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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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A Qualitative Case Study of a Transitional Program for Students
In Middle School as They Transition to High School

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Patrick Tremayne Moore

March 2021

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all my family. I especially dedicate this work to my wife, Latoria, and my two boys, Gavin and Brayden. Without the support of my family I would not have made it to this point. Helping me push through the long days of work and the late nights of studying, I again say thank you.

Acknowledgments

There is a saying which says, “It takes a village to raise a child.” I realized that it also takes a village to write a dissertation. My wife, Letoria, and my sons, Gavin and Brayden, were by my side during this long journey and always supported me with great encouragement. Also, my family made sure that I never forgot to enjoy life during the process. My family helped me realize that it was ok to take a step back and breathe and to trust the process. My parents kept pushing me forward every day and always gave words of encouragement. My parents always told me from day one that I should always bet on myself, and when I felt like giving up just remember the race is not complete until you reach the finish line. I thank you all and will always cherish your words.

Thank you to my committee members who provided me with amazing feedback and support during this process. Dr. Rademaker helped me understand what I was really trying to argue and discover. I appreciate your support, which started when I enrolled in your Intro to Doctoral Studies course. You would not let me quit, and you always made me understand that every assignment I submitted had to be of the best quality. You helped make me a better writer, student, and person. I thank you.

Finally, I want to thank all of those people who, once upon a time, were my teachers who helped me start my educational journey. As there are way too many names to mention, just know that I really do appreciate your dedication.

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Abstract

Every school year, many U.S. students prepare to make the transition from being a middle school student to becoming a high school student. School transitions happen regularly and can be considered predictable. As students transition to high school, there are more challenges such as school work and peer influence. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of students who participate in a transition program as they transition from middle school to high school. Also, this study explored the perceptions of teachers who participated in the transition programs. The population of this study consisted of students who were enrolled in a rural school district, which has a total student population of 500, in South Carolina who have participated in a transition program. The sample of this study was purposeful sampling of eight students who have participated in a transition program, as well as a purposeful sample of five staff who have worked with students in the transition program. An overall conclusion of the findings revealed the students enjoyed the transition program as it provided additional resources for students and access to additional clubs that provided structure and the ability to develop connections with peers. The staff found the transitional program beneficial to all students to help improve student success. Recommendations for future research include conducting all interviews in person, interviewing students and staff who have not participated in the transition program, and interviewing principals and superintendents. Program directors' should develop a curriculum plan that students will follow and schools should seek funding to assist with providing transportation to students to attend the transitional program.

Keywords: bridge program, transition program, low socioeconomic background, focus groups, administrators

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Every school year, many U.S. students prepare to make the transition from being a middle school student to becoming a high school student. School transitions happen regularly and can be considered predictable (Roybal et al., 2014). However, for many students, the transition from middle school to high school can cause a student to function differently (Vasquez-Salgado & Chavira, 2013). For example, a student may not do so well with their academics due to more advanced work or not having proper study habits. Some students encounter difficulties because they do not understand how to effectively communicate (Benner, 2011). Many students struggle to communicate with their teachers due to having a lack in understanding how to speak with or how to schedule appointments with their teachers (Benner, 2011).

The high school environment, which includes higher expectations for studying, academic achievement, more complicated structure, and diverse cultures that students may have experienced in middle school, can cause stress on students who are not prepared for the changes, and can contribute to student academic failure (Roybal et al., 2014). The transition for some students can be simple, while the cycle of moving from one school to the next might be considered a complicated process for others (Roybal et al., 2014). Moving from middle school to high school is a critical development stage for students that can have both positive and negative outcomes on the academic setting used for student learning (Muscara et al., 2018). Even with the many changes of transitioning to a new school, the students should know the structure that is in place at the high school to ensure student success.

The transition to high school occurs at a unique time in teenagers' life as they are changing biologically from childhood to adolescence (Stoddard et al., 2016). Sawyer et al.

(2018) stated the age of adolescence starts at the age of 10 and can continue through the age of 19. The adolescent stage is a critical stage for students as they consider different personal possibilities, many different prospective job opportunities, and their contentment associated with the loneliness of moving to a new school (Stoddard et al., 2016). Also, even if a student is part of a transition program, there must be a feeling of connection (Stoddard et al., 2016). Students who are unable to feel connected to their new academic environment may not perform well due to having a sense of not having any academic assistance (Roybal et al., 2014). Transition programs are needed to develop ways for students to connect and feel comfortable with others around them, which can lead to their academic success.

During my eight years' experience working with students transitioning from middle to high school, I had the opportunity to observe students who were excited and prepared to move to high school as well as students who were terrified and felt incredibly unprepared for what was ahead at the high school level. The students who reported feeling prepared attended a transitional prep program that focused on advancing the students' reading and writing and allowed students to participate in extracurricular activities. The students who were not able to participate in a transitional prep program generally struggled in multiple areas of learning. It was not clear; however, why students who participated in a transitional program seemed more prepared compared to those students who did not participate in a program. Therefore, it became my plan to research the perceptions of how students felt about transitional programs, while also wanting to know if students had a belief that a program could better prepare them for school.

Background to the Problem

Transitional programs are essential to ensure student success (Frank, 2011). Iver et al. (2015) explained that not only should students be involved in a transitional program, but it is

critical to have family engagement at the high school level. Without transitional programs, students who struggle with the transition from middle school to high school are more likely to fall behind in school and could drop out of school, which might cause a repeat in the cycle of poverty (Frank, 2011). Such students could struggle to get a good job and being able to provide for themselves and their family.

Prior research has shown the importance of a transition program to help ensure student success (Frank, 2011). This research has emphasized the importance of high school teachers understanding that reaching students before their move to high school is essential, especially for a student who might be considered at risk (Frank, 2011). At-risk students need more attention to ensure they continue school and graduate (Dorman, 2012). Common characteristics of at-risk students include coming from a low socioeconomic background, not having the support needed to succeed in school, or having an undiagnosed learning disability (Barling & Weatherhead, 2016; Okamoto & Smith-Lovin, 2001). Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds may face more challenges such as mastery of school subjects, and having proper learning materials (Barling & Weatherhead, 2016). These students also face challenges due to coming from troubling environments which are different circumstances than what their counterparts who come from a higher socioeconomic background (Barling & Weatherhead, 2016). A successful transition program should ensure students of all ethnicities, no matter their socioeconomic background, receive the additional assistance needed to help master school subjects.

Statement of Problem

Students who are unable to transition from middle school to high school might find themselves at risk of not completing high school (Muscara et al., 2018). The transition into high school can be shocking to students due to the new environment, advanced expectations, more

structure, and the different culture (Roybal et al., 2014). Students from a low socioeconomic background tend to struggle more due to living in poverty and having a lack of resources (Hughes, 2010; Oreopoulos et al., 2014). Parental assistance is essential as parents can connect with their child and be a consistent motivator (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017). It is necessary to note that some parents are unable to be a motivator as they might be dealing with struggles of their own (Oreopoulos et al., 2014). Research further explained that impoverished children struggle due to receiving poor investments from their parents due their parent's economic stress, while many of the children struggle due to being exposed to worse schools and neighborhoods environment at a pivotal development stage (Oreopoulos et al., 2014). It is essential to provide support to at-risk students whose grades from previous years show a need for extra support to ensure a successful transition (Dorman, 2012).

While researchers have suggested that students would benefit from participating in a transition program, other researchers have noted there is a financial cost of these programs that most schools might not be able to afford (Oreopoulos et al., 2014). There is a lack of knowledge about which programs need funding, which programs are most effective, and the number of activities that are needed for each transition program for students to be successful in school (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Mac Iver, 1990; Oreopoulos et al., 2014). Oreopoulos et al. (2014) discussed the financial needs of Pathway to Education program, which is an academic support program for students moving to high school cost \$3,500 in Canadian dollars, which converts to \$2,634 U.S. dollars plus an additional \$1,200. Many public schools might not be able to receive additional funds each year to pay for a transition program for students (Oreopoulos et al., 2014). Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) found that many urban schools that have transitional programs have a lower number of transition activities available to students compared to higher achieving

schools with higher funds. Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) also wrote, “Numerous activities geared toward the needs and concerns of students, parents, and teachers can be effective in helping students transition to a new school with less anxiety and more academic success” (p. 23).

Researchers have stated how a transition program can assist students (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Mac Iver, 1990), but there are still areas of research needed to reach a conclusive decision on school transitional programs. For example, what should be taught during the transitional program, should all students be required to participate in a transitional program, what teachers are qualified to oversee the transitional program, will students perceive more work as to much, and are students old enough to make their own decisions about a transitional program. Benner (2011) explained that by adding more work for students to do during a transition program it could cause greater challenges for students such as, not wanting to complete the work or feeling they are not prepared to succeed academically. When it comes to making decisions about academics, Emmett and McGee (2012) discussed that even though a student is moving to high school, they are still too young to make decisions. More youthful students’ decisions are based on emotions and not what is best for the student’s success. As students might feel more work is not needed the extra work the students receive could be needed to help the students advance in a particular academic subject. Not researching this topic could lead to leadership not being able to improve existing transitional programs which will cause not all students to be reached and could cause students to not improve academically.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to evaluate an existing transitional program in rural South Carolina to understand trends in students’ perceptions as they prepare to move from middle school to high school. This study was designed to determine the participants’

success in a transitional program. In order to define what elements do students find most useful in a transitional program in schools. The study explored the participants' attendance rates, a sum of the participants' behavioral issues, and the participants' grades. The population of this study consisted of students from a rural school district in South Carolina that has a total student population of 500. The freshman population consisted of 125 students who were eligible to participate in a transition program. Staff members who assisted with the transition program were also selected to participate in the study. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants for this study.

Research Questions

Q1. What are high school students' perceptions of their participation in a transition program from middle school to high school?

- a. How do high school students perceive having access to educational material such as technology, educational books, and tutoring through the transitional program?
- b. How do high school students who participated in a transition program describe how they perceive their current and future teachers?

Q2. What are transition program directors' perceptions of students who participate in the program?

- a. What are transition program directors' perceptions of how the program benefit students?

Q3. How do transition program documents compare with student experiences?

Definition of Key Terms

Academic challenges. Challenges that students face in academic courses that might result in a student receiving a low grade which can result in a student failing a course (Hoffmann et al., 2016).

Adolescence. A specific age range or group that categorizes a student. The process of moving from a young child into a young adult (Stoddard et al., 2016).

Effective schools. Schools that have specific plans in place to help ensure students success which guides students to move closer to graduation (Emmett & McGee, 2012).

Student engagement. Student engagement occurs when students who are enrolled in a school or program make a physical and psychological investment in learning by participant in group and self-lead projects or events (Shoulders & Krei, 2015).

Transition. The moving from one place to another or making a change from one condition to another (Stoddard et al., 2016).

Summary

The transition into high school can be shocking due to the many different changes that a student will endure. Even for the most reliable and most resilient student transitioning to a new school can bring uncertainty. Transitional programs are important to ensure student success, which is why students should be involved. It is essential for students to have a grasp on what their new environment will look like, how to contact their teachers, how to make proper adjustments to the course work, and how to connect with others in which they will be surrounded by each day. The overall purpose of this research study is to identify students' perceptions of a transitional program from middle school to high school while identifying what supports are essential to assist students with their academic challenges and what assists are essential to help

ease the transition from middle school to high school. Understanding how students perceive transitional programs and what students find to be essential for transitioning from middle school to high school can be used to help better develop transitional program to ensure the needs of students are being met to help ensure academic success. Chapter 2 serves as a review of the literature that is applicable to the transition from middle school to high school. It presents relevant literature unfolding to the problem with student dropout, transitional programs, current research recommendations for transitional programs, student teacher relationships, effective teachers, smaller classes and student engagement, student activities, peer influence, peer mentoring, catch up courses, and motivation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The transition into high school can be frightening to students due to the new atmosphere, advanced outlooks, more organization, and the different culture (Roybal et al., 2014). If students are not fully prepared to adapt and adjust to the many new situations it could cause students to fall behind in their course work and not progress in school. A successful transition program can allow students to understand how to cope with the many changes they will have to endure at such a young age. Emmett and McGee (2012) discussed that even though a student is moving to high school they are still too young to make decisions. Making decisions is just one factor that plays into helping students have a successful transition into high school. Participating in a transition program that showcases effective teachers, positive peer support, and academic and administrative support can help students succeed in school (Roybal et al., 2014).

The literature review serves as a baseline for the need for and relevance of the present study of transitional programs. The review is broken down into three main areas of research. The first area discusses the drop out crisis in school the need for transitional programs, how transitional programs are explained by researchers in the literature. The second area discusses practices in transitional programs such as number of student activities, small peer groups, catch up courses, and bridge programs and motivation. The third area outlines current recommendations for having transitional programs and their benefit to students, impact of student teacher relationships, uses of effect teachers, and smaller classes and student engagement.

Theoretical Framework Discussion

Two theoretical frameworks were used to help guide with this research study: self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and stage-environment fit theory (Eccles et al., 1993).

Deci and Ryan (2000) explained that self-determination theory is focused on positive developmental tendencies as well as social environment tendencies. Deci and Ryan (2000) further explained that self-determination theory has also been used to outline different approaches to motivation. The different approaches being intrinsic motivation as well as self-regulation of extrinsic motivation. Each of the different approaches were seen to have different concerns for learning, student performance, personal experience, and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

The second theoretical framework is stage-environment fit theory (Eccles et al., 1993). Stage-environment fit theory suggests at the basic level that many middle schools do not provide the specific developmental needs and appropriate education environmental needs for students (Eccles et al., 1993). Stage-environment also explains that the needs of adolescents as they develop as well as the educational environment is essential. Eccles et al. (1993) further explained that a positive environment is needed for students in the adolescent age as it is a vulnerable age. Also having a negative environment can cause children's perceptions of themselves and their education to become negative and result in students not succeeding well in school.

Using self-determination theory and stage-environment fit theory allowed me to ask what are the students perceptions about motivation, personal developmental needs, and what were the students' perceptions on their educational needs. Based on the students' perceptions it can lead to developing new recommendations to school transitional programs on how to better serve students. Also, I was able to use self-determination theory and stage-environment fit theory to gain the perception from teachers about their students' motivation. Also, state-environment theory was used as a lens to help me understand the collected data to understand how essential it is to have a positive environment for students in order for the students to succeed.

Dropout Crisis

Graduating from high school is essential for a student's success, as dropping out of high school could delay the future success of those who do not graduate (McKee & Caldarella, 2016). The high school dropout rate is essential not only to educators, but it is also essential to politicians (Suh & Suh, 2011). According to Ellerbrock et al. (2015), approximately 7% of high school's students drop out of school due to many influences such as lack of school recourses and lack of help at home. Identifying the many multiple types of influences that students might meet once they move to high school such as peer pressure, drugs, or just being property prepared could prevent students from dropping out of school (Ellerbrock et al., 2015). High school dropout symbolizes multiple problems such as psychological, economical, and social issues that can have extreme ramifications (Khalkhali et al., 2013). When a student has a smooth and positive transition to high school, they also have a higher chance of graduating. Subsequently, that high school diploma is more likely to enhance lifelong economic and career success (Hirschfield, 2014). Programs need to be put in place to outline early warning statuses of students who are at risk of having low student achievement which could lead to student dropout (Balfanz et al., 2012). McKee and Caldarella (2016) also affirmed by stating, all students who might be considered at risk should be identified early in their middle school and high school career as the thought of dropping out of school might have become an option.

There are multiple reasons as to why students drop out of school. Some factors that contribute to students dropping out of school are the attendance of a student in middle school as well as the student's grades (McKee & Caldarella, 2016). Attendance and grades can serve as early warning indicators of a student's success or nonsuccess in school (McKee & Caldarella, 2016). Students who have poor attendance in middle school will raise their chances of also have

poor attendance in high school (McKee & Caldarella, 2016). Having a pattern of poor attendance in high school can cause students to have a decrease in their grades and grade point average due to missing multiple assignments, in which can cause a failure in courses (McKee & Caldarella, 2016). Allensworth et al. (2014) expressed that a student having a pattern of missing an excessive amount of days in school can be more critical to a student passing high school than a student scoring high on test scores. Loveless (2017) further expressed that certain disciplinary actions such as suspensions and expulsions contribute to students falling behind in school from the rest of their peers academically, which can cause the student to want to give up and not further persevere their education. Owen et al. (2015) expressed that alternative methods could be given which would allow students to receive discipline, but are still allowed to remain in school to reduce the risk of at-risk students of dropping out of school. Owen et al. (2015) further explained that alternative schools or a well- designed format of an in-school suspension program can serve as a better outlet for students to attend so that it reduces the student's chances of missing school while again keeping the student on track to complete school.

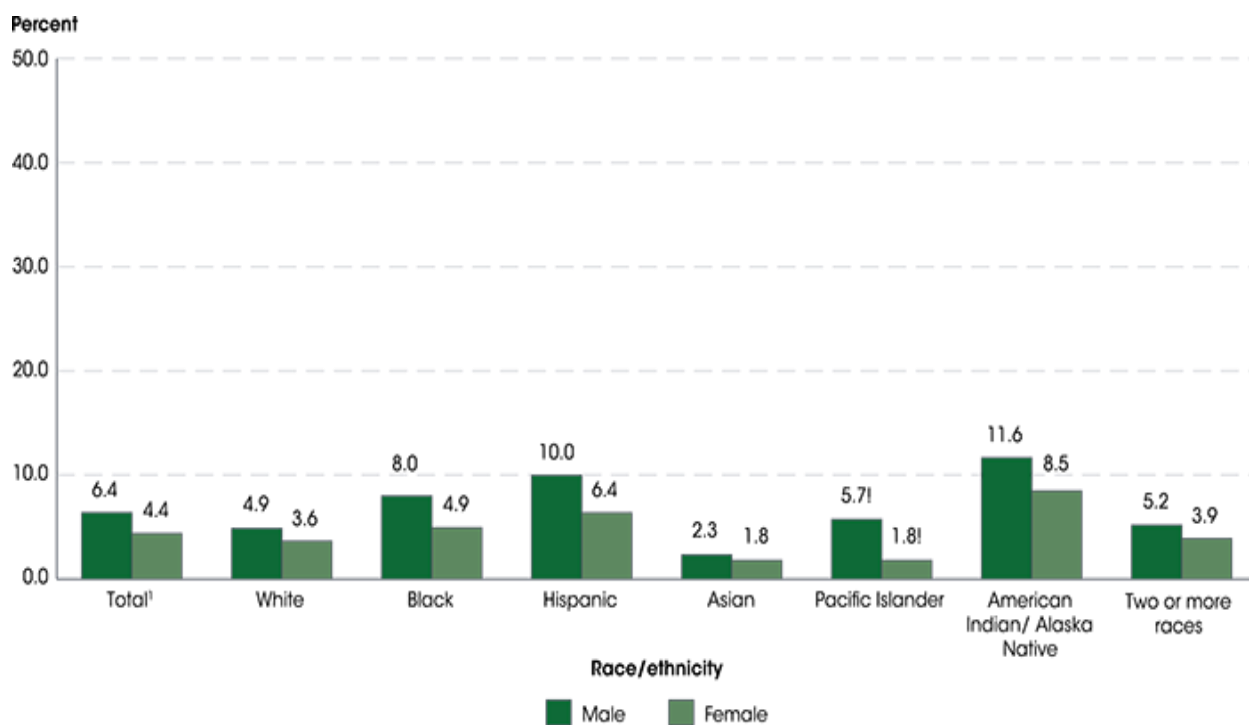
Graduating has also been seen as extremely critical for students of color and students who come from a low socioeconomic background (Swanson, 2019). McKee and Caldarella (2016) explained that a high number of minority students will leave school before graduating. Garcia et al. (2018) further outline that negative interaction with peers, living in unsafe neighborhoods, lack of social support, and lack of positive thinking will cause academic challenges. Transition programs could help assist students to continue their studies and not drop out of school. Ritter (2015) discussed that coming from a low socioeconomic background is one of the strongest predictors as to why students are likely to drop out of school. The social status of a student plays

an important part in a student's life and affects a student's academic performance and can lead to a student dropping out of school (McKee & Caldarella, 2016).

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 2019) outlined information from 2000 to 2016 which explained student dropout rates decreased from 10.9% to 6.1% nationwide (see Figure 1). The NCES also explained that in 2016 there was a higher dropout rate for males than females by a total of 2.0%. The highest male dropout rate being 11.6% by American Indian/Alaska Native males. The second highest dropout rate being Hispanic males with a total of 10.0% followed by Black males with 8.0%. Pacific Islander males followed with 5.71 dropout rate followed by a 5.2% dropout rate of males noted to be of two or more races. White males totaled 4.9% of student dropout rates, and the lowest male rating being 2.6% from the Asian male population. American Indian/Alaska Native females averaged the highest dropout rate of 8.5% followed by Hispanic female students with an average of 6.4%. Black female students held an average of 4.9% student dropout rate while female students of two or more races held an average of 3.9%. White female students averaged 3.6% dropout rate, while Pacific Islander females averaged 1.81%. Asian female students had the lowest average of female dropouts being a total of 1.81%. With drop out rating information collected information from the NCES, transitional programs will have a better understanding of which demographic of students will need the most attention to ensure the students are able to succeed. Figure 2 outlines further information on dropout information on students in the state of South Carolina.

Figure 1

Status Dropout Rates of 16 to 24 Year Olds, by Race/Ethnicity: 2000 Through 2016 From National Center for Education Statistics



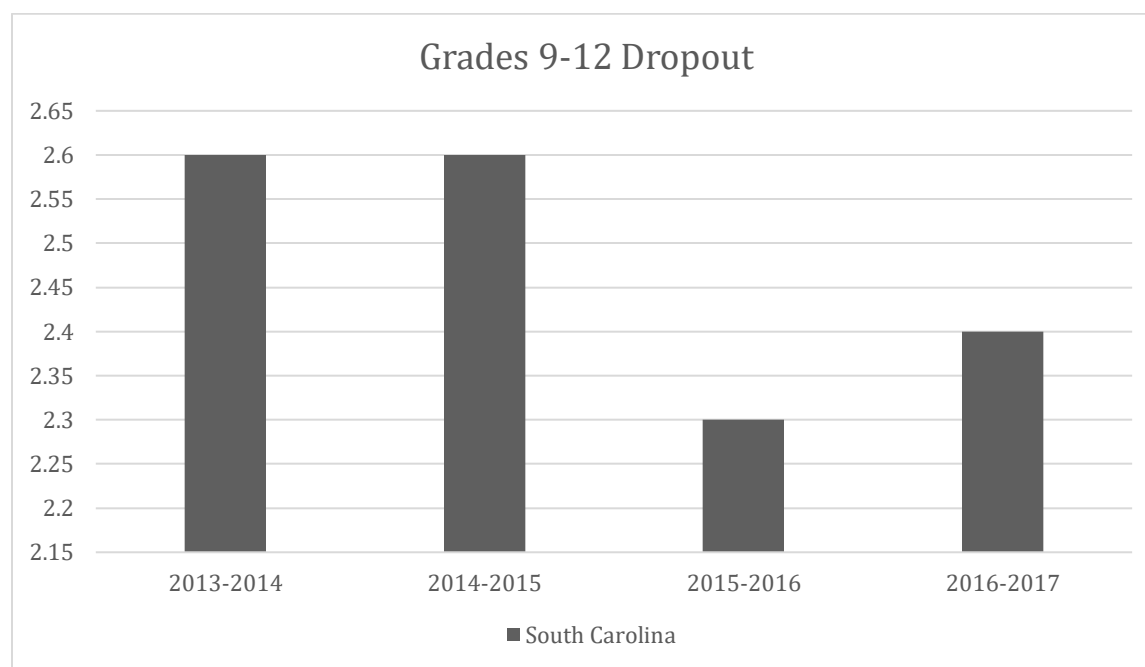
Note. The dropout rate is the percentage of people 16 to 24 years old who are not enrolled in school and did not earned a high school diploma or equal credential such as a GED certificate. Data are based on sample surveys of persons living in certain households. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. From the U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2017. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, Table 219.80. In the public domain.

Figure 2 outlines the dropout rates of students from South Carolina who are from a low socioeconomic background. Figure 2 outlines information from the academic school year of

2013 through 2017 based off information from the State of South Carolina Department of Education of student dropout report. The South Carolina Department of South Carolina reported a steady average of 2.6 % of students who were enrolled in school dropped out of school during the 2013-215 school year. In 2015 the South Carolina Department of Education reported a slight decrease in the number of student dropout as the number dropped to 2.3%, but there was a significant rise again for the 2016-2017 year rising up to 2.4%. The South Carolina Department of Education did not report any other specific reason as to the cause of the student dropout rates increasing or decreasing, but only that the socioeconomic status played a contributing factor to many of the student dropouts.

Figure 2

State of South Carolina Department of Education Report on Student Dropout Rates 2013-2017



Note. The number of average student dropout rate for the state of South Carolina. Reported from the years 2013 – 2017. From the U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2006 through 2017. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, Table 219.80. In the public domain.

Table 1 also outlines information from the South Carolina Department of Education. The South Carolina Department of Education further explains the dropout rates of students from the 2016-2017 school year by giving a breakdown of race, gender, English proficiency, migrant students, and economically disadvantaged students. A total of 5,351 students were reported to have dropped out of school in South Carolina during the 2016-2017 school year. Of all the students who dropped out of school 68 were American Indian, 26 Asian, 1,984 Black, Non-Hispanic, 556 Hispanic, and 2,715 White, Non-Hispanic. The South Carolina Department of Education reported a total of 113,786 males were listed as enrolled in school in 2016-2017.

With a record of 113,786 males enrolled in school, 3,216 of the males were listed as dropping out of school which made up 2.8 % of the male population as having dropped out of school. 109,861 female students were listed as enrolled in school during the 2016-2017 school year while 2,135 female students dropped out of school, which made up 1.9%. 3.4% of the students who were enrolled in school were listed as having limited proficiency in English. Also, 3.5% of students enrolled in school during the 2016-2017 school year were listed as economically disadvantaged, and 0.7% of students enrolled in school was considered to be migrant students. Students of the American Indian or Alaska Native demographic had the highest student dropout rate during the 2016-2017 school year. Hispanic students had the second-highest dropout percentage with 3.1, followed by Black, Non-Hispanic students with 2.5% of student dropout. White, Non-Hispanic students followed with 2.3% of student dropout rating. The Asian or Pacific Islander students had the lowest rating reported by the South Carolina Department of Education with a total of 0.5% of student dropout rating during the 2016-2017 academic school year. Transition programs could use the listed information from the South Carolina Department

of Education to develop a plan of which students should be targeted to receive additional assistance to prevent an increase in the student dropout rate.

Table 1

South Carolina Dropout Rates, 2016-2017

Dropouts By Groups	# of Dropouts	Enrollment	Dropout Rate
All Students	5,351	223,647	2.4
American Indian or Alaska Native	68	1,380	4.9
Asian or Pacific Islander	26	5,097	0.5
Black, Non-Hispanic	1,984	79,663	2.5
Hispanic	556	18,085	3.1
White, Non-Hispanic	2,715	119,181	2.3
Limited English Proficient	364	10,767	3.4
Economically Disadvantaged	3,828	110,878	3.5
Migrant	4	555	0.7
Male	3,216	113,786	2.8
Female	2,135	109,861	1.9

Note. Adapted from South Carolina Department of Education, Student Dropout File Collected October 2016-2017 average student dropout. U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2006 through 2017. See Digest of Education Statistics 2018, table 219.80. In the public domain.

Table 2 outlines the drop out information from a rural high school in South Carolina for the 2017 school year. During the 2017 academic school year it was noted that a total of 355

students were listed as enrolled in the ninth grade. Of the 355 enrolled students, 7.2% of those students did not complete the ninth grade.

Table 2

Rural South Carolina 9th Grade Dropout Rates

School Year	2017
Grade	9th
Number of Students	355
Percent who did not finish 9th grade	7.20%

Students who are considered at risk should be identified as early as the first day of high school to ensure a plan of action is in place to try and prevent the student from dropping out of school. Carl et al. (2014) wrote,

Waiting until the end of the first year of high school, or even the end of the first semester, to identify students as off track may be too late to effectively intervene to help these students, because some students drop out during the first year of high school. (p. 34)

According to the Schott Foundation for Public Education (2015), students of color are seen as at risk. The Schott Foundation for Public Education (2015) further explained that many of the students of color who are seniors are at risk of failing and not graduating due to lacking many skills needed to complete school. Empowering schools to identify struggling students earlier will allow students to be placed in a specific program or receive additional tutoring as a method to assist the student before dropping out of school becomes an option.

Research has explained that many of the students who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds live in what is considered a disadvantaged household which adds to a student

falling behind in school. Ladd (2012) explained, “Children from disadvantaged households perform less well in school on average than those from more advantage households” (p. 204). According to Korbey (2015), a large number of poor and minority ninth-grade students have issues when it comes to making the transition to high school. According the U.S. Department of Education, many students who live in low socioeconomic areas attend schools that only serve other students who live in the same low socioeconomic area (NCES, 2019). Many times these schools do not have appropriate resources and educational material for students to be better educated and taught how to succeed (Barling & Weatherhead, 2016). In order for schools to adequately prepare students, it is essential for each classroom to have proper equipment and resources to educate each and every student. Teachers are considered adequate resources that students need, when teachers are too busy to work one on one with students who are struggling the students can feel disconnected and drop out from school (Low & Ang, 2011).

Advancing through high school is essential for students, especially those who are looking to enter into any job field. Students who drop out are more at risk to have a limited life and job opportunities and are at risk of being unemployed (McKee & Caldarella, 2016). According to Albanes et al. (2014), students who do not complete high school will limit their options for advancing to postsecondary education as well as employment which requires an education. As 59% of jobs in 2010 required additional education and training, Carnevale et al. (2013) expressed that the number of 59% will increase to 65% of jobs requiring a form of additional education or training by 2020.

Students who graduate high school are more likely to receive better employment opportunities than those who drop out of school (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Lynch (2014) discussed that students who do not graduate high school are more at risk of being in poverty than

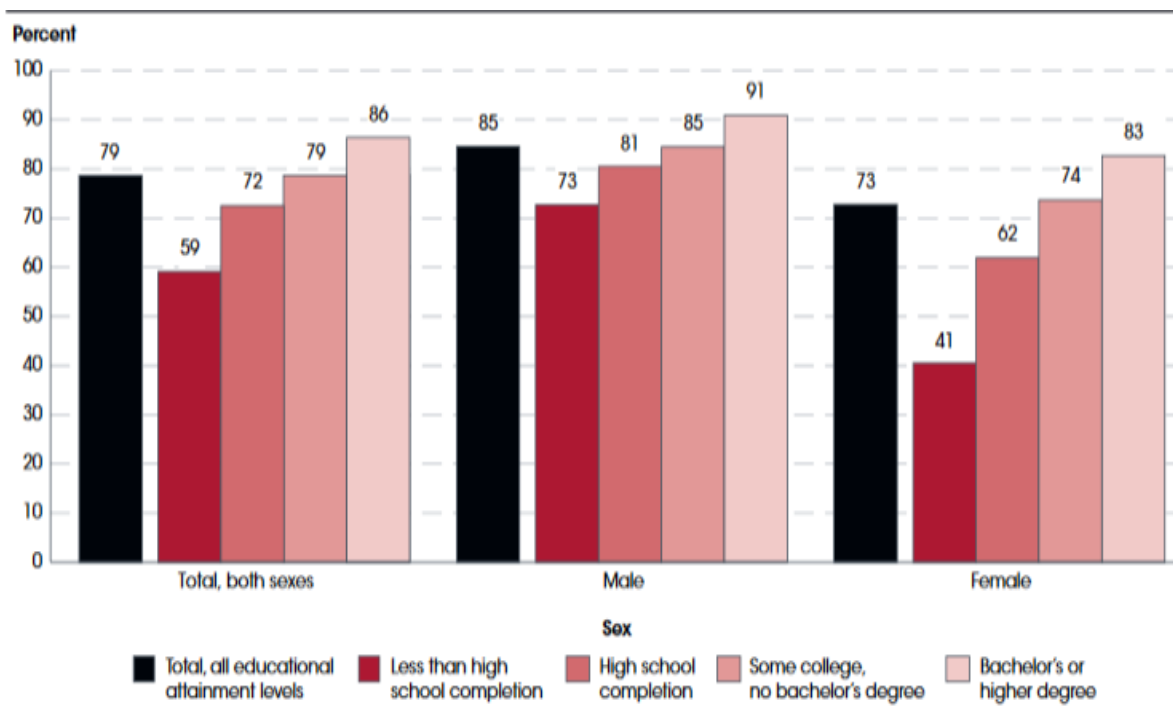
those who graduate high school and college. Also, Lynch (2014) stated that students who dropout of high school will have lifetime earnings of \$260,000 less than the students who do graduate high school. According to Hughes et al. (2018), students who are able to earn their high school diploma will earn an average of \$8,000 more annually, compared to high school dropouts who are more likely to be periodically unemployed, be placed on government assistance, or even end up in prison. For example, McFarland et al. (2019) wrote that in 2018 adults between the ages of 25 and 34 who completed a higher level of education had a higher level of employment rate compared to those who did not complete high school.

Figure 3 outlines information from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), Annual Social and Economic Supplement, (2018). The CPS outlines information on the employment rates of males and females between the ages of 25 and 34 years of age. The CPS further outlines information of people who have received employment due to not completing high school, completing high school, completing college with no degree, and completing college with a bachelors or higher degree. According to the CPS, 59% of adults between the ages of 25 and 34 were able to obtain a job with less than a high school diploma, while 72% of students who were able to complete high school in 2018 between the ages of 25 and 34 were able to obtain employment. 79% of adults between the ages of 25 and 34 who attended college but did not graduate were able to obtain employment, while 86% of students who attended college and completed their bachelor's degree or higher were able to obtain employment. The employment rates in 2018 were higher for male adults between the ages of 25 and 34 compared to female adults by 12% . Male adults had a total average of 85% , while female adults had an average of 73%. Males with no completion of high school had an employment rate average of 73% compared to adult females who had a much lower employment

rate average of only 41%. Adult males who completed high school made an employment rate average of 81% compared to an employment rate of 62% by female adults in 2018. Males who were about to attend college but did not complete their bachelor's degree had an employment rate average of 85%. Female adults who attended college but did not complete their bachelor's degree had an employment rate average of 74%. Finally, male adults who attended college and had a completion of a bachelor's degree or higher had an employment rate average of 91%, while female adults who attended college and obtained a bachelor's degree or higher had an employment rate average of 83%. The information provided by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), Annual Social and Economic Supplement, (2018) is essential as it outlines to students how essential it is to complete school to help ensure employment.

Figure 3

Employment Rates of 25 to 34 Year Olds, by Sex and Educational Attainment: 2018



Note. From the U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), Annual Social and Economic Supplement, March 2019. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, Tables 501.50, 501.60, and 501.70. In the public domain.

The data shows a clear gender gap in every area of employment rates for adult males and adult females. For example, the gender gap between adult males and females with no high school completion who were able to find employment was 32%. The gap for male and females who completed high school and were able to find employment had a rate difference of 19%. There was a gap for male and females with some college experience but with no degree at 11% difference, and finally, the gender gap for those with a bachelor's degree or higher had a difference of 8%. The gender gap shows that male students are more likely to be given opportunities for employment than female students with or without a degree. The data shows that

it is vital that students graduate high school to help ensure they have a chance of receiving employment. According to the employment rates for 2018 it is especially essential for female adults to complete high school as the data shows they have a much lower employment rate than males. The employment rate information should be explained to students and used as a way to help students become determined to succeed in high school and not drop out of school.

The transition to high school comes with a lot of challenges that students must overcome in order to graduate. Graduating from high school is essential for students as dropping out of high school can delay or even stop the future success of those who do not graduate high school (McKee & Caldarella, 2016). The literature has shown that students need to graduate high school to help ensure that the students will have a better chance at receiving a good job. Also, it is essential for students to graduate high school so the students could have an opportunity to further advance their education by attending a college to further develop more skills or trades that jobs will require of their future employees. Graduating high school can not only give students a sense of pride, but graduating high school can also give students a sense of completion. As literature has shown, there are many different factors that contribute to students dropping out of school. There is not one consistent system in finding or understanding the precise graduation rate of students. Additionally, there does not seem to be one particular factor that points to why students do not graduate high school with the class in which the student started with when they began high school.

Transitional Programs

Moving from one school to another such as middle school to high school are experienced by many American students (Wentzel et al., 2019). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 2019) reported that in the fall of 2018, 56.6 million students attended elementary and

secondary schools in the United States. The NCES (2019) further discussed that of the 56.6 million students who attended public schools in the United States 15.1 million of those students were in grades 9 through 12. The NCES (2019) also explained there will be an expected increase of 4.0 million students for the 2018 school year who will be enrolling in high school. With an expected increase of students moving from middle school to high school there will be a bigger need for student support to ensure a successful transition. Many U.S. students struggle in high school due to having a difficult transition from junior high school. Students in high school face more challenges than they did in junior high, such as harder classes, more homework, and receiving credits that will go toward their graduation (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010).

Transitional programs can be essential for incoming freshman students. According to Wang and Degol (2015), having students participate in an active program when entering ninth-grade may help the students connect to the high school. Schmitt and Goebel (2015) explained having a program for students can help increase the odds of students succeeding in high school. Roybal et al. (2014) outlined there is a need to have effective programs which are designed by teachers to assist ninth-grade level students succeed in order to help improve graduation rates. Transition programs assist with retaining academic information. According to Rowe et al. (2015) there is a substantial amount of achievement loss that students face as they make the transition from elementary to middle school. Heckman and LaFontaine (2010) further expressed that students in middle school further experience achievement loss as they make the transition to high school. If students continue the pattern having academic loss it can cause the student to have repeat grades or the student might drop out of school as to not being able to adapt to the transition to a new school.

Every student will adapt to their transition from junior high to high school differently.

Positive and negative interaction between the students and their teachers will play a key role in determine how the students is able to adapt to the new environment (Tikkanen et al., 2015). The different school experiences of students will vary; however, research has shown how important it is that schools and teachers know about the possible experiences of students who have struggled in school, the student's lifestyle, and possible success rating of the student (Milner & Laughter, 2015). Transitional programs can bring to light problems that will cause student to not only do well in ninth grade but also not graduate. For example, Benner and Wang (2014) discussed the importance of attendance as missing too many days from school will cause a student to fail. Benner and Wang (2014) also noted that many students miss classes due to their transition to a new school. Benner and Wang (2014) conducted research into the student attendance. The authors discovered that many students had a large amount of time missed from school during the transition of eight grade to ninth grade. Students missed an average 2.1% of school days during ninth grade. Through a transition program working with students to correct their attendance issue could lead to student success and graduation, furthermore Benner and Wang (2014) discussed that intervention programs which could serve as part of transition programs should investigate the attendance issues of students while finding those students who are most at risk following the move to high school.

Schools and teachers can learn about a student's experiences through participation in a transitional program. Transitional programs can allow for teachers to develop mini-courses and personalize each meeting to meet a student's specific needs (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2014). Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2014) conducted a study at Westshore a large high school in the southeastern United States. Westshore had a population of 50% minority students with low socioeconomic backgrounds. The authors developed 16 sections of a transition courses for ninth

grade students that focused on students being active in their school, learning the environment, and establishing academic goals. Developing the program at Westshore created a community that showed it cared for students, provided additional student support, and made the transition to high school easier (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2014). Transitional programs such as Westshore will prepare students for what they will need to learn to be successful in high school and will help reduce or even eliminate students from dropping out of school. Even though Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2014) conducted research and developed sixteen sections of a transition course, Roybal et al. (2014) indicated that in order for a transition program to be effective a few components are needed. Components such as parents need to be involved, having effective caring teachers, and schools should also develop a sense of belonging to help students succeed.

Transition programs are also able to assist students with personalizing their first year of high school by developing a community with other ninth-grade students (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2014). According to Neubert and Leconte (2013) the new school setting will cause challenges for students to establish a peer group or community due to a much larger student body which might be more diverse than what was seen in elementary or middle school. Developing a community through a transition program can bring a positive opportunity for engagement with students. Bowers et al. (2014) discussed that a positive transition can create a better fit between students, school, and the student's emotional needs as having a sense of control and belonging are essential. Wentzel et al. (2019) affirmed that stating students in a transition program from middle school to high school helps with the concern of control, competence, and having a sense of social belongingness. Personal control and competence can be challenged due to new rules and policies as well as success at new academic tasks due to more challenging materials being taught (Wentzel et al., 2019). Having social belongingness serves as a challenge for students when

looking to develop a community as students look to acquire positive interactions with peer groups, teachers, and staff (Vollet et al., 2017; Wentzel et al., 2019).

Transitional programs serve as more than just an academic learning environment for students. Transitional programs can also serve as an environment to assist students in decision making as expecting ninth grade students to make adult-like decisions about their education is not best (Emmett & McGee, 2012). Assisting students to address the obstacle of decision making is something that must be done to help place students on the right path to have an opportunity for success as a freshman (Emmett & McGee, 2012).

Transitional programs are important to creating a smooth transition to high school as a student having a smooth transition to high school is essential to them graduating. A high school diploma is more likely to enhance lifelong economic and career success than those with a GED (Hirschfield, 2014). According to Pharris-Ciurej et al. (2012) some individuals believe completing high school equivalent courses are just as equal to the high school diploma, but the reality is a GED is not on the same level of a high school diploma. As a high school diploma is important to ensure students have an opportunity to attend college and receive a good job, it is essential that transitional programs work to keep students engaged as they enter high school to push toward receiving a diploma.

The transition from middle school to high school can be a challenge for many American students. Researchers have explained that transition programs are essential to a student's success and it is important that teachers design programs that will assist students to have academic success, while also helping students further their success by advancing to graduation (Roybal et al., 2014). With proper assistance many students could not only have a successful first year of high school academically, but students could develop new communities of friends, learn life

skills from peer support, and continue their success and graduate. Without proper assistance students could be at risk of dropping out of school. Dropping out of school can hurt the success of students in the future (McKee & Caldarella, 2016).

Researcher authors such as McCallumore and Sparapani (2010), Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2014), Roybal et al. (2014), and Wentzel et al. (2019) have outlined multiple essential items needed to have an effective transitional program. Essential items such as caring teachers, multiple programs, creating a sense of belonging, and parent interaction. Even though each author noted different items that are needed for an effective transition program it is clear that all the researched items play a positive factor in students having a successful transition from middle school to high school.

Current Recommendations for Transitional Programs

Researchers in the area of transitional programs have recommended a variety of concepts relevant to effective transition programs. Some of the recommendations include 1) student relationships and communities with their peers and teachers (Roybal et al., 2014), 2) having effective, energetic, and cultured teachers hired (Bland et al., 2014), and 3) the effect of having smaller class sizes to ensure a lower teacher to student ratio and student engagement (Filges et al., 2018; Lekwa et al., 2019). Student relationships with their peers and teachers can create a sense of belonging and connection (Roybal et al., 2014). Having energetic teachers can give students hope to work harder and want to succeed. Lastly, research has shown that smaller classes allow teachers to connect more with their students and also allows students to feel more open to participate and be more engaged in the classroom.

Student - Teacher Relationships

Transition programs are beneficial to students not only for learning but also for building relationships. School is essential for students as they learn about socialization and building relationships (Saltali, 2013). One important relationship that a student can establish in their school environment is their relationship with teachers (Saltali, 2013). According to Martin and Collie (2019), teacher-student relationships are essential to the interpersonal context which takes place at school which can impact the students' academic development. Student teacher relationships is just one way to help ensure a student's academic success. Furthermore, a positive student teacher relationship is also another essential way of advancing the student's social and emotional development (Hershkovitz, 2018). Strong relationships between the student and their teachers can give students a sense of safety, security, and belongingness which again can help lead to the student having a successful academic year (Hershkovitz, 2018).

Gorard and Huat See (2013) conducted research using a meta-analysis of over 100 studies and discovered that one of the most essential elements in having successful classroom engagement in learning was having good student teacher relationship. Martin and Collie (2019) explained, developing a relationship with teachers is essentially important for students who are in secondary school as many students in secondary school will have multiple teachers during the day. Students who have developed a trusting relationship with those connected with their school such as teachers and administrators can lead to the students achieving success academically (Roybal et al., 2014). If a student feels more connected with their teachers, there is a chance they will seek help to ensure they achieve academic success at all times. Bakadorova and Raufelder (2018) conducted research confirming that positive teacher-student relationships contribute to basic need satisfaction for students who are making the transition from middle school to high

school. School teachers are the next person who students meet and work with building relationships after their parents (Saltali, 2013).

It is necessary to remember that students moving to high school encounter a completely new environment, new classrooms, learning environments, daily activities, rules, classes, social relationships, multiple teachers, and peers (Bakadorva & Raufelder, 2018; Martin & Collie, 2019). Experiencing these many changes at one time can make for a difficult transition. Having a steady, dependable relationships could make these many changes easier for students to handle. Teachers should be open to using multiple methods that would allow them to establish caring and warm relationships with the many students in their classroom (Saltali, 2013). Brinkworth et al. (2018) elaborated stating, teacher relationships with students are essential as they help identify students learning interest, developing interventions when needed, and allows the teacher to give additional support. Brinkworth et al. (2018) further explained that students who develop successful relationships with their teachers are more likely to perform better for those teachers and they can even be influenced to perform better in their other classes.

One method a teacher should consider using is maintaining a positive atmosphere in the classroom. Maintaining a positive atmosphere can be done by encouraging students at all times. Deci and Ryan (2012) discussed that many students can develop the same beliefs and values that their teachers maintain and this could help the students function positively in their academic time with that teacher. Having a good relationship with teachers is seen as having positive association which can lead to positive academic engagement, but having a negative relationship with teachers can impact a student's engagement causing the student to perform poorly academically (Martin & Collie, 2019). The emotions of a teacher can make a student want to develop a relationship and at the same time cause a student to want to avoid teachers based on their

behavior. Martin and Collie (2019) further explained that negative emotions can tend to create immediate effects while positive emotions can play out slowly and evoke a sense of care, wanting to be around, and willingness to assist.

Research has explained that teachers serve as more than just educators (Phillippo & Stone, 2013), but that teachers also serve as advisors to students while also serving in a mentoring and support role for students to succeed. Serving in multiple roles to develop relationships with students can help make the relationship between the teacher and student stronger. Phillippo and Stone (2013) explained that if teachers do take on more roles of support there is a stronger change that students will recognize this positive behavior and respond positive positively to the teacher's role. Positive behavior can equal positive relationships. Positive relationships are formed due to friendly interactions and communication while negative relationships are developed due to unfriendly interactions and communication (Claessens et al., 2016). Teachers who are able to deliver positive behavior to students show students that they care and want to see the student succeed. Teacher student relationships differ from teach to teacher, but a positive relationship between a teacher and student can change the quality of a student from being a problematic student to being a positive student (Claessens et al., 2016).

The quality of a student's engagement or interactions in the classroom can change from day to day. One day, a student might be very interested in learning while the next day the student might only put forth a small amount of effort to participate and try (Patall et al., 2019). As the teachers are the leaders of the classroom they have to work hard to ensure they can build a trusting relationship with their students to keep them on track of being focused. Patall et al. (2019) further explained that supportive teachers work to offer choices to their students while encouraging them to work at their own pace in their own why while developing course work

around the interest of the students when probable. As research has shown, student teacher relationships are essential not only to the student, but also to the teacher. As students feel comfortable there is greater chance of academic success which gives the notion the teacher is an effective teacher.

Effective Teachers

Research has described that an effective teacher delivers educational content to their students, continue to learn, and work to reach students to help them succeed academically. Many schools in the United States determine if a teacher is considered effective based on the teacher's evaluations. Teacher evaluations are one way for administrators to receive feedback on the effectiveness of teachers. In the 1900s, teacher evaluations became a priority as testing data was utilized to determine the performance level of teachers (Marzano, 2012). Elliott (2015) explained a change is needed in the way educators think about the evaluation process of teachers as more processing of improving the quality of teacher learning in the classroom is needed. A simple check list does not equate if a teacher holds the qualities of being an effective teacher. As Marzano (2012) explained that teacher evaluations were a priority, Elliott (2015) further argued that more diverse evaluation are needed to assist in the measuring process of deciding if a teacher can be considered an effective teacher. Effective teaches are able to do more than just check off a list of things on an evaluation form. Effective teachers are able to connect with their students to help them advance in school and life.

Derrington et al. (2015) explained that to have effective change to all teacher evaluations that school educators have to successfully support administrators with appropriate training. Multiple researchers explained how essential it is to have revisions to different practices and programs which support teachers and administrators in the evaluation process of them being

considered an effective teacher (Danielson, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2016). Having effective revisions to the practices of teacher evaluations can lead to ensuring that effective teachers are properly judged. If teachers are not properly judged, it could cause students to miss out on having an effective teacher support them on their educational journey as the teachers could be considered not a good fit to educate students.

Effective and qualified teachers are at the center of a student's ability to learn (Marzano & Toth, 2013). The growth or the lack of growth of a student is seen based on the strength and weakness of the teacher's ability to reach and connect with the students (Hanushek et al., 2014). Effective teachers continue to work with students even after they have effectively reached a student and helped the student develop academically. Lavy (2016) discussed that teachers who reach students by helping them reach achievement gains such as good grades tend to continue to assist those students in other years while in school. One thing that I find difficult personally as an educator is reaching students. I have discovered that using multiple teaching strategies is one way in which effective teachers are able to reach students. For students who are transitioning to high school, it is important they connect with a teacher who is not only able to teach the subject matter but who is also able to help the students prepare for the future.

An effective teacher is seen as one who connects with their students and helps their students prepare for their future, while other effective teachers push students to their top potential and lead students to high achievement gains (Lavy, 2016). Effective teachers chose to stay at schools when they were able to teach the grades and classes that reflected their certification, when their voice was considered, and when they were encouraged by the administration to develop learning environments that would encourage students to participate and work hard to be successful (Bland et al., 2014). Effective teachers can reach students and if

schools want to keep effective teachers, the schools must ensure that the teachers are given the resources needed to educate students and allow those teachers to use the knowledge they have personally gained in school (Young, 2018).

Walker (2008) explained effective teachers possessed traits such as prepared, positive, hold high expectations, creative, and fair. Coe et al. (2014) argued that effective teachers not only hold high expectation, are creative, and are fair, but effective teachers should also pose traits such as quality content knowledge, strong evidence of instruction, a classroom climate that demands more, good classroom management, strong teacher beliefs, and good professional behaviors. Assali and Kushkiev (2016) explained that effective teachers should possess intellectual, pedagogical, and interpersonal skills in order to develop and sustain a conducive and friendly classroom room for learning and teaching. As intellectual, pedagogical, and interpersonal skills are essential Rogers (2011) expressed that cognitive and pedagogic skills play a role in being an effective teacher, but an encouraging positive teaching manner will promote positive learning in which students will feel comfortable to engage in educational learning long term.

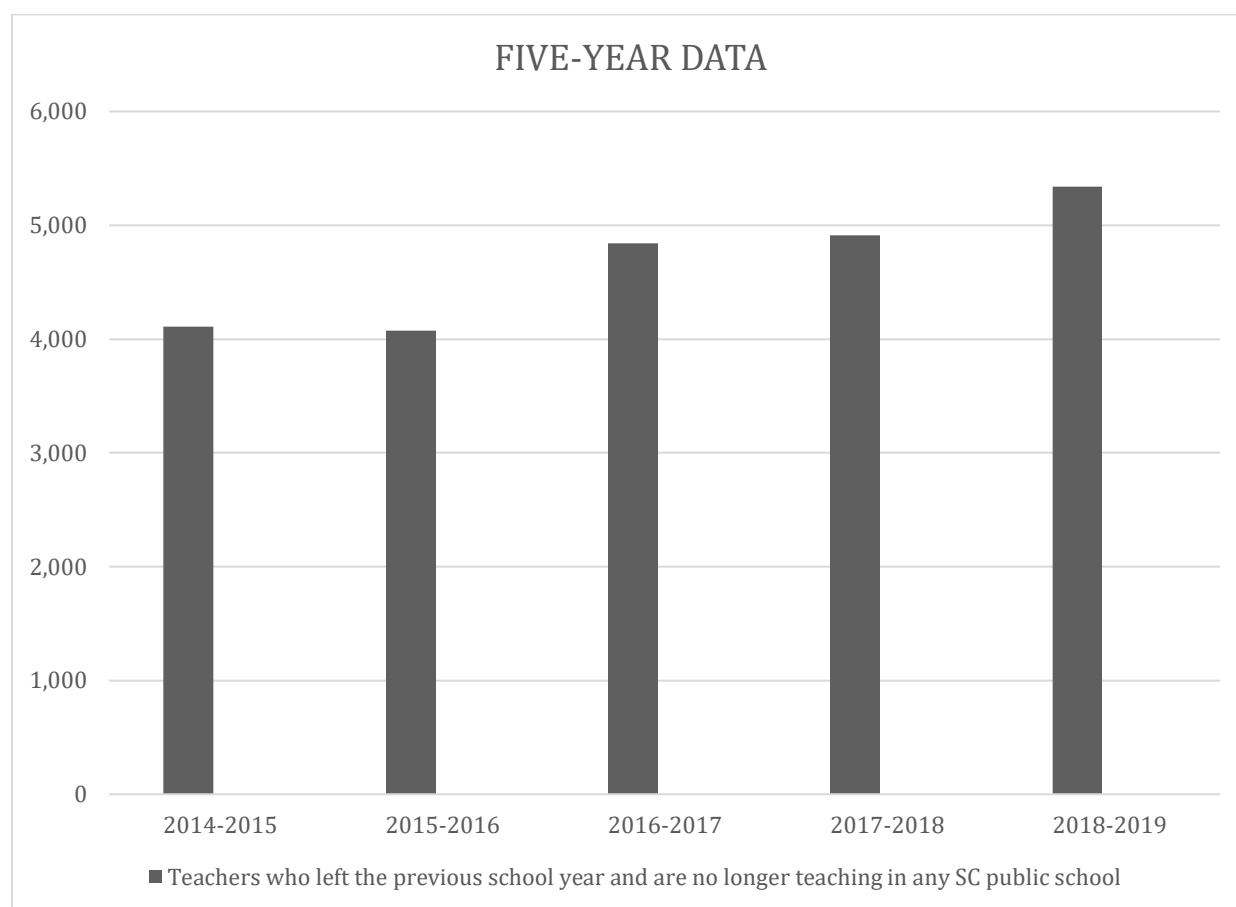
Effective teachers act in the best interest of their students and not for their personal gain (Low & Ang, 2011). Those who work to be effective teachers must have a character of motivation and possess a deep passion of passing down knowledge to the future generation with hopes they will help make the work a better place (Low & Ang, 2011). Low and Ang (2011) also argued that a good and effective teacher is selfless and works to look after the students who are weak in educational learning more than the students who are strong in their educational learning. Also, Low and Ang (2011) discussed that an effective teacher works to keep learning their craft while developing new ways for teaching. Finally, Low and Ang (2011) discussed an effective

teacher keeps a positive attitude especially when faced with disruptions from school and students, but the effective teacher finds ways to manage their emotions and classroom to promote a positive learning environment.

As effective teachers are important as they work to help build students confidence, it is also difficult to maintain effective teachers due to so many teachers leaving the classroom for other schools or for other professions. The Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement (CERRA), formerly the South Carolina Center for Teacher Recruitment (SCCTR), outlined the number of teachers who left the teaching in South Carolina Schools at the end of a school year has increased from 2014 to the 2018 school year by 1,233 (see Figure 4). In the 2014 academic year 4,108 teachers left the previous school year and no longer associated with teaching in any schools in South Carolina. In the 2015 academic year the number increased to 4,074 teachers. The 2016 academic year saw a major increase as 4,842 teachers left teaching while 2017 recorded another increase of teachers leaving South Carolina with 4,914 in total. 2018 the State of South Carolina saw the largest number of teachers leaving the education field with a total of 5,341. With such a large number of teachers leaving the profession it will make it difficult for students to gain a connection with a teacher or even maintain a teacher who might be considered an effective educator.

Figure 4

Key Teacher Data from the 2018-19 SSC Educator Supply and Demand Report



Note. These data refer to teachers who left the position they held the previous school year. For example, data in the 2016-2017 row include teachers from 2015-16 who did not return to teach in the same district for the 2015-16 school year. From <https://www.cerra.org/supply-and-demand.html>. In the public domain.

The CERRA also explained, that 35% who left the teaching profession in the state of South Carolina had a total of five or fewer years of teaching experience (see Figure 5). Also, only 13% of certified teachers for the 2018 academic school year had one year or less of total teaching experience. With almost 5,000 teachers leaving the teaching profession in 2017, CERRA reported that 7,600 teachers were hired to assist with the teacher shortage. CERRA

further reported that many of the teachers who were hired were from out-of-state. Finally, CERRA reported that for the 2017 academic school year 25% of the certified first year teachers left the teaching profession either during the academic school year or at the end of the academic year and no longer were teaching in the state of South Carolina.

Figure 5

Key Teacher Data from the 2018-19 SSC Educator Supply and Demand Report

5,300	35%
SC teachers left their jobs last year and are no longer teaching in a SC public school.	of teachers who left had five or fewer years of experience. 13% had one year or less.
7,600	25%
vacancies filled prior to the start of the 2018-19 school year. Districts continue to rely upon out-of-state, international, and alternatively certified teachers to fill these vacancies.	of first-year teachers hired for the 2017-18 school year left their positions during or at the end of that school year and are no longer teaching in any SC public school.

Note. These data refer to teachers who left their position they held the previous school year, the percent of teacher with left the profession based on years of experiences, vacancies filled, and number of first year teacher hired during 2017-2018 year who left their positions. From <https://www.cerra.org/supply-and-demand.html>. In the public domain.

Smaller Classes and Student Engagement

For many students being in a smaller class is a better choice for learning. Reducing school class sizes could have a significant financial effect on schools, such as having to increase hiring costs (Chingos, 2013). Chingos (2013) further explained, schools deal with many financial pressures due to either an increase in student enrollment or a decrease in state funding which makes it difficult for schools to keep smaller class sizes. Having larger class sizes helps schools

control their budgets. At the same time a smaller class sizes can be beneficial to students, especially when it comes to student engagement (Filges et al., 2018). Large classes can cause student engagement to suffer; for example, large classes can reduce the amount of student participation in each class as it can become extremely time consuming and might include only a few students (Whisenhunt et al., 2019). Smaller classes at times also offer opportunities for students to have more hands on learning, be more active in answering questions, and allow for additional learning tools to be used to help improve student learning (LoPresto & Slater, 2016; Whisenhunt et al., 2019). Belanger et al. (2018) discussed that class size is important as it can affect how long students are able to retain class information as deeply held knowledge might be forgotten in larger classes due to a lack of time to break down information, while smaller classes will allow for a deeper explanation for all given information. Furthermore, students who are able to participate in smaller classes are able to learn more, students are able to be more engaged with their teacher, and students are more acceptable to having a better attitude toward discipline (Benton & Pallett, 2013; Monks & Schmidt, 2011). Due to the attention that students receive in smaller classes, Monks and Schmidt (2011) explained that students are likely to give their teachers and the course they are taking better ratings.

As larger classes mean more students which can cause students to be unable to receive important feedback during class time. Van der Kleij et al. (2015) expressed for student success it is essential for feedback to be given to students. With more students in each class it could mean that teacher's time is limited when it comes to offering feedback to students. Timing is essential and must be taken into account when delivering feedback to students as they develop their learning (Van der Kleij et al., 2015). Even though reducing the size of a classroom could cost a lot of money, it is essential to consider the students who might benefit from having a smaller

class. Students who could benefit the most are students who are considered at risk, a slower learner, and students from a low socioeconomic background (Filges et al., 2018). Therefore, students from low socioeconomic background will need to be engaged and receive feedback at all times.

Wright et al. (2019) conducted research in which a course size was decreased from 25 to 18. Although 25 to 18 was not a huge decrease, Wright et al. (2019) showed this number was in line with other courses in the UK. The findings from the research showed that many instructors felt with smaller classes they would be able to develop more writing, more questioning, and discussion in small-and large-group formats. Many instructors also noted having a change of smaller classes would allow students to be able to interact with each other as well as have the opportunity to interact with the instructor. Wright et al.'s (2019) second major findings noted by the instructors is the instructors believed having smaller classes would allow them to offer more written and oral feedback to the students. Offering additional feedback to students can help students succeed and advance in school.

Student Engagement

Student engagement is a broad term that can have multiple meanings, and it can involve the student listening and participating in class, having a lack of behavioral issues, and communicating with their teacher (Lekwa et al., 2019; Olson & Peterson, 2015). Kindermann and Skinner (2012) discussed that engagement refers to students being actively involved, emotionally positive with their participation, enthusiastic about all activities that will take place in the classroom. Teachers can assist in ensuring students are motivated and enthusiastic, for example, Lekwa et al. (2019) explained that teachers work to develop active academic engagement with students through the use of instructional strategies. Using different effective

instructional methods allows teachers to present new information, describe multiple concepts to students, and will enable the student's time to process the information while being provided positive academic feedback (Lekwa et al., 2019). With teachers allowing students the opportunity to participate, and if the teachers are considerate with their feedback, it may cause students to be more open and have better behavior when participating in class. Teaching strategies to educate students and working to control student behavioral issues to help students become more engaged both play an essential part in helping promote and maintaining a students' engagement with learning and being successful in school (Lekwa et al., 2019). Giving opportunities for practice, providing positive feedback, and showing support are just general ways in which school can work to try and increase their student engagement in all the teachers' classrooms (Olson & Peterson, 2015). Roybal et al. (2014) expressed there are multiple factors that can contribute having student engagement. Using different instructional strategies, allowing students to give feedback, and working to motivate students to have positive participation are important, but Roybal et al. (2014) argued that effective teachers along with having a positive school atmosphere are also essential to ensuring student engagement along with building student characteristics.

Make Up of Good Transition Programs

Number of Activities

There are many things that can be included to make a transition program for students moving from middle school to high school a success. Items such as specific programs, additional teacher support, or even additional student support. Wide-ranging transition programs that are comprised of multiple activities and courses that are geared toward the needs of students who are participating can be highly effective in ensuring that all students are successful as they make the

transition to high school (DeLamar & Brown, 2016). While research has explained that small groups, catch up courses, and bridge program are essential, Shylashree and Rekha (2018) articulated that having multiple activities might not be a necessary need as a student's motivation to learn is associated with finding academic activities that are considered meaningful and worthwhile. If a student's motivation to learn is associated with finding particular positive activities, then transitional programs must find one or two specific activities that can be beneficial to a student while also encouraging the student to learn. Activities that can benefit students are small group peer interaction, catch up courses, and summer bridge programs (DeLamar & Brown, 2016; Emmett & McGee, 2012). Small groups, catch up courses, and bridge programs can serve as the stepping stone of ensuring students success not only in a transitional program, but also in life outside of school.

Small Peer Groups

Moving to high school starts a new journey for students as they work toward responsibility of learning how to decide and maintain good academic performance and develop new behavioral goals (Allensworth et al., 2014). As high school is a significant new place for students having a group of peers to confide in can help make the new area of high school feel better. Moving to a new school for many means making new friends which can be a difficult task for some students; many students may feel disconnected and lonely from their transition due to not being able to make new friends (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). Peer groups are generally developed by regular interaction between students (Vollet et al., 2017).

Smaller groups are essential as they allow students to receive the attention needed and desired, build strong relationships, and it helps students decrease the feeling of alienation (DeLamar & Brown, 2016). Small peer groups allow students to provide different opportunities

for dyadic interactions, form new friendships, and make connections with peers who have similar interest (Kindermann & Skinner, 2012). Students working in smaller peer groups helps increase their confidence due to the fact that peers most times can better explain concepts to their fellow students from a different perspective, which then promotes comprehension (Whisenhunt et al., 2019). With fewer people around, there is a chance the students will feel less judged, more open to asking questions, and more open to asking for assistance even if the assistance is from another student and not their teacher (Vollet et al., 2017). Not feeling judged can allow a student to gain confidence as a student and a person. Also, gaining confidence and building connections with peers can further help students in their academic career.

Peer Influence

Peer groups are not only essential for students to gain confidence, but peer groups are also essential students get older they tend to move away from their parents to move closer to friends they feel they are able to connect with (Wood et al., 2015). During the adolescence stage positive peer relationships are essential for students (Sreckovic et al., 2017). Students moving to ninth grade seek the approval of other students their age, look for other students who think the same as they do, and students who will give support without judgement (Wood et al., 2015).

School is a place where students look to have their need met socially and emotionally

(Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2014).

With students having their needs met students will be able to work toward improving their work and learning how to further work alongside others. Sreckovic et al. (2017) conducted research to investigate the effects of peer network. The study took place at a public, rural high school in the United States. Results from the study showed that peer network intervention was

effective in increasing social interacting with students and students who were considered on the autism spectrum disorder.

Peer Mentoring

Peers can serve as a big influence to other students. If teachers can develop small groups of students who all have the same needs, the teacher's will be able to give the specific attention that each student needs in order to be successful (Emmett & McGee, 2012). Placing students together can also serve as a school peer mentoring program. According a study conducted by Herrera et al. (2013) having peer mentoring programs are essential as they can provide (1) a protection against depressive methods, (2) promote positive change in other students who serve as a mentee, and (3) the mentee receives positive reinforcement for making better grades. However, four recommendations were made to further research which included (1) training that will help support the needs displayed by the participants, (2) mentoring should cover a wide variety of levels, (3) more emphasis should be placed on mental health of the peer, and (4) a continuation to create an effort to engage the progress of developing more mentoring programs (Herrera et al., 2013). According to Oscar and Ross (2016) school peer mentoring programs not only support students while they are in high school, but peer mentoring also supports students as they move from middle school to high school. The American School Counseling Association (ASCA; 2015) supports peer programs for mentoring. The ASCA expressed that peer support programs can help enhance a schools counseling program to reach students and help advance outreach to other students who need support.

Catch Up Courses

Many students transition to high school with a knowledge base well below what is needed to be successful in their high school courses. Starting high school with a low knowledge

base puts students in a position that will be difficult to overcome if there is course failure (Emmett & McGee, 2012). Once a student is in ninth grade they are three to five times more likely to fail a course than in any other grade (Breakthrough Collaborative, 2011). Once a student fails a course, the student becomes short on credits needed to graduate, and the student must retake the course at some point in order to graduate. The US Department of Education expressed that catch up courses or credit recovery should be made available online, in a various setting, and be made available to students at different times to allow the student to retake the course to stay on track toward graduation (NCES, 2019). Using online courses as an element to assist students with getting back on track toward graduation is essential and gives at-risk students another chance to succeed (Powell et al., 2015). If students were allowed to take failed course online, the student could begin taking the course earlier instead of waiting for an entire school year or multiple school years to retake the failed course. The longer the student has to wait to retake the course the more at risk the students become of forgetting any of the information that was obtained in the course (Emmett & McGee, 2012).

Levin and Rouse (2012) explained that on average only 7 of 10 ninth-graders receive a high school diploma in the United States. DePaoli et al. (2015) argued that nearly one in five American students either do not or will not graduate high school on time, if ever especially if students are required to retake a course. If students were able to make up course material that which might have been failed more students could receive their high school diploma. Hill (2014) explained there has been a major push to raise the American high school education standards for all students. Raising the standards in a classroom can be difficult especially for students who are required to repeat courses or if students are taking a course for the first time with multiple students who are repeating the course.

Bridge Programs and Motivation

Many active bridge programs have been used to retain students who are preparing for the move from high school to college (Wathington et al., 2016). The same goes for many high schools who have developed summer bridge programs for students over the summer who are transitioning from middle school to high school who need additional support (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). As bridge programs are essential to help improve the readiness of students as they prepare for college, a high school bridge programs can help close the gap for students who feel as if they are not prepared for high school. Bridge programs allow students to gain further knowledge in the area they might be lacking while also reviewing information the student might have previously learned to be successful (Wathington et al., 2016). A bridge program serves to help students develop more in their academics as they move forward in school.

Bridge programs not only help students prepare for their future studies, but bridge programs can also help students develop the motivation to succeed personally and academically (Maldonado & Baker-Wright, 2019). Shylashree and Rekha (2018) expounded that researchers often find a strong correlation between motivation to learn and student achievement. A student's teacher can affect a student's motivation to want to learn. Kumari and Chamundeswari (2015) described that teachers at any level now focus on developing a positive classroom climate as it will help enhance the student's willingness to learn and be motivated. Having a positive learning environment moves students to try harder and develop an achievement motivation mindset. Chetri (2014) explained achievement motivation allows the students to not focus on the achievements themselves, but develop an attitude to achieve. Bridge programs serve multiple purposes, but preparing a student for the future courses needed to graduate school and building a student's motivation is essential to student success.

Summary

This review of literature indicates the need for transition programs for students moving from middle school to high school. Transition programs that are able to outline students who are in need at an early stage can develop educational plans and work to help improve student success and student retention. As students prepare to transition from middle school to high school it is essential that teachers, counselors, and administrators collaborate to ensure the transition is easy for students. Students need to feel comfortable and develop a sense of familiarity before they start school.

The transition from middle school to high school is an important but challenging time for students. It is essential for students to have a smooth transition as completion of ninth grade is a way of determining if a student will graduate high school and enroll in college (Mac Iver & Messel, 2013). Transition programs are essential to providing students with additional resources needed to help improve the success and graduation rate of students. The literature has shown that the transition into high school is a complicated process for many students. The literature has also shown that students who are listed as ninth graders who have a rough transition have a high dropout rate. Many schools have put in place programs or procedures to help increase the graduation rates of students. It is essential to remember that the literature has explained that students who drop out of school can make less financially and are more likely to be subject to living in poverty or even end up in prison. As McFarland et al. (2019) explained that in 2018, 59% of adults between the ages of 25 and 34 who completed high school did not have a job, while 72% of adults 25 to 34 who did graduate high school were able to get a job.

The literature has confirmed that the class size can determine success for students. Smaller classes are more beneficial for student learning in multiple ways. Whisenhunt et al.

(2019) explained large classes can cause students to suffer, as larger classes can reduce the amount of demonstration time available in each class as it could be very time consuming. In order for students to succeed there must be an adequate amount of time available for each student to ensure the information has been processed correctly. With smaller classes the students will have a greater chance for effective learning.

The literature also explained the impact of a student failing a course. Students who are at risk of failing a course or grade should be notified as early as middle school. Roybal et al. (2014) explained that many middle schools have too often, not been successful at being able to prepare students for the transition from middle school to high school. It is essential that the transition from middle school to high school is a smooth transition to help ensure a successful experience for all students. Also, the relationship a student has with their teacher as well as the input a teacher can give is a very critical element for knowing the causes of students dropping out of school or not succeeding starting in the ninth-grade. Also, it is important that teachers further understand which students need assistance and what type of strategies can be developed to give those students assistance to ensure student success.

Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology and rationale while also further explain the sampling of the participants for the research study. Chapter 3 will further outline the data collection from the focus group which will be conducted as well as individual interviews of those who participate the most during the focus group to gather their full thoughts of the research. Chapter 3 will outline the data analysis explaining how the data will be analyzed.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to evaluate an existing transitional program in rural South Carolina to understand students' perceptions as they prepare to move from middle school to high school. This study was designed to determine the participants' success in a transitional program. Also, the study looked to define what elements do students find most useful in a transitional program in schools. The objective of this study was to determine the impact of transition programs on attendance rates, a sum of the participants' behavioral issues, and the participants' grades.

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research methodology for the qualitative phenomenology theory regarding the effectiveness of a transitional program for students in middle school as they transition to high school. This approach can provide an insight on students' experiences that attended transitional programs. This approach will also help develop a theory from the data that will be collected in order to understand if transitional programs have a long term positive effect on a student's success. The research plan, including the methodology, participants, analysis method, and concerns are components of this chapter.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

Q1. What are high school students' perceptions of their participation in a transition program from middle school to high school?

- a. How do high school students perceive having access to educational material such as technology, educational books, and tutoring through the transitional program?
- b. How do high school students who participated in a transition program describe how they perceive their current and future teachers?

Q2. What are transition program directors' perceptions of students who participate in the program?

- a. What are transition program directors' perceptions of how the program benefit students?

Q3. How do transition program documents compare with student experiences?

Methodological Approach

According to Stake (2010), when looking to explain an occurrence by focusing on the experiences that are given by a person, a qualitative study is the appropriate study to use. Qualitative research is one of the research methods that is used to collect data on specific subjects. According to Mason (2018), qualitative research allows the researcher to explore a wide-ranging array of items. These items include the stability and weave of daily life, their understandings, the different experiences and imaginings of the research participants, institutions, relationships or discourses, and the significance of the meanings that they produce. The qualitative research I implemented was a case study. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how transition programs have been perceived and utilized by students as they prepare to move from middle school to high school.

This study explored student's perceptions of a school transition program in rural South Carolina that helps prepare students in middle school for transitioning to high school. Yazan (2015) explained that one of the most frequently used research methodologies for qualitative research is a case study. Case studies are used to help contribute information to other areas, such as groups and individuals. According to Yin (2003), a case study is a research format strategy that helps contributes to the knowledge that is gained from individuals or groups that help explore multiple topics of research. Case studies also help the researcher display the strength in

research in that it can help facilitate in-depth analysis and gain specific information which is collected about a particular case that is being studied by a researcher (Stjelja, 2013).

Using the case study approach allows the researcher to start with a large number of questions and narrow the focus of the questions down to a specific number of questions as progress is made during the study, instead of trying to assume what will be the outcome before any study has been conducted (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2009). In this case study, I was able to explore and examine students' perceptions on the effectiveness of a transition program as they prepare to transition to high school. The case study also explored the perceptions of students who participate in a transition program and determine if any challenges affect students transitioning to high school and how these challenges affect the students' overall grades and even attendance. This study also includes the directors' perceptions and program documents for triangulation.

Some specific challenges of completing the case study included completing all the work, getting students and staff to participate, and gaining the trust of the participants to answer questions about the study that were used for research data. Receiving information from students about their own experiences helped bring valuable information to the research. For the researcher to obtain information, specific questions were asked to the participants. Yin (2009) and Stake (1995) both agreed that how and why questions can give the researcher better information in a case study. The information received was used to help faculty, staff, and directors of transitional programs better prepare students for their transition from middle school to high school.

Boundaries

Setting boundaries during a research study helps the researcher explain what the study is and what the study is not. According to Yin (2003) and Stake (1995), it is essential for a researcher to place boundaries on the study to ensure specific topics or questions stay the course

and do not become too broad or too many objectives are developed. The main boundary for this research study is the Title I school and program itself located in a rural area in South Carolina. For this research study, I am not attempting to compare this program to other existing programs, but to see how this program best serves its students.

Population

The population of this study consisted of students who are enrolled in a rural school district which has a total student population of 500 in South Carolina. Not all 500 students have participated in a transition program. The population also consisted of staff who work with students in the transition program. According to the state of South Carolina schools report card, in 2018, there were a total of 120 ninth-grade students who were enrolled at the public high school in this rural school district. Of all the ninth-grade students enrolled in the public high school, a total of 67% of the students enrolled were listed as being African American. A total of 26 % of the students enrolled were listed as being White, and a total of 6% of the students enrolled in the school were categorized as Hispanic. With a total school enrolment of 500 students from the 2018 school year, 46% of that student population were females while 54% of the school population were males.

With the public high school being in a rural area and a majority of the students being categorized as coming from a low-income family, the school also offers 100% free lunch for all students who are enrolled in school. According to the state of South Carolina public schools report, 100% free lunch is 45% higher than the states average of 55% of students being on free lunch. According to the state of South Carolina, this rural school's records serving students who are listed as living in poverty is prevalent. In 2017, the rural school in South Carolina reported that 78.6% of its students were classified as living in poverty while in 2018 that number

increased by 0.6% to a total of 79.2%. Of all the listed students, 79.2% of students are listed as living in poverty is the highest number of students ever reported by this rural high school in South Carolina. The public schools report explained there were a total of 31 full-time teachers, and each classroom has a student-teacher ratio of 14:1. A 14:1 student-teacher ratio is exceptionally low compared to the average state's level of 16:1.

Sampling

This study utilized purposeful sampling of 10 students who have participated in a transition program, as well as a purposeful sample of 10 staff members who have worked with students in the transition program. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), purposeful sampling includes selecting individuals or a group of individuals to participate who are considered to be knowledgeable or have experience and interest related to the topic at hand. It is also essential to have participants who are available and are open to expressing their experiences and thoughts in a reflective manner. Focus groups help research areas like social research, counseling, and needs assessments (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Focus group A consisted of 10 students who had participated in a school's transition program. Focus group B consisted of 10 staff members who worked with students who participated in the transition program. With the permission of the district and principal, a letter of invitation was sent to all students who participated in the transition program as well as a letter of invitation to all teachers who participated in assisting students in the transition program. The letter explained the purpose of the study while also offering the students and staff a position to participate in the study (see Appendix A). As minors were involved, the letter also asked the parents to grant permission for their child to participate (see Appendix B). Also, the letter requested the student to consent to participate in the research study (see Appendix C).

Materials/Instruments

Focus groups, interviews, and document records assist with the data collection for this research study. The focus groups contributed to gaining information from a group setting. Morgan (1996) outlined that focus groups have positive and negative advantages. Morgan (1996) explained there are positive and negatives with focus groups especially since that the participants are able to explain themselves with each other. The interview process helped contribute a greater understanding of the perceptions of the students as well as the staff members who assisted with the transitional program. Questions for the interview were developed by information gathered from Brinkmann's (2014) design for interviewing. The documents helped give a record of student progress in school due to participating in the transitional program.

Focus Groups

Focus groups help bring a select group of people together to talk who hold an interest in a common topic. Krueger and Casey (2015) wrote,

A focus group is a special type of group in terms of purpose, size composition, and procedures. The purpose of conducting a focus group is to better understand how people feel or think about an issue, idea, product, or service. (p. 25)

As focus groups are used to gather information, focus groups also gather perceptions from many people at once, to engage in conversation amongst people who are knowledgeable about the phenomenon, which can allow the research to glean deeper meanings about the phenomenon as experienced (Krueger & Casey, 2015; Then et al., 2014). Focus groups can help assist others who are participating in the group as they might realize that others in the group may feel the way as they feel. Focus groups can also give students the courage to speak up on a topic in a safe, judgment-free environment. Focus group A consisted of 10 students while focus group B

consisted of 10 staff members. To ensure the focus group was organized and structured, a protocol was designed to help ensure everyone stays on task (see Appendix F). The protocol was used with each meeting with hopes to gain substantial information from those who participated.

Interviews

As focus groups are essential to gather collected information from a group, individual interviews can also help gather data without the participants feeling influenced by others in their response. According to Marshall (2016), face-to-face interviews can be time consuming, but these interviews allows for the researcher to work to gain effective responses while also being able to view perceptions, opinions, and the attitudes of those participating. Open-ended questions help get responses from others experiences, perceptions, and feelings (Patton, 2015). Open-ended questions helped to ensure there were no leading questions that could have caused discrepancies in the data. The interview strategy used was semistructured, while using semistructured questions. The semistructured questions proceeded to follow up questions that allowed for more data information to be collected. A list of open-ended interview questions served as a second form of research material. The interview questions were developed to help lead the discussion by the participants and to also help the researcher collect valuable information from the participants (see Appendix E). A guideline for the structure of the interview was developed to ensure that each interview was structured the same (see Appendix D).

Documents and Archival Records

Documents can be essential to finding information about research. Yin (2003) outlined three main points on how documents are helpful in research. Yin (2003) wrote,

First, documents are helpful in verifying the correct spellings and titles or names of organizations that might have been mentioned in an interview. Second, documents can

provide other specific details to corroborate information from other sources. Third, you can make inferences from documents. (p. 87)

Stjelja (2013) and Yin (2009) discussed archival records and documents are both instruments that can be reviewed multiple times and could have very broad coverage. Archival records classify as personal records, service records, organizational records, and lists of names and other relevant items (Yin, 2003).

It is essential to understand that both documents and archival records are good sources to collect information, neither source is superior to the other as they both have strengths and weaknesses for explaining information that can be beneficial to research (Stjelja, 2013). As records are a personal matter, parents will be asked to consent to providing copies of all requested documents. All submitted documents are stored in a secure lock cabinet that is only accessible by the researcher. One document that was requested was each students' report cards from their last year of middle school along with a report card from the students first year of high school. The report cards will show if there has been any significant improvement due to the student participating in a transition program. Another document that was requested was the students' school attendance record from their last year of middle school and their first year of high school. The records were used to see if the influence from the transitional program had an impact on the student's will to not miss school, stay ahead, and work towards graduation.

Data Collection

Possible contributors were sought by contacting the superintendent and principal and the principal's designee via e-mail at the rural school in South Carolina. The reason for selecting this area is due to me having the ability to get to the school in which participants attend and also, due to my working in close proximity to allow a space to host conducting interviews and focus

groups. A letter of invitation was developed to recruit students and teachers to participate in the research study. The interviews and focus groups were developed and scheduled after the statements of informed consent were returned to me and once permission was granted from the superintendent and school's principal. Due to the global pandemic all interviews were conducted using a video conference software program like zoom.

Collecting data is an essential part of the research process. Stake (1995) expressed, "There is no particular moment when data gathering begins; A considerable proportion of all data is impressionistic, picked up informally as the researcher first becomes acquainted with the case" (p. 49). As collecting data is essential, using multiple sources of evidence to collect data in a case study is also essential to ensure there is enough data collected (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). It is also important to use multiple sources as this will add to the reliability of the study that is being conducted (Stjelja, 2013). To collect data for this qualitative case study, I used focus group interviews, documents, and archival records. Focus group interviews were conducted with student participants of transitional programs as well as teachers and staff.

Data Analysis

Analyzing data is a critical part of the research process. Noble and Smith (2014) advised that data analysis consisted of coding the collected data, transcribing collected data to find themes, and identifying recurring themes. The data analysis also included a review of existing literature to explore any similarities or differences. According to Yin (2003), the analysis of research included categorizing information, examining collected research, and tabulating, resting, and even recombining evidence of both quantitative and qualitative evidence which helps to address the propositions of a study. According to Strake (1995), the analysis is a way of giving meaning to the first impressions and also the final compilations of the research to find

information. Data were transcribed and similar phrases and themes were color coded to outline the patterns. Similar concepts and ideas were categorized and labeled to interpenetrate the perceptions of the transition program for those who participated in the study. Merriam (1998) explained analysis is making sense of what has been stated by interpreting what others have said and what has been seen or read. Another technique used to expand data analysis and data saturation was methodological triangulation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Methodological triangulation is outlined as a method of assembling data by using two or more methods and it is one of the most common type of triangulation (Graue, 2015). The data analysis begun as soon as information from the focus group interviews were started, documents are submitted, and document records were also submitted and reviewed.

Coding

Coding the transcripts or breaking the information down into a controllable amount of information will be critical during the analysis phase. Using different forms of coding helped ensure the researcher does not place too much emphasis on one aspect of the study (Charmaz, 2006; Stake, 2010). To code the provided information, a pattern matching technique was used. Pattern matching involves specific patterns and or effects of those who participated in the data collection process (Baskarada, 2014; Stjelja, 2013; Yin, 2003). Being able to identify specific patterns, words, or phrases helped in understanding the key themes in all the collected data. The pattern matching technique also included compare and contrast. Glaser and Strauss (1967) referred to compare and contrast approach as multiple themes that represent similar actions or themes that are present but are different from each other. Also, looking for terms that may have been used in an unfamiliar way or words that sound unfamiliar were selected during the pattern matching phase to help code responses from participants. During each phase of coding, it was

essential to review the collected data multiple times so that connections can be made. The data analysis and connections was continued simultaneously and continuously until all information had been documented. This method allowed me to go back and forth with the transcripts to gain more information. Two phases of coding were used, open coding and selective coding.

Open Coding. Using open coding allows the researcher to go through all their data and mark sections of the text with codes that the researchers feel will become a theme. According to Corbin and Strauss (1990), interaction, actions, and events are compared with other listed events, interactions, and actions in search for similarities and differences. According to Urquhart (2012), open coding is understood as each line of transcribed text being coded line by line. Using a line by line coding process allowed a closer look at finding similar phrases and thoughts to further understand the thinking process of those participating in the research study.

Selective Coding. Selective coding starts when there are no new open codes to outline, or when specific codes begin to relate only to specific categories that occur (Urquhart, 2012). Many of the selective codes will occur more often than others. At times a code could become a more essential code or theme that is present multiple times throughout the research (Birks & Mills, 2015; Urquhart, 2012). In selective coding, the researcher focuses to outline emerging categories. According to Urquhart (2012), it is essential to revisit the categories of the selective code while also determining if the selective codes signify the open codes or the selective codes which have been identified. Urquhart (2012) further suggested that observing the attributes and relationship of the selective code can help further differentiate between open and selective codes. Coding is only the beginning phase of analysis. The next move was to develop themes or specific issues that might come up from the students' perceptions. Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and stage-environment fit theory (Eccles et al., 1993) influenced how I interpreted themes

such as positive environment, friendly place, determined to learn, needing more assistance to learn, and more. These themes allowed teachers who work with students in a transition program to gain a good understanding of how students in the program perceive the events which take place to prepare them for high school.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the quality that readers can trust that the findings collected from the researcher were drawn from the collected data from the study. According to Fang et al. (2011), it is important to set specific rules on conducting the research and follow the rules to help lower any bias in research. It was essential to outline what information was collected as well as what the data stated in an unbiased way. Fang et al. (2011) expressed that the research must always be accessible and help in aiding trustworthiness. A third party, Verbal link, was used to transcribe the focus groups and recorded interviews from each session. To help establish trustworthiness, questions to be used from the focus group and interview were pretested and reviewed by professors with doctoral degrees from South Carolina State University.

Researcher Role

My role as the researcher for this research study was serving as a college professor who was studying the importance of school transitional programs to develop ways to try and improve high school graduation and retention rates. Research was conducted at a school in a rural area in South Carolina with which I have no affiliation. The school is also not located in the same district as the college I work. High school retention and graduating high school is essential for students especially those students who plan to further their education and attend college. If the graduation rate and retention rate of high school students does not improve it could have an impact on the number of students who attend college.

Ethical Concerns

I ensured that ethics remained a top priority during the study. Before any research began, I sought ACU IRB approval to conduct any and all research. Once approval was granted to conduct research (see Appendix I), an informed consent form was delivered and read to each participant prior to participating in the study (see Appendix A). The risks to the human subjects were minimal. As participants were under 18 years of age, parental consent was also gained before any subjects participated in the research study. Any recorded material was deleted after final approval was granted by the research committee, which helped limit future risks that may be associated with confidentiality.

Assumptions

Some things can happen in research that were out of the researchers control and make the study seem not to work or not exist are seen as assumptions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). One assumption was that every participant would answer each question provided honestly. It is important to know that all participants in the research are volunteers and each participant may remove themselves from the study at any time with no consequences. Without correct information given from the participants, the results of the study will not be beneficial to helping understand the importance of a transitional school program. Also, it is hoped the selected sample would be a good representation of the population in which the research study will make inference to in order gain substantial information. It is also assumed that the collected information from this research study will help transitional programs make the needed changes to improve their program as well as develop new ways to increase student retention and graduation rates.

Limitations

Limitations of a research study are seen as a probable weakness or certain complications in which the researcher identifies in the study (Creswell, 2013). A limitation to the research study was that research was only being done at one school located in South Carolina. Conducting the research at one school can run the risk of not having enough subjects to participate in the study. If there is a low number of participants in the study, it could cause a problem with gathering valuable information from those who have participated in a transitional program. Conducting the research at multiple schools that offered transitional programs might have offered different results and more valuable information that were collected. Another limitation was the research focused on the perceptions of the participants. Perceptions can be subjective and will make it difficult to generalize with other students who participate in high school transitional programs. Additionally, I was not able to account for other outside issues that might have influenced the responses of students and staff members.

Delimitations

Delimitation help to simplify boundaries of a research study listed by the researcher (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). A delimitation of this study is that it was conducted at a single school in a rural area of South Carolina that hosts over 500 students with the freshman population consisting of 125 students who were eligible to participate in a transition program. Another delimitation of the study was the use of purposeful sampling of ninth grade students and staff members who work with ninth grade students during a transition program. Only ninth grade students and teachers from one school in a school district were invited to participate in the research study.

Summary

The goal of this chapter was to give an outline of the research method to be used to help answer the outlined research questions. Also, this chapter focus was to give a discussion on the procedures to be used, the participants for the study, data collection methods to be used, and gain an understanding on the perceptions of students. The research study used self-determination theory and stage-environment fit theory to help understand the effectiveness of a transitional program for students in middle school as they transition to high school. Interview questions were developed to allow students and teachers to explain their perception of the transition program that was being studied. It is hoped that all of the subjects of the study contribute to this study by giving their experiences. The overall goal of this research is to provide information to educators to help assist them in planning, restructuring, and developing a successful program which will further enhance retention and graduation rates for all students. The goal of Chapter 4 is to outline and prove the results from the current study and show that the methodology described in Chapter 3 was followed for correct results.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to evaluate an existing transitional program in rural South Carolina to understand students' perceptions as they prepare to move from middle school to high school. The study was designed to determine student and faculty perception of the elements of the program that supported student persistence in high school. This chapter will include the results of the data analysis gathered through the experiences of eight students who participate in the transition program. This chapter will also report the results of the data collected regarding the experience from five of the 25 staff members who work with the transitional program.

A qualitative instrumental case study approach was used to identify students' perceptions as they prepare to move from middle school to high school. The data were collected from eight students and five staff volunteer participants. The eight student and five staff interview transcripts were read and coded multiple times. The primary source of data in this study is attributed to student and staff participant interviews. Additional sources of data included artifacts such as documentation of different services offered along with student report card information were incorporated in the discussion of the results section. Specifically, I requested that the staff director participant voluntarily submit to me lesson plans, curriculum, and other strategies teachers use to teach, model, and facilitate how to stay engaged. The staff director notified me that there is not one particular curriculum used for the program at this time as the state funded program does not require a set curriculum. The information that I did receive outlines the different services in which the transitional program provides to all students who participated. It was also indicated there were other clubs and programs that students could participate in to assist in their adjustment to being in high school. The additional clubs available include, Chess club,

Creations for Inspiration, Fellowship of Christian students, Band, Math club, Multicultural club, and Student Council. No other specific information was given about the grant that is used. The program director noted that the school has to apply to renew the grant they receive every five years.

The voluntary student participants in this study were assigned code names to conceal their identity. The code names begin with the letter S and are followed by a number (e.g., S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, and S8). The staff participants in this study were also assigned codes to protect their anonymity. The staff codes begin with the letter T and are followed by a number (e.g., T1, T2, T3, T4, and T5).

The interview data transcripts from the students, staff, and the documentation of services provided were read multiple times to identify reoccurring phrases for analysis and possible theme distinction. The data were then grouped within a coding matrix according to similar and interrelated ideas and concepts (Gale et al., 2013). The clusters of ideas and concepts identified (see Appendix G) became the groundwork for the developing of themes and the reporting of findings and answers to the research questions. In line with each conversations' agreements, the participant data collected are loosely organized by themes to allow future researchers to use key phrases and thoughts to continue research on transitional programs.

There is no set number of students who can participate in the transitional program. Students become eligible to participate in the program once the students begin sixth grade. The program director explained that the transitional program meets during the summer, Monday through Thursday from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. most times. Once school starts, students are still considered to be part of the program and meet during the week when the director of transitional program is on campus. The program director also explained, at times students are asked to meet

after school to receive additional assistance in course areas that the student might be struggling. The program director again noted the school has to apply to renew the grant they receive every five years.

The district is located in a rural area. The school district consists of two elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. The school district notes that 100% of students are on free or reduced lunch. The school district outlines that, on average, 35% of students are proficient in reading while 34% of students are proficient in math. The total population for the entire school district is 1,690. The school district list 56.5% of students as being African American, 35.3% White, 6.9% Hispanic, and 13.0% are listed as other. 48% of students in the district are female, while 52% are male. The student-teacher ratio in the school district is 13:1.

Research Question 1

What are high school students' perceptions of their participation in a transition program from middle school to high school?

Research question 1 explored high school students' perceptions of their participation in a transitional program from middle school to high school. The student participants offered specific responses to their perception of participating in the transition program. The students' responses were outlined, and themes were developed to answer the first research question. The themes presented themselves as participation or involvement, developing new friendships, student-teacher relationships, access to educational materials, and the student's perception of their current and future teachers.

Conducting the focus group using a video conference web system presented a few challenges with the participants. At times during the focus group many of the participants

seemed hesitant before responding. Many attempts were made to put all participants at ease when responding, but many participants still kept their responses very short and often time just agreeing with other participants who responded before them. Many of the student participants also requested to have their camera turned off which made it difficult to read the participants body language as they responded. Being able to read the participants body language could help give indicators on if the participant is responding truthfully. Finally, none of the student participants disagreed with each other during the focus group or had anything negative to say in their responses.

Participation or Involvement Was Helpful to Getting Acclimated in the School

All eight students responded that their overall experience in the transitional program was good or positive. S2 and S3 indicated that their overall experience was good, with no further explanation. Two student participants indicated that participating in the program allowed them to get involved with other after school programs. S1 and S4 both indicated a specific program of the band as the program in which they could become involved. S1 stated, "The program also allowed me to get involved in band, and music is something that has always been fun." S4 echoed those remarks by stating,

It was something new it also allowed me to get involved with the band because I was not sure if I wanted to do band in high school because I did not have a good middle school director. Meeting the high school director made me want to be involved in something else.

All eight student participants made it known that being active in a program gave a sense belonging and it seemed to be an essential part of the program. Throughout the focus group the

students made it clear that being able to connect with others is one thing that made the transitional program a good choice for them to participate.

Developing New Friends is Essential to Students Participating

The student participants all agreed that a benefit of the program was being able to make new friends. Being able to make friends seemed to be very important to all eight participants. S1, S6, and S8 indicated their experience while participating in the transitional program was good as it allowed them to develop new friends. S1 explained they were able to meet new people. S6 and S8 echoed those remarks by making the same statement. S1 further stated that meeting new people was difficult for them, but the program made it a little easier because they were around the same people each day. S5 explained that making new friends made being in the program easier as they did not feel alone and felt they had someone which they could communicate with who was the same age. S2, S3, S4, and S7 all just agreed with what the other student participants had previously stated. The students' responses show that developing friendships is an essential part of students participating in the transitional program.

Student-Teacher Relationships Are Essential to Students

The student participants noted that developing friendships with other students was essential. A few of the student participants also indicated that developing good relationships with their teachers was crucial. S5, S7, and S8 were the only students to make mention of meeting the new teachers who would either be involved with the transitional program or be the new teachers that they would have for the academic school year. S7 stated,

At first, I didn't know what to expect. I did have high expectations and worked to keep an open mind to meeting new teachers because each teacher has a different way of teaching, and they have a different vibe, so I just wanted to keep an open mind.

S5 and S8 made similar remarks by stating that they were both excited to meet their new teachers. All students agreed their experience with the transitional program was positive with a result of good.

While trying to receive more in-depth answers during the focus group, the participants were asked what they disliked about the transitional program. S4 and S8 asked to pass on the questions. I believe the two students were hesitant to give a response as they were still trying to adjust to being part of the focus group. As the focus group continued the students became more open with answering questions. Four of the student participants stated there was nothing they disliked about the program. S5 expressed they disliked still having the feeling of not knowing what to expect. Even though they were excited about meeting their new teachers and people, there was still uncertainty. S7 expressed a positive experience with the transitional program, but the only dislike was that the participant started the program late, and they wished they could have started earlier. The student participants' consensus giving positive results indicates that the students' perception of participating in the transitional program was positive.

While conducting the focus group, I noticed that it seemed as if many of the student participants were afraid to respond to the questions that were being asked. Many of the student participants' responses were very short, and when probed to try and get a more in-depth answers from the participants many had no response. Starting with the first few questions, a few of the student participants again declined to answer. To put the students at ease, I made sure to mention multiple times before the focus group started and during the focus group that if a student did not feel comfortable answering a question, they could request to pass. I also made the students aware multiple times that if they changed their mind later and decided that they did want to respond to a question, we could revisit the question. As the focus group went on, many student participants

opened up more and began to give more profound responses. As more of the other students became willing to answer questions with longer responses the other student participants also began to give longer responses.

Access to Educational Materials

Student participants responded that by having access to educational materials such as technology, books, and tutoring while in the transitional program made learning easier. Using additional educational material is helpful, as many students learn differently. S3 explained during the transitional program that students were able to use iPads and computers for learning purposes. S7 further explained that the program allowed access to having a laptop and useful study information that would be needed due to the program being organized and clear. No other students mentioned this use of technology, but other student participants and staff participants did mention having access to tutoring. For example, S3 stated,

I would like to say that I agree that every student should participate because it also helped my grades. I mean I made good grades in middle school but struggled in math and English and I was able to receive extra tutoring to help me understand

S8 mentioned that there was additional help from teacher/staff members, and tutoring was a resource offered to each student in which they did participate. T3 outlined that the students can receive tutoring and additional academic support to help ensure that each student is able to succeed. T5 echoed T3 by explaining that after school tutoring and information is available to students, as well as the additional resources that students receive during the day. T5 expressed that more students could obtain access to supplementary technology, book, and tutoring, but only 1/3 of the program's students attend after-school activities. Finally, with the outbreak of COVID-19, everything is virtual at this time; many students do not want to participate.

Students' Perceptions on How They Perceive Their Current and Future Teachers

While the purpose of this study was to evaluate an existing transitional program in rural South Carolina to understand student perceptions as they prepare to move from middle school to high school, student participants provided responses about the teachers in the transitional program. Positive student-teacher relationships are just one way to help ensure a student's academic success.

Out of the eight student participants, only one participant requested not to respond to providing their thoughts on their current or future teachers. The student did not seem hesitant about answering the questions, but just kept insisting that they would like to pass on giving a response to their perception of their current and future teachers. The other student participants who responded provided positive feedback about how they perceived their current and future teachers from the transitional program. S7 stated,

I had heard things about the teachers, so I was a little scared. The program allowed me to meet the teachers, and this helped me not be scared of them, so in a way it made things better and made me really like the program.

S8 echoed the sentiments of S7 by stating, "I ended up loving all my teachers. They were all nice, and I thought they would not be, but they all showed that they cared." S6 explained they felt the same way as they had heard that many of the teachers they would encounter did not really care about the students, but that the teachers only wanted to focus on assigning work. After meeting the teachers, they discovered that the teachers do care and want help. Seven of the eight participants noted they learned from their new teachers and liked their teachers. For example, S3 indicated that getting to meet some of the teachers early in the transitional program allowed them to understand the teacher's style, which was helpful.

Using the responses provided by the student participants, themes were developed to answer the first research question. The themes presented themselves as participation or involvement, developing new friendships, student-teacher relationships, access to educational materials, and the student's perception of their current and further teachers. Each of the student participants gave a positive response to their experience of participating in the transitional program. The students explained that they had no problems or issues with the transitional program or any of the available activities to students who participated in the transitional program. The only concern expressed was that a few of the students noted that they would like to see more students take advantage and participate in the transitional program. While trying to gain a more in-depth response from the student participants, the focus group was asked to explain if there was anything they disliked about the transitional program, what made the transitional program not good, and what needed to change to make the transitional program better. Each student participant gave a unified consensus response again of not having any issues with the transitional program. Each of the student participants seemed to have been genuinely excited to have participated in the transitional program and each student noted that they would participate in the program again.

Research Question 2

What are transition program directors' perceptions of students who participate in the program?

To conduct the research, I interviewed five teachers. Some of these teachers also serve as staff. One participant was a director, one was a former director who still assists with the transitional program and serves as a counselor, and the rest were teachers in the school district. One teacher taught students in grades ninth through twelve, and two teachers taught students in ninth and tenth grade.

Research question 2 explored the perceptions of the program directors' of students who participated in the school's transitional program. The responses given by the transitional program teacher/staff participants allowed for themes to be developed, which help answer the second research question on the transition program directors' perceptions of students who participate in the program. The themes developed were caring, growth, lack of student participation, and the program's benefits for students.

The teacher/staff participants' consensus was that as staff members, they must teach, care, and provide safety, awareness, and model to all students that they can be successful each day. T1 elaborated on this by stating, "I believe all students deserve a chance, I love all students. Any student that wants help will get help so they can succeed." T1 further explained they believed that once the students realize that the staff members are at school to teach and show compassion and care for the students, there is a better chance of the students working hard in the class room. T3 made a statement explaining that each student deserves a chance because all children are essential and unique. T2 stated that students are important, and teachers know how essential it is for all students to advance and succeed, which is something that all educators want to see happen. T3 echoed T4, both responded by explaining that students are essential, and the program allows students to develop a better foundation for their education. T4 also noted their position allows them to not only work with students, but they also get to assist students with working with the school's councilors. T4 continued explaining that getting students connect with the school's councilors helps the students know they have additional resources of people who care about them. The students should know that teachers want to help them with their class schedules, helping the students sign up for ACT or SAT testing, and working to assist the students with applying for college scholarships in the future. T5 noted they felt all the students

were their own children. T5 further explained that creating a positive relationship with the students helps build trust as the staff members are learning just as the students are learning. T3 also stated that “building trust with the students makes their job easier, because once the students know we care then they can trust us to educate them as they know we have good intentions for their life.”

Student Growth is Critical in Order for Them to Adjust to a New Environment

Students’ growing and maturing was a theme that all teacher/staff members made mentioned about the students in their responses. T1 stated that every student should know what it is like to be in high school as it is a different place from elementary or middle school. Each student must understand that even though high school is a different place, high school is a place in which the students can grow and become something great. T5 expounded by saying, high school can be a scary place, and it is our job as educators to let the students know that it is a safe space for them to learn. The transitional program is a great first step for the students to take, to grow, and become adjusted to their new environment. T2 described that many students come into the transitional program confused about having to be in a new place such as high school, but by the end of the transitional program, you get to see how so many of the students have grown and matured. T4 stated,

The one thing I enjoy the most is watching the students grow and mature from a young child to a young adult in such a short time. Also, seeing the students become more social and branching out more lets us know how well the students are making a good adjustment to their new environment.

T1 agreed by saying, watching the students learn about their new environment, teachers, and friends is fun to see. We as educators get to see the students go from being afraid to growing into

a student with high confidence about the new journey they are about to take. T3 elaborated on helping students feel better about a new environment by stating that students need to feel safe and feel essential to the new environment they will be part of for the next 3-4 years. It is up to the staff members to assist students in this process and the reward is watching the students grow and mature and come into their own. Overall, the staff members conveyed that it is essential to be role models and show that they care about them. The staff members noted the importance of having a willingness to recognize and understand the needs of the students to help them all succeed in high school.

Lack of Student Participation in the Transition Program

When asked what each teacher/staff member disliked about the transitional program or what the teacher/staff members would like to see done differently, each teacher/staff participant gave a unified answer. Each teacher/staff member stated the lack of student participation in the transition program as a significant issue. For example, T1 said, “There are just not enough students to participate in the program each year. The transition program has so much to offer each student, and it would be great if more students would participate.” T4 mentioned there was not enough participation from parents or students, and if the school could find a way to get the parents involved, then there could be a chance that more students would become involved with the transition program. T2 explained there are many students who need help but just refuse to be part of the transition program. T2 also stated they wished more students would participate in the program as the program can help students become more comfortable with their surroundings.

Also, the program can help students succeed academically. T3 made a similar comment stating, I dislike that we do not have more students participate in the program. We need to

find a way to not only get more kids involved but to also get the parents involved to help push those students who really need this program.

T5 echoed T2 response by saying that many students need assistance but are afraid to ask for help.

Teacher/staff participants were asked why some students would not participate and what they would do differently to get students to participate in the transition program. T1 stated some students do not want to be part of the program as they believe it is just extra work, and some students do not want to give up the extra time to participate. T5 explained that student participation during the normal school day was always at 100%, but if the transition program was taking place after school hours, the participation dropped to only one-third of student participation. Even during the summer, the participation numbers varied each day. T5 also mentioned that some students explained that not have proper transportation played a part in them not participating in the program. T1 stated the schools do not have the budget to provide transportation or offer incentives so that more students would be willing and want to participate in the transition program. T4 explained if funding were available, they would add student dances, field days, develop new school clubs, and social events to use as a way to increase student participation. T3 also stated they would want to add transportation as well as an anxiety program as this could get more students involved. Still, it could also make students feel more comfortable about opening up to others about issues they might be facing. Having funding to provide transportation could increase the overall number of students who participate in the transition program to ensure the students who need help with their academics receive assistance.

Program Benefits to Students

All the teacher/staff participants noted one main issue with the transition program. The main issue being not enough students taking advantage of the transitional program as the program is meant to develop student success academically. T5 outlined that students who participate in the transitional program have the ability to also participate in various school clubs such as the college and career club, empowering students to succeed. The college and career club empowering students to succeed focuses on student success and works to get students thinking about going to college at an early age. T3 stated the program benefits students as they are able to receive not only an emotional connection with their teachers but also get rid of the idea they are being labeled.

To further explain the specific benefits that students receive from participating in the program, T3 stated they like that they meet their teachers and do some testing. Many students are available to participate in team-building exercises to become acquainted with other students. It is encouraged that all students take a new building tour as it can help them feel better about their new environment as they will have a better sense of understanding their surroundings. T1 echoed this statement by expressing that the transitional program allows students to see what it is like to be on a high school campus, meet teachers, and learn about receiving additional resources for help. T1 further explained, “We want to avoid the struggling part and just jump right to succeeding.” T4 explained that the program allows students to become more social and can help students branch out more to make the adjustment to being in high school. As high school comes with many challenges knowing what to expect is also a challenge. T2 explained that the transitional program helps students get a heads up about the many things they will experience. For example, having multiple teachers, multiple courses, being able to be part of after school

clubs and organizations and being exposed to new students in a new environment. T4 made a similar statement explaining the program gets students prepared for taking multiple classes with many different teachers. T5 gave a similar response to T2, stating the transitional program helps students understand what is expected of high school students and how they should plan for the future of graduating and life after graduation.

Research Question 3

How do transition program documents compare with student experiences?

Research question 3 explored how do the documents from the transitional program compare with the students' experiences. The student and the staff participants, provide responses that were outlined to develop themes that helped answer research question 3. Participation, preparedness and grade improvement were the two themes outlined by both students and staff.

Student Participation

The transitional program offers many different areas for students to participate and receive additional services to be better prepared for high school, and college. T5 provided documentation of services (see Appendix H), which outlines 11 different areas for students to participate in. The areas that students can participate in are, tutoring/academic programs, job site visit/shadow/intern, comprehensive mentoring, and college visit/student shadow, counseling/advising/academic planning/career counseling, summer program, educational field trip, workshop, family/cultural event, and financial aid counseling/advising.

T4 explained the program gets students prepared for taking multiple classes with many different teachers while also offering assistance with tutoring. S8 explained that participating in the program's extra activities made them feel prepared for high school. The extra activities helped them find a new efficient way to study, ask for help, gain a better understanding of what

high school means, and make them want to attend school more often. S7 explained that because the transition program offered cultural events, counseling, and advising, they felt they were better prepared to succeed in high school while also giving the students a heads up on the requirements needed to succeed after they completed high school. S1 felt they did not have good teachers in middle school so they had a lot of doubt of succeeding in high school. The transition program allowed them to participate in different programs while learning how to advance in school. T5 explained the program is designed to expose students to different things to improve their school attendance by giving students the courage to advance and prepare all the students for a strong future. T4 echoed this response by saying the many options that students have will make the students prepared for high school and college.

Grade Improvement for Student Participants

The transitional program is designed to provide students with additional assistance in subject areas in which students might be struggling. The teacher/staff members who participate in the transitional program offer tutoring during the regular school hours as well as after school to all interested students. The transitional program is also designed to help students receive needed attention to prepare them for the many new challenges of high school.

During the focus group, the student participants agreed that every student should participate in the transitional program especially if the students needed to improve their grades. For example, S1, S3, and S4 explained that every student should participate in the program as the program helped increase their grades from middle school to high school. S1 stated that the program gave students a sense of pride about making better grades and that they could do better in school. S3 further explained that math and English were subject areas in which many students struggled. The students who struggled were able to receive extra tutoring, which led to them

receive good grades in those subject areas in high school. S4 express their grades increased as the student went from making a C average to make a B average in all their classes. S2 also agreed that their grades improved due to them being able to receive additional assistance in the subject areas that they were struggling. S4, S2, and S6 explained that the transitional program allowed them to meet new people and understand what work in high school would be like so they could succeed. Students were asked if anyone did not see improvements in grades in certain subject areas. All students' responded they did see improvement, and no one had a decrease in their grades.

Research questions three was answered by showing that this transitional program provides multiple activities for students to participate such as tutoring, advising, and mentoring. The student participants provided responses on their report cards' document showing grade improvements in school subjects such as English and math from middle school to high school. With all the student participants explaining they all improved in many different subject areas due to their participation in the transition program.

Summary

This chapter began with a review of the purpose of the research study and research questions that were being investigated in the study. Major themes that arose out of the analysis of the eight student participant as well as an analysis of the five participant teachers were identified and discussed. Chapter 5 contains a discussion of the summary of the findings, implications, recommendations for future research, and the conclusion.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

This qualitative case study evaluated an existing transitional program in rural South Carolina. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand students' perceptions as they prepare to move from middle school to high school. The study was designed to determine student and faculty perception of the elements of the program that supported student persistence in high school. This chapter focuses on the interpretation of the findings and recommendations for future research. The importance of themes and how they answer the research questions are discussed, and recommendations for the transitional program are identified. This chapter ends with reflections and closing remarks.

Summary of the Study

This study utilized qualitative data collection. Focus group and one-to-one internet-based interviews were used to collect information on an existing transitional program in rural South Carolina. Participants voluntarily submitted artifacts such as the documentation of services offered and student report card information were utilized to provide context on the transitional program.

Brief Overview of the Problem

Transitional programs are essential to ensure student success (Frank, 2011). The transition into high school can be shocking to students due to the new environment, advanced expectations, more structure, and the different culture (Roybal et al., 2014). Students who are unable to transition from middle school to high school might find themselves at risk of not completing high school (Muscara et al., 2018). Iver et al. (2015) explained that not only should students be involved in a transitional program, but it is critical to have family engagement at the high school level. Without transitional programs, students who struggle with the transition from

middle school to high school are more likely to fall behind in school and could drop out of school, which might cause a repeat in the cycle of poverty (Frank, 2011).

Researchers have stated how a transition program can assist students, but there are still areas of research needed to reach a conclusive decision on school transitional programs. Such as, what should be taught during the transitional program, should all students be required to participate in a transitional program, what teachers are qualified to oversee the transitional program, will students perceive more work as being too much, and are students old enough to make their own decisions about a transitional program. Benner (2011) explained that by adding more work for students to do during a transition program it could cause greater challenges for students such as, not wanting to complete the work or feeling they are not prepared to succeed academically.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to evaluate an existing transitional program in rural South Carolina to understand students' perceptions as they prepare to move from middle school to high school. The primary source of data in this study is attributed to student and teacher/staff participant interviews. Additional sources of data included artifacts such as documentation of different services offered along with student report card information were incorporated in the discussion of the results section. This study's research questions supported a qualitative approach that outlined student and teacher/staff perception of the transitional program. The interviews were analyzed to identify themes regarding the research questions. A purposeful sample of eight students and five teacher/staff members were interviewed. The focus group and teacher/staff interviews were all conducted online. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic,

face-to-face interviews were not feasible. Online consent from the voluntary participants was obtained.

The research questions were:

Q1. What are high school students' perceptions of their participation in a transition program from middle school to high school?

- a. How do high school students perceive having access to educational material such as technology, educational books, and tutoring through the transitional program?
- b. How do high school students who participated in a transition program describe how they perceive their current and future teachers?

Q2. What are transition program directors' perceptions of students who participate in the program?

- a. What are transition program directors' perceptions of how the program benefit students?

Q3. How do transition program documents compare with student experiences?

Review of the Study Design

A qualitative instrumental case study approach was used to evaluate an existing transitional program in rural South Carolina to understand students' perceptions as they prepare to move from middle school to high school. The data collected from the eight voluntary student participants and the five voluntary teacher/staff participants were analyzed. The interview data transcripts were read multiple times and highlighted the reoccurring phrases for analysis and theme grouping. The clusters of ideas and concepts identified became the foundation for the narrative findings and support for emerging themes. The eight purposefully selected students met the criteria to be included in this study by participating in the transitional program. The five

purposefully selected teacher/staff members consisted of one director, one former director, and three teachers. All teacher/staff met the criteria to be included in this study by being a staff member of the transition program, currently teaching students at the freshman and sophomore level, and by being staff members who make decisions on students entering the transition program.

Summary of Major Findings

The major findings of this study are summarized by research questions.

Research Question 1. Research question 1 explored high school students' perceptions of their participation in a transitional program from middle school to high school. The findings were:

- Students perceived the program as a positive experience
- Students perceived their teachers as helpful
- Students were able to become comfortable in their new surrounding
- Students were exposed to more clubs and organizations and given the opportunity to join those clubs and organizations

Research Question 2. Research question 2 explored the perceptions of the program directors' of students who participated in the school's transitional program. The primary findings were:

- Program directors' find the transition program to be a benefit to students
- Program directors' look to support students by providing additional educational resources such as tutoring, books, and supplies
- Program directors' focus is to get students adjusted to taking high school classes, having multiple teachers, and having access to educational programs

- Program directors' focus is to help students graduate and advance to college

Research Question 3. Research question 3 explored how the documents from the transitional program compare with the students' experiences. The findings were:

- Staff members believe the Documentation of Services is designed to help increase the students' engagement as students have options to multiple programs to participate
- Students received better grades after participating in the transition program
- Staff member found the documents of offering allowed their teachers to develop teaching strategies to reach all students
- Students who participated in the transition program found that the teaching strategies and programs that were offered were essential to the students' success
- Staff members believe the program documents of offerings is developed to help students see that they have a support group that wants to assist students succeed in high school

Interpretation of the Findings and Discussion

This qualitative instrumental case study was designed to evaluate an existing transitional program in rural South Carolina to understand students' perceptions as they prepare to move from middle school to high school. The overall conclusion revealed that the transitional program provided essential resources for students such as tutoring, laptops, and educational clubs for those who needed help. Students who are unable to transition from middle school to high school might find themselves at risk of not completing high school (Muscara et al., 2018).

The transition into high school can be shocking to students due to the new environment, advanced expectations, more structure, and the different culture (Roybal et al., 2014). Transition programs can also assist students with personalizing their first year of high school by developing a community with other ninth-grade students (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2014). According to Neubert

and Leconte (2013), the new school setting will cause challenges for students to establish a peer group or community due to a much larger student body, which might be more diverse than what was seen in elementary or middle school.

Research Question 1

Research question 1 explored high school students' perceptions of their participation in a transitional program from middle school to high school. Based on the findings, the students who participated in the transitional program found the transitional program to be essential to their educational experience as the program gave each of the students a sense of belonging. Students found that developing new friends and positive relationships with teachers were essential to their success.

Wood et al. (2015) explained that peer groups are not only essential for students to gain confidence, but peer groups are also essential as students get older. The older students get, they tend to move away from their parents and move closer to friends that they are able to connect with. Three students indicated that their experience while participating in the transitional program was good as it allowed them to develop new friends. While peer groups are essential, Saltali (2013) stated another meaningful relationship that a student can establish in their school environment is their relationship with teachers. According to Martin and Collie (2019), teacher-student relationships are essential to the interpersonal context, which takes place at school, which can impact the students' academic development. The students need to know that they can communicate with their teachers when there is a need. It is also essential for students to understand their teachers want to develop a positive learning environment that will allow all students to succeed. Well-developed student-teacher relationships are just one way to help ensure a student's academic success. Bakadorova and Raufelder (2018) conducted research confirming

that positive teacher-student relationships contribute to basic need satisfaction for students who are making the transition from middle school to high school.

The findings were further supported when Phillippo and Stone (2013) stated that teachers could serve in other roles than just educators. Teachers can also serve as counselors or advisors as well as mentors to show additional support to students during their educational journey. Teacher-student relationships differ from teacher to teacher, but a positive relationship between a teacher and student can change a student's quality from being a problematic student to being a positive student (Claessens et al., 2016).

While developing new friends and developing positive relationships between the students and the teachers is essential, based on findings, the students further noted that participating and being involved in the transitional program was also essential with helping getting acclimated to the new school. Wang and Degol (2015) explained that having students participate in an active program when entering ninth-grade may help the students connect to the high school. All eight of the student participants indicated that the transitional program was good as it allowed them to all get involved in other programs, meet new people, and get acclimated to their new environment. Bowers et al. (2014) discussed that a positive transition can create a better fit between students, school, and the students' emotional needs as having a sense of control and belonging are essential. All eight of the students further noted that being involved in a transitional program gave them a sense of belonging as being in a new place can cause challenges for students. Neubert and Leconte (2013) explained that the new school setting will cause challenges for students to establish a peer group or community due to a much larger student body that might be more diverse than what was seen in elementary or middle school.

Based on the findings, the students who participated in the transitional program, all the students gave a positive response to their perceptions of their future teachers. Two of the students explained that they heard rumors about how the teachers could be difficult and not care, but the students ended up loving their teachers. All eight of the students also explained that their teachers were effective teachers who showed they cared about their students' education. One student explained that getting to meet their new teachers during the transitional program allowed them to understand the teachers teaching style to see how much of an effective teacher they would have. Walker (2008) explained that effective teachers possessed traits such as being prepared, positive, hold high expectations, creative, and fair. Having an effective teacher is essential to the students' success in school.

Research Question 2

Research question 2 explored the perceptions of the program directors' of students who participated in the school's transitional program. The suggested conclusion based on the findings indicated that the program directors' and staff/teachers find the transitional program essential to the students' success. The program directors' and staff/teachers all found the transitional program necessary to help students adjust to high school and get students involved in other programs that will encourage students to graduate. Roybal et al. (2014) explained there is a need to have effective programs designed by teachers to assist ninth-grade level students in succeeding to help improve graduation rates. One teacher outlined that students who participate in the transitional program have the ability to also participate in various school clubs such as the college and career club, empowering students to succeed. Schmitt and Goebel (2015) explained that having a program for students can help increase the odds of students succeeding in high

school. With multiple programs available for students to join there is something available to meet the needs of each student.

Even though all five of the staff members found the program essential, all five staff members explained that the transitional program could be more successful if there were more student participation. The lack of student participation in the transition program is a concern for staff as they all felt that students who struggled in middle school would also struggle in high school without additional help. Three of the staff/teacher members stated that they believed that if parents became involved, they would get more students involved. Roybal et al. (2014) indicated that in order for a transition program to be effective, a few components are needed. Components such as parents need to be involved, have effective, caring teachers, and develop a sense of belonging to help students succeed.

One teacher/staff member stated that the transitional program also helps students make better grades and learn how to make better decisions such as developing better study habits. Emmett and McGee (2012) discussed that even though a student is moving to high school, they are still too young to make decisions. The teacher staff member elaborated by stating the program allows teachers to work one on one with students, teach students responsibility on organizing and completing their work, and helping the students learn how to communicate with their teachers. These decisions also focus on student growth, as all the teacher staff members stated during their interview that student growth is critical to adjusting to a new environment. Transitional programs can also serve as an environment to assist students in decision making as expecting ninth-grade students to make adult-like decisions about their education is not best (Emmett & McGee, 2012). One teacher/staff member explained that the transition program allows teachers and staff to be involved in the students' educational process for more than just

their time in high school. Lavy (2016) discussed that teachers who reach students by helping them reach achievement gains such as good grades tend to continue to assist those students in other years while in school.

Program directors' also indicated that the program finds it important to utilize effective teachers who support all students. Having effective teachers is vital as one teacher staff member explained that effective teachers are able to connect with students on a personal level. The findings are supported by Marzano and Toth (2013) which stated that effective and qualified teachers served at the center of a student's ability to be able to learn and succeed not only in their education but also in life. Walker (2008) explained that effective teachers possessed traits such as prepared, positive, hold high expectations, creative, and fair. Low and Ang (2013) argued that a good and effective teacher is selfless and works to look after the students who are weak in educational learning more than the students who are strong in their academic learning.

Research Question 3

Research question 3 explored how do the documents from the transitional program compare with the students' experiences. The findings of this question showed that students who participated in the transition program found that the teaching strategies and programs that were offered were essential to the students' success. One teacher/staff member discussed that the documents they use provides and outline of services the transition program provides which helps the teachers develop strategies to ensure students have a positive learning experience. Lekwa et al. (2019) stated the strategies that teachers use to educate students can keep the students engaged with learning which can lead to the students being successful in school.

Two teacher/staff members explained that the documents were developed to help students see that they have a support group that wants to help increase the students' engagement. Olson

and Peterson (2015) explained that giving opportunities for practice, providing positive feedback, and showing support are just general ways in which school can work to try and increase their student engagement in all the teachers' classrooms. Two teacher/staff members stated that the program documents also give teachers ideas of items to develop to help expose students to different things while also helping students prepare for their future in high school.

Implications

This study's findings have the following implication for the transitional program at a rural school in South Carolina. This study began with three questions to understand trends in students' perceptions as they prepare to move from middle school to high school. The first research question explored high school students' perceptions of their participation in a transitional program from middle school to high school. The second research question explored the perceptions of the program directors' of students who participated in the school's transitional program. The third research question explored how do the documents from the transitional program compare with the students' experiences. In this research study, the data showed that all the student participants enjoyed participating in the transitional program and had no issues with the program.

Conducting the focus group using a video conference web system presented a few challenges with the student participants. At times during the focus group many of the student participants seemed hesitant before responding and kept all answers short. Many of the student participants also requested to have their camera turned off during the process. Conducting the adult interviews using a video conference web system did not seem to present any issues. The adult participants seem to be open with all their responses, gave no sense of being nervous, and all adult participants were willing to keep their camera on during the interview.

Connecting to the Theoretical Framework: Self-Determination Theory and Stage-Environment Fit Theory

The data collected from the staff members showed that all five of the interviewed staff members found the transitional program essential to success. The program is meant to motivate students and to help students adjust to a new environment. Stage-environment fit theory suggests at the primary level that many middle schools do not provide the specific developmental needs and appropriate education environmental needs for your students (Eccles et al., 1993). Having a negative environment can cause children's perceptions of themselves and their education to become negative and result in students not succeeding well in school. Stage-environment theory also explains that the needs of adolescents as they develop and the educational environment are essential. Eccles et al. (1993) further explained that a positive environment is needed for students in the adolescent age as it is a vulnerable age. The results from the research showed that having a positive environment was important to students. The results also showed that faculty and staff members believe it is their job to create a safe environment for students, because if the students feel safe they are more likely to be successful during their time in high school.

Self-determination theory and stage-environment fit theory can also be used to ensure the program is structured to benefit all students. Deci and Ryan (2000) stated stage-determination theory is focused on positive developmental tendencies as well as social environment tendencies. Deci and Ryan (2000) further explained that self-determination theory has also been used to outline different approaches to motivation. The results demonstrate elements of self-determination theory and self-environment fit theory as the program directors' explained their focus is to provide a positive learning experience for students while also providing opportunities for students to become part of peer groups and receive mentoring from faculty and staff

members. The students also expressed how essential it was for them to be able to be part of positive peer groups and be part of clubs and organizations that would promote mentoring and student success as well. As self-determination theory is focused on positive developmental tendencies, the results further show that program directors' and staff also focus to get students adjusted to taking high school classes, having multiple teachers, and having access to educational programs. These results show benefits to students' emotional and physical needs while also providing a positive way to allow students to properly adjust to their new environment. The theoretical underpinnings can be used to support continuing improvement of the transitional program by ensuring that peer groups and peer mentoring is always made available to students, new clubs and organizations are developed to ensure there is always an organization available that focuses on assisting students with adjusting to their new school environment, and ensuring that dedicated faculty and staff members also serve as a mentor to students who participate in the transitional program.

As a result of the literature, findings, and theoretical framework I suggest the following implication for leadership and administrators in the transitional program:

1. The teachers and director of the transitional program should develop a curriculum plan to be put in place that's focuses on the main subject areas in which students struggle. Schools that have specific plans in place to help ensure students success (Emmett & McGee, 2012). The plan should address specific courses, assignments, and learning outcomes. Without a specific curriculum plan in place the students who participate in the transition program might struggle in certain subject areas in high school as they did in middle school. Teachers perceived that students who participated made better grades, but

it was unclear whether this is due to academic tutoring or if its due to students making stronger connections to teachers and other students.

2. The school's administrators should schedule regular meetings with the programs directors to evaluate the mission, vision, and progress of the transitional program. All participants should be involved in the process of creating a mission and vision to help ensure more students will buy-in to the transitional program. Regular evaluation and assessments should be conducted to determine if all staff and teacher participants feel as if the transitional program is meeting the goals of student improvement and success.
3. A schedule should be developed that would allow students to attend tutoring during the instructional school day and not just after school. The tutoring should be structured to outline different approached to self-motivation. The school leadership should develop a schedule that will allowing teachers planning time to develop teaching plans that will best meet the needs of those students who participate in the transition program.

Limitations

For this research study, the data collected mainly supports the existing literature. It is critical to outline the findings' limitations. First, this study was not conducted at multiple institutions that have transitional programs. This research study was only conducted at one school located in rural South Carolina. With the study taking place at only one school, it could lead to limitations that could prevent results from being comprehensive for future research on the effectiveness of transitional programs. Second, there were only eight student participants, and only five staff participants participated in the study. With the small sample size of participants, even though they met all the requirements to participate in the research study, this could lead to limitations for research results on students and staff members' perception about the transition

program. Third, the research only focused on the perceptions of the participants. Perceptions can be subjective and can make it difficult to generalize with other students who have participated in the high school transitional programs. Finally, due to COVID-19, the research was conducted online using a video conference software program. Having to use a video conference software program caused a limitation as I was limited on reading body language of the participants as some participants cut their camera off at times when responding. I believe it also made some of the students reluctant or hesitant to participate and answer some of the questions fully. Not being able to see the participants' body language could have an effect on the interpretation of the results.

Recommendations for Practice

The findings of this study can be used by other transitional program to identify strategies and tools to use to help facilitate discussion about improving their transitional program. Also, the implication of this study could help those in leadership roles such as administrators, coordinators, and teachers in the following ways.

- Teachers should develop early warning systems such as a decrease in attendance and grades for students who should be considered to be part of the school's transitional program
- Educators must understand that not all individuals will be ready, willing, and equipped to participate in a transitional program
- Schools should seek funding for transportation to help increase student participation in after school transitional programs.
- Having additional clubs and organizations are essential to students as it assists with allowing students to develop relationships with their peers.

- Teachers must understand that developing positive relationships with a student is not only important for the student to do well in their course, but it is also essential for the student's future development.
- Schools leadership should develop plans to also get the parents of students involved.
- The leadership must develop new ways to develop a full curriculum that students will follow for the transitional program.

Recommendations for Future Research

To further gain more information on an existing transitional program to understand students' perceptions, future researchers should conduct interviews in person including students who have completed the transitional program and interview faculty, and staff members who do not work with the transitional programs. Schmitt and Goebel (2015) explained having a program for students can help increase the odds of students succeeding in high school. Roybal et al. (2014) outlined there is a need to have effective programs which are designed by teachers to assist ninth-grade level students succeed in order to help improve graduation rates. I believe it would be good to see if students who have completed the transitional program had the same experiences and thoughts as those currently participating in the transitional program.

I believe it would be valuable to conduct interviews with students, faculty, and staff members who have not participated in the transitional program. The goal will be to determine if those who did not participate in a transitional program find the transitional program beneficial. Future researchers should also consider conducting interviews with school's administrators such as school principals and district's superintendents. Including the principals and superintendents might reveal how the administrators feel about the transitional program, if the program has increased the retention and graduation rates, if the administrators receive any additional

assistance from the state due to the help the transitional program brings to their school. It will also be essential for future researchers to see how the administrators view the teachers and students who participate in transitional program and if they feel needs are being met to help students advance in school.

Reflections and Closing Remarks

This study evaluated an existing transitional program in rural South Carolina to understand students' perceptions as they prepare to move from middle school to high school. During the online focus group and staff interviews, I was impressed by everyone's commitment to voice their experience and opinion on the current transitional program. The teachers appeared very confident and passionate about all students succeeding. The teachers also made it very clear that they also want to serve as a role model for all students. I have walked away from this experience with a firm belief that every school should have a transitional program to assist all students in their educational journey. I also feel that every teacher in every school district should play a part in a transitional program to further help students succeed in school. I feel self-assured that the knowledge gained from this experience will help me further my skills as a leader, become more engaged with assisting students, and develop plans to further all students' educational journey.

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Appendix A: IRB Informed Consent and Recruitment Material

Informed Consent Form

Title of Study: The Effectiveness of a Transitional Program for Students in Middle School as They Transition to High School

Principal Investigator:

Patrick Moore

Abilene Christian University School of Educational Leadership

XXXXXX@acu.edu

Purpose of Study

You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted for a dissertation at Abilene Christian University. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to evaluate an existing transitional program in rural South Carolina to understand trends in student's perceptions as they prepare to move from middle school to high school. This study is specifically designed to understand and determine the participant's success in a transitional program in order to determine what elements do students find most useful in a transitional program in schools. It is hoped to learn about the participant's attendance rates, a sum of the participant's behavioral issues, and the participant's grades. The population of this study will consist of students from a rural school district in South Carolina that has a total student population of 500 who have participated in a transition program.

Study Procedures

You will be asked to answer open ended questions about the perceptions of students of their participation in a transitional program from middle school to high school. The staff will be asked open ended questions about their perceptions of students who participate in a transitional program. Approximately 60 minutes of your time will be requested to complete a face-to-face interview. The interview will be recorded and later transcribed.

Risks

There is always the risk, however slight, of breach of confidentiality. Also, you might find some questions difficult to answer. You may decline to answer any or all questions and you may terminate your involvement at any time if you choose.

Benefits

The results of this study may have positive benefits for students, teachers, and educational leaders who are interested in better developing transitional programs for students as they transition from middle school to high school.

Confidentiality

Your interview and the responses you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will make every effort to preserve your confidentiality including the following:

- Assigning code names/numbers for participants that will be used on all research notes and documents
- Keeping notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher.

Participant data will be kept confidential except in cases where the researcher is legally obligated to report specific incidents. These incidents include, but may not be limited to, incidents of abuse and suicide risk.

Contact Information

If you have questions at any time about this study, or you experience adverse effects as the result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher whose contact information is provided on the first page, Patrick Moore. The lead researcher can be reached at 806-786-1301 or XXXXX@acu.edu. If the lead research cannot be reached you may contact the faculty advisor Dr. Linnea Rademaker at XXX@acu.edu. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or if problems arise which you do not feel you can discuss with the Primary Investigator, please contact the Institutional Review Board and Executive Director of Research, Megan Roth, Ph.D. Dr. Roth may be reached at

(XXX) XXX-XXXX

XXXXXX@acu.edu

320 Hardin Administration Bldg, ACU Box 29103

Abilene, TX 796699

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

Consent

I have read, and I understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Type your name in the box below to indicate agreement to participate in this study.

Appendix B: IRB Parent Informed Consent and Recruitment Material

Parent Informed Consent Form

Title of Study: The Effectiveness of a Transitional Program for Students in Middle School as They Transition to High School

Principal Investigator:

Patrick Moore

Abilene Christian University School of Educational Leadership

XXXXXX@acu.edu

Purpose of Study

You are being asked to allow your child to take part in a research study being conducted for a dissertation at Abilene Christian University. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to evaluate an existing transitional program in rural South Carolina to understand trends in student's perceptions as they prepare to move from middle school to high school. This study is specifically designed to understand and determine the participant's success in a transitional program in order to determine what elements do students find most useful in a transitional program in schools. It is hoped to learn about the participant's attendance rates, a sum of the participant's behavioral issues, and the participant's grades. The population of this study will consist of students from a rural school district in South Carolina that has a total student population of 1,200 who have participated in a transition program.

Eligibility Criteria

Students:

- Any freshman student who has participated in the bridge program
- Any sophomore student who has participated in the bridge program

Study Procedures

I will ask your students questions about the transition program. I will interview them in a focus group setting, with approximately 4-5 other students. The focus group will be held on video-conferencing software, like Zoom, and will last 60 minutes.

Risks

Your student may feel uncomfortable discussing the program. Please know that they can skip any question or stop participating at any time.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits to your child. However, with their input, we may be able to improve the program for future students, and provide information that will help other schools wanting to start a similar program.

Confidentiality

Your child's responses will be kept confidential. The researcher will make every effort to preserve your child's confidentiality including the following:

- Assigning code names/numbers for participants that will be used on all research notes and documents
- Keeping notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher.

Participant data will be kept confidential except in cases where the researcher is legally obligated to report specific incidents. The list of codes for participants will be kept in a separate locked location from the actual data. Only the code name will appear on the data. Informed consent forms will be kept separate from the data.

Contact Information

If you have questions at any time about this study, or you experience adverse effects as the result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher whose contact information is provided on the first page, Patrick Moore. The lead researcher can be reached at XXX-XXX-XXXX or XXXX@acu.edu. If the lead research cannot be reached you may contact the faculty advisor Dr. Linnea Rademaker at XXXX@acu.edu. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or if problems arise which you do not feel you can discuss with the Primary Investigator, please contact the Institutional Review Board and Executive Director of Research, Megan Roth, Ph.D. Dr. Roth may be reached at

(XXX) XXX-XXXX

XXXXXXXX@acu.edu

320 Hardin Administration Bldg, ACU Box 29103

Abilene, TX 796699

Voluntary Participation

Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether to take part in this study. If you agree that your child can participate, you will be asked to sign this consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw your child at any time and

without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

Consent

I have read, and I understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my child at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Type your name in the box below to indicate agreement to participate in this study.

Type your child's name below.

Appendix C: IRB Student Informed Assent Form

Student Informed Assent Form

Title of Study: The Effectiveness of a Transitional Program for Students in Middle School as They Transition to High School

Principal Investigator:

Patrick Moore

Abilene Christian University School of Educational Leadership

XXXX@acu.edu

Purpose of Study

You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted for a dissertation at Abilene Christian University. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to evaluate an existing transitional program in rural South Carolina to understand trends in student's perceptions as they prepare to move from middle school to high school. This study is specifically designed to understand and determine the participant's success in a transitional program in order to determine what elements do students find most useful in a transitional program in schools. It is hoped to learn about the participant's attendance rates, a sum of the participant's behavioral issues, and the participant's grades.

Eligibility Criteria

You can participate if:

- You are in the 9th or 10th grade
- You were in the bridge program after junior high

Activities:

- Participate in one focus group with 4-5 other students. This session will last about an hour. I will ask you questions about the bridge program

Study Procedures

You will be asked to answer open ended questions about the perceptions of students of their participation in a transitional program from middle school to high school. Approximately 60 minutes of your time will be requested to complete the interview using a web based software. The interview will be audio recorded and later transcribed.

Risks

There is always the risk, however slight, of breach of confidentiality. Also, you might find some questions difficult to answer. You may decline to answer any or all questions and you may terminate your involvement at any time if you choose.

Benefits

The results of this study may have positive benefits for students, teachers, and educational leaders who are interested in better developing transitional programs for students as they transition from middle school to high school.

Confidentiality

Your interview and the responses you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will make every effort to preserve your confidentiality including the following:

- Assigning code names/numbers for participants that will be used on all research notes and documents
- Keeping notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher.

Participant data will be kept confidential except in cases where the researcher is legally obligated to report specific incidents. The list of codes for participants will be kept in a separate locked location from the actual data. Only the code name will appear on the data. Informed consent forms will be kept separate from the data.

Contact Information

If you have questions at any time about this study, or you experience adverse effects as the result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher whose contact information is provided on the first page, Patrick Moore. The lead researcher can be reached at XXX-XXX-XXXX or XXXXX@acu.edu. If the lead research cannot be reached you may contact the faculty advisor Dr. Linnea Rademaker at XXXX@acu.edu. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or if problems arise which you do not feel you can discuss with the Primary Investigator, please contact the Institutional Review Board and Executive Director of Research, Megan Roth, Ph.D. Dr. Roth may be reached at

(XXX) XXX-XXXX

XXXXXX@acu.edu

320 Hardin Administration Bldg, ACU Box 29103

Abilene, TX 796699

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

Consent

I have read, and I understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Type your name in the box below to indicate agreement to participate in this study.

Appendix D: Research Interview Guidelines

Research Questions: What is your perception of participation in a transition program from middle school to high school?

Selecting participants: The researcher will contact the participants by e-mail

Setting place for interview: Interviews will take place at an agreed location and time

Welcome

Introduce myself and thank the participant for attending

Our topic is

Explain what the results from the study will be used for

Explain why the participants were selected

Guidelines

No wrong or right answers

Interview will be recorded, speak clear and feel free to be open

Feel free to not answer a questions

Remember your participation is voluntary feel free to stop at any time

Opening questions

Follow-up questions

Final thoughts

Dismiss

Appendix E: Research Interview Questions

Staff Transitional Program Interview Questions

1. What was your experience while participating in the transitional program?
2. What do you like about the transitional program?
3. What do you dislike about the transitional program?
4. How do you feel about the students in the transitional program?
5. What are some ways you feel the transitional program could improve?
6. How does the transitional program prepare students you for high school?
7. What makes the students better prepared for high school after participating in the transition program?
8. What activity would you add to make the transitional program better?
9. Why do you believe every student should participate in a transition program?
10. If you were a student would you participate in the transitional program again and why or why not?

Appendix F: Focus Group Protocol

Welcome

Introduce myself and thank everyone for attending

Our topic is

Explain what the results from the study will be used for

Explain why the participants were selected

Guidelines

No wrong or right answers

Focus group is being recorded, only one person speaks at a time

Only use first names

You can disagree with others, but do so with respect

No use of phones while in focus group

Opening questions

Final thoughts

Dismiss

Students Transitional Program Focus Group Questions

1. What was your experience while participating in the transitional program?
2. What do you like about the transitional program?
3. What do you dislike about the transitional program?
4. How do you feel about the teachers in the transitional program?
5. What are some ways you feel the transitional program could improve?
6. How does the transitional program prepare you for high school?
7. Do you feel better prepared to move to high school after participating in the program?

8. What activity would you add to make the transitional program better?
9. Do you feel every student should participate in the transitional program?
10. Would you participate in the transitional program again and why or why not?

Appendix G: Coding Matrix

Research Question 1: What are high school students' perceptions of their participation in a transition program from middle school to high school?

Theme	Categories	Description	Supporting Evidence
-Experience -Feeling -Participation or involvement -New friends	-Shared learning - Interest and willingness to participate - Perspective -Opportunity	-How students feel about participating in a form of a transitional program as they move to high school	- The program also allowed me to get involved in band and music is something that has always been fun -Good -Gave opportunity to learn from others - I did have high expectation and worked to keep an open mind to meeting new teachers because each teacher has a different way of teaching and they have a different vibe so I just wanted to keep an open mind. - It was good I guess; it was something new it also allowed me to get involved with band because I was not sure if I wanted to do band in high school because I didn't have a good middle school director. Meeting the high school director made me want to be involved in something else

			<p>- Yea I would do it again it got me involved with other programs after school and since I didn't have anything to do it really in a way motivated me to do more.</p> <p>- it taught me a lot of new experiences and helped me meet a lot of great people so I would do it again it was fun.</p>
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- a. What are high school students' who participated in transition programs experiences with having access to education materials such as technology, books, and tutoring?

Theme	Categories	Description	Supporting Evidence
-Resources -Materials -Participation	-Learning experiences -Environment -Materials	-Materials that are available to assist with learning	<p>- It was also organized and clear. I had access to a computer and study information</p> <p>- I was glad they had a program because it also let me meet some new people and learn some new things. We got to use iPads at times which was cool.</p> <p>- I like that the program has extra help for students who need help in certain subjects and we also can join different clubs like band, college prep and stuff like that.</p>

			- The people are nice and there was help with work.
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b. How do high school students who participated in a transition program describe how they perceive their current and future teachers?

Theme	Categories	Description	Supporting Evidence
-Teachers -Helpful -Motivation - Relationships	-Perception -Learning -Teachers	-Assistance from teachers -Learning from teachers	- The people are nice and there was help with work. - I like all of my teachers overall they are pretty good it's no problem with them. - All the teachers were good in my opinion. - I ended up loving all my teachers they were all nice and I thought they would not be but they all showed that they cared - I heard that many of the teachers did not really care but I mean if you just do your work the teachers really do want to help - I also heard that many of the teachers were mean but they were helpful and ok I guess.

Research Questions 2: What are transition program directors' perceptions of students who participate in the program?

Theme	Categories	Description	Supporting Evidence
-Student success -Culture awareness -Student safety	-Teachers -Students	-Challenges -Thoughts of students	-All students deserve a chance -Any student that wants help will get help so they can succeed -We help students learn what they are missing -Every student needs to know what it is like to be in high school, I believe every student deserves a chance -It is nice to meet the new students that will be coming to high school and getting to learn from the students as well -We want to see the students succeed -We understand that every student learns different. They are all from different backgrounds so we also learn from them -The program also gives the teachers a first-hand look at what students might need additional attention

			<p>-The students need to feel safe and feel important</p> <p>-Every student is essential and important and deserves a chance because all children are special</p>
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a. What are transition program directors' perceptions of how the program benefit students?

Theme	Categories	Description	Supporting Evidence
<p>-Growth</p> <p>-Meeting teachers</p> <p>-Learning new environment</p> <p>-Culture awareness</p>	<p>-Staff</p> <p>-Benefits</p> <p>-Labeled</p>	<p>What do teachers do to provide a benefit to students</p>	<p>-Help the students grow and mature</p> <p>-Well the program allows the students to meet their teachers, learn their surroundings, and see what it is like to be on a high school campus</p> <p>-We do a lot of culture awareness in the program. We are close to three HBCUs.</p> <p>-...By the end of the program you get the watch the students grown and mature and become comfortable with their new surroundings</p> <p>-I want them to know that they can adjust to their new surrounding and that they can go on to be something great in life</p>

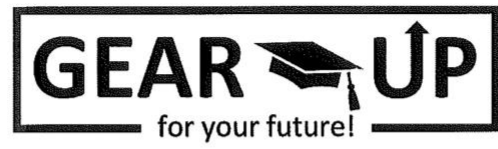
			<p>-I don't want any child to feel like they are being labeled.</p> <p>-It's our duty as educators to make everyone feel welcome</p> <p>-The program helps students get an idea of what it is like to take multiple courses and adjust to multiple teachers</p>
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Research Question 3: How do transition program documents compare with student experiences?

Theme	Categories	Description	Supporting Evidence
<p>-Grades</p> <p>-Improvement</p> <p>-Comfort zone</p>	<p>-Advancing</p> <p>-New things</p>	<p>-Student improvement</p> <p>-Participating in different activities</p>	<p>- I made better grades which meant I would be part of other clubs at school and that all</p> <p>- it got me involved with other programs after school and since I didn't have anything to do it really in a way motivated me to do more.</p> <p>- I would say every student should participate because it really helped me with my grades. The program also made me realize that I could do better in school if I just worked a little harder because the teachers</p>

			<p>want to see me succeed.</p> <p>- I mean I made good grades in middle school but struggled in math and English and I was able to receive extra tutoring to help me understand</p>
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Appendix H: Documentation of Services



Documentation of Services

School		Date	
Additional info:			

STUDENT SERVICES:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tutoring/Academic Programs | <input type="checkbox"/> Summer Program |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Job Site Visit/shadow/intern | <input type="checkbox"/> Educational Field Trip |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Comprehensive Mentoring | <input type="checkbox"/> Workshop |
| <input type="checkbox"/> College Visit/student shadow | <input type="checkbox"/> Family/Cultural Event |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Counseling/Advising/Academic Planning/Career Counseling | <input type="checkbox"/> Financial Aid Counseling/Advising |

TEACHER SERVICES:

- Professional Development

Number of hours for activity: _____ Signature _____

Appendix I: IRB Approval Letter

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885



August 10, 2020

Patrick Moore
Department of Educational Management
Abilene Christian University

Dear Patrick,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "The Effectiveness of a Transitional Program for Students In Middle School as They Transition to High School",

was approved by expedited review (Category 7) on 8/10/2020 (IRB # 20-104). Upon completion of this study, please submit the Inactivation Request Form within 30 days of study completion.

If you wish to make any changes to this study, including but not limited to changes in study personnel, number of participants recruited, changes to the consent form or process, and/or changes in overall methodology, please complete the Study Amendment Request Form.

If any problems develop with the study, including any unanticipated events that may change the risk profile of your study or if there were any unapproved changes in your protocol, please inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs and the IRB promptly using the Unanticipated Events/Noncompliance Form.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs