entering middle school student once felt in elementary school – a key element associated with the positive motivation to enjoy and succeed in academic tasks. The young adolescent must feel successful in school, have opportunities for self-expression and decision-making, and feel cared for and respected as a person. The concerns most often expressed by students about to enter middle school focus on the routine of the new school: finding their way around and getting to class on time, dealing with lockers and combination locks, and mixing with older students. They also worry about choosing sports or extracurricular activities, and keeping up with homework and



long-term assignments. Schools at both levels can mitigate many of these concerns by providing orientation activities that demystify new routines well before the first day at middle school (p. 2).”

The changes brought on by puberty combine with cognitive and social development changes to make middle school transition a complex situation (Rutter, 1987). The transition to middle school marks a time of increased referral to mental health services. Rates of smoking, alcohol, drug, and violence problems that appear to peak in the high school really have their start in the middle school (Rutter, 1987).

Middle school brings with it opportunities to learn to adapt and cope. Educators often underestimate the importance of these demands, but in reality, children’s energy for learning depends on the nature of these coping experiences. The problems that students encounter or worry about encountering when they enter middle school challenge adolescents’ coping skills and often are main sources of adolescent stress. Many trips to the school nurse and phantom ailments are the result of students’ trying to cope with these kinds of fears or problems and the strong feelings they engender (Elias, 2001).

In 1995, Berndt and Mekos conducted a longitudinal study on adolescents’ changing perceptions of the stressful and desirable aspects of the transition to junior high school. The study was conducted in the spring of the fifth grade, when students were in elementary school; in the fall of the sixth grade, after they had entered junior high school; and in the following spring of their sixth grade year. At each time, the adolescents (N = 101) reported what they liked and disliked about junior high school. Adolescents made more positive than negative comments about junior high school at all three times, which suggests that they perceived the transition as more desirable than stressful. Sixth graders

who engaged in more misconduct were less concerned in advance about moving to junior high school; however, after entering sixth grade, they perceived the new school less positively than other students. Students who were higher achievers were more concerned in advance about moving to junior high school, but once there, they viewed the new school more positively than other students.

Whenever students change schools or programs within schools, they need orientation and a period of adjustment to the new situation in which they often face different philosophies, procedures, requirements, expectations, and rewards (Brazee, 1987). Nowhere can the range of abilities and needs of adolescents be seen more clearly than at the middle level. The common link in most school districts is the middle level school because it works with both ends of the system, elementary and high school.

The transition from elementary to middle school is an important time for students and their families (Odegaard and Heath, 1992). In the new setting, young adolescents must apply previously learned skills and understanding; learn new school rules and routines, make new friends; function in different physical and social environments; work more independently; and conform to greater teacher expectations. Adolescents are ready for the challenge of new experience, but at the same time they are still in tune with their elementary experiences. This may result in anxiety and stress. If the transition is poorly planned, each of the challenges may become obstacles that can adversely affect the transition (Perkins and Gelfer, 1995).

Student comments and behaviors give insight into their concerns as they move to a new school. Students in Gwinnett County, Georgia, when asked about their concerns in facing a school transition mentioned the following worries: (1) getting to class on time,

(2) finding lockers, (3) keeping up with “materials,” (4) finding lunch-rooms and bathrooms, (5) getting on the right bus to go home, (6) getting through crowded halls, and (7) remembering which class to go to next (Weldy, 1991). In addition to these concerns, other studies include personal safety (aggressive and violent behaviors of other students) as a prominent concern of students (Anderman & Kimweli, 1997; Arowosafe & Irvin, 1992; Odegaard & Heath, 1992).

Students’ perceptions of the quality of school life decline as they progress from elementary to secondary school, with the largest decline occurring during the transition to a middle level school (Diemert, 1992). Meeting social needs during the transition from an elementary to a middle level school is a major consideration because most programs focus more on academics and regulations.

Students from elementary grades that rotate students between classes at least part of the day reported feeling better prepared to enter a middle level school. Waggoner (1994) investigated transition concerns and the self-esteem of 171 sixth-graders. Students from teamed settings in elementary schools demonstrated a stronger affiliation in school activities and fewer concerns about the transition to junior high school than students in self-contained sixth-grade classrooms. Teachers in teamed settings felt their students exhibited fewer indicators of stress related to progressing to junior high school than teachers of students in self-contained sixth-grade classrooms. Sixty-six percent of all students surveyed believed they would be better prepared for seventh grade if they had more than one sixth-grade teacher (Waggoner, 1994).

When students leave the middle school to enter the high school, parents have justifiable concerns. The concerns tend to center on academics. During this period,

parents also have to make a change. Once heavily involved in the elementary schools, when the child reaches middle school there tends to be less parental involvement because students are not comfortable with their parents being around. They prefer their peers to assist them in the decision making process. Research shows that students whose parents are involved in the educational process have a tendency to do better in their academics. The additional parental concerns are: 1) anonymity, 2) curriculum, and 3) safety (Queen, 2002).

Many parents are extremely intimidated by the size of the new school and they are very fearful that their child may “fall through the cracks,” (Williamson and Johnston, 1999). They are afraid that their child will be placed in a classroom where a teacher pays very little attention to the needs of the child, and most parents really have a problem with the school’s lack of continual contact (Queen, 2002). Additionally, the curriculum taught by the middle level teachers can remain a mystery for many parents. Since the child sees a different teacher for each subject, parents do not see a connection of the content taught. They sometimes feel helpless when trying to assist the child with homework and studying for tests.

Parents want their children to be safe at school and fit into the complex social structure of teenagers. They want to be sure their child will be in a safe learning environment, and they have concerns about student behavior. Furthermore, they feel that schools tolerate high levels of rude behavior, and that there should be zero tolerance for rudeness and incivility (Queen, 2002). It is extremely important for parent to be involved in the learning process, even at the middle school level. Mizelle (1999) points out many strategies that have been proven to help parents assist their child during the learning

process at the middle school level; students experience higher levels of achievement, become better adjusted, and are less prone to drop out of school.

The transition into middle level schools is accompanied by intellectual, moral, social, emotional, and physical changes taking place in at least part of the transition group at any given time, though not all are on the same point of the growth curve at any point in the school year. Students making the transition into middle level schools need to receive assistance prior to, during, and after the move so that their social, psychological, and academic well-being is not compromised (Schumacher, 1998).

Queen, (2002) states that varying concerns surface during the transition of students from one school level to the next, ranging from issues involving various teaching methods to the actual learning process. Researchers studying school transitions believe that the transitions between schools need to be smooth to avoid extremely drastic changes and to limit the negative impact on students. In the age of high-stakes testing and an underestimated number of students quitting school, many transitionalists advocate that it is imperative that well developed programs be implemented to maximize student success (Balfanz and Legters, 2001).

Adolescence has long been regarded as a period characterized by rapid and dramatic biological, cognitive, and psychosocial change (Erikson, 1968; as cited in Proctor and Choi, 1994). It seems altogether too commonplace that adolescents confront developmentally inappropriate models in their worlds. Their parents are conflicted between clinging to the innocence of the child and expecting the adolescent to “grow up and act your age.” Their teachers provide increasingly stultifying school experiences while often overlooking their more sophisticated cognitive abilities. They engage in

sophisticated formal and informal competition with their peers surrounding the behavior of maturity. They are bombarded with mass-media representations of adults who behave poorly, late adolescents who behave like adults, and early adolescents who are precocious beyond their years. It is no wonder that early adolescence has been traditionally viewed as a high-risk period in the development of children's self-esteem, self-perceptions, and success-failure negotiation (Duffy, 1999).

### Summary

Chapter II has examined a review of related literature in relation to the need for and effects of transitional activities on students entering middle school or junior high. The transition into middle level schools is accompanied by intellectual, moral, social, emotional, and physical changes taking place in at least part of the transition group at any given time. Students making the transition into middle level schools need to receive assistance prior to, during, and after the move so that their social, psychological, and academic well-being is not compromised (Weldy, 1991). While the literature reflects the positive result in student achievement when transitional activities are introduced, there is little, if any, data to indicate a long-term study of a group of students over a prolonged period of time. There is a need to study the same groups of students over a period of at least three years to indicate whether or not a comprehensive transitional program is indeed effective in producing a sustained or increased level of achievement and attendance when students transition from the elementary school setting to the middle school or junior high school environment.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Students making the transition from elementary to middle school or junior high experience a plethora of educational and social changes. The relative safety and security of the self-contained classroom of the elementary school is replaced by multiple classrooms, teachers, and expectations for achievement and attendance. Alspaugh and Harting's (1995) research shows that some schools are using transitional activities to assist in maintaining at a constant level or improving student achievement and attendance, but a prolonged comprehensive program is not used effectively in the majority of school districts. Responsibility for planning and implementing a transition program should begin at the middle level because the middle level has the most to gain and the most to lose from such a program. Generally, most people know the goals, objectives, and purposes of elementary schools and high schools. That is not true for the middle level school (Brazee, 1987).

Alspaugh (1998) found a statistically significant achievement loss associated with the transition from elementary school to middle school at sixth grade. The transition loss achievement was larger when students from multiple elementary schools were merged into a single middle school during the transition. The middle school years are critical to students and their academic and social successes. The middle level years form the basis for the high school years by providing an experience that will help shape the future.

While the research shows that many students, parents, and teachers are experiencing concerns regarding the transition to a middle school or junior high, all school districts do not provide a comprehensive transition program. This study measured the impact of transitional activities on student attendance and achievement compared to a school offering no transitional activities. In addition, data was analyzed by feeder elementary school since these schools varied in socio-economic status. The latter might interact with transitional activities to produce a different effect. Student achievement was analyzed for an additional year (grade 7) to examine longer-range effects of transition activities. No previous studies of this sort had been identified.

This was a unique opportunity to participate in and gather data from a program that the researcher had assisted in developing. Having had familiarity with the program was an advantage in gathering data and gathering research.

#### Source of Data

To test the hypotheses of this study, the data were gathered through the School Information System, or SIS, that is used exclusively to gather and sort data on student achievement and attendance. The School Information System is a software program commonly used throughout the state of Missouri that generates information that is submitted to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The program is capable of generating vast amounts of information dealing with student attendance, grade point averages, discipline profiles of students, attendance history, and other information pertinent to each individual student.

The school districts chosen for inclusion in this study were selected because archival data from the districts were available to the researcher as a result of her



employment in an administrative role. One district, the treatment district, was chosen because it had implemented a transitional program five years before data were retrieved. The other, “control” district was chosen because of its similarity in demographics to the district using transitional activities and because it had not provided a transitional program.

The treatment sample was limited to students who were in fifth grade classes from two feeder schools to the middle school during the years 2000 to 2003 in a rural school district in south central Missouri. A committee from the district researched activities designed to lessen the anxiety of both students and parents as students left fifth grade and went to a new middle school.

The researcher protected the identity of the students by securing written permission from the Superintendent of Schools for both the treatment and control group scores. The researcher collected Terra Nova Achievement Test Scores from grades five and six, while a school secretary collected the yearly attendance rates. A school counselor collected Terra Nova scores from grade seven in both districts. All persons involved were required to sign a Federal Educational Right to Privacy Act (FERPA) Form, which is a federal mandate that prohibits school personnel from divulging personal information regarding any student. While gathering group attendance rates, no student names were identified. While gathering the Terra Nova Achievement Test Data from student cumulative folders, no students were identified by name. Each was assigned a number beginning with the number one and ending with the number 187 for the Treatment Group. The Control Group began with the number one for the first student and ended with the number 147.

### Transition Activities

Several transition activities were chosen to implement. Fifth grade students were bused to the middle school in March to see a short video on organizational skills, what to do about bullies, and what changes they should anticipate when they began their middle school years. Following that video, the fifth grade students ate lunch in the middle school cafeteria and then were given a tour of the building. The principal also visited the fifth grade students in their elementary classrooms during March. Students were shown what a sample schedule might look like, and how the middle school day was structured. During April, a letter was mailed to all fifth grade parents inviting them to the middle school for breakfast. That included a presentation by the principal and a tour of the building. The principal also encouraged parents to write a letter to the school about their child and the principal personally answered each letter. Those letters were routed to the child's teachers when the new school year began. During May, the fifth grade students were again invited to the middle school for lunch and rotated through classrooms meeting all the sixth grade teachers. In August, incoming sixth grade students were bused to the middle school for a comprehensive orientation day. They got their schedules, went through a mock school day, received their locker assignments, practiced opening their locks, put money on their lunch accounts, had pictures taken for their identification cards, and ate lunch in the cafeteria. The objective was to familiarize them with all aspects of the new school so they would be comfortable and less apprehensive the first day of school. Activities took place from the spring of the students' fifth grade year, and ended with an orientation day one week prior to the beginning of the new school year.

### Participants

The treatment sample has averaged approximately 187 students in each year of its progression from fifth to seventh grade each year over the past eight years who have attended the school district as elementary school students.

The fifth grade classes comprising the two elementary feeder schools whose students come together at the middle school have significant differences in socioeconomic status. Feeder school "A" is predominately middle to lower-middle class with 42.38 percent of its students receiving free or reduced lunch. Feeder school "B" is overwhelmingly middle to upper class with 25.78 percent of its population receiving free or reduced lunch. School "A" is located in the center of town within one mile of the middle school and high school. School "B" is located eight miles out of town, and the majority of its students are bused in from the rural areas surrounding the facility.

The average fifth grade class size at school "A" is 28, and at school "B" the average fifth grade class size is 17. Average achievement test scores at school "B" average as high as twenty percentage points above those of school "A." The parent teacher organization at school "B" encompasses 90 percent of families with children attending that school whereas only 33 percent of parents are active in the school "A" parent organization. Students from both elementary schools attend the same middle school at the sixth grade level and participate in exactly the same type of transition activities prior to their sixth grade year.

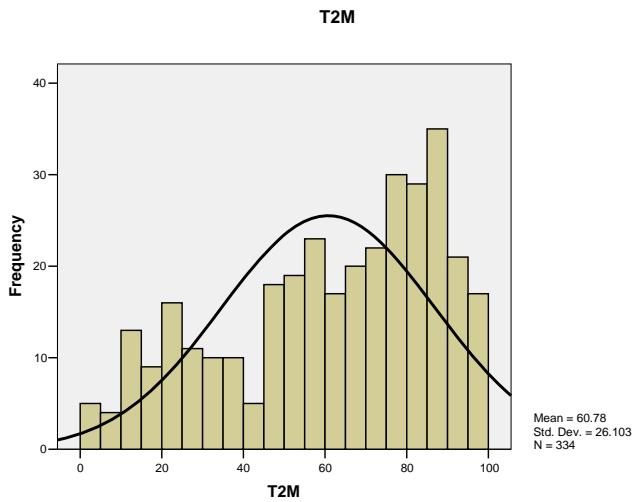
The control sample was a school of like size in south central Missouri with similar socioeconomic status and rate of free and reduced lunch. This district does not participate in any type of transition activities as students go from one school to another.

Activities are solely limited to a “middle school night” where students and parents may walk through the facility in order to look over the classrooms, and enroll for middle school while in their fifth grade classrooms. The control group did not receive any other transition activities according to the district administrator. Students of the control group come from two feeder elementary schools, one rural with smaller class sizes of approximately 18, and one in town with larger class sizes of approximately 26. The free and reduced lunch rates in the control group are similar to the treatment group. While the treatment group feeder school “A” has identified 42.38 percent of its students as qualifying for free or reduced lunch, the like control group has identified 36.04 percent. Similarly, the treatment group feeder school “B” has identified only 25.78 percent of its students as free or reduced lunch. The like control group that is located out of town has identified 32.02 percent of its students as qualifying for free or reduced lunch. The control group is also tested via the Terra Nova achievement test in grades five, six and seven; therefore, the researcher collected the data measured in both school districts in the same manner.

The variables representing the six Terra Nova test scores are all approximately normal distributions on the scale (ratio) level. This was determined by comparison of the variables’ mean, median, and mode, a review of the Pearson skewness statistic, histograms, and probability distribution plots. The descriptive statistics are provided in Table 1 and an example of the histogram is provided in Figure A for the sixth grade math test total variable consisting of both the treatment and the control groups. This analysis was performed on both the overall variable ( $n=334$ ) and the two group variables ( $n=187$  and  $n=147$  respectively).



Figure A: Histogram of Statistics for Sixth Grade Math in Treatment and Control Groups



Having determined that the variables are normal distributions, we proceeded with the comparison of the treatment and control groups to solidify our earlier tentative decision that the two groups were equivalent in all meaningful measures. Both the treatment and control groups were similar in socioeconomic data, parent involvement, and student demographics. Comparison of group means for each of the six test score variables show that the null hypothesis (“there is no difference”) is not being rejected in any of the cases, all evaluated at an alpha = .05 (See Table 2 below). Therefore, we feel confident in stating that the treatment group and the control group are equivalent.

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Table 2: Comparison of Group Means of Six Test Score Variables

	Math		Social Science	
	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
5 <sup>th</sup> Gr	.108	.914	-.997	.32
6 <sup>th</sup> Gr	-.817	.414	-.096	.924
7 <sup>th</sup> Gr	-.385	.70	-.1.018	.31

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Description of the Sample

Data were gathered from two school districts. Data included average daily attendance rates, Terra Nova Achievement Test Scores from social studies in grades five, six, and seven, as well as math in grades five, six, and seven.

Demographically the two rural school districts were similar as is shown in the following tables. Information included was gathered from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website as well as from School Information Systems, (SIS), and individual student permanent records containing various achievement test scores from all tests given while that student was enrolled in a particular school district. (Tables 6, 7, 8, and 9).

Table 6: Demographic Data, 2000-2004 Treatment School "A"

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Total Enrollment	497	522	358	361	497
Asian (Number/Percent)	1/0.20	1/0.20	1/0.20	0/0.00	0/0.00
Black (Number/Percent)	6/1.20	5/1.00	2/0.60	4/1.10	5/1.00
Hispanic (Number/Percent)	1/0.20	1/0.20	0/0.00	3/0.80	5/1.00
Indian (Number/Percent)	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00
White (Number/Percent)	489/98.40	515/98.70	355/99.20	354/98.10	487/98.00
Free/Reduced Lunch (FTE)* (Number/Percent)	216/43.80	219/42.10	149/40.90	149/43.10	209.5/42.00

\*FTE is Full-Time Equivalency. January Membership Data is used as the denominator when calculating the percent.



Table 7: Demographic Data, 2000-2004 Treatment School "B"

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Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Total Enrollment	337	340	339	329	373
Asian (Number/Percent)	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00
Black (Number/Percent)	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00
Hispanic (Number/Percent)	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00
Indian (Number/Percent)	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00
White (Number/Percent)	337/100.0	340/100.0	339/100.0	329/100.0	373/100.0
Free/Reduced Lunch (FTE)* (Number/Percent)	91/28.20	97/29.90	82/24.80	79/24.40	84/22.50

\* FTE is Full-Time Equivalency. January Membership Data is used as the denominator when calculating the percent.

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Table 8: Demographic Data, 2000-2004 Control School "D"

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Total Enrollment	337	326	328	304	272
Asian (Number/Percent)	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00
Black (Number/Percent)	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00
Hispanic (Number/Percent)	0/0.00	1/0.40	1/0.40	1/0.40	1/0.40
Indian (Number/Percent)	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00	1/0.40
White (Number/Percent)	337/100.0	326/100.0	328/100.0	304/100.0	271/99.60
Free/Reduced Lunch (FTE)* (Number/Percent)	112/32.60	104/30.80	120/37.30	119/38.50	114/41.00

\* FTE is Full-Time Equivalency. January Membership Data is used as the denominator when calculating the percent.

Table 9: Demographic Data, 2000-2004 Control School “E”

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Total Enrollment	297	285	283	271	268
Asian (Number/Percent)	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00
Black (Number/Percent)	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00
Hispanic (Number/Percent)	0/0.00	1/0.40	1/0.40	1/0.40	1/0.40
Indian (Number/Percent)	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00	0/0.00
White (Number/Percent)	297/100.0	284/99.60	282/99.60	270/99.60	267/99.60
Free/Reduced Lunch (FTE)* (Number/Percent)	92/31.00	88/30.80	82/30.00	89/33.80	95/34.50

\* FTE is Full-Time Equivalency. January Membership Data is used as the denominator when calculating the percent.

### Data Collection

Data were gathered for the treatment group from the School Information Systems of four schools: School “A” elementary, grade five, school “B” elementary, grade five, and the middle school, grade six. The same data were gathered from the control group that had experienced no transitional activities. Control groups were identified as “D” from the feeder school in town and “E” for the more rural control feeder school sampled. Data on student attendance from grade five was compared to grade six to see if transitional activities produced an effect on students’ attendance. This information was gathered and analyzed using data from the School Information System (SIS). Finally,

Terra Nova test results were compared from grade five to grade six, and grade six to grade seven, using the same group of students. Data were analyzed to determine the level of difference between the math and social studies subscores of students who have been provided transition activities at the end of the elementary school years, and the control group of students who transition to middle/junior high school without any transition activities.

### Student Achievement Instrument

The Terra Nova is a national norm-referenced test that is given in both grades five and six in the five-core subject areas of reading, language, math, science, and social studies in the selected school district as well as the control group. It is administered in the spring of the year in both the sample school district and the control group.

This study examined the difference between the Terra Nova Achievement Test Scores of students in grade five as compared to those same students at the end of grade six with the fifth grade scores being used as a covariate. Using the fifth grades' scores as a covariate assured that any differences observed in student achievement at the middle school level can be attributed to the transition activities and not necessarily to the experimental group being ahead of the control group in student achievement, or vice versa. Terra Nova test data was also examined at the seventh grade level in both school districts to measure achievement test scores in the year following the transition. Terra Nova achievement test data is only available in the core areas of math and social studies at the seventh grade level so only those two subscores were used. There has never been a systematic study on the impact of transitional activities conducted for this treatment

group; therefore, this study was the first test for this well-established transition program that has been in effect for the past eight years.

Persons working in the school district familiar with the middle school transition program gathered the research conducted for this study. A thorough knowledge of the middle school program and those of the two feeder elementary schools was an advantage in obtaining and interpreting quantitative data. For purposes of this study, the middle school principal, who also assisted in developing the transition program, developed the project and gathered the data. The independent variables were transition activities in fifth grade with the treatment group engaging in transition activities and the control group engaging in minimal to no transition activities. The dependent variables are the outcomes of those activities; specifically, the subsequent observed gains, constancy, or loss in academic achievement as measured by the Terra Nova in the areas of mathematics and social studies, and attendance.

### Analysis Design

A Treatment by Feeder School by Grade, with Feeder School vested in Treatment, and repeated (2 X 2 X 3) measures on Grade MANCOVA with repeated measures for math and social studies achievement scores was used to determine if there was a difference between the treatment and control groups. Those observed scores are a Terra Nova Achievement Test math score from grades five, six, and seven, and a Terra Nova Achievement Test social studies score from grades five, six, and seven, with the grade five scores used as a covariate.

Post-hoc *t*-tests were used for determining the significance of the differences among means of composite Terra Nova achievement test data in grades five, six, and

seven. The differences in the final year were measured with *t*-tests to determine if there are changes in attendance and achievement test scores resulting from a comprehensive transition program during the fifth grade year.

In regard to student attendance, only group data are available. There were no individual attendance rates for students from which a mean could be derived, so no test for significance in the difference was possible. Only the effect size could be ascertained. The effect size of the difference is already included in the figures since percentages are themselves a measure of effect size.

### Statement of Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: There is no difference in rates of attendance from students transitioning from elementary to middle school whether they have experienced transitional activities or not.

Hypothesis 2: There is no difference in Terra Nova Social Studies Achievement Test scores between students transitioning from elementary to middle school whether they have experienced a comprehensive transition program or not.

Hypothesis 3: There is no difference in Terra Nova Math Achievement Test scores between students transitioning from elementary to middle school whether they have experienced a comprehensive transition program or not.

### Summary

Chapter III described the method used to gather data in order to address the study's hypotheses. It also examined the demographic data that were used in this comparative analysis. Both feeder schools for the selected sample and the control group were profiled and information concerning both was discussed. The students receiving

transitional activities as fifth grade students had their academic achievement on the Terra Nova Test and attendance as fifth graders compared with the same data as sixth graders in order to determine the relevance of the activities developed for them. The same data was gathered from the control group receiving no transitional activities. It outlined the school information system that is the tool to be used in data collection as well as the criteria to be assessed. The research planned for examination answered the question of whether or not the transitional activities used in the selected school district had a direct correlation to increased attendance and academic achievement.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS OF DATA ANALYSES

The transition to middle school or junior high is a time of diverse changes for students. The transition from elementary to middle school, which roughly coincides with the transition from childhood to early adolescence, offers greater opportunities for students to interact with and rely on their peers.

Many parents of young adolescents worry about their child's move from elementary to middle school or junior high school (Mizelle, 2000). Both students and parents worry about adjusting to a new environment, new social situations, peer pressure, and increased academic rigors. The transition from elementary to middle school is an important time for a student and his or her family. During this transition, it is imperative to help students acclimate to the new school environment (Perkins and Gelfer, 1995). The early adolescents (ages 10-14) in middle school are undergoing rapid physical growth and experiencing many new emotions. They are moving from concrete to abstract thinking as they progress in their studies. They are acquiring a self-concept and social skills. They are developing lasting attitudes about learning, work, and other adult values. Finally, they are learning to take responsibility for their education (Schwartz, 1998).

Prior to the 1980's, little research was completed on the effects of transition from one school to another. As the research evolved in the 1980's and 1990's, educators became increasingly aware of the need for transitional activities for students to ease the



period of adjustment upon entering a new facility. In addition, research found that when elementary school students took part in a middle school transition program with several diverse articulation activities, fewer students were retained in the transition grade (Mac Iver, 1990).

Alspaugh (1998) found a statistically significant achievement loss associated with the transition from elementary school to middle school at sixth grade. The transition loss in achievement was larger when students from multiple elementary schools were merged into a single middle school during the transition. The middle school years are critical to students and their academic and social successes. The middle level years form the basis for the high school years by providing an experience that will help shape the future.

Students' perceptions of the quality of school life decline as they progress from elementary to secondary school, with the largest decline occurring during the transition to a middle level school (Diemert, 1992). Meeting social needs during the transition from an elementary to a middle level school is a major consideration because most programs focus more on academics and regulations. In Diemert's survey of 23 fifth-graders in a middle level school, of the top 11 (out of 23 possible) needs identified by boys, six were social, two were academic, two were procedural, and one was academic and procedural. Of the top ten needs identified by girls, five were social, two were academic, and three were procedural.

In middle level schools, it is important to emphasize mastery and improvement rather than relative ability and social comparison. Empirical evidence suggests that middle schools tend to stress relative ability and competition among students more, and effort and improvement less, leading to a decline in task goals, ability goals, and

academic efficacy. Working in groups, focusing on effort and improvement, and being given choices all support a more positive task-focused goal structure (Anderman and Midgley, 1998).

Alspaugh (1998) states that the goals of elementary schools tend to task oriented, meaning students learn the skills of multiplication and reading, whereas the goals of middle schools tend to focus on academic performance, or showing the teacher what they have learned. Middle School teachers tend to have many students for short periods of time; therefore, the student-teacher relationship changes from elementary to middle school. No longer are students with a single teacher for the day, they must deal with multiple teachers each day. Associated with the change in student-teacher relationships is a change from small-group and individual instruction to whole-class instruction in the intermediate level schools (Alspaugh, 1998).

#### Statement of Hypothesis and Results of Analysis

Hypothesis 1: There is no difference in rates of attendance from students transitioning from elementary to middle school whether they have experienced transitional activities or not.

For Hypothesis 1, the null hypothesis was not rejected. In the treatment group, those receiving a comprehensive transition program as fifth grade students had their attendance drop an average of -0.45 percent from fifth grade to sixth. Treatment group “A” showed a drop of -0.50 and treatment group “B” dropped -0.41 percent. Control group “D” dropped -0.60 percent while control group “E” dropped -0.19 for an overall average decline of -0.39 percent.

During the seventh grade year there was an even larger decline in attendance in the

Treatment group. Treatment group “A” declined an additional -1.19 percent for an overall drop of -1.69 percent from the end of fifth grade to the end of their seventh grade year. Treatment group “B” also declined even more. The drop in attendance at the end of seventh grade for treatment group “B” was -2.36 percent for an overall drop of -2.77 percent.

The control group had declining results; however, their drop in average attendance was not as much as the treatment group. Control group “D” declined -.27 percent at the end of seventh grade for an overall drop of -.87 percent. Control group “E” declined an additional -.95 percent for an overall decline of -1.14 percent.

Hypothesis 2: There is no difference in Terra Nova Social Studies Achievement Test scores between students transitioning from elementary to middle school whether they have experienced a comprehensive transition program or not.

For Hypothesis 2, the null hypothesis was not rejected. The *t*-test that was run resulted in a *p*-value of .320 in Grade 5, .924 in Grade 6, and a .31 in Grade 7. Since anything above a .05 indicates no significant difference, it has been shown there was no difference between the treatment and control groups as a result of the students experiencing a comprehensive transition program compared to the other group that had not received any programs at all.

(See Table 10).

Table 10: Independent Samples *t*-test Terra Nova Social Studies Achievement

Test Scores in Grade 5

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value
Treatment	187	58.71	23.232	1.699	-.997	.320
Control	147	61.22	22.557	1.860		

Independent Samples *t*-test Terra Nova Social Studies Achievement Test Scores in Grade 6

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value
Treatment	187	59.89	24.848	1.817	-.096	.924
Control	147	60.15	23.768	1.960		

Independent Samples *t*-test Terra Nova Social Studies Achievement Test Scores in Grade 7

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value
Treatment	187	57.07	25.552	1.869	-1.018	.31
Control	147	59.83	23.844	1.967		

Finally, a Multivariate Analysis of Covariance was run, as there were two Terra Nova Social Studies scores that could be considered together resulting in multiple dependent variables; therefore, the MANCOVA with repeated measures was used. The MANCOVA resulted in a *p*-value of .107 in the treatment group and .125 in the control group. Anything above a .05 indicates no significant difference between the treatment

and control groups as a result of one experiencing a comprehensive transition program and one not receiving any programs at all (See Table 11).

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Table 11: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects Terra Nova Social Studies

Multivariate			
Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i> -value
Treatment	2	19.631	.107
Control	2	23.288	.125

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Hypothesis 3: There is no difference in Terra Nova Math Achievement Test scores between students transitioning from elementary to middle school whether they have experienced a comprehensive transition program or not.

To confirm that the two groups (school districts) performed the same on the Terra Nova Math Test in grades five, six, and seven, we ran *t*-tests comparing the means for each of those grades. The *t*-test test that was run resulted in a *p*-value of .914 in Grade 5, .414 in Grade 6, and .70 in Grade 7. Anything above a .05 indicates no significant difference it has been shown there was no difference between the treatment and control groups as a result of one experiencing a comprehensive transition program and one not receiving any programs at all.

We did not reject the null hypothesis for h3 as the *t*-test comparing the group means for the change in math scores was not significant ( $t = -1.656, p = .10, \alpha = .05$ ) (See Table 12).

Table 12: Independent Samples *t*-test Terra Nova Math Achievement Test Scores in Grade 5

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value
Treatment	187	59.04	24.094	1.762	.108	.914
Control	147	58.74	25.444	2.099		

Independent Samples *t*-test Terra Nova Math Achievement Test Scores in Grade 6

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value
Treatment	187	59.74	26.424	1.932	-.817	.414
Control	147	62.09	25.718	2.121		

Independent Samples *t*-test Terra Nova Math Achievement Test Scores in Grade 7

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value
Treatment	187	55.80	25.685	1.878	-.385	.70
Control	147	56.90	25.966	2.142		

Finally a Multivariate Analysis of Covariance was run, as there were two Terra Nova Math scores that could be considered together resulting in multiple dependent variables; therefore, the MANCOVA with repeated measures was used. The MANCOVA resulted in a *p*-value of .100 in the treatment group and .267 in the control group. Since anything above a .05 indicates no significant difference it has been confirmed there was no difference between the treatment and control groups as a result of one experiencing a comprehensive transition program and one not receiving any programs at all (See Table 13).

Table 13: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects Terra Nova Social Studies

Multivariate			
Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i> -value
Treatment	2	19.631	.100
Control	2	23.288	.267

In this project, scores were gathered on the two Math and Social Studies Terra Nova Achievement Test Scores for the treatment and control groups in fifth, sixth, and seventh grade. Hypothesis (h3) stated there was no difference between the groups on the seventh grade scores when using fifth and sixth grade scores as covariables to control for repeated measure relationships. This hypothesis was tested using the repeated measures MANCOVA with the multivariate dependent variate of the seventh grade combined test scores, the group membership as the independent variable, and the fifth and sixth grade math and social studies scores as covariables

$$(Y_{7M} + Y_{7S} = a + X_{5M} + X_{5S} + X_{6M} + X_{6S} + X_{\text{Group}} + E).$$

The result of the test show that the overall model is statistically significant ( $F = 260.127, p < .001$  for seventh grade math,  $F = 156.30, p < .001$  for seventh grade Social Studies) indicating that there are differences amongst the group means. Step two analysis shows that the only non-significant independent variable is the group membership variable representing the treatment and control groups ( $F = .003, p = .960$  for seventh grade Math,  $F = .947, p = .331$  for seventh grade Social Studies). Thus, the null hypothesis, and therefore the narrative hypotheses (h3) can not be rejected and must conclude that there is enough evidence to support the claim that transition programs, as

implemented in the treatment district, do not have a long-term effect on middle school performance.

### Summary

Chapter IV discussed the data that were gathered from two school districts. Data included average daily attendance rates, Terra Nova Achievement Test Scores from social studies in grades five, six, and seven, as well as math in grades five, six, and seven. The demographic data from the two rural school districts included the enrollment and ethnicity of students. Data on the percentage of Free/Reduced Lunch were also gathered.

The null hypothesis was not rejected for all three hypotheses. Transitional activities during elementary school did not result in any significant increase in the rate of attendance. Rather, attendance dropped each year from grade five to six and again from six to seven. Data analyses run on Terra Nova Achievement Test scores showed there was no significant difference between the treatment and control groups as a result of one experiencing a comprehensive transition program and one not receiving any programs at all.

Chapter V will contain the summary and discussion of this study on transition activities and practices that occurred in elementary school. It will review the statement of the problem, the methodology used in this particular study, and finally a summary of the results.



## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Prior to the 1980's, little research was completed on the effects of transition from one school to another. As the research evolved in the 1980's and 1990's, educators became increasingly aware of the need for transitional activities for students to ease the period of adjustment upon entering a new facility. In addition, research found that when elementary school students took part in a middle school transition program with several diverse articulation activities, fewer students were retained in the transition grade (Mac Iver, 1990).

Transition practices need to be in place to provide accommodations and activities that schools can use to assist students in the adjustment from one school to another. A team of teachers must plan for any problems that may arise when students enter a new school. Problems must be identified and goals should be set. Once the plan is written, implementation should include a model for evaluation of the program. A program evaluation would be useful in examining any transition program that is in place. An examination of the program evaluations would lead to a predictor as to the effectiveness of any program.

The transition to middle school or junior high is a time of great change for students. The transition from elementary to middle school, which roughly coincides with the transition from childhood to early adolescence, offers greater opportunities for students to interact with and rely on their peers. There is a correspondingly "dramatic

increase in the amount of unsupervised age-mate contact during this developmental period” (Higgins and Parsons, 1983). Adolescents are able to spend more time in “relationships that are likely to be more symmetrical in terms of interpersonal power and authority” (Higgins and Parsons, 1983). The intellectual changes expected as students enter middle school require preparation by the students, teachers, and parents in order to ensure a successful experience. The transition from elementary to middle school is an important time for a student and his or her family. During this transition, it is imperative to help students acclimate to the new school environment (Perkins and Gelfer, 1995). The early adolescents (ages 10-14) in middle school are undergoing rapid physical growth and experiencing many new emotions. They are moving from concrete to abstract thinking as they progress in their studies. They are acquiring a self-concept and social skills. They are developing lasting attitudes about learning, work, and other adult values. Finally, they are learning to take responsibility for their education (Schwartz, 1998).

Chapter V will summarize and discuss the results of this study on transition activities and practices that can occur when a student moves from one school to another. It will review the statement of the problem, the methodology used in this particular study, and finally a summary of the results.

### Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness that transitional activities have on student achievement and attendance when students move from two elementary schools to one middle school. Research indicates that receiving support from important others in stressful times or during difficult transitions, or knowing that others

are available if needed, provides protection from distress (Fenzel, 2000). More specifically, the study will attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent does the use of transitional activities for elementary students entering middle school result in increased attendance?
2. To what extent does the use of transitional activities for elementary students entering middle school result in increased achievement? The nationally norm referenced Terra Nova test results will serve as the indicator for this research question.

Students make many transitions during their years of school; from home to school, elementary to middle school, middle to high school, and high school to college or work. In addition, there are transitions associated with relocation, mobility, family transitions such as more single parent and blended families, and transfers both in childhood and adolescence. These transitions are usually major events in the lives of students and parents. The stresses created by these geographical and socio-emotional transitions can be minimized when the new environment is responsive to each particular age group (Schumacher, 1998). In order to obtain data relative to the statement of the problem and the major questions, the following hypotheses were developed:

1. Hypothesis 1: There is no difference in rates of attendance from students transition from elementary to middle school whether they have experienced transitional activities or not.

2. Hypothesis 2: There is no difference in Terra Nova Social Studies Achievement Test scores between students transitioning from elementary to middle school whether they have experienced a comprehensive transition program or not.
3. Hypothesis 3: There is no difference in Terra Nova Math Achievement Test scores between students transitioning from elementary to middle school whether they have experienced a comprehensive transition program or not.

### Review of the Methodology

As explained in Chapter III, the study reported here was a quantitative analysis of data gathered from a control group as well as a treatment group. The treatment group consisted of students who had experienced a comprehensive transition program while in the fifth grade. Those activities included visits to the fifth grade classrooms by the middle school principal and counselor, multiple visits by fifth grade students to the middle school, parent breakfasts, and an orientation day prior to the beginning of sixth grade where all new sixth grade students were bused in to the middle school; received their schedules, locks, lockers, student planners, ate lunch and went through a sample day of school. The control group of students received no orientation activities.

This study relied exclusively on the average attendance percentages for each group of students at the end of each year in grades five, six, and seven. In addition, Terra Nova social studies and math scores were compared using t-tests from grade five to grade seven to determine if there were changes in the scores that may be attributed to the transition activities. Alspaugh (1998) found a statistically significant achievement loss associated with the transition from elementary to middle school at sixth grade. This

study was conducted to determine if the comprehensive transition program that had been in place for a number of years in the treatment school district was effective enough to stop that achievement loss. The same students were followed for three consecutive years to determine whether their attendance rates and achievement test scores would remain the same, decline, or increase.

### Summary of the Results

The results of this study show a drop in both attendance rates and achievement test scores for both the control and treatment groups. Interestingly, the treatment group that had received a comprehensive transition program had a larger decline in attendance rates and achievement test scores than the control group receiving no transition activities. Regarding attendance rates from grades five through seven the following results were determined:

- Students from treatment school “A” had a decline in attendance from fifth to seventh grade of -1.69 percent.
- Students from treatment school “B” had a decline in attendance from fifth to seventh grade of -2.77 percent.
- Students from control school “D” had a decline in attendance from fifth to seventh grade of -.87 percent.
- Students from control school “E” had a decline in attendance from fifth to seventh grade of -1.14 percent.

Regarding Terra Nova Social Studies Achievement Test Scores from grades five through seven the following results were determined:

- There was no difference in Terra Nova Social Studies Achievement Test scores between students transitioning from elementary to middle school whether they have experienced a comprehensive transition program or not. The null hypothesis was not rejected. The t-test that was run resulted in a p-value of .320 in Grade 5, .924 in Grade 6, and a .31 in Grade 7. Since anything above a .05 indicates no significant difference, it has been shown there was no difference between the treatment and control groups as a result of the students experiencing a comprehensive transition program compared to the other group that had not received any programs at all.
- The MANCOVA with repeated measures resulted in a p-value of .107 in the treatment group and .125 in the control group in analyzing Terra Nova Social Studies Achievement Test data. This also did not result in any significant difference between the treatment and control groups.

Regarding Terra Nova Math Achievement Test Scores from grades five through seven the following results were determined:

- There was no difference in Terra Nova Math Achievement Test scores between students transitioning from elementary to middle school whether they have experienced a comprehensive transition program or not. The null hypothesis was not rejected. The t-test that was run resulted in a p-value of .914 in Grade 5, .414 in Grade 6, and .70 in Grade 7. Since anything above a .05 indicates no significant difference it has been shown there was no difference between the

treatment and control groups as a result of the students experiencing a comprehensive transition program compared to the other group that had not received any programs at all.

- The MANCOVA with repeated measures resulted in a p-value of .100 in the treatment group and .267 in the control group in analyzing Terra Nova Math Achievement Test data. This also did not result in any significant difference between the treatment and control groups.

### Discussion

On the basis of this study alone, it is difficult to determine the effects of all transition programs. While this study determined there is no reason to believe the interventions made any difference in the overall attendance and achievement test scores, the literature and other studies have shown positive results. The staff, students, and parents of the students in the treatment group receiving a comprehensive transition program were convinced that it would result in higher attendance rates and achievement test scores. The program had been in place for several years and had received recognition by the community and staff as exemplary. The principal had been invited to speak at state conferences about the benefits of the transition program. Teachers touted it as giving new sixth grade students the tools they needed for a successful transition. Parents were convinced the program quelled the fears of their children that were leaving the relative security of one teacher who taught all classes to deal with multiple teachers throughout the course of each day. Students had been surveyed for several years to report their reactions to the transition program and appeared much more at ease the first week of school than before the program was implemented. The staff met regularly to reflect and

make changes in the program. On the surface it appeared that the program was well worth the time and effort it required.

### Suggestions for Future Research

Now that this study has been completed it shows that indeed the transition program did not result in improved attendance and achievement test scores for these two groups. Moreover, the control group that had absolutely no transition activities had better attendance rates as well as better achievement test scores; however, it may be that individual students were helped. The treatment and control groups in this study were predominately white.

Previous studies have shown a statistically significant achievement loss with the transition from elementary school to middle school at sixth grade (Alspaugh, 1998). The stresses caused by the transition can be minimized when the new environment is responsive to each particular age group (Anderman & Kimweli, 1997, Arrowsafe & Irvin, 1992, Odegaard & Heath, 1992).

The fact that the treatment group did not show gains that were statistically significant may have resulted from a difference in school policy on student attendance. There could also have been a stronger math program at the control school, and this study did not examine the curriculum and teaching methodology of each program. The control schools could have provided a more supportive program for teachers and students that may have caused them to have better achievement test scores. We did not look at the teachers in these grade levels in regard to effectiveness in the classroom or instructional practices. We did not determine the level of experience of teachers nor expectations on the part of the teachers.



The social relations aspect of this study needs to be further examined. The psychosocial factor was not examined and further research in this area may yield different data. Because of the transition program, students appeared happier and more adjusted to their new school environment. Parents had much less anxiety about sending their children to a larger middle school. Parent issues about drugs and safety of their children appeared to decrease when they visited the middle school and were able to talk to the principal and teachers. Teachers expressed that they were able to actually teach the curriculum the first day of school since the students had experienced the mock school day a week before school began. They were not in the halls helping students learn to work their combination locks as that activity had already occurred. The teachers were not spending instructional time showing students where their next class was located since that process had also occurred the week before school began. There was no confusion during lunch as students already knew how to get through the lunch line and where to dispose of their lunch trays.

There may have been a bigger impact on the learning climate of the school even though it did not impact Terra Nova Achievement Test Scores. In theory, satisfied and content students and staff should yield higher attendance and achievement test scores, but since this study did not find that to be the case additional research could examine the climate and satisfaction of students, parents, and teaching staff on transitional program. The psychosocial factor and independent qualitative research could examine a more human factor that was not examined in this study.

## Conclusion

Most students attending public school today will experience several formal transitions, or the process of moving from one level of schooling to another, prior to kindergarten and concluding after graduating from high school (Queen, 2002).

Varying concerns surface during the transition of students from one school level to the next, ranging from issues involving various teaching methods to the actual learning process. Researchers studying school transitions believe that the transitions between schools need to be smooth to avoid extremely drastic changes and to limit the negative impact of students (Belfanz and Legters, 2001).

Recommendations for further research would include the planning, implementation, and evaluation of transition activities and their effects on student attendance and achievement to determine if varied or additional activities would produce a different outcome. Clear collaboration between elementary and middle school teachers, administrators, and counselors would be essential to a successful program.

Different socioeconomic groups may have different needs as they transition between schools. Surveying students and developing a program suited to particular needs would be crucial. Addressing the needs and concerns of young adolescents in transition would create a climate that values and supports all parties involved.

Recommendations for future research would also include examining individual students' data. It would be interesting to determine if a transition program would benefit lower achieving students as compared to the group study that was done in this instance. Perhaps low performing or at-risk students would benefit more than the average or above average performers.

Further research could examine data gathered from student and parent interviews. That qualitative approach could measure the needs of both students and parents, and a transition program could be developed to address the areas identified by a survey or interview tool. It would also be a way to gather and sort socioeconomic data.

This study examined a very homogeneous group of students. Research of this sort could be quite different if it was conducted in a suburban district that had a wide variety of ethnic groups. School districts that participate in the Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Council (VICC) could add another element. The VICC students are all from the inner city and are bused out to county schools as part of the desegregation program.

An additional suggestion for study would be the transition from middle school or junior high to high school. Although the maturation of students would be different, the movement to a new school and school environment would be of interest. This study focused on the transition from elementary to middle school; however, those same stressors would also be found in the transition from middle school to high school.

A final suggestion for research would include examining data from special education students. In theory, the consistency of a transition program should support the educational plan for special education students. A study of how they progressed over a period of time having been exposed to a transition program may yield very different results.

Effective and comprehensive transition programs help (1) build a sense of community; (2) respond to the needs and concerns of the students; and (3) provide appropriate, faceted approaches to facilitate the transition process (Schumacher, 1998).

Most importantly, responsibility for planning and implementing a transition program should begin at the middle level because the middle level has the most to gain and the most to lose from such a program. Generally, most people know the goals, objectives, and purposes of elementary school and high schools. That is not true for the middle level school (Brazee, 1987). Transition programs should be comprehensive and encompass all aspects of the middle level school. In-coming students should meet the principal several times, tour the new facility multiple times, have lunch, and visit with students who attend the new building, have the opportunity to find their classrooms, meet the teachers, and practice finding lockers and opening locks. Activities for parents should include breakfast with the principal, meetings with the counselors and teachers to discuss scheduling and curricular issues and the opportunity to read and review middle school newsletters.

A final orientation exercise should be inviting all new students to come to school a week prior to the beginning of the new school year. Students should receive their schedules and practice a mock school day. This gives students the opportunity to acclimate themselves to the new school, meet their teachers, and spend the day working and learning to better prepare them for a new school year. Since the middle school environment differs significantly from the elementary, students can expect differences in class sizes, schedules, activities, teaching methodologies, rules, and expectations for their performance, and their interactions with adults and peers. It would be extremely helpful for elementary children to experience the new environment that they will be entering and for teachers to make observations about students' social and cognitive/academic behaviors before exiting elementary school (Perkins and Gelfer, 1995).

Stevenson (1992) contends that every child wants to be successful, liked, and respected; every youngster wants physical exercise and freedom to move; and every child wants life to be just and fair. Educators should consider these wants and needs, as well as the stages of development of children as they explore ways to make the transition to middle school.

The transition process takes time and effort and entails more than one orientation meeting at the beginning of the school year. Successful transition programs include several different articulation activities at different times of the year. MacIver (1990) suggests that activities include programs that provide students and parents with information about the new school; provide students with social support during the transition; and bring each school's personnel together to learn about the other's curriculum, requirements, standards, and expectations.

Transition should be an on-going process designed with a positive outcome for students, parents, and teachers. Collaboration between the adults involved in the transition should be foremost in the planning and implementation of the program.

Continuing research should provide a direction for school personnel responsible for the well being of students. There are many methods of examining data in studies of this sort. Additional research may yield findings that may be very beneficial to students and their educational program.

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