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What Academically At Risk Students Need from a Summer Transition Program

Tiffany N. Kaiser
The College at Brockport

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Acknowledgments

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Abstract

The topic of school transitions and school transition programs were examined and reported on. At risk students transitioning from 8th to 9th grade were identified and completed a self reporting survey of 14 questions regarding what they have as academic, social/emotional, and programmatic needs. Eighth grade teachers were also surveyed regarding what they saw as the student's academic, social/emotional and programmatic needs. Survey results concluded that that the identified students lack social and academic support and reported that the students' would like more support from teachers. Students and teachers alike identified topics that would be helpful in a summer transition program, including how much homework to expect in high school, what classes to take, and the layout of the building.

What Academically At Risk Students Need from a

Summer Transition Program

The term transition denotes "a passage from one state, stage, subject, or place to another" (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1993). Systematic transition is built into the structure of the public school system, which incorporates developmental transition involving physical, social, and emotional change (Queen, 2002). Increased attention has been dedicated to the impact of age-related transitions in the educational environment related to psychological functioning of adolescents (Harter, Whitesell, & Kowalski, 1992), resulting in being a frequent topic in both research and practice literature in the recent years (Akos & Galassi, 2004). Since it has been noted that transition from one level of education to another can influence school performance and lead to truancy (Garrison, 2006), research has focused exclusively on the characteristics and behaviors of children that are associated with poor school adjustment, including factors that place children at risk during the transition process (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1993).

Additional research has indicated that the transition between schools is often accompanied by a decline in the students' well-being or performance in school (Weiss & Bearman, 2007). This research indicates that during the transition period, many students experience a decrease in their academic achievement and grade point average (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). In fact, school level transition has been used to explain why both dropout and truancy patterns increase when youth move from elementary to middle school and from middle school to high school (Alspaugh, 1998). School transition research continues to examine this relationship between school grade transitions and various other factors that lead to a decline in academic performance (Garrison, 2006).

Review of the Literature

This review will address the literature in the following ways: (1) school transitions, (2) the transitions to middle school and high school in particular, and (3) school transition programs with suggestions for key components to successful programs. While the present research will focus on the transition from middle school to high school specifically, it is noteworthy to discuss the transition to middle school as well. Seidman, Aber, LaRue, & French (1996) affirmed that students face double jeopardy when they make a transition from elementary school to middle school and then experience a second transition to high school. The experience of making a previous transition does not moderate the achievement loss during the second transition to high school (Alspaugh, 1998).

School Transitions

In the course of a school career, children face a host of transitions that vary in intensity and scope (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1993). Every year, students move from elementary school to middle school and from middle school to high school (Rachetta, 2007). It is important to remember that during these transitions students start over each year with new teachers and new peers in a different classroom environment (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1993).

The changes accompanying school transitions require the mutual accommodation between the student and the new environment (Fenzel & Blyth, 1986). Teachers play a significant role in this process, as they are the students' main contact reflecting the schools receptiveness to the students' needs (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). School transitions are often characterized with greater teacher control and authority, more rigid discipline,

and less personal attention from teachers (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). According to Ferguson and Fraser (1998) students relate their deterioration at school with the quality of teacher-student interactions. In addition, the unique attributes of the school structure, such as the number of peers attending the school, quality of teachers, and the presence of specific transition programs impact the ease of transition and subsequent achievement (Smith, 2006).

There have been many arguments related to the effects of transitions but there are limited studies that have compared students who make a transition and those who do not (Beane, 1986; Weiss & Bearman, 2007). Alspaugh and Harting (1995) suggested that students who have already changed schools once will be better at a second transition than those who have not yet changed schools, because they are familiar with the types of adjustments required and have already developed the necessary coping skills. Simmons and Blyth (1987) then argued that students undergoing two transitions did not adjust as well as those making a single transition, hypothesizing two moves are worse than one. Crockett, Petersen, Graber, Schulenberg, and Ebata (1989) compared single and double transition groups, showing that those who encountered more than one transition revealed poorer academic performance than those who only encountered one transition. Alspaugh (1998) also found that schools with two transitions had higher dropout rates than schools with only one transition.

For many, school transitions are not embraced, but rather met with fear, anxiety, and apprehension (Rabideau, 2005; Rachetta, 2007). Students making grade level transitions are often concerned with being successful with schoolwork and finding new friends (Dickey, 2004). In regards to these concerns, Weiss and Bearman (2007) have

found that some of the benefits of transitioning, include allowing students a fresh start, especially for those students who have troubled histories with respect to peer integration, attachment to school, and prior history of grade retention. Supporting this, Seidman, Aber, Allen, and French (1996) found that during transitions students reported increased social support, and extracurricular involvement as well as an increased engagement with peers. While some students may benefit from transitions, it has also been noted that these same experiences can be seen as negative (Weiss & Bearman, 2007).

School Transition Difficulties

The literature has provided evidence that a normative school transition can be challenging and potentially disruptive (Crockett, Petersen, Graber, Schulenberg, & Ebata, 1989). Moving to a new school, even when the move is in the organizational structure is difficult for some (Weiss & Bearman, 2007). School transitions may or may not be difficult for the majority of children depending on the nature of the school and the nature of the adolescents themselves (Fenzel & Blyth, 1986).

There are a variety of reasons why students experience transition difficulties (Schwartz, 2000). Many of these reasons fall into two primary categories of why children have difficulty making school transitions 1) they lack necessary skills, knowledge, or ability to adapt to the new school setting, or 2) their ability to perform in the new setting is disrupted by the change (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1993). Poor school adjustment is a result from a mismatch between the skills, resources, and experience of the child and the structure and demands of the new school setting (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1993). The American school system is structured in such that the tribulations that adolescents face

coincide with the new physical and social environments that mark school transitions (Schiller, 1999).

The transition to a new school is a developmental milestone (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2007), which involves changes in the environment as well as changes in the role of the student (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Following the transition students must negotiate a new physical setting while they integrate themselves into a new social system while taking greater responsibility for their social and academic life (Schiller, 1999). Navigating a new building, new teachers, new class subjects, higher achievement expectations, and new peer groups are some of the challenges that students are facing (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2007; Harter, Whitesell, & Kowalski, 1992). The extent to which transitioning students experience increased risk for maladjustment and school disengagement is largely affected by the magnitude of environmental changes (Gillock & Reyes, 1996).

The more discontinuous two school environments are, the greater psychological, academic, and social disruption there will be (Blyth, Simmons, & Carlton-Ford, 1983). When a student perceives less change in their environment there is less of a disruption to school perceptions, self-perceptions, and academic performance (Gillock & Reyes, 1996). In addition to the change in educational environment, factors such as puberty and the students' perception about the transition and of being able to fit in play a role in the ability of students to adapt to the new school environment (Garrison, 2006). Weiss and Bearman (2007) argue that it may not be the transition that is difficult, but that it is a difficult phase of life.

The biological and social changes associated with puberty have been held responsible for the changes in adolescents' self-perceptions (Wigfield, Eccles, MacIver, Reuman, & Midgley, 1991). Many students face insecurities about their position in a new school hierarchy (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2007), associating the school transition with increased psychological distress, lowered self-esteem, and a decline in academic performance (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1993; Beane, 1986). These insecurities and build up of self-doubt or anxiety can begin to develop while the youth is still in the pre transition grade (Garrison, 2006; Rabideau, 2005). Harter, Whitesell, & Kowalski (1992) found that school transitions have detrimental effects principally on children who already perceive themselves as not very scholastically competent. Schiller (1999) affirmed that when a large group of students move between schools together those at the bottom have difficulty climbing their way up the ladder.

Given the physical, social and intellectual changes that occur during the transition, students face what could be considered a reconstruction of their self-concepts (Beane, 1986). Student self-definitions undergo change as they shift from being the oldest to the youngest again, in relation to their peers (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1993). Knowing the strains and stressors of the transition, it is not surprising that problem behaviors often occur at the school transition time (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2007), in fact those who experience these major life changes all at the same time experience increased difficulty with self-esteem, GPA, and extracurricular participation as well as problem school behavior (Simmons, 1987, Crockett, Petersen, Schulenberg, & Ebata, 1989). Changes that coincide with other changes requiring substantial adaptive efforts may overload the adolescent's capacity to cope (Crockett, Petersen, Schulenberg, & Ebata, 1989). Research

suggests that some students develop self-esteem problems after transitioning (Garrison, 2006). The ability for these children to learn is compromised, resulting in the internalization of stress (Fenzel & Blyth, 1986; Schwartz, 2000). Students then feel less positively about their academic potential and the value of schooling, and give up more quickly and put forth less effort (Garrison, 2006).

Reduction in self-esteem and not fitting in can lead to other adjustment problems including a decline in academic achievement, difficulties in peer relationships, alienation from teachers, and negative views on the efficacy of the school (Beane, 1986; Garrison, 2006). Declines in grades following a school transition may reflect these transition-related disruptions (Crokett, Petersen, Schulenberg, & Ebata, 1989). In addition, declines in grades have been found to be a strong predictor of self-concept, self-efficacy, and confidence in intellectual abilities (Gillock & Reyes, 1996). Grade point average also declines, particularly as students change into junior high school and then again into high school (Crockett, Petersen, Schulenberg, & Ebata, 1989; Simmons, 1987). Thornburg and Glider (1984) argued that changes in self-esteem, perceived anonymity, and academic declines were minimal for transitioning adolescents.

Although there are reported maladjustment difficulties, including declining grades after transitions, the long-term outcomes are largely determined by the ability of the student to cope with and manage change within the new environment (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Simmons, 1987). The short-term responses of students in relation to the transition alter into long-term risk as there coping skills decrease, making the students vulnerable to further academic and social problems (Beane, 1986; Cillessen & Mayeux, 2007). For some, the transition may be stressful and detrimental to well being, undermining the

development of adaptive capacities, while those with sufficient coping skills allow the challenges and demands to generate, mobilize, or enhance the development of internal resources and abilities (Crockett, Petersen, Schulenberg, & Ebata, 1989). Therefore, it is necessary that students have active coping skills to be successful when there is a change to a new school environment with a different physical layout, different role expectations, and higher standards of performance (Crockett, Petersen, Schulenberg, & Ebata, 1989).

Following the transition there are typically tougher teacher standards for academics, reduced levels of engagement with teachers and course work, and intense attention placed on the outcome of student performance (Weiss & Bearman, 2007). The roles of the teachers within the new environment may have lasting unfavorable effects on the attitudes of students (Ferguson & Fraser, 1998). Alienation from school occurs when students rightly or wrongly feel harassed or ignored by teachers and see no connection between school and their futures (Garrison, 2006). This altered teacher-student relationship in particular poses a challenging adaptive task for adolescents (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2007). Students' positive performances have been associated with a well organized, involving, and supportive school environment as well as the high-quality instructional performance of teachers (Fenzel & Blyth, 1986). Although, there seems to be a developmental mismatch between young adolescent needs for a more personalized, student-managed, and task-focused environment and the reality of teacher control and discipline, standards of comparative performance, and fewer opportunities for student initiation and teacher-student relationships starting at the middle school level (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1993).

Middle School Transition

Transitions between schools, particularly entry into middle school may be the closest that American society has to a formal right of passage (Blyth, Simmons, & Carlton-Ford, 1983). This transition from elementary to middle school is seen as the most dramatic change (Crockett, Petersen, Schulenberg, & Ebata, 1989). The transition to middle school has been found to be more disruptive than later transitions; with more long-term and disabling effects (Crockett, Petersen, Schulenberg, & Ebata, 1989). More than 88 percent of public school students in the United States enter a new school as they transition to middle school (Mac Iver & Epstein, 1991). Students face many changes in their school environment related with the transition to middle school (Alspaugh, 1998; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). As the student moves out of childhood into adolescence, he/she makes a transition out of a small, intimate elementary school into a large more impersonal school (Simmons, 1987).

Junior high schools are different structurally than elementary schools, presenting children with a larger social comparison network and more challenges in finding their own niches (Harter, Whitesell, & Kowalski, 1992). These changes of the educational environment experienced by many students could be responsible for the declines associated with the transition to middle school (Eccles, Wigfield, Midgley, & Reuman, 1993). Students must learn to negotiate numerous subject specific teachers and classrooms, placing increased responsibility on the students for making it through the school day (Harter, Whitesell, & Kowalski, 1992). The environment becomes more impersonal, more formal, more evaluative, and more competitive (Harter, Whitesell, & Kowalski, 1992). There seems to be a stage-environment fit problem in the transition to

junior high school, a transition in which young adolescents have shown a downward shift in both motivational orientation and perceived competence, two potential precursors to school failure (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1993; Feldlaufer, Midgley, & Eccles, 1988). The lack of fit between the junior high school environment and the needs of adolescents contributes to the shift toward more negative self-evaluations and attitudes toward learning (Eccles & Midgley, 1990; Harter, Whitesell, & Kowalski, 1992).

Evidence suggests that the transition to junior high school is associated with an increase in whole class task organization, between-classroom ability grouping, and external evaluation, which increases social comparison (Feldlaufer, Midgley, & Eccles, 1988). Middle schools also tend to have goals that focus primarily on performance rather than on the individual (Alspaugh, 1998). The middle school environment becomes more controlling just at the point when adolescents are seeking more autonomy (Harter, Whitesell, & Kowalski, 1992). It has been reported that girls respond more strongly to the sharp environmental change of junior high school than to the physiological changes of puberty where boys seem to react to the pubertal changes but not to those changes of the school environment (Simmons, Blyth, Van Cleave, & Bush, 1979). The transition to middle school often places girls at risk in terms of their self-esteem and both boys and girls at risk in terms of grade point average (Blyth, Simmons, & Carlton-Ford, 1983).

Researchers have found declines in student self-perception and self-esteem associated with this transition from elementary school to middle school (Alspaugh, 1998). Girls who have transitioned to junior high school are at greater risk for negative self-esteem than other children (Simmons, Blyth, Van Cleave, & Bush, 1979). This transition has been implicated in producing lowered perceptions of academic

competence, decreased academic motivation, and a weakened interest in learning (Harter, Whitesell, & Kowalski, 1992). It has also been reported that students participation in activities drop after their transition to junior high school (Fenzel & Blyth, 1986). Other researchers have suggested that the timng of the middle school transition along with pubertal development may be the cause of such declines (Eccles, Wigfield, Midgley, & Reuman, 1993; Wigfield, Eccles, MacIver, Reuman, & Midgley, 1991).

A student's ability to transition well to a secondary school depends on several factors, including personal maturity and coping resources, the nature of the new school environment, and the level of preparation and social support available prop to and during the transition (Crockett, Petersen, Schulenberg, & Ebata, 1989). It is important to provide middle school students with activities that will relate directly to their transition into high school (Mizelle, 1998). The experiences that students have in middle school are predictive of their later motivation and behavior in high school (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000; Queen, 2002).

High School Transition

The process of transitioning from middle school to high school is one of the many developmental challenges that students face in their adolescent lives (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Mizelle, 1998; Reents, 2002). While the transition into a secondary school is a normative change, it is a defined source of stress for young adolescents (Chute, 1999; Fenzel & Blyth, 1986). Starting ninth grade is not just another transition, for most students it is a major life change (Supporting Successful Transition to Ninth Grade). It can be one of the most emotionally difficult, most academically challenging times in a child's life (Reents, 2002), although for some the transition presents new opportunities

where students who previously struggled get a fresh academic start (Phillips, 1984;

Schriller, 1999; Smith, 2006). Kinney (1993) found that the high school transition is

beneficial to those students who were unpopular in middle school, while Schiller (1999)

found that students that struggled academically in the eighth grade benefited from

attending a high school in which the majority of students did not come from their eighth

grade school.

There are many academic, personal, and social changes that adolescents face as

they transition to high school (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Schiller,

1999). Incoming ninth graders encounter what is called "top dog" phenomenon, moving

from the top position in one school to the bottom position in the new school, this shift

from "top dog" to "bottom dog" may cause a variety of disruptions or difficulties for

students (Blyth, Simmons, & Carlton-Ford, 1983). The process of transition from middle

to high school involves a new environment and new roles and behaviors for the student

(Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Compared to elementary and middle schools, high schools are

larger, more bureaucratic environments (Stone, 2006).

Challenges with social and academic functioning suffer because the social system

is larger and opportunities for individual attention and support from teachers are

minimized (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2007). Students reported a decline in the supportiveness

of the school environment; including relationships with teachers and the engagement in

course work follow the transition (Dickey, 2004; Stone, 2006). Students also report that if

their middle school teachers held them more responsible for their learning, taught them

more about strategies for learning on their own, and provided them with a more

challenging curriculum, their transition to high school would have been easier (Mizelle,

1998). Students often have difficulty transitioning to the next school level because they do not feel fully prepared (Queen, 2002). Dissatisfaction with school is one of the most given reasons for students who drop out of school (Pittman & Haughwout, 1987).

Academic accomplishment is the main priority in secondary schools but there seems to be little formal attention to the needs of the students (Osterman, 2000). Factors such as more departmentalized curriculum and whole class instruction are evident and can create a more competitive atmosphere, therefore complicating student adjustment (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1993; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). These classroom conditions can influence students' feelings about themselves, in turn reflecting student engagement and achievement (Osterman, 2000). Ferguson and Fraser (1998) disagreed and stated that secondary schools were perceived as having less friction and competitiveness than primary schools. When students experience a difference in institutional organization it is often linked to lower levels of trust, greater emphasis on discipline, and lower levels of connection and engagement or students (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Weiss & Bearman, 2007). It can be an unpleasant experience even to those students who have been labeled "gifted" or "high-achieving" in middle school (Mizelle, 1998), although students possessing an academic advantage have been found to be better prepared to make the high school transition (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2007; Cillock & Reyes, 1996).

Incoming freshman have fears about transitioning into high school (O'Brien, 2003). Studies that have included students' thoughts and feelings about moving into high school reveal that they are both exited and concerned with the transition (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000), some of their concerns include, being picked on and teased, having harder work, grades, and getting lost in an unfamiliar school (Mizelle, 1998). Results from Cotterell

(1992) outline three main kinds of adjustment reaction a) feelings of anxiety, confusion, insignificance, and alienation b) initial anxiety which the student "deals with" and c) expressions of excitement, enjoyment, sense of belonging, and a sense of being more "grown up". It has been found to bring about increased levels in stress, a decrease in self-esteem, deteriorated academic performance, and a heightened risk for maladjustment (Blyth, Simmons, & Carlton-Ford, 1983; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Mizelle, 1998), leading to a decrease in academic performance and an increase in absenteeism (Reyes & Hedeker, 1993). Failure to monitor student reactions during the transition may result in passivity or anti-school attitudes (Brown & Armstrong, 1982; Heck & Mahoe, 2006).

Ninth grade is considered a crucial year for determining whether a student will graduate from high school (Chute, 1999). Entrance into high school provides the potential for both advancement and failure (Schiller, 1999). If a student is successful in their freshman year they tend to have continued success (Minaya, 2007). On the other hand poor performance in the first year of high school establishes a pattern of failure, leading to poor educational outcomes throughout school, therefore significantly heightening the possibility of drooping out of school (Phillips, 1984; Weiss & Bearman, 2007). The ninth grade accounts for the largest number of students with poor attendance, tardiness, and those students who cause disturbances and disruptions (Queen, 2002).

Nationally, the average percentage for the holding back of ninth-graders is in the mid 20 percent, according to a survey of 400 high schools and their sending middle schools (Chute, 1999). It is likely for students who have a difficult transition to never reach their academic and social potential (Schiller, 1999). These outcomes may be due to more difficult grading standards by teachers of older students and not necessarily the

transition process (Simmons, 1987). When students' needs are not met in an educational setting it is predicted that there will be diminished motivation, impaired development, alienation, and poor performance (Osterman, 2000).

The transition to high school can be a vital turning point in adolescent's social and academic lives (Queen, 2002; Schiller, 1999). First year high school students may become distracted by the increased complexity of social interactions that are pertinent within the high school environment (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Seidman, Aber, LaRue, and French (1996) found that the transition to high school was marked with increased engagement with peers. This transition is often characterized by an increasing number of students and groups who form more diverse peer cultures that are organized into a less hierarchical social structure (Kinney, 1993). Increasing levels of peer support may assist in reducing transitioning students' emotional stress and increase their attachment to the high school (Schiller, 1999).

Peer groups have been identified as having an essential influence on students' academic performance following the transition to high school (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Weiss & Bearman, 2007). Peer group influences can push students towards academic achievement and school-level involvement or pull them away (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1993). The emergence of a new peer group is a reference point for behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes, resulting in an expanded social ground (Beane, 1986). For some, having an increased opportunity to find meaningful and rewarding relationships among the diverse groups or cultures found in many high schools allows them to bloom (Mac Iver & Epstein, 1991; Schiller, 1999).

Research has demonstrated a link between positive peer relationships and academic engagement, as well as peer status and academic achievement (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2007). Extreme orientation toward peers could also lead to poorer family relationships during high school (Fuligni, Eccles, Barber, & Clements, 2001). At the time that the students peer groups' influence increases, parental influence seems to decrease (Weiss & Bearman, 2007). Some researchers have speculated that students often exchange their dependency on their parents with a dependency on their peers during the transition (Fuligni, Eccles, Barber, & Clements, 2001). The move to a new school involves disrupting relationships with teachers and peers at a time when adolescents are becoming more independent from their families and are experiencing less parental involvement (Schiller, 1999). In addition, students whose family life is in turmoil often suffer from lack of parental involvement (Schwartz, 2000).

Parental Involvement

The transition to high school is also a change for the parents, as they are often not as involved with their children in high school as in the middle and elementary grades because students are not comfortable having their parents around (Queen, 2002; Weiss & Bearman, 2007). Parental involvement in schooling appears to be instable as the adolescent experiences stressors associated with this transition (Stone, 2006). As the student transitions to high school his/her parents generally give him/her greater autonomy (Weiss & Bearman, 2007), resulting in decreased parent monitoring of students' time, less direct communication with the school, diminished assistance with homework, as well as a decline in school related discussions (Stone, 2006).

When parents are involved in the transition to high school they tend to stay involved in their child's school experiences, increasing the students' achievement and decreasing the likelihood of dropping out (Mizelle, 1998). Parents must do a series of small things to assist their child toward maximum educational attainment, ranging from monitoring performance to managing a specific school problem (Baker, 1986). Perceived support from parents is related to the students' adjustment to the high school transition (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999). If a student does not feel supported his/her grades and attendance may suffer (Stone, 2006). A large national and regional survey found associations between supportive home environments and adolescent school success (Stone, 2006).

Characteristics and practices of the high school also play a role in parent involvement; they can shape the levels of parental involvement (Paulson, 1994). It is important that the school includes parents to ensure that they are involved in and understand the course selection process and the long term effects of course selection decisions (Mizelle, 1998). Parental involvement in school functions has been found to be positively related to achievement (Paulson, 1994). It is important for the school to make it inviting for the parents to become involved since the structural factors of the high school often make it less inviting to parents and confine the interaction between teachers and parents (Stone, 2006). Students need the help and guidance of adults, specifically a parent, in the transition in order for their self-perceptions are to be accurate, realistic, and positive (Beane, 1986). Although this is a time when adolescents need the security, guidance, and support of close, caring adults they are also desperate for increasing autonomy from adults (Mac Iver & Epstein, 1991).

The transition to high school is the most critical point for parents and schools to intervene and prevent students from losing motivation, failing, and dropping out of school (Reents, 2002). Black (2004) found that most high schools offer little or no guidance to help ninth-graders adjust academically and/or socially. It is a critical time for transition supports designed to assure all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school to be put in place (Supporting Successful Transition to Ninth Grade).

Transition Programs

Transition programs are designed to smooth the transition to the next level of schooling and give students the attention they need during this critical time (Reents, 2002). Transitions need to be smooth in order to avoid drastic changes and to limit the negative impact on the students (Queen, 2002; Reents, 2002). The question of whether transition programs made available to middle school students in attempt to aid them in getting into, and performing well in high school has concerned educators since the creation of separate schools (Smith, 1997). Some schools have embraced a 7th-12th-grade model, removing the middle school transition, while others are using freshman transition centers to aid in a smooth transition from middle school to high school (Felner, 2002; Smith, 2006). Whatever it may be, it is important that schools create an environment that provides students with the best educational and social opportunities possible (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Many middle schools and high schools have developed school transition programs (Mac Iver & Epstein, 1991), although few have proposed specific interventions to make the school environment more accommodating to the special needs of children in transition (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1993).

It is important to look at how the qualities of the students interact with the characteristics of the settings to determine whether it promotes or undermines the success of the transition (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1993). Many interventions focus on deficits in the child when deficits in the environment may be the more serious problem (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1993). The school can offer guidance during the time of the transition by providing factual information and a supportive environment (Beane, 1986). If teachers and school personnel are knowledgeable and sensitive to potential stumbling blocks for students and parents they are in a position to provide the necessary academic and social support that is essential to addressing transition challenges successfully (Akos & Galassi, 2004). Identifying academically at risk youth and helping them to improve their outcomes is an important goal for educators and school administrators (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2007; Felner, 2002).

Investing in a transition program to aid the students' transition to high school is critical (Smith, 1997). Mizelle and Irvin (2000) report that schools that have extensive transition programs have significantly lower failure and dropout rates than schools that do not have such programs. Fewer students are retained after the transition if they participated in a transition program with diverse activities (Mizelle, 1998). Eighth grade transition programs should provide the opportunity for a variety of specific activities aimed at enhancing positive motivation about making the ninth grade transition (Supporting Successful Transition to Ninth Grade). Mizelle and Irvin (2000) report that the best transition programs are those that include a variety of activities, in particular, counseling, school visits, and special summer courses to help students understand the

new school. School districts that do not have transition programs could risk watching their ninth grade students fall through the cracks (Reents, 2002).

High quality, long term programs should begin early and continue throughout the schooling of targeted groups (Schwartz, 2000). It is important to be proactive and address potential problems at the earliest stage of transition (Addressing School Adjustment Problems). Student's often face three kinds of problems that they must master while embracing the transition 1) reordering of assumptive worlds, 2) shifts in role definition and role behavior, and 3) reconstruction of social networks and social supports (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1993). It is important that a transition program focuses these social and personal needs of the students to address and reduce their concerns and anxiety (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2005).

Smith (1997) found a positive association between middle schools with transition programs that involve students, parents, and teachers and student achievement and school completion. It is the schools responsibility to encourage the development of a sense of community by designing communal activities in which everyone has the opportunity to participate (Felner, 2002; Mizelle & Irvin, 2002; Osterman, 2000). Successful transition programs include activities that bring administrators, counselors, and teachers from all levels together to learn about programs, courses, curriculum, and requirements of their respective schools (Mizelle, 1998). It is important to establish a set of criteria for identifying critical transition points and for the responsibilities of staff and educators to be clearly defined at every level (Queen, 2002).

Mizelle and Irvin (2000) also recommend that a high school transition program include a variety of activities that provide students and parents' information about the

new school, provide students with social support during the transition, and bring middle

school and high school personnel together to learn about curriculum and requirements.

Transition programs developed to guide students and parents step-by-step will help

guarantee that the transition will be calmer and better structured (Queen, 2002). When

planning activities for parents, educators should remember that parents of students who

are already in high school are an excellent resource for other parents and may also

encourage new parents to be more involved in school activities (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000).

    It is fundamental that a transition program includes activities that will provide

incoming students an opportunity to socialize with older students and other incoming

students (Mizelle, 1998). A hands-on, inquiry-oriented curriculum with students divided

into small groups has been shown to be more effective than traditional teaching methods

(Schwartz, 2000). Findings from the Tennessee's STAR Project show that there are

noteworthy benefits of smaller class sizes for student achievement (Weiss & Bearman,

2007).

    Coordinating programs involving intense reading training and tutoring, frequent

assessment of student progress, and parental support services, may provide assistance

with building relationships and successfully transitioning (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1993).

Particular attention should be paid to enhancing opportunities for social support,

counseling, and advocacy (Supporting Successful Transition to Ninth Grade). It is also

beneficial for students to belong to various clubs, organizations, and sports, as it will

contribute to a sense of belongingness (Dickey, 2004). Increased participation in school

activities reduces the likelihood of a student leaving school (Pittman & Haughwout,

1987; Simmons, 1987).

Focusing on the student's assets, such as outside interests, hobbies and what he/she likes at school will allow an opportunity to build a positive working relationship between the student and school personnel (Addressing School Adjustment Problems). Transition support should aim at creating a good "match" or "fit" between students and the school environment, including school personnel (Supporting Successful Transition to Ninth Grade). Transition support should also include programs designed to deepen students knowledge and skills, increase social and emotional problem solving capabilities, and enhance student feelings of competence, self-determination, and connectedness with support from others (Schwartz, 2000; Supporting Successful Transition to Ninth Grade).

 North High School located in Eau Claire, Wisconsin held a "Preview Night" for eighth graders and their families to learn about courses offered, a tour of the school, and a heartfelt welcome from the high school administration, staff, and students (O'Brien, 2003). When a student are able to meet teachers and take tours of the school before the transition they are more apt to transition well because they feel more prepared (Queen, 2002). Teachers at Ithaca High School adopted a summer transition program, where the focus was to; introduce students to high school level expectations, show students how to manage their time and develop good study skills, orient them to the building, and go over key skills like reading their schedules and using textbooks (Rachetta, 2007).

It has been reported that summer school transition programs are an effective strategy, as it prevents a loss of learning for at-risk students and provides them with a head start on the upcoming school year (Black, 2004). Students who attended schools with a transition program were more likely to experience a smooth transition to high

school than students who attended schools without such programs (Felner, 2002; Smith, 2006). Students who have had access to full and partial transition programs show higher average GPA following the transition as opposed to students who do not have access to transition programs in middle school (Smith, 1997). Successful transitions are marked by students who feel a sense of connectedness and belongingness, those who are engaged in classroom learning, and who are able to cope with daily stressors (Supporting Successful Transition to Ninth Grade). Programs should be evaluated frequently and altered accordingly to have continued success (Schwartz, 2000).

Smith (1997) found that programs designed specifically to assist students' transition to high school are effective, especially when the school provides complete support for such programs, making it critical for schools to build bridges between eighth and ninth grades (Chute, 1999). Designing and implementing activities for a particular high school transition program involves middle school and high school educators working together (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000), focusing on enrichment, rather than remediation (Schwartz, 2000).

Summary

The school transitions at early adolescence are of special interest and concern because they coincide with the individual and contextual changes that make this period a particularly challenging one (Crockett, Petersen, Schulenberg, & Ebata, 1989). Planned school transitions affect students' subsequent academic and social integration in high school (Heck & Mahoe, 2006). When considering an appropriate intervention to promote better school adjustment for children, to help more children make successful transitions it is necessary to relate all factors which can lead to difficulty with school transitions

including characteristics of the child, features of the environment, and the interaction

between the two (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1993).

The present research will focus on gathering data on the academic,

social/emotional, and programmatic needs of middle school students transitioning to the

high school. It is hypothesized that the identified 8th grade students and their teachers will

differentiate unfulfilled academic, social/emotional, and programmatic needs. The data

gathered will be analyzed to assist in developing a summer transition program designed

for 8th grade students identified as academically at risk.

<div align="center">Method</div>

Setting

The present research took place in a middle-sized rural/suburban middle school

located in the Northeast United States. The school is made up of 764 students, consisting

of grades seventh, and eighth. Specifically there are 366 students enrolled in the seventh

grade and 398 enrolled in the eighth grade. The average class size consists of 23

students. Of the 764 students 92 were eligible for free lunch, while 47 were eligible for

reduced price lunch. The school consists of mainly Caucasian students, a reported 717

students, 17 Black or African American, 7 Hispanic or Latino, and 6 American Indian or

Alaska Native (Office of Information and Reporting Services, 2006). There were 6

students identified as being limited in English proficiency. The district as a whole

borders a shoreline encompassing 68 square miles primarily rural/suburban in portions of

four towns, serving a population of 24,000 residents (Office of Information and

Reporting Services, 2006).

There were a total of 59 employed teachers, 4 other professional staff, 1 assistant principal, and 1 principal. There were a total of 190 identified core classes taught. The 8th grade students were broken into two teams. Each team consisted of five core classes including Math, English, Science, Language Other Than English (L.O.T.E.), and Social Studies. There are a total of 17 core class teachers in the 8th grade.

Participants

Identified academically at risk 8th grade students were surveyed. Academically at risk was defined as a student failing one or more core classes including Math, English, Science, Language Other Than English (L.O.T.E), and Social Studies as of November 9, 2007, which distinguished the end of the first marking period. A total of 51 8th grade students were given surveys to complete, consisting of 40 males and 11 females. The students were asked to not place their name on the survey. These students were chosen because as Weiss & Bearman (2007) stated, over 40 percent of all freshman will fail one or more major subject during the first semester of high school and these students were already facing failure.

In addition to students being surveyed, 8th grade teachers were also surveyed. Teachers were surveyed if they taught a core class, also defined as Math, English, Science, Language Other Than English (L.O.T.E.) or Social Studies with one or more of the identified students in their class. The teachers were asked to fill out a separate survey on each of the identified students in their class. Although some students were failing more than one core class at the time, only one core class teacher was asked to fill out a survey for each of the identified students. The teachers were provided with a list from the researcher of what students they were being asked to complete a survey about. The

teachers were asked to not place the students name on the survey. A total of 17 teachers were asked to fill out surveys.

Materials

The researcher developed two surveys, one that was distributed to the 8th grade students and one that was distributed to the 8th grade teachers. Questionnaires are an effective way of collecting information from the point of view of the respondents (Needs Assessment Decision Aid). Since one of the advantages of utilizing surveys is the ability to obtain information on behavior as well as opinions (Iowa State University Extension, 2001), both surveys were comprised of 14 questions including open-ended, multiple choice, and ranking type questions related to the academic, social/emotional, and programmatic needs and opinions of the students. The surveys were designed to take no longer than 15 minutes. Questionnaires are efficient when the respondents spend no more than 10 to 15 minutes completing them (Needs Assessment Decision Aid).

The surveys asked the same questions of the students and teachers except for one question (Appendix C & D). The surveys were developed with the aid of the assistant principal at the district's high school, who is responsible for implementing the summer transition program. The questions were developed in hopes to receive data on what types of information and learning environments should be provided at a summer transition program for this specific district.

Procedure

The researcher obtained permission from the Director of Student Services, the Middle School Principal, High School Principal, and District Superintendent to complete the research. The researcher also submitted a proposal to the College at Brockport's

Institutional Review Board that was accepted and supported. After receiving support

from all of the above, a list of 8th grade student's failing one or more core classes as of

November 9, 2007 was obtained from the middle school counseling office. The list

contained the students name, address, what class(s) they were failing, and the teachers

name of the failing class. A packet containing a parental consent (Appendix B), minor

consent (Appendix A), a student survey (Appendix C), and a preaddressed, stamped

return envelope, were mailed home to each of the 51 identified students and their parents.

They were asked to sign the consent forms, and complete the survey and return them in

the enclosed envelope back to the primary investigator. Roughly three weeks later a

letter was sent home to all 51 students' and parents' to remind them to complete and

return the survey that they received a few weeks prior.

The teacher surveys (Appendix D) were placed in the identified teachers'

mailboxes located at the main office of the middle school along with an explanation of

the project and names of the students' they were being asked to complete the surveys on.

Approximately three weeks after the surveys were distributed the researcher and the

assistant high school principal jointly sent out an e-mail to the identified teachers to

remind them to fill out the surveys that were placed in their mailboxes a few weeks prior.

<div align="center">Results</div>

Of the 51 surveys sent to 8th grade academically at risk students 6 were completed

and returned, resulting in a 12% response rate. Of the 51 surveys distributed to 17 8th

grade teachers 17 surveys were returned, resulting in a 33% response rate. Overall there

was a 45% response rate. These are the data:

Table 1

	Student Responses	Teacher Responses	Combined Responses
Male	100%	94%	96%
Female	0%	6%	4%

The highest percentage of student respondents were male students, in addition the

surveys filled out by teachers were mostly on male students.

Question #1

What type of learner is the identified student?

Table 2

	Student Responses	Teacher Responses	Combined Responses
Visual	50%	12%	22%
Auditory	0%	18%	13%
Tactile/Kinesthetic	33%	29%	30%
More than one	50%	41%	43%

Both student and teacher responses identified the students as being more than one type of

learner.

Question #2

Does the student like to be social while learning?

Table 3

	Student Responses	Teacher Responses	Combined Responses
Yes	67%	65%	65%
No	0%	35%	26%
Sometimes	33%	0%	9%

Teacher and student responses were consistent with identifying that the students like to

be social while learning.

 If yes or sometimes when does the student prefer social activities?

Table 4

	Student Responses	Teacher Responses	Combined Responses
In the beginning of the day	33%	29%	30%

At the end of the day	0%	24%	17%
Within instruction	67%	94%	87%

The highest percentage of responses revealed that the identified students like to be social

within instruction.

Question #3 (Student survey)

What type of clubs, activities, sports or other extracurricular activities are you involved

in? If none, what has stopped you from becoming involved?

Responses included lacrosse, travel soccer, paintball, football, working out, and

basketball, 33% of the respondents stated that they are not involved in any extracurricular

activities. Of the 33% who responded that they are not involved in any extracurricular

activities, 100% identified that the reason they are not involved is because of their grades.

Question #3 (Teacher survey)

How often does he/she stay after school to receive extra help? (in hours)

Table 5

	Teacher Responses
0-5	100%
5-10	0%
10 or more	0%

All teachers responded that the identified students stay after 0-5 hours to receive extra

help.

Question #4

Does the student like to work alone or in a group?

Table 6

	Student Responses	Teacher Responses	Combined Responses
Alone	17%	12%	13%
Group	83%	88%	87%

The highest percentage of both student and teacher responses revealed that the identified

students like to work in a group.

Question #5

What area does the student need more information on regarding the transition to high

school?

Table 7

	Student Responses	Teacher Responses	Combined Responses
What classes to take	67%	18%	30%
School Expectations	17%	41%	35%
Classroom Expectations	33%	35%	35%
Understanding the schedule	50%	35%	39%
Layout of the building	33%	24%	26%
Who to go to if there is a problem	17%	29%	26%
How much homework there is	33%	59%	52%
None of the above	0%	0%	0%
All of the above	0%	18%	13%
Other	0%	6%	4%

The highest percentage of student responses (67%) identified that need more information

on what classes to take, the highest percentage of teacher responses (59%), as well as the

combined teacher and student responses (52%) revealed that the identified students need

more information on how much homework there is in high school.

Would you like this information provided in a summer school program?

Table 8

	Student Responses	Teacher Responses	Combined Responses
Yes	67%	94%	87%
No	33%	6%	13%

The highest percentage of both student and teacher responses state that they would like to

have information such as what was listed in the first part of question #5 offered in a

summer school program.

Question #6

Does the student feel like they have academic/social support?

Table 9

	Student Responses	Teacher Responses	Combined Responses
Yes	50%	24%	30%
No	50%	76%	70%

Of the student responses half revealed that they feel like they have social and academic

support while half stated that they do not feel that they have social and academic support.

Of the teacher responses the highest percentage (76%) stated that the identified students

do not receive social and academic support.

Question #7

Who would the student like more support from academically and socially?

Table 10

	Student Responses	Teacher Responses	Combined Responses
Parents	17%	35%	30%
Friends	33%	0%	9%
Siblings	0%	6%	4%
Teachers	67%	47%	52%
Principal	0%	0%	0%
Counselors	0%	41%	3%
Religious Leader	0%	0%	0%
Relatives	17%	6%	9%
Other	0%	0%	0%

Of all the responses, including student, teacher and their combined percentages it was

revealed that the identified students would like to receive more social and academic

support from their teachers.

Question #8

What stops the identified student from asking for more social/academic support?

Student responses:

67% of the surveys did not have an answer to this question; the other 33% stated that they

do not ask for more social and academic support because they are embarrassed.

Teacher responses:

35% of the surveys did not have an answer to this question; of the other 65% of responses

64% stated that the students do not ask for more social/academic support because they do

not care and have a lack of motivation. The remaining 36% of responses were varied

including, the student doesn't know what to do, the student does not understand the depth

of the issue, and the student is facing depression.

Question #9

What does the student like least about school?

Table 11

	Student Responses	Teacher Responses	Combined Responses
Homework	83%	88%	87%
Classes	33%	18%	30%
Being with friends	0%	6%	4%
Teachers	17%	12%	13%
Principal	17%	0%	4%
School rules	17%	12%	13%
Other	17%	0%	4%

The highest percentages of both the student (83%) and teacher responses (88%) identified

homework the object that the students like least about school.

Question #10

What are some of the challenges that the students are facing in 8th grade?

Table 12

	Student Responses	Teacher Responses	Combined Responses
Making/Keeping friends	17%	29%	26%
Romantic relationships	0%	6%	4%
Not doing	50%	76%	70%

homework			
Not enough help	0%	35%	26%
Home life	33%	53%	48%
Attendance	17%	24%	22%
Not paying attention in class	50%	53%	52%
Not understanding the content	33%	53%	48%
Not enough individualized time with teachers	0%	35%	26%
Drug/Alcohol abuse	0%	18%	13%
Other	0%	0%	0%

The highest overall percentages identified not doing homework as the challenge that the

students are facing most often.

Question #11

The student doesn't perform better because….

Table 13

	Student Responses	Teacher Responses	Combined Responses
It irritates their parents	0%	6%	4%
Their friends don't think it's cool	0%	0%	0%
They have better things to do	33%	24%	26%
They don't like to ask for help	83%	47%	57%
They get frustrated with homework	17%	18%	26%
They don't care if they do well	50%	65%	48%
They don't like others telling them what to do	0%	12%	17%
They don't think they can do any better	33%	24%	17%
Other	0%	0%	0%

The highest percentage of student responses (83%) revealed that they do not perform

better because they do not like to ask for help. The highest percentage of teacher

responses (65%) exposed that the students don't perform better because they don't care if

they do well.

Question #12

What do the students think they would benefit from most in a summer transition

program? (Rated 1=most beneficial, 5= least beneficial)

Table 14

Additional help with reading/writing/ math	Student responses	Teacher Responses	Combined Responses
1	33%	41%	39%
2	50%	29%	35%
3	0%	18%	13%
4	0%	12%	9%
5	17%	0%	4%

Table 15

Time for social/recreational activities	Student responses	Teacher Responses	Combined Responses
1	17%	47%	39%
2	0%	6%	4%
3	17%	6%	9%
4	50%	29%	35%
5	17%	12%	13%

Table 16

Information regarding the high school	Student Responses	Teacher Responses	Combined Responses
1	17%	47%	39%
2	17%	12%	17%
3	33%	6%	9%
4	0%	29%	17%
5	33%	12%	17%

Table 17

Meeting and being taught by a variety of high school teachers	Student Responses	Teacher Responses	Combined Responses
1	17%	12%	13%

2	33%	47%	43%
3	17%	29%	22%
4	0%	0%	0%
5	33%	18%	22%

Table 18

Counseling opportunities	Student Responses	Teacher Responses	Combined Responses
1	0%	47%	35%
2	17%	29%	22%
3	0%	12%	9%
4	17%	0%	4%
5	67%	12%	26%

Overall student responses revealed that they would find additional help with reading,

writing, and math as well as being taught by a variety of high school teachers most

beneficial in a summer transition program. Of the teacher responses, they too thought that

students being taught by a variety of high school teachers would be beneficial, in

addition, the teachers identified all of the options listed as being beneficial to the students

in a summer transition program.

 Question #13

How can we better help the students to succeed in school?

Student responses:

83% of the students answered this question. Of the 83%, 80% stated that if they were

given more help and one on one attention it would help them better succeed in school.

Teacher responses:

47% of surveys did not include an answer to this question. Of the remaining 53%, 67%

stated that if there were real and logical consequences carried out as well as continued

support it would help the students succeed. The other 33% stated that motivating the

students would help them succeed.

Question #14

What steps can the students take to succeed in school?

Student responses:

67% of the responses stated that the students think that they will succeed in school if they stay focused and pay attention more. The other 33% of respondents stated that they would be more successful in school if they complete their homework.

Teacher responses:

71% of teachers responded that the identified students could be more successful at school if they did their homework and became more motivated. The other 29% stated that the students would need to receive counseling and parental support in order to be more successful because school is second to home life.

Discussion

The current study was aimed to have an identified group of students and their teachers identify their academic, social/emotional, and programmatic needs through a survey style questionnaire. The purpose of conducing such research was to assist a particular high school with the development and implementation of a summer transition program offered to academically at risk 8th graders. Findings supported the current research hypothesis; both the identified students and their teachers were able to recognize their academic, social/emotional and programmatic needs. In addition, they were able to distinguish what challenges they are currently facing and what they need more information on regarding their transition to the high school.

Findings were consistent with Alvidrez and Weinstein's (1993) thought that a transition program should have additional help with reading and other tutoring

availability. Both the students' and teachers' responses identified additional help with reading, writing, and math as one of the most beneficial aspects of a summer transition program.

The increase in number of subject specific classes and increase in responsibility of completing homework has been seen as a challenge of transitioning to the middle school (Harter, Whitesell, & Kowalski, 1992). The findings of the current research are consistent with this, as the students and teachers both identified not doing homework and not paying attention in class as the most significant challenge that the highest percentage of the identified students are facing. In addition, the results also show that students would like to know more about how much homework there would be in high school. Homework was also identified as the number one thing that the students do not like about school. Although the students have identified homework as what they do not like about school, they have also reported that in order to achieve academic success they need to complete their homework. It can be concluded that homework is a polarizing problem that the students are facing, on one hand they are identifying that they need to do homework in order to be successful at school, but on the other hand they have identified homework as what they do not like about school. Homework may be a consistent problem with the identified students in the current research due to the variety of learning styles the students has. The highest percentage of students and teachers identified the students as having more than one type of learning style; this could distract the student from concentrating on homework, especially if the homework is geared toward only one type of learning style.

Prior research has acknowledged that opportunities for individual attention and support from teachers are minimized, as well as a decline in the supportiveness of

teachers (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2007; Dickey, 2004; Stone, 2006). Both student and teacher survey responses indicated that there is a need for more social and/or academic support from teachers in order achieve academic success. Consistent with the literature students and teachers also identified the need for more parental support. In addition to support from teachers and parents, Dickey (2004) states belonging to clubs and activities will help students' feel a sense of belongingness, through the findings of the current research students that are not involved in clubs and/or activities have identified that the reason they are not is due to their unwillingness to complete homework, therefore affecting their grades making them ineligible to participate.

Limitations

Although the results of the completed surveys provided momentous information regarding what students have as challenges in the 8th grade and what would help support them in being academically successful in the transition to high school there were limitations to the study which if not present t could have lead to receiving more information.

The first noted limitation was the low percentage of surveys returned. There was a limited number of surveys sent out due to the outlined criterion, in addition to the low number of surveys sent out there was a significantly lower percentage returned. As parents were required to sign the consent form, they may not have found the research relevant to their child's education or they did not want their child to participate in the study. As Stone (2006) reported parental involvement begins to decrease the year prior to the transition to high school. In addition, the students may have filled out the survey in front of their parents, since the surveys were mailed home; therefore the students'

answers may not be entirely truthful. Also, only 8th grade students failing one or more core classes at the end of the first marking period were surveyed. It is assumed that there was students other than those surveyed who failed on or more core class at another point throughout the year. It is possible that those students not surveyed would be eligible to participate in the summer school program.

Lastly, the primary investigator developed the instruments distributed; therefore there is no documented reliability and/or validity on these instruments. It was also asked that the 8th grade teachers fill out only one survey on each of the identified students. For those students failing more than one class, multiple surveys could have been helpful as each of the classroom dimensions are different, therefore allowing for different behaviors, achievement, and learning styles from the student.

Suggestion for Future Research

The current research was aimed to assist one particular high school with gathering information for the continued development of a summer transition program. Since the research was intended for one specific school future research should focus on examining whether there are consistencies throughout various schools including urban, suburban, and rural schools. It would be significant for future research to have a larger sample size to analyze a variety of students thoughts instead of just those identified as academically at risk, as not only academically at risk students have fears and concerns regarding the transition to high school. Future research should provide facts on what 8th graders fear most about the transition to high school, therefore providing concrete data regarding what high schools should focus on in their transition programs.

Although surveys represent the participants perspective, it would be beneficial in future research to interview participants, in order to get the their whole story. Unless the respondents are very specific with answering the open ended questions it leaves room for interpretation from the researcher when compiling data. If the participants were interviewed it would eliminate misinterpretation of their written answers.

Implications for Implementation

The findings of the current research have produced significant indications of the challenges and fears that the identified 8th graders are facing prior to their transition to high school. It is vital that during the development of a transition program that these findings are taken into account to aim the focus of the transition program directly at what the students are struggling with.

The students' have been identified as having more than one learning style, therefore, while teaching students both during a transition program and within normal school instruction it is imperative that the teachers incorporate the variety of learning styles, including visual, auditory and tactile/kinesthetic. This means including a variety of listening, hands on and visual type activities. As students' have identified homework as being a problem in the year prior to the transition it is important to assist students with homework skills and to provide them information on the homework requirements of high school during the transition program. It is essential to address the key factors that students are facing at their earliest stage of transition in order to interact with students in a way that will minimize their confusion (Addressing School Adjustment Problems).

It will also be vital for a transition program to include time for the students to interact with other students and teachers during academic learning times. This is

important because the students and teachers in the current research identified that the students like to be social during instruction. In addition, it is important for the teachers to create a caring and supportive environment since both the students and teachers have identified that students need more social and academic support from their teachers in order to be successful. Teachers can support the students by providing them accurate information regarding the transition and help them accumulate necessary coping skills (Fuligni, Eccles, Barber, & Clements, 2001). If this environment is created the students will be more likely to ask for additional assistance and not feel embarrassed. In the current research the students' did identify that they do not like to ask for help and that it is because they feel embarrassed to do so.

Conclusions

There are many factors affecting the transition to high school including increased peer pressure, cliquishness among students, fear of bullying, being the youngest in the new school, the need to fit in, and finding the right bus (Garrison, 2006). Due to the increase in the number of students, the high school environment can become a more anonymous setting than the middle school environment (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). The adjustment to this ecological transition may be facilitated or impeded by characteristics of the setting being entered (Felner, 2002).

From the findings of the current research one can conclude that that homework is the number one challenge that the students are facing even before the transition to high school. Although they recognize that they need to do their homework in order to be successful there is a barrier that is stopping them from completing this academic requirement. It is also concluded that the students need to feel that they have the support

of their teachers so that they can ask for additional help when needed. Feelings of belongingness is a key concept in the transition to high school in not only gaining support from teachers but also gaining support and respect from a new peer group.

Although the current research was intended to gather data for a specific high school, the presented figures offers a personalized understanding of the challenges, fears, and unmet needs of current academically at risk 8th graders transitioning to high school. Future research should offer further understanding of these needs and a clear understanding of what students would like to be provided in a transition program.

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Appendix A

STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT FOR MINORS

This form describes a research study being conducted with 8th grade students regarding what their academic, social/emotional, and programmatic needs are. The purpose of this study is to survey students to better understand these needs in order to meet the needs for students attending a summer transition program for academically at risk students. The person conducting the research is a student at SUNY College at Brockport. If you agree to have your child participate in this study, s/he will be asked to complete a questionnaire about his/her academic, social/emotional, and programmatic needs.

The possible benefit from being in this study could be that the information gathered will allow the Hilton School District implement a successful summer school transition program that your child may be eligible to attend.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Bing in it or refusing to be in it, will not affect your grades or class standing. You are free to change your mind or stop being in the study at any time.

I understand that:

1. My participation is voluntary and I have the right to refuse to answer any questions. I will have a chance to discuss any questions I have about the study with the researcher after completing the questionnaire.

2. My confidentiality is guaranteed. My name will not be written on the survey. There will be no way to connect me to the written survey. If any publication results from this research, I will not be identified by name. Results will be given anonymously and in group form only, so that neither the participants nor their schools can be identified.

3. There will be no anticipated personal risks or benefits because of participation in this project

4. My participation involves reading a written survey of *10* questions and answering those questions in writing. It is estimated that it will take *15* minutes to complete the survey.

5. Approximately *60* people will take part in this study. The results will be used for the completion of a research project by the primary researcher.

6. Data and consent forms will be kept separately in a locked filing cabinet by the investigator and will be destroyed by shredding when the research has been completed.

You are being asked whether or not you want to participate in this study. If you wish to participate, and you agree with the statement below, please sign in the space provided. Remember, you may change your mind at any point and withdraw from the study. You can refuse to participate even if your parent/guardian gives permission for you to participate.

If you have any questions you may contact
Primary Researcher: Tiffany Kaiser 392-1000 ext. 2048
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Thomas Hernandez, Counselor Education Department 395-2258

I understand the information provided in this form and agree to participate in this project.

_____
Signature of participant   Date

_____
Birth date of participant

_____
Signature of a witness 18 years of age or older   Date

Appendix B

STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARENTS

This form describes a research study being conducted with 8th grade students regarding what their academic, social/emotional, and programmatic needs are. The purpose of this study is to survey students to better understand these needs in order to meet the needs for students attending a summer transition program for academically at risk students. The person conducting the research is a student at SUNY College at Brockport. If you agree to have your child participate in this study, s/he will be asked to complete a questionnaire about his/her academic, social/emotional, and programmatic needs.

The possible benefit from being in this study could be that the information gathered will allow the Hilton School District implement a successful summer school transition program that your child may be eligible to attend.

Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. Bing in it or refusing to be in it, will not affect your child's grades or class standing. S/he is free to change her/his mind or stop being in the study at any time.

I understand that:

1. My child's participation is voluntary and s/he has the right to refuse to answer any questions. S/he will have a chance to discuss any questions s/he has about the study with the researcher after completing the questionnaire.

2. My child's confidentiality is guaranteed. Her/his name will not be written on the survey. There will be no way to connect my child to the written survey. If any publication results from this research, s/he would not be identified by name. Results will be given anonymously and in group form only, so that neither the participants nor their schools can be identified.

3. There will be no anticipated personal risks or benefits because of participation in this project

4. My child's participation involves reading a written survey of *10* questions and answering those questions in writing. It is estimated that it will take *15* minutes to complete the survey.

5. Approximately *60* people will take part in this study. The results will be used for the completion of a research project by the primary researcher.

6. Data and consent forms will be kept separately in a locked filing cabinet by the investigator and will be destroyed by shredding when the research has been completed.

You are being asked whether or not you will permit your child to participate in this study. If you wish to give permission to participate, and you agree with the statement below, please sign in the space provided. Remember, you may change your mind at any point and withdraw from the study. Your child can refuse to participate even if you have given permission for her/him to participate.

I understand the information provided in this form and agree to allow my child to participate as a participant in this project. I am 18 years of age or older. I have read and understand the above statements. All my questions about my child's participation in this study have been answered to my satisfaction.

If you have any questions you may contact
Primary Researcher: Tiffany Kaiser 392-1000 ext. 2048
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Thomas Hernandez, Counselor Education Department 395-2258

_____
Signature of Parent   Date

Child's name: _____

Appendix C

Student Survey
Circle the answers that best describe you and your needs

Male   Female

1) **I am a _____ learner**
   a) **Visual** (learn best from visual displays, take detailed notes)
   b) **Auditory** (learn best from verbal lectures, and discussions)
   c) **Tactile/Kinesthetic** (learn best through moving, doing, and touching)
   d) More than one

2) **I like to be social while learning**
   Yes   No   Sometimes

   If yes or sometimes when would you prefer social activities?
   a) In the beginning of the day (before classes)
   b) At the end of the day (after classes)
   c) Within instruction (during classes)

3) **What type of clubs, activities, sports or other extracurricular activities are you involved in?**
   _____
   _____
   If none, what has stopped you from becoming involved?
   _____
   _____

4) **Do you like to work alone or in a group?**

5) **What areas do you think you need more information on regarding your transition to the high school? (Circle as many as you would like)**

What classes to take   Who to go to if there is a problem

School expectations   How much homework there is

Classroom expectations   None of the above

Understanding the schedule   All of the above

Layout of the building   Other _____
Would you like this information available during a summer school program?
          Yes   No

6) **Do you feel like you have academic and/or social support? If so, from who?**

7) **Who would you like more support from academically and socially?** (**Circle as many as you would like**)

Parents	Teachers	Religious leader
Friends	Principal	Relatives
Siblings	Counselors	Other _____

8) **What stops you from asking for more social/academic support?**
_____
_____

9) **What do you like least about school? (Circle as many as you would like)**

Homework	Teachers	Other _____
Classes	Principal	
Being with friends	School Rules and Expectations	

10) **What are some of the challenges you are facing in 8th grade? (Circle as many as you would like)**

Making/Keeping friends	Attendance
Romantic relationships	Not paying attention in class
Not doing homework	Not understanding the content
Not enough help	Not enough individualized time with teachers
Home life	Drug/Alcohol use

Other_____

11) **I don't perform better because: (Circle as many as you would like)**

It irritates my parents	I get frustrated with homework
My friends don't think it's cool	I don't care if I do well
I have better things to do	I don't like others telling me what to do
I don't like to ask for help	I don't think I can do any better

Other _____

12) **What do you think you would benefit from most in a summer transition program?** Please rate 1-5 (1= most beneficial 5= least beneficial)

___ Additional help with reading/writing/math

___ Time for social/recreational activities

___ Information regarding the high school (ex: house teams, schedule, classes etc.)

___ Meeting and being taught by a variety of high school teachers

___ Counseling opportunities

13) **How can we better help you to succeed in school?**
_____
_____
_____

14) **What steps do you think you can take to succeed in school?**
_____
_____
_____

Appendix D

Teacher Survey
Circle the answers that best describe students who are failing your class

Is the student Male____ Female_____

1) **What type of learning style is he/she?**
   a) **Visual** (learn best from visual displays, take detailed notes)
   b) **Auditory** (learn best from verbal lectures, and discussions)
   c) **Tactile/Kinesthetic** (learn best through moving, doing, and touching)
   d) More than one

2) **He/She likes to be social while learning**
   Yes   No   Sometimes

If yes or sometimes when do they prefer social activities?
   a) In the beginning of the day (before classes)
   b) At the end on the day (after classes
   c) Within instruction (during classes

3) **How often does he/she stay after school to receive extra help?**
a) 0-5
b) 5-10
c) 10 or more

4) **Does he/she like working alone or in a group?**

5) **What areas do you think he/she needs more information on regarding their transition to the high school? (Circle as many as you would like)**

What classes to take	Who to go to if there is a problem
School expectations	How much homework there is
Classroom expectations	None of the above
Understanding the schedule	All of the above
Layout of the building	Other _____

Do you think this information should be available during a summer school program?

Yes   No

6) **Do you think he/she has academic and/or social support? If so, from who?**

7) **Who do you think he/she would like more support from academically and/or socially? (Circle as many as you would like)**

Parents	Teachers	Religious leader
Friends	Principal	Relatives
Siblings	Counselors	Other _____

8) **What do you think stops him/her from asking for more academic/social support?**
_____
_____

9) **What do you think he/she likes least about school? (Circle as many as you would like)**

Homework	Teachers	Other _____
Classes	Principal	
Being with friends	School rules and expectations	

10) **What are some of the challenges you see him/her facing? (Circle as many as you would like)**

Making/Keeping friends	Attendance
Romantic relationships	Not paying attention in class
Not doing homework	Not understanding the content
Not enough help	Not enough individualized time with teachers
Home life	Drug/Alcohol use

Other _____

11) **Why do you think that he/she doesn't perform better? (Circle as many as you would like)**

It irritates their parents	They get frustrated with homework
Their friends don't think it's cool	They don't care if I do well
They have better things to do	They don't like others telling them what to do
They don't like to ask for help	They don't think they can do any better

Other _____

12) **What do you think he/she would benefit from most in a summer transition program?** Please rate 1-5 (1= most beneficial 5= least beneficial)

___ Additional help with reading/writing/math

___ Time for social/recreational activities

___ Information regarding the high school (ex: house teams, schedule, classes etc.)

___ Meeting with and being taught by a variety of high school teachers

___ Counseling opportunities

13) **How do you think that we can better help him/her to succeed in school?**
_____
_____
_____

14) **What steps do you think that he/she needs to take in order to succeed in school?**
_____
_____
_____