

The Impact of a Transition Program on Ninth Grade Students' Performance

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(ABSTRACT)

Transition programs designed to ease the middle to high school transition are becoming a necessity in high school because ninth grade is deemed as a critical year for determining students' success in high school. Few studies examined transition programs' impact on students' educational outcomes, and transition research is typically conducted in inner-city or urban settings. The purpose of this case study was to examine the impact of a full transition model program on ninth grade students' performance in a rural high school.

A comparison of the students who participated in the transition program to those who did not was examined by using a mixed method approach. The qualitative data consisted of the ninth grade teachers and administrators' perceptions and the program documents. The quantitative data consisted of a chi-square analysis of the transition and nontransition program students' pass rate of high stakes tests, earned credits, retention status, out-of-school suspensions, dropout status, and attendance. The study also examined if specific groups of students as categorized by race, gender, and socioeconomics were impacted more by the transition program. The findings of this study suggested that the transition program may have eased the transition by providing support to ninth grade students to improve their conduct. The quantitative evidence does not show other significant benefits from the transition program, however. Improving academic performance still remains a challenge for this rural high school.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

High school offers unlimited opportunities and life-altering decisions for students entering ninth grade. For many children, this is the opening door for them to flourish in higher education and prepare them for successful, productive lives. However, ninth grade can be the end of the road for some children. Anonymity, peer pressure, academic rigor, and higher expectations can be overwhelming to novice high school students. Also, high stakes testing policies that dictate the requirements of graduation become obstacles for many ninth grade students' success.

Ninth grade is becoming a pivotal year in determining whether or not students graduate. In the United States, more students are being retained in the ninth grade than in any other grade (Haney et al., 2004). Ninth grade students are at higher risk of dropping out (Neild & Farley, 2004). However, over the past decade, recent trends for reducing the level of negative outcomes for high school students such as academic failure, chronic absenteeism, and poor conduct involve ways to ease their transition from eighth to ninth grade. Transition programs are designed to address the difficulties present in the move from middle school to high school, and thereby improve the chances that students will experience success in high school and beyond.

Background of the Problem

Ninth grade is the critical year for students. Over the last 30 years, attrition between grades nine and ten has tripled (Haney et al., 2004). This is occurring because of the ninth grade "bulge." Ninth grade bulge refers to the number of students enrolled in grade nine relative to the previous grade eight indicating that more students are retained in grade nine (Haney et al., 2004). In the United States, more students are being retained in the ninth grade than in any other grade (Haney et al., 2004).

There are many concerns associated with students' transition from middle school to high school. A primary concern is the decline in academic performance as a result of the transition. John Alspaugh (1998) examined the achievement loss associated with the transition by looking at the test scores of the students' eighth and ninth grade years. Because of the decline in the test scores, the findings suggested that the transition can impact students' academic performance (Alspaugh, 1998). Even when the students do not physically change schools, the move from eighth to ninth grade still affected students' academic performance (Weis & Bearman, 2007)

indicating that the level of academic rigor and expectations of ninth grade is different than eighth grade.

Another concern is reducing the behaviors that are indicative of students who are at risk of failing and dropping out-of-school. These behaviors include chronic absenteeism and poor conduct. Attendance problems include truancy, cutting class, and tardiness which can affect student performance because of the instructional time lost (Mayer & Mitchell, 1993). Mayer and Mitchell (1993) asserted that school absenteeism can be associated with increased acts of juvenile crime. Dyke (2007) suggested that transition programs can reduce the number of days missed by ninth grade students. In addition, Dyke (2007) suggested that transition programs can impact poor conduct of students as measured by the reduction of the number of out-of-school and in school suspension referrals. Ninth grade students perceived that “good behavior” and “avoiding negative influences” are factors that lead to success in high school (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005). Therefore, programs should be implemented that address issues with students’ attendance and conduct.

Third, ninth grade students are at higher risk of dropping out-of-school. Neild and Farley’s (2004) analysis tracked the educational status of a cohort of students who were first-time freshmen in noncharter high schools in the Philadelphia school district during the 1996-1997 school year. The data showing the education status of students as of November, 2001, revealed that 45.8% of the 3,115 dropouts were still in the ninth grade when they dropped out-of-school, and 33.5% dropped out in the tenth grade. In addition, Alspaugh (1998) suggested that students who transition from a middle school to a high school increase their chances of dropping out. Alspaugh’s (1998) study explored the relationship between school-to-school transitions and high school dropout rates.

The last concern associated with ninth grade students is high stakes testing. Under the auspices of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), most states have implemented high stakes testing and accountability policies that often outline promotion requirements or graduation requirements. Unlike middle school, high school high stakes tests serve as a prerequisite to graduation. High stakes testing is becoming a driving force of establishing educational policies. Not only are ninth grade students faced with the challenges that accompany the middle to high school transition, but they also are faced with the demands of meeting the standards of high stakes testing to graduate. Students’ performance in ninth grade sets a trajectory of their overall performance in high

school. Because of these issues, transition programs are becoming a necessity in high schools to provide ninth grade students with the support they need to prevent them from dropping out and underachieving.

To resolve these issues associated with the transition of ninth grade students into high school, many researchers have suggested the implementation of transition programs (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005; Dyke, 2007; Kerr, 2002; Smith, 1997). The desired outcome of the transition program is to provide ninth grade students with opportunities for success and to reduce the risk of potentially dropping out. The U.S. Department of Education (2001) endorsed The Small Learning Community (SLC) model as a means of improving ninth grade students' educational outcomes. The SLC, along with various practices that decrease students' feelings of anonymity and that increase student achievement, is called a full transition program (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005). Smith (1997) concurred that the students who received full or partial transition programs were less likely to drop out or under perform in high school.

Statement of the Problem and Purpose

The purpose of this mixed method case study was to examine the impact of a full transition model program on ninth grade students' performance in a rural high school. The ninth grade teachers' and administrators' perceptions of how the transition program impacted ninth grade students' performance was explored. The academic performance was measured by the ninth grade students' high stakes test scores and whether the students earned the number of credits required to be classified as a tenth grade student. In addition, an examination of the ninth grade students' retention status, number of out-of-school suspensions, and attendance was conducted. Furthermore, research reviewed how many ninth grade students dropped out of ninth grade. The study also examined if specific groups of students as categorized by race, gender, and socioeconomics were impacted more by the program.

This study fills a void in the literature. Most transition research reported evidence of how the transition to high school affects students' academic performance. Other studies have outlined suggestions about how transition programs should be established and what they should include. Most research discussed how the transition from middle to high school impacts performance (Akos & Galassi, 2004a; Fulk, 2003; Haney et al., 2004, Smith, 1997); however, few studies have provided evidence of how the transition programs impacted students' performance. Also,

most transition research was conducted in urban settings; this study examined a transition program in a rural setting.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this inquiry were:

1. What are the ninth grade teachers' perceptions of how the transition program in Dean County High School impacted ninth grade students' performance?
2. What are the high school administrators' perceptions of how the transition program in Dean County High School impacted ninth grade students' performance?
3. How did students in the transition program perform on indicators of student success, including:
 - a. Students' ninth grade earned credits
 - b. Transition program students' ninth grade SOL pass rates as compared to the pass rates of students who did not participate in the transition program
 - c. The number of students retained in the ninth grade
 - d. Ninth grade students' attendance
 - e. The student conduct as measured by the number of out-of-school suspensions
 - f. The number of ninth grade dropouts
4. Were any specific groups of students impacted more by the transition program?

Definition of Terms

Commonwealth of Access: Transition, Readiness, and Access Initiative

The Commonwealth of Access: Transition, Readiness, and Access Initiative was Virginia's initiative to accomplish the goals of the National Governors Association (NGA) to "Redesign the American High School." Some of the goals included decreasing ninth and tenth retention in high school, increasing the number of graduates, and decreasing the number of dropouts. The initiative involved selecting thirty schools in Virginia and providing these schools

with grant money to achieve the goals. As part of the grant requirement, the schools had to implement a ninth grade transition program (Virginia Department of Education, n.d.).

Dropout

When discussing Virginia data, *dropout* is an individual who:

1. Was enrolled in school at some time during the previous school year and was not enrolled on October 1 of the current school year; or
2. Was not enrolled on October 1 of the previous school year although expected to be in membership (i.e., was not reported as a dropout the year before); and
3. Has not graduated from high school or completed a state- or district-approved educational program and
4. Does not meet any of the following exclusionary conditions: transfer to another public school district, private school, or state- or district-approved education program; temporary school-recognized absence due to suspension or illness; or death (Demary, 2000).

Honors School

An *Honors School* is one of the thirty schools selected by the Virginia Department of Education to participate in the *Commonwealth of Access: Transition, Readiness, and Access Initiative*.

Ninth Grade Bulge

Ninth grade bulge refers to the number of students enrolled in grade nine relative to the previous grade eight year indicating that more students are retained in grade nine (Haney et al., 2004). The relationship consists of a higher number of ninth grade students as compared to their eighth grade year.

Standards of Learning (SOL) Tests

“The Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools describe the commonwealth's expectations for student learning and achievement in grades K-12 in English, mathematics, science, history/social science, technology, the fine arts, foreign language, health and physical education, and driver education. These standards represent a broad consensus of what parents, classroom teachers, school administrators, academics, and business and community leaders believe schools should teach and students should learn” (Virginia Department of Education, n.d.). In high schools, Standards of Learning tests are used as high stakes tests that are utilized as a graduation requirement.

Transition Program

A *transition program* consists of activities and practices designed to ease the middle to high school transition or the move from eighth to ninth grade. These programs are usually characterized by various practices and a type of small learning community (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). In particular, these practices are developed to decrease students' feelings of anonymity (Akos & Galassi, 2004b) and increase student achievement (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005; Fulk, 2003). Also, these practices are aimed to reduce the behaviors that are indicative of students dropping out or failing in high school. According to the Virginia Department of Education, transition programs consist of:

1. A plan to create enhanced transition for students from grade eight to nine
2. A plan to identify ninth grade students at risk of failure
3. A plan to implement instructional and organizational strategies that focus on student motivation and academic success
4. A plan to focus on improving literacy among ninth grade students (Virginia Department of Education, n.d.)

Relevance and Significance of the Study

The body of literature related to middle to high school transition, the impact of transition on student outcomes, and models of transition programming are extensive; yet, the literature did not extensively reveal the impact of transition programs on students' performance. It was important to measure the effectiveness of programs designed to help ninth grade students meet success, especially when ninth grade was deemed as a critical year in determining whether or not students graduate from high school.

In addition, few transition research studies examined the high stakes test scores of students. With the accountability and high stakes testing provisions of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), many school divisions are implementing policies dictating that high stakes tests be used as a graduation requirement in high schools. Ninth grade students not only face the challenges of entering a new school, but they also face the pressure of high stakes tests. States that have high-stakes testing policies have larger ninth grade bulges and higher attrition rates (Haney et al., 2004). This study examined the impact the transition program had on students in a high school with high stakes test policies in a high stakes testing state.

This study offered a qualitative component that was not presented in current transition research. The perceptions of teachers and students were captured in transition research (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005; Fulk, 2003). These perceptions were used to develop transition programs, but they did not include perceptions of how the transition program improved educational outcomes of students. In addition, administrators' perceptions were not highlighted in the research. The viewpoints of the administrators made up a part of the qualitative data of this study.

Furthermore, the effects of the transition had been documented extensively about urban youth and few had been documented about rural youth (Estell et al., 2007; Tompkins & Deloney, 2002). Most researchers look at large or urban schools as samples in transition research (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005; Dyke, 2007; Fulk, 2003; Kerr, 2002) because students in those schools have an increased risk of dropping out. However, some researchers have suggested that dropout rates are higher in rural areas, especially with higher populations of low income minorities as compared to urban areas (Orfield, 2004; Tompkin & Deloney, 2002). This study examined the impact of the transition and transition programming on students in a small, rural school.

Overview of the Methodology

The researcher used this case study to attempt to clarify whether or not the transition program impacted the performance of ninth grade students at a rural high school. This study used a mixed method approach and triangulation to get an in-depth understanding of the transition program's impact. The qualitative data included the interview responses from open-ended questions asked of the administrators and teachers and included the material culture and program documents. Results of the interview responses were presented as themes resulting from the analysis. The quantitative data consisted of the use of chi square tests of related variables. The variables included the ninth grade students' pass rate, earned credits, conduct, retention status, dropout status, and attendance. Because several researchers in the review of literature suggested that gender and socioeconomic status be considered when establishing transition programming, this study provided a closer look at these variables as well to see if any specific group of students was impacted more by the program.

Limitations

There were several limitations of this study. Most of them were associated with issues of transferability. For one, the qualitative portion of this study involved the use of interview responses. A limitation was the bias in the perceptions of the interview respondents. Two, the results may be restricted because the views are narrowed to the ninth grade teachers and administrators of one high school. Three, the study limited transferability because the school was located in a rural area in Central Virginia. The results may not be extrapolated to another school setting in another location. Also, the definition of *dropout* may have restricted transferability because the definition utilized in the study was based on the definition provided by the Virginia Department of Education. Other states may have utilized a different definition. Five, the sample was exclusive of special education students. In addition, all four core areas were not explored when determining achievement because data was not available for English high stakes tests. Ninth grade students were not required to take the English SOL test. Last, there were different principals for the nontransition and transition program students. The change in leadership styles could have affected the ninth grade students' performance.

Organization of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if a transition program at Dean County High School impacted the performance of ninth grade students. Chapter one introduced the topic, stated the problem, and presented the purpose and research questions. Chapter one also defined significant terms, offered limitations of the study, and presented an overview of the methodology. Chapter two is the review of literature that highlights current peer-reviewed studies associated with the transition of ninth grade students. The literature review is divided into four sections: "Ninth Grade: The Critical Year," "Transition Research," "Full Transition Model," and "Summary and Synthesis." Chapter three includes the methodology of how the data was collected, interpreted, and analyzed. In this chapter, the variables are explained and the sample is described. Chapter four presents the results. Chapter 5 presents the discussion and implications of the findings and recommendations for further study

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Organization of Literature Review

The literature review is divided into four sections: “Ninth Grade: The Critical Year,” “Transition Research,” “Full Transition Model,” and “Summary and Synthesis.”

The first section, “Ninth Grade: The Critical Year” is divided into seven subsections. The first subsection highlights historic and recent trends in national ninth grade data and the educational pipeline. The second subsection details the effects of transition on ninth grade students’ academic performance. The third and fourth subsections explore the behaviors that are characterized by students who are at risk of failing or dropping out. The fifth subsection explores the dropout rates associated with ninth grade students. In addition, it examines the reliability of national dropout and graduation rate reports. The sixth subsection links the research that emphasizes the impact of high stakes testing on ninth grade retention, confirming the need for effective transition programming. Because the high school in the study is located in Virginia, a high stakes testing state, the last subsection is an examination of Virginia’s ninth grade data. Furthermore, this section provides a closer look at Virginia’s educational policies and initiatives to address the analysis of the ninth grade data. In particular, this section reports a critical view of the Virginia’s Commonwealth of Access: Transition, Readiness, and Access Initiative which promotes the implementation of transition programs.

The second section, “Transition Research,” examines and synthesizes several current peer-reviewed studies involving middle to high school transition, and the impact of the transition on ninth grade students’ academic performance and educational outcomes. Several themes emerged from the transition research and are reported as subheadings in this section. The themes serve the purpose of providing valuable insight on recent transition research and reveal the gaps in the existing literature, thus supporting the need for more transition research.

The third section reports the various practices consistent with transition programming. The transition program in the high school for the study will be characterized by the practices that the body of literature suggested. Section four offers a synthesis and summary of the literature review and introduces Chapter three which details the methodology.

The purpose of this case study was to examine the impact of a full transition model program on ninth grade students' performance. Most transition research reports evidence of how the actual transition or move to high school affects students' academic performance and educational outcomes; however, few studies have provided evidence of how transition programs designed to ease the transition affect students' performance on the indicators of success.

Ninth Grade: The Critical Year

Ninth grade is deemed as the “make it or break it year.” In the United States, more students are being retained in the ninth grade than in any other grade (Haney et al., 2004). The performance of students in the ninth grade is imperative in determining whether or not students graduate. The following subsection explores national data of ninth grade retention. The subsequent sections explore four main reasons why ninth grade is the critical year. One reason is that the academic performance of ninth grade students declines. The second reason is the behaviors that ninth grade students exhibit that are indicative of students at risk of failing or dropping out. The third reason is that ninth grade is the year that students often dropout. The fourth reason is the emphasis on high stakes testing and accountability.

National Ninth Grade Data

Haney and colleagues (2004) conducted a study examining the education pipeline from 1970 to 2000. Using cohort progression analysis, the data analyzed was from the Digest of Education Statistics (DES), an annual report by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) since 1962, and the Common Core of Data (CCD), a federal repository of education statistics. The purpose of the study was to report dropout statistics and grade retention data since dropout statistics were unreliable and states did not report grade retention data. Their analysis identified “key transition points through which students progress or fail to progress from kindergarten to grade 12” (Haney et al., 2004, p. 5). One of their major findings was the high attrition rate between grades nine and ten.

Over the last 30 years, attrition between grades nine and ten has tripled (Haney et al., 2004). According to the analysis, in the early 1970s, less than 4% fewer students were enrolled in grade ten than in grade nine the previous year. However, in the late 1970s to the mid 1980s, the attrition rate accelerated, and by 2000 there were 12% fewer students enrolled in grade ten than in the previous grade nine. Between 1984-1985 and 1985-1986, when the national grade

nine and ten attrition rate was less than 5%, six states had attrition rates of 10% or more. Virginia was one of those states with an attrition rate of 10%. In “1998-1999 there were 3.86 million students enrolled in grade nine in the United States, but in 1999-2000 there were 3.42 million enrolled in grade ten, a difference of 440,000 students (11.4%)” (Haney et al., 2004, p. 13). By 2000, the number of states with more than 10% attrition rates had tripled. The analysis showed the grade nine to ten attrition rate as being the biggest concern of the United States education pipeline.

Haney and colleagues further sought to explain why there was an increasing rate of attrition between grades nine and ten. As a result, their second major finding was an increase in the ninth grade “bulge.” Ninth grade bulge refers to the number of student enrolled in grade nine relative to the previous grade eight indicating that more students are in grade nine as compared to their grade eight (Haney et al., 2004). The analysis indicated that in the early 1970s the percentage of students enrolled in grade nine was approximately 4% more than in grade eight; in the 1980’s the percentage range was 6% to 10%; and in the 1990s to the start of the 21st century the percentage range was 10% to 14%. It is interesting to note that the ninth grade bulge and the ninth and tenth grade attrition numbers were similar in the early 1970s and grew at a similar rate up to the present. This is strong evidence that something is going wrong in ninth grade. Also, in 1999-2000 there were 440 thousand more students enrolled in grade nine than grade eight, and 520 thousand more students enrolled in grade nine than grade ten (Haney et al., 2004). An interesting fact with regard to these numbers is that the eighth grade enrollment was about 80 thousand larger in the eighth grade than in the tenth grade, which shows how many students were being lost in the ninth grade. Analysis of state-level enrollment data from 1984-1985 to 2000-2001 indicated that as early as 1985 there were few states that had “bulges” ten percent or higher; however, by the start of the 21st century nearly half of the states had “bulges” ten percent or higher (Haney et al., 2004).

Ninth Grade Students’ Academic Performance

There are many concerns associated with students’ transition from middle school to high school. In particular, a concern is the decline in academic performance as a result of the transition. In a study conducted by John Alspaugh (1998), he examined the achievement loss associated with the transition from middle to high school. The sample consisted of three groups of 16 school districts for a total of 48 districts. One group consisted of districts with one K-8

elementary school and one 9-12 high school. The second group of districts had a linear transition consisting of one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school. The last group had a pyramid transition in which students of multiple elementary schools moved into one middle school and then moved on to one high school. It is imperative to note that Alspaugh's purpose was not to compare the levels of achievement for each group; instead, he studied changes in the achievement during school-to-school transitions. For the purpose of the study, academic achievement was measured by the Missouri Mastery Anti Achievement Tests (MMAT) scores. Using a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), the results indicated that relative to the state's average ninth grade test score of 300, all three groups experienced a mean achievement loss in the transition to high school at ninth grade. In addition, Alspaugh examined the transition from elementary to middle school (grade five to grade six). Similar to the middle to high school transition, the groups that transitioned experienced an achievement loss. However, the K-8 schools that did not transition between grades five and six, showed a gain of 7.40 relative to the state average. Overall, the findings suggested that transition can impact students' academic performance.

Challenging the idea that transition negatively impacts student outcomes, Weis and Bearman (2007) compared ninth grade student outcomes of students who made the transition in moving to ninth grade to those who did not. Their method consisted of analyzing data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), an ongoing, nationally representative, school-based study of adolescents in grades 7-12 that was initiated in 1994. The Add Health sample consisted of 132 schools (private, religious, and public) located in 80 communities (urban, suburban, and rural) with a total of 90,000 students with diverse ethnic backgrounds. From the Add Health sample, Weis and Bearman (2007) selected a sample of 1,680 students. They restricted their sample to students who were in the eighth grade during Add Health's first interview and in the ninth grade during the second interview. Add Health's interview questions were based on social and demographic characteristics, educational and occupational background of parents, health risk behaviors, visions of the future, self-esteem, and health status. Using Add Health's data, Weis and Bearman (2007) examined nonacademic and academic outcomes of the students. The four nonacademic outcomes were physical fights, use of drugs, alcohol, or tobacco, delinquency, and carrying a weapon to school. The school-related outcomes were grades in school, school integration, trouble in school, and college aspirations.

They divided the sample into two groups, students who changed school in moving from eighth to ninth grade (transition students) and those who did not change (non-transition students) and compared the results.

Even though Weis and Bearman (2007) asserted that their research is unlike previous transition research which highlight the negative effects of transition, their research still indicate that negative consequences exist and that ninth grade is a critical year for all students regardless of whether or not they physically move to a new school. Using a regression analysis, their results showed that as ninth grade students, the nonacademic outcomes for both groups were not statistically different, except for carrying a weapon to school. More students who moved from eighth to ninth grade carried a gun to school in the ninth grade as compared to the other ninth grade students who did not move. In addition, both groups' academic behaviors declined in the ninth grade. Not consistent with other research, the students who did not move to another school for ninth grade experienced a steeper decline than the students who moved to another school for ninth grade (Weis & Bearman, 2007). Weis and Bearman (2007) did not offer a detailed explanation of why this occurred, but using a multi-level regression analysis they did examine other factors such as individual-level differences (IQ, female, poverty, retained, social connectedness, socially isolated, transition between schools) and school factors (school size, school minority status, private schools, transition between schools) that may influence the negative outcomes of ninth grade students. Weis and Bearman (2007) suggested that these factors could be "masking the effects of transition" (p. 410). Their results indicated that these factors significantly impacted student outcomes, but their findings were typical. For example, students with higher IQs had higher GPAs and students who were retained had lower GPAs; females were less likely to have a physical fight or carry weapons as compared to males. Several of the school factors were significantly related to the students' ninth grade outcomes (Weis & Bearman, 2007). Although, Weis and Bearman (2007) suggested that the actual transition did not significantly impact student outcomes, they also suggested that moving from eighth to ninth grade changed all students' outcomes. One could argue that this research shows that transition programs are needed even if the children stay in the same school. The key transition may not be to a different physical school, but to a different level of academic coursework and expectations.

A major limitation of Weis and Bearman's (2007) study was that the outcome measures were self-reported by the students. Some of the variables could have been validated by school

records. For example, variables such as student grade point average, weapon to school, and trouble in school could have been obtained by official school records. A triangulation of the school records, students' survey responses, and parents' or school administrators' responses would have "ensured credibility and rigor" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p.69).

Ninth Grade Students' Conduct

Only a few of the transition studies addressed the conduct of ninth grade students. In Weis and Bearman's (2007) study, which focused on whether the movement to another school affected student outcomes, they concluded that students who transitioned to another school were more likely to carry a gun or weapon to school in ninth grade as compared to ninth graders who did not change schools.

Felicia Dyke's (2007) quantitative study which examined the impact of a transition program on over-age first time ninth grade students offered insight on how transition programs can improve ninth grade students' conduct. Using independent t-tests, Dyke (2007) looked at the number of out-of-school suspensions (OSS) and in school suspensions (ISS) that the transition program students received as compared to the traditional program students. Although, she concluded that there was not a significant difference favoring the transition program, still a higher percentage of the transition program students (67%) did not receive OSS as compared to the traditional program students (59%). Likewise, a higher percentage of the males in the transition program did not receive OSS (Dyke, 2007). There were similar results for the ISS referrals. No significant difference existed, but there were more students in the transition program that did not receive ISS as compared to the traditional program students (Dyke, 2007).

Behavior is an indicator of students' success. In a study examining the factors leading to success in ninth grade as perceived by students, "good classroom behavior" (M= 3.17, SD=.74), "hanging out with the right people" (M=3.20, SD=.84), "avoid negative influences" (M=3.28, SD=.92), and "self-discipline to be successful" (M=3.16, SD=.83) were some of the students' top choices (Butts & Cruziero, 2005). In addition, several of the studies suggested that the transition program include the teaching of conflict resolution skills and ways to avoid negative peer pressure (Butts & Cruziero, 2005; Fulk, 2003) indicating that the behavior of ninth grade students is a concern.

Ninth Grade Students' Attendance

Chronic absenteeism is a characteristic of students who are at risk of failing and dropping out-of-school (Mayer & Mitchell, 1993). Because ninth grade is a critical year, it is imperative to look at the attendance pattern of these students. In Dyke's (2007) study, the transition program students were more likely to be absent than the traditional program students. However, in regards to gender, the transition program was effective in reducing the number of female students' absenteeism when compared to the traditional program students (Dyke, 2007). It is suggested that gender be considered when establishing transition programs (Akos & Galassi, 2004a; Fulk 2003). The transition program presented in Dyke's (2007) study may not have considered strategies to decrease male students' absenteeism as compared to females. Further research is necessary to determine what type of programming is effective in improving the attendance of students to prevent academic failure and dropping out-of-school.

Ninth Grade Dropouts

Current analysis of reliable data has shifted educational leaders' focus to ninth grade as a critical year to prevent students from dropping out. In order to determine the impact of how the performance of ninth grade students impacts dropout and graduation rates, it is equally important to know how the rates were derived to get a better understanding of how many ninth grade students are actually failing to complete high school. With this information, educational leaders can design effective programming to support ninth grade students and ensure their success during and beyond high school.

Before addressing the issue of ninth grade dropouts, it is important to acknowledge the unreliability of dropout and graduation rates. Because of the many discrepancies and inconsistencies that exist in the national dropout and graduation rates, it is imperative to note that the studies selected for this section of the review of literature contain recent and reliable dropout and graduation rate data. The studies selected closely fit the recommendations offered by the National Center for Education Statistics(NCES) to report dropout and graduation rates. According to the NCES there are three methods of calculating dropout rates (Laird et al., 2007). *Event dropout rate* estimates the percentage of high school students who left school between start of a school year and the next school year without earning a diploma or equivalent (Laird et al., 2007). *Status dropout rate* reports the percentage of individuals in a given age range who

have not completed school (Laird et al., 2007). *Cohort dropout rate* indicates the percentage of first time ninth grade students who earned a diploma in four years time (Laird et al., 2007). When dropout rates are reported in this study, indication of the type of rate will be noted. Without the guidelines of a uniform calculation method among the states and school divisions, drop out and graduation rates may vary from one publication to another.

States rely on school divisions and school divisions rely on individual schools to report accurate data as efficiently as possible. However, variations occur in calculation methods and in the definitions of “dropouts” and “graduates” which can skew the overall national rates. For example, some school divisions do not count students who get married as dropouts, and some school divisions do not count students who drop out over the summer (Hollinger, 1996). While some school divisions consider General Educational Development (GED) certificate recipients as high school graduates, others only count students who earn a regular diploma as graduates (Hollinger, 1996). Therefore, depending on the source, dropout rates reported may reflect a decline or increase over the years.

A prime example is the controversy that surrounded the Texas Education Agency (TEA) dropout and completion rate reports. Prior to 2005, the Texas Education Agency did not use the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) definition of dropout. Therefore, it appeared that Texas had overall increasing graduation rates and particularly increasing rates of African American and Hispanic students (Texas Education Agency, 2005). However, the report’s data was skewed because it was later revealed that Texas school districts were under reporting drop out rates (Texas Education Agency, 2005). In fact, once TEA began to use the NCES definition of dropout and graduate calculation method, the report indicated that graduation rates of African American and Hispanic students were decreasing as compared to their white counterparts (Texas Education Agency, 2006). Because of the skewed data, it is safe to assume that Texas was not well-informed or prepared to develop programs to meet the needs of their students. However, if Texas had reliable data it would have increased the likelihood of the school officials making informed decisions about dropout prevention.

Ninth grade students are at higher risk of dropping out-of-school. Neild and Farley’s (2004) analysis tracked the educational status of a cohort of students who were first-time freshmen in noncharter high schools in the Philadelphia school district during the 1996-1997 school year. The data showed that 45.8% of the 3,115 dropouts were still in the ninth grade when

they dropped out-of-school, and 33.5% dropped out in tenth grade. Ninth grade students whose academic performance plummets are at higher risk of dropping out. For example, the Texas Dropout Report 1994-1995 reported that 58.6% of 17,218 dropouts indicated school-related concerns such as failing grades or attendance issues as reasons they dropped out (Texas Education Agency, n.d.).

Results are mixed on the issues of how transition impact students' outcomes and how it impact students dropping out. As previously mentioned, Weis and Bearman (2007) suggested the actual transition has minimal impact on students' outcomes; however, they did not examine if transition had an impact on dropping out. Alspaugh's (1998) study explored the relationship between school-to-school transitions and high school dropout rates. In the study, dropout rates were the 5-year average percentage of students in grades nine through 12 who dropped out-of-school each year between 1990 and 1995 (Alspaugh, 1998). Using Tukey's pairwise comparison, there was a statistically significant difference between the mean dropout rates for the K-8 schools and the dropout rates for both middle school groups. Because there were two transitions for the middle school groups, at sixth and ninth grade, Alspaugh (1998) suggested that schools with two transitions had higher dropout rates than schools with only one transition. This further suggests the need for programs to assist in easing the transition of students to improve their academic performance.

The ramifications of dropping out are costly. For students who fail to complete high school, their obstacles are more compounding and their futures are bleak. Dropouts will not survive economically (Queen, 2002). Many of them become impoverished due to unemployment, under employment, or lack of post-secondary education. Also, more dropouts than graduates become incarcerated. A 2003 study conducted by the United States Justice Department reported that two-thirds of prison inmates are dropouts (Orfield, 2004). Therefore, the cost is not only detrimental to the dropouts, but to the nation. School dropouts cost the nation from 60 to 228 billion dollars a year in welfare, unemployment expenditures, lost revenue, and crime prevention (Dunn, Chamber, & Rabren, 2004).

High Stakes Testing and Ninth Grade Students

Haney and colleagues offered a compelling argument that explained contributing factors to the increased "bulges." They hypothesized that high stakes testing impacted the bulge. To test their hypothesis, Haney and colleagues (2004) compared the grade nine and ten attrition rate and

grade nine bulge to determine if there was a relationship to the states that had high stakes testing policies. The researchers defined high stakes testing policies as a “state-level accountability system which consists of four components: a) content standards that communicate the desired content knowledge and skills; b) tests that measure progress toward achieving the content standards; c) performance targets that identify criteria used to determine whether schools, students, or both have reached the desired level of achievement; and d) incentives, such as consequences (rewards and sanctions), or stakes, that reinforce the attainment of performance targets” (Haney et al., 2004). Of the 21 states with the highest attrition rates between grades nine and ten, 17 had high stakes testing policies (Haney et al., 2004). Likewise, the majority of the states that had the largest bulges were high stakes testing states (Haney et al., 2004). Haney and colleagues (2004) did not offer the total number of states that had high stakes testing policies at the time of the study; however with the federal regulations of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) that emphasizes high stakes testing and accountability, the grades nine and ten attrition rates and grade nine bulge have a strong probability of continuously increasing.

High stakes testing and accountability put school officials under so much pressure that they employ practices that adversely affect ninth grade students. The intention behind the practices is to help raise the achievement of lower performing students, but some of the practices’ effects have been contradicting the intention. For example, Allensworth (2004) examined the impact of the implementation of high stakes testing in Chicago’s elementary schools (kindergarten to eighth grade) using dropout and graduation rates. Chicago’s promotion policy stated that all eighth grade students were required to meet the cut-off scores of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills in reading and math before being promoted to ninth grade (Allensworth, 2004). As a result, during the first year of implementation, 1,800 eighth graders were held back from entering ninth grade, and during the three subsequent years, the number increased to approximately 3,000 each year (Allensworth, 2004). The findings suggested that “the students who were retained were less likely to graduate than they would have been without the promotion policy” as compared to previous cohorts of students who were not affected by the policy (Allensworth, 2004, p. 171). What started out as an intention to increase the academic performance of low achieving students, resulted in a number of over-age ninth grade students who eventually dropped out-of-school (Allensworth, 2004). After the first year of implementation, Chicago public schools implemented transition programs and recovery

opportunities for students who did not meet the cut-off scores to reduce the retention and dropout rate (Allensworth, 2004). Although improvements in the retention and dropout rates were seen after four cohorts were under the promotion policy (Allensworth, 2004), further study is needed to examine the cause of the improvements.

Haney and colleagues (2004) suggested that the standards-based reform efforts as indicated in NCLB have put schools under so much pressure that some school officials have begun participating in practices that exclude low achieving students from testing. Although NCLB has accountability provisions, states can decide which students are tested. These practices vary from state to state and are not limited to the following: administratively withdrawing students so that school officials would not have to report them as official test-takers, admitting students to alternative schools, and promoting GED to low achieving students (Haney, et al., 2004). These practices are called “pushing out” and students who are impacted by this are called “pushouts.” Consequently, schools do not count pushouts as dropouts. Quite often, pushing out occurs between the transition of grades nine and ten (Haney, et. al., 2004), deeming ninth grade as a critical year.

This review of literature is not designed to debate all of the pros and cons of high stakes testing; however, high stakes testing is highlighted because it plays an intricate part in determining whether or not students graduate from high school, and how high stakes testing has a particularly strong impact on ninth grade students. Under the auspices of NCLB, most states have implemented high stakes testing and accountability policies that often outline promotion requirements or graduation requirements. High stakes testing is becoming a driving force of establishing educational policies. Not only are ninth grade students faced with the challenges that accompany the middle to high school transition, but they also are faced with the demands of meeting the standards of high stakes testing to graduate. Students’ performance in ninth grade sets a trajectory of their overall performance in high school. Because of these issues, transition programming is becoming a necessity in high schools to provide ninth grade students with support to prevent them from dropping out and underachieving. As discussed above, in a study conducted in Philadelphia, close to half of the dropouts who participated in the study were still in ninth grade when they dropped out (Neild & Farley, 2004), indicating that ninth grade is a critical year. If transition programs are implemented to improve the educational outcomes of ninth grade students, then this would include their performance on high stakes tests.

Virginia's Ninth Grade Data

The high school in the study is located in Virginia. Therefore, this section provides a closer look at the ninth grade data and policies of Virginia.

In 2000-2001, Virginia was one of 26 states that had a ninth grade bulge of more than 10% (Haney et al., 2004). Ranked number 11, 16% more ninth grade students were enrolled compared to the eighth grade enrollment (Haney et al., 2004). As recent as 2005, Virginia was still no exception to the ninth grade bulge (Warner, 2005).

Virginia's Blueprint for an Action Agenda: Analysis of Baseline Data (Warner, 2005) reported the rate of grade retention was the highest in grade nine at 13%. "This rate is approximately twice that of the percent of students held back in grades eight and ten, suggesting that grade nine is a key transition point in high school" (Warner, 2005).

Also, the Commonwealth Education Policy Institute (CEPI) (Warner, 2005) study of Virginia concluded that a disparity exists between the percentage of White, Hispanic, and African American students who complete ninth grade. The data revealed that African American (63.6%) and Hispanic (69.1%) students complete ninth grade at a lower rate as compared to their white (80.7%) counterparts (Warner, 2005). Also Virginia's baseline data suggested that low income and minority students are overrepresented in performing low academically and dropping out-of-school (Warner, 2005).

Based upon the baseline data, the Virginia Department of Education concluded that 88 high schools in Virginia have a retention rate over 20% between grades nine and ten (Warner, 2005). The high ninth grade retention rates can be correlated with the dropout rate because students who experience school failure are at a greater risk of dropping out (Wheelock & Miao, 2005). The review of the data also indicated that Virginia's high schools that are characterized by high ninth grade retention rates were in urban and rural areas (Warner, 2005). As a result, Governor Warner developed the Virginia's Proposal to the National Governors Association to Redesign the American High School and launched Commonwealth of Access; Transition, Readiness and Access Initiative.

Virginia is one of ten states selected by the National Governors Association (NGA) to help in its effort to "Redesign the American High School." To accomplish this, the participating states received grants to implement redesign initiatives in high schools. Virginia has selected thirty high schools called honor schools, one of which will be presented in the study. Honor

Schools throughout the state of Virginia received grant funds to assist in achieving the goals of the NGA and Virginia's Commonwealth of Access: Transition, Readiness, and Access Initiative. Some of the goals included decreasing ninth and tenth grade retention in high school, increasing the number of graduates, and decreasing the number of dropouts. As part of the grant requirement, Honor Schools must implement a ninth grade transitional program or expand an existing transitional program aimed at reducing the dropout rate and increasing college readiness (Virginia Department of Education, n.d.).

Transition Research

Transition programs are becoming a priority and a necessity in high schools across the nation. The Dropout Prevention Program Recognition Initiative of the U.S. Department of Education indicated that students often drop out at critical transition points such as the middle to high school transition (n.d.). Focusing on the transition years is critical in preventing students at risk of dropping out-of-school from actually leaving school (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Mizelle (as cited in U.S. Department of Education, n.d.) and Smith (1997) suggested that students are less likely to drop out of high school or academically underperform in high school if they participate in programs that help them transition from middle school to high school.

Teacher Transition Perceptions

The perceptions of teachers are a valuable resource to school leaders to develop programs to increase the academic achievement and prevent the failure of ninth grade students. For example, Fulk (2003) examined a Midwestern high school's response to 30% of its ninth grade students failing one or more of their classes in one semester. The method consisted of three phases: one, teachers' perceptions regarding the ninth grade students' strengths and weaknesses was collected; two, ninth grade students' perceptions of their strengths and weaknesses was collected; and three, the results from the teachers and students' responses was used to create a comprehensive program for easing students' transition to high school (Fulk, 2003).

Fulk's findings from the teacher surveys suggested a relationship between the teachers' practices and the students' outcomes. Eighty percent of the 94 teachers completed the surveys. The survey consisted of ten closed items that addressed teachers' course requirements and classroom practices, and five open-ended questions asking teachers to evaluate the skills and attitudes of their ninth grade students. Results from the descriptive statistics for the closed items

indicated that 75% of teachers required class notebooks, assigned homework, and were concerned about students' homework completion. Nearly half of the teachers indicated that they taught test-taking skills and note-taking skills. The responses of the open-ended questions revealed four major concerns that teachers had about ninth grade students. They were: (1) poor test preparation skills and test-taking skills, (2) poor organization and time management, (3) lack of motivation for school and/or concern about grades, and (4) poor rate of homework completion (Fulk, 2003). Further study is relevant to determine if a relationship existed between the numbers of teachers who used a practice and the students' weaknesses or strengths as it related to the practice. For example, only half of the teachers taught test-taking skills, and the students' lack of test-taking skills was the teachers' major concern.

Akos and Galassi's (2004b) study had similar findings. Akos and Galassi's (2004b) purpose was to compare the perceptions of teachers, students, and parents involved in middle and high school transitions to develop interventions associated with negative consequences of the transitions. Akos and Galassi's (2004b) survey questions asked ninth grade teachers to rate the difficulty of the move from middle to high school for ninth graders using a four-point Likert scale. Also, open-ended and short answer questions asked: (a) what types of programming should be provided for rising ninth graders, (b) who should provide the programming, and (c) when it should be provided (Akos & Galassi, 2004b). The results showed that before the transition, high school teachers recommended a harder middle school curriculum (29%), more help with study skills at the middle school level (24%), and meetings about the new curriculum the state adopted (24%) (Akos & Galassi, 2004b). During the transition summer, high school teachers recommended academic remediation (24%), and after the transition they recommended teaching study skills (12%). Overall, both studies indicated that the teachers' concerns regarding ninth grade students' transition were heavily related to academic performance (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; Fulk, 2003).

Student Transition Perceptions

Students perceived that the most difficult part of the transition to high school was getting adjusted to the high school's academic demands. For example, Fulk's (2003) 51 item survey was divided into eight categories: (a) cognitive strategy use, (b) concentration and self-regulation, (c) intrinsic motivation, (d) metacognition (i.e., the ability to take control of one's own learning and thinking processes), (e) organization, (f) self-efficacy, (g) study habits, and (h) test anxiety (Fulk,

2003). The questions asked students to rate their own skills (1=Never like me, 2= Not often like me, 3=Sometimes like me, 4= Often like me, and 5=Always like me). The results of Fulk's (2003) student surveys indicated that study habits ($M=2.94$, $SD=.73$) and test anxiety ($M=2.95$, $SD=.92$) was a major concern for ninth grade students. The findings also suggested that cognitive-use- strategies such as note-taking and summarizing were students' weaknesses. In comparison to the teachers' responses, the responses of the students paralleled. They all felt that study and test taking skills were a priority for success in the ninth grade.

Likewise, the results of Akos and Galassi's questionnaire (2004b) indicated that academic performance was a major concern for ninth grade students. Homework, pressure to do well, and hard classes were the top concerns (Akos & Galassi, 2004b). Thirty-five percent of the 320 participants identified homework as the top concern; they also suggested having less work initially (34%) would ease the transition (Akos & Galassi, 2004b). To get more adjusted to high school, ninth graders indicated that they had to focus on completing school work (Akos & Galassi, 2004b).

Also, ninth grade students identified getting homework done in school as a factor leading to success in ninth grade (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005). Butts and Cruzeiro's (2005) purpose was to identify the factors that assisted ninth grade students to be successful in the ninth grade. The top three factors were "teachers who explain well" ($M=3.62$, $SD=.62$), "go to class every day" ($M=3.60$, $SD=.68$), and "interesting classes" ($M=3.58$, $SD=.64$) (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005) which are relevant in impacting the academic performance of students.

All of the researchers indicated that their findings were used to make changes in or recommendations for transition programming (recommendations discussed in section three) (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005; Fulk, 2003). Therefore, further study is necessary to determine the impact of transition programs on ninth grade students' academic performance, and whether or not the transition programs address the students' academic concerns.

Ninth grade students are concerned with peer relationships during the transition. Because ninth grade students were concerned about fitting in and making new friends (Akos & Galassi, 2004b), ninth grade students indicated that making new friends ($M=3.12$, $SD=.85$) and having friends in class ($M=3.54$, $SD=.77$) were some of the key factors of success in the ninth grade (Fulk, 2003). To ease the transition and get adjusted to high school, ninth graders indicated that

spending time with old and new friends helped (Akos & Galassi, 2004b). Weis and Bearman (2007) indicated that transition students who had stronger ties with their peers had significantly better grades than non-transition students. However, for students who had troubled pasts in respect to peer-integration, attachment to school, and prior history of school failure, Weis and Bearman (2007) suggested that a transition to a new school was beneficial. For example, the results indicated that isolated (students who have few or no ties to peers), eighth graders who transitioned to a new school, were significantly more connected to school as ninth graders compared to the ninth graders who as eighth grade students did not move to another school (Weis & Bearman, 2007). Nevertheless, ninth graders identified making new friends as one of the top attractions of the transition (Akos & Galassi, 2004b). Adversely, ninth graders are also concerned with getting along with peers and coping with bullies. Overall, the researchers suggested that a component of transition programming should include building peer relationships.

Building relationships with teachers is another concern for students. Typically, a high school's organizational structure is not conducive in meeting the needs of ninth grade students (MacIver, 1990). In large comprehensive high schools, where students may see several teachers during the day, students are less likely to build close, trusting relationships with teachers (MacIver, 1990). Ninth grade students indicated that teachers who care ($M=3.24$, $SD=.75$) and teachers who are easy to talk to ($M=3.44$, $SD=.71$) are important elements of a successful ninth grade year (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005). Also, ninth graders suggested that cooperation between students and teachers leads to positive student outcomes (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005). To reduce students' feelings of anonymity and enhance students' academic performance, many transition programs consist of smaller learning communities, schools-within-schools, or interdisciplinary teams in which teachers can work closely with a smaller group of students (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005; Dyke, 2007; Fulk, 2003; MacIver, 1990). Further discussion of these transition program models is presented later in the chapter.

Lastly, major concern of entering freshman is the fear of the unknown. Rising ninth graders indicated that providing information and insight about high school eased the transition (Akos & Galassi, 2004b). Ninth grade students suggested that before their transition, upperclassmen should come to the middle school to dispel the myths and tell them what high school is really like (Akos & Galassi, 2004b). Learning to navigate the building was a top

concern; therefore, the students suggested better orientations and tours during the transition (Akos & Galassi, 2004b). In addition, students wanted a better insight on the class expectations to be academically successful (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005). As the research suggested, transition programming should be an extension of the middle school and offer opportunities for students to receive relevant information to ensure a smooth transition (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; Fulk, 2003; Smith, 1997).

Gender and Transition

Should gender be considered as a variable in school transition? This is a question often asked by many researchers, and the responses vary depending on the particular issue studied. Akos and Galassi (2004a) explored gender and transition. The Likert scale questionnaire asked students to measure their perceptions about the transition. The response choices ranged from (1) difficult, (2) somewhat difficult, (3) somewhat easy, and (4) easy. Their study concluded that gender was not a significant variable in ninth grade students' perception of the difficulty of the transition to high school (girls, $M = 3.13$, $SD = .90$; boys, $M = 3.10$, $SD = .83$). The findings of Akos and Galassi (2004a), Weis and Bearman (2007), Akos & Galassis (2004b), and Butts and Cruzeiro (2005) emphasized that students do not always perceive the transition as being difficult, but Alspaugh (1998) reported that there was still achievement loss during the transition. This can be reflected by a decline in grade point average (GPA) or low test scores.

Although gender differences were not important with regard to the difficulty of the transition, they played a role in other aspects of the transition. Akos and Galassi (2004a) revealed that ninth grade boys ($M = 15.7$, $SD = 2.2$) felt significantly more connected in high school than did ninth grade girls ($M = 14.4$, $SD = 2.8$), $F(1,300) = 18.52$, $p = .001$). Although the boys felt more connected to school (Akos & Galassi, 2004a), Fulk's (2003) findings suggested that girls considered themselves to be more serious about school than boys. The female students rated their skills higher than males in the areas of organization, study habits, cognitive strategy use, and test anxiety (Fulk, 2003). Because boys felt a connection to school, offering them more support through a transition program should increase their skills to ensure academic success. Dyke's (2007) findings are aligned with this assumption. Her study concluded that a transition program was effective in reducing the number of male students recycled in the ninth grade as compared to males in a traditional program. Overall, evidence supports that gender differences are important elements in establishing transition programs.

Race and Transition

Although minority students are overrepresented as compared to their white counterparts as students who do not graduate, who are retained in the ninth grade, and who dropout (Nield & Farley, 2004; Orfield, 2004; Swanson, 2004; Warner, 2005a;), few studies have examined how middle to high school transition impacts racial and ethnic groups. In most of the transition studies, the racial and ethnic groups in the sample may be representative of the school or district populations, but these studies do not examine large minority populations. For example, Akos and Galassi's (2004a) study focused on the gender and race as variables in psychosocial adjustment to middle and high school transition. The sample included 76.3% Caucasian (n = 244), 10.3% African American (n = 33), 5.6% Asian American (n = 18), and 3.4% Latino (n = 11). In Butts and Cruziero's (2005) and Fulk's (2003) studies, which focused on student perceptions of middle to high school transition, the specific race of the participants was not indicated. However, they did include the racial composition of the schools' population. In both studies, the populations included approximately 80% Caucasian students. Fulk's (2003) school's population had less than 10% African American, and less than 3% Latino; whereas Butts and Cruziero's (2005) had 1.7% each for African American and Latino students. Because of the disproportionate number of Caucasian students as compared to minority students, the results from the sample reflected the perceptions of mostly the Caucasian students. Further study is needed to explore if there is a relationship between the minority students who are at higher risk of dropping out or performing low academically and their transition experience.

Likewise, few studies have examined how transition programs designed to increase graduation rates and decrease the dropout and grade retention rates impact racial and ethnic groups. Akos and Galassi (2004a) examined race and gender as variables in the students' perceptions of the difficulty of school transitions, feelings of connectedness to the new school, and persons who are perceived as most helpful during the transition experience. The results indicated only one significant difference for the high school sample. As compared to the white students, Latino students found high school counselors as the most helpful person during the transition experience (Akos & Galassi, 2004a). In the discussion of the results, Akos & Galassi (2004a) suggested that because of the counselor-dependency of Latino students, school counselors should play a vital role in easing the transition of these students. They also suggested that the study should be replicated to determine whether the results are common among varying

districts. The district in the study was characterized as a high performing school district in which 90% of the students attended postsecondary education (Akos & Galassi, 2004a). In addition, the racial composition of the sample of ninth grade students was a representative of the high school population, indicating that nearly 80% of the student body was Caucasian, 10% African-American, and 3% Latino. It would be interesting to replicate this study in a low performing district with a larger population of minority students since schools that have a higher percentage of minority students are implementing transition program practices (Kerr, 2002), indicating that there is a need for further study of transition research involving minority students.

Socioeconomic Status and Transition

Students who are identified as low socioeconomic status have a greater tendency to have difficulty with middle to high transition; however, some researchers have conflicting opinions about whether or not low socioeconomic students are being provided with the support they need. Kerr's (2002) study investigated the approaches taken by Maryland Public Schools to provide support to ninth grade students to ease their transition to high school. Kerr (2002) received data from three sources: (1) a survey that was issued to all the public high schools (sample consisted of 79% response rate; 138 schools out of 174), (2) Maryland School Performance Report providing demographic, economic, and academic information about the students in the schools, and (3) qualitative data such as interviews with ninth grade students, ninth-grade teachers and administrators, and observations of ninth grade classrooms. The results indicated that schools implementing practices to support ninth grade students had a history of low performance on the Maryland Functional Math Test, and low attendance and achievement rates. These schools are also characterized by having a high percentage of minorities and low socioeconomic status students as determined by the free or reduced lunch eligibility (Kerr, 2002).

Contrastingly, Smith's (1997) results of a national representative sample of public, private, and Catholic schools indicated that students who have a full transition program that extends from middle school are advantaged by family income, parental education, and occupational status. Smith's (1997) sample included a number of schools from rural or small town settings, but according to Kerr (2002), schools in rural or small towns have low poverty and low minority populations. Kerr (2002) and Smith's (1997) contrasting viewpoints are indicative of their different samples. However, both researchers suggested that accounting for

socioeconomic status, students who have access to a full or partial transition program were less likely to drop out and performed better in high school.

Transition Research in Rural Schools

There are few studies detailing middle to high school transition that have featured small or rural schools. In 1994, Tompkin and Deloney (1994) discussed the lack of educational research involving at-risk rural students, and over a decade later, Estelle and colleagues (2007) discussed the same issue. The researchers asserted that the effects of transition have been documented in urban youth and few have been documented extensively in rural youth (Estell et al., 2007; Tompkins & Deloney, 1994). Smith's (1997) study looked at small and rural schools but they were inclusive of private and Catholic schools that may not feel the high stakes test pressure as compared to public schools. In addition, Kerr (2002) offered that rural or small town schools have low poverty and low minority populations, but did not address the rural or small schools that have high minority and high poverty students. Most researchers look at large or urban schools as samples in transition research (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005; Dyke, 2007; Fulk, 2003; Kerr, 2002) because students in those schools have an increased risk of dropping out. However, keeping in perspective the accuracy of dropout rates, some researchers have suggested that dropout rates are higher in rural areas, especially areas with higher populations of low income minorities as compared to urban areas (Orfield, 2004; Tompkin & Deloney, 1994).

Tompkin and Deloney (1994) offer unique features of high poverty and minority rural areas as compared to high poverty and minority urban areas. The differences warrant further study as to why rural high school students have an increased risk of dropping out or underperforming. In particular, they asserted that lower student aspirations appear to be more prominent in rural communities than in other settings (Tompkin & Deloney, 1994). This may be attributed partly to the various direct effects of the isolation of rural communities (e.g., fewer human services, fewer cultural amenities, lack of cultural diversity, lack of exposure to career options and opportunities, etc.) (Tompkin & Deloney, 1994). Because of this, it is crucial that rural students entering high school receive more support and guidance that consists of programming to keep them on track towards graduation. The U.S. Department of Education (n.d.a) has recognized the uniqueness of rural areas and offers programs such as the Small Rural School Achievement and the Rural and Low-Income School Program to increase students'

academic improvement. Study is needed to determine what practices best ensure the success of at-risk, rural high school students.

Full Transition Model

There is no specific practice that has been proven to be effective in easing the middle to high school transition. However, based on the perceptions of ninth grade students, their parents, and school staff, researchers have suggested possible practices that will be indicative of establishing a sound transition program to meet the students' needs. The desired outcome of the transition program is to provide ninth grade students with opportunities for success and to reduce the risk of potentially dropping out. In a few cases, researchers have measured the impact of these practices on students' outcomes. However, researchers have indicated that a combination of these various practices may increase the likelihood of ninth grade students paving a positive road towards graduation (Kerr, 2002; Fulk, 2003; Smith, 1997; Wheelock & Miao, 2005). A transition program that consists of various practices to meet students' needs is called a full transition program (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005). Full transition programming is commonly characterized by the use of small learning communities.

Small Learning Communities

The Small Learning Community (SLC) model is endorsed by the U.S. Department of Education and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 as a means of improving the academic achievement of ninth grade students (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). There are several structures of Small Learning Communities: (a) academies which are sub-groups within schools, organized around particular themes, (b) house plans which divide students in a large school into groups of several hundred, either across grade levels or by grade levels, (c) a school-within-a-school which is a small, autonomous program housed within a larger school building, and (d) magnet schools which use a specialty core focus (such as math, science, creative arts, or a career theme or cluster) to attract students from the entire school district (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). The SLC structures offer ninth grade students a support system to ensure their success. In conjunction with one of the structures, specific practices are consistent with improving ninth grade students' academic performance. These practices are often designed to increase the students' sense of belonging to reduce the anxiety of entering a new school, and to

increase academic achievement to prevent ninth grade retention. Overall, the desired outcome of these practices is to increase the number of students graduating.

Practices Decreasing Anonymity

There are several practices that assist in increasing students' sense of belonging. As they enter high school, students' feelings of anonymity and isolation can negatively influence their performance in ninth grade (Akos & Galassi, 2004b). Students who feel connected to adults and peers within school are less likely to drop out (Fulk, 2003). Because entering freshmen are heavily concerned with building relationships with peers and teachers (MacIver, 1990; Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005; Akos & Galassi, 2004b), it is important to develop an organizational structure that allows this opportunity. Researchers suggested that small learning community structures that incorporate practices such as teacher advisory systems, alternative scheduling, and peer mentor programs are effective practices (U.S. Department of Education, 2001; Kerr, 2002). A teacher advisory system is when teachers are assigned to small groups of students to help personalize the high school experience (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). They often meet weekly to help students develop personal learning plans to achieve postsecondary career and college goals (U.S. Department of Education, 2001), teach study and time management skills to adjust to academic demands (Akos & Galassi, 2004b), and develop conflict and resolution skills to cope with bullying and peer pressure. Another practice is alternative scheduling. A common practice associated with alternative scheduling is block scheduling which addresses the need for students to spend more time with teachers (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005). With block scheduling, teachers can see fewer students during the day so that they can concentrate more on getting to know each student and his or her needs. In addition, ninth grade students have reported that they enjoyed hearing peer perspectives instead of the usual teacher perspectives (Fulk, 2003). Therefore, transition activities should include mentoring from older students (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). The upper classmen can serve as "role models to the ninth graders and provide tours of the school and tips for being successful in high school" (Fulk, 2003, p. 23). Overall, ninth grade students indicated that building peer and teacher relationships were indicative to ensure a successful transition and ninth grade year (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005; Fulk, 2003); however, there is little research that discuss how these key practices impact students' performance.

Practices Increasing Student Achievement

Several practices to ease the middle to high school transition are suggested to increase student achievement. Increasing student achievement is important because students who experience academic success are less likely to drop out-of-school. Therefore, more research is needed to measure the effectiveness of these practices.

Some practices that increase student achievement are designed to connect the middle school and high school experience. Ninth grade students reported that the most rigorous challenge of the transition was getting adjusted to the academic demands of high school (Fulk, 2003; Akos & Galassi, 2004b; Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005). Fulk (2003) and Butts and Cruzeiro (2005) suggested that during the eighth grade year, entering ninth graders should receive an orientation, orchestrated by high school teachers, counselors, and upper classmen, highlighting the expectations of high school. Although, students receiving summer remediation before entering high school was a favorable suggestion among researchers, (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005; Fulk, 2003; Kerr, 2002), Kerr (2002) concluded that only 31.9% of Maryland high schools addressed the academic content preparedness of incoming students before they entered high school. Fulk (2003) concluded, that students who attended a summer enrichment program before entering high school, as compared to those who did not attend, received nearly 25% fewer course failures.

Extended class periods associated with block scheduling were favorable as well. Block scheduling would allow more time for teachers to deliver lessons in greater depth (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005), more time for student-centered activities and cooperative-learning practices (Kerr, 2002), and more time for students to receive recovery and remediation opportunities. In addition, ninth grade students indicated that academic concerns such as managing time for homework, easing test anxiety, and enhancing note taking skills were important elements to ensure academic success (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005). These areas of concern would be addressed during a homeroom advisory period (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; Fulk, 2003; Kerr, 2002).

The last common practice that was suggested is the use of interdisciplinary teams. Interdisciplinary teams consist of the four core-subject area (math, science, English, and history) teachers who share the same students. In addition, the teachers have a common planning time (Fulk, 2003; Kerr, 2002). The common planning time allows teachers to discuss individual needs

of students in the areas of academics, attendance, and discipline. At the same time, the teachers can develop lessons together so that the students can get a better understanding of the concept being taught. Ninth grade students rated interesting classes, student and teacher cooperation, and teachers who explain well as leading factors to guarantee success in ninth grade (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005). These factors can be accomplished by the implementation of interdisciplinary teaming.

In conjunction with the small learning community structure, the practices suggested by the researchers are vital to increasing academic achievement and decreasing feelings of anonymity of ninth grade students. As Smith (1997) suggested, students who receive the support of a full or partial transition program are less likely to drop out or under achieve. However, few researchers have discussed the full transition model's impact on ninth grade students' academic performance. Dyke (2007) examined the first semester grade point averages of ninth grade students to determine an impact of a transition program; however, she did not examine the students' high stakes test scores. In some states, high stakes testing is a requirement for graduation (Haney et al., 2004). If that is the case, examining the test scores would give a clear depiction of whether or not the students were on the right path towards graduation, which is the overall goal of transition programming.

Summary and Synthesis

The body of literature related to middle to high school transition, the impact of transition on student outcomes, and models of transition programming are extensive, yet the literature does not reveal extensively the impact of transition programs on student performance. Haney et al. (2004) examined the education pipeline from 1970-2000. Their findings concluded a high attrition rate between grades nine and ten and an increasing bulge in grade nine. This phenomenon occurred more frequently in states which emphasized high stakes testing. Likewise, states that had high stakes testing policies had the greatest bulges. With accountability and high stakes testing provisions of No Child Left Behind, the ninth grade bulge and attrition rate will continuously increase. In particular, Virginia, a high stakes testing state, had an increasing ninth grade bulge (Warner, 2005). The retention of ninth grade students in Virginia sparked the Virginia's Commonwealth of Access: Transition, Readiness, and Access Initiative that promoted the need for transition programming in high schools (Virginia Department of Education, n.d.).

Focusing on the transition years is critical in preventing students at risk of dropping out-of-school from actually leaving school (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.b). Students who experience academic success during their ninth grade year are less likely to drop out, yet when they transition into ninth grade students experience an achievement loss (Alspaugh, 1998). Teachers and students are critically concerned with academic issues involving transition such as test anxiety and curriculum preparedness (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005; Fulk, 2003), indicating there is a need for transition programming as a support system for ninth grade students. However, the body of literature does not indicate transition concerns of high school administrators; further study is needed in this area. Transition programming is also necessary to reduce the characteristics such as chronic absenteeism and poor conduct that are associated with students who are at-risk of academic failure. Gender differences (Akos & Galassi, 2004a), racial and ethnic groups (Orfield, 2004), and socioeconomic status (Kerr, 2002) of students should be addressed in establishing transition programming. In addition, the effects of transition have been documented in urban youth and few have been documented extensively in rural youth (Estell et al., 2007; Tompkins & Deloney, 1994). Smith's (1997) study looked at small and rural schools, but the sample was inclusive of private and Catholic schools that compared to public schools may not always feel the high stakes test pressure. Small Learning Community (SLC) structures, in conjunction with specific practices that are consistent with transition programming are called a full transition model (Kerr, 2002). With the exception of Dyke's (2007) study, the body of literature does not extensively quantify the impact of transition programming on academic performance. In addition the literature lacks the qualitative component, teacher and administrator's perceptions, of whether or not the full transition model impacts academic performance of ninth grade students. Few studies involving middle to high school transition have highlighted the administrator's perspective.

The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of a ninth grade transition program on ninth grade students' overall performance. Chapter three presents the methodology which provides a clear framework of the study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Chapter three features sections detailing the methodology used in this study. The first section is the overview of the study and research design which emphasizes a mixed method approach. The next two sections detail the qualitative method approaches and quantitative method approaches which consist of the participants, setting, consent procedures, data collection process, and analysis procedures. The chapter concludes with a summary and a preview of what is featured in Chapter four.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to examine the impact of a full transition model program on ninth grade students' performance. The academic performance was measured by the passing rate of the high stakes test scores and the earned ninth grade credits. The ninth grade teachers and administrators' perceptions of how the transition program impacted ninth grade students' performance was explored. The study also examined if specific groups of students were impacted more by the program. In addition, an examination of the ninth grade students' retention status, number of out-of-school suspensions, dropout status, and attendance was conducted. The research questions guiding this inquiry were:

1. What are the ninth grade teachers' perceptions of how the transition program at Dean County High School impacted ninth grade students' performance?
2. What are the high school administrators' perceptions of how the transition program at Dean County High School impacted ninth grade students' performance?
3. How did students in the transition program perform on indicators of student success, including:
 - a. Students' ninth grade earned credits
 - b. Students' ninth grade SOL test pass rate as compared to the SOL test pass rate of students who did not participate in the transition program
 - c. The number of students retained in the ninth grade
 - d. Ninth grade students' attendance
 - e. The student conduct as measured by the number of out-of-school suspensions
 - f. The number of ninth grade dropouts

4. Were any specific groups of students impacted more by the transition program?

In this study, the researcher examined whether transition programming increased high stakes test scores of ninth grade students, number of earned credits, and improved their overall performance in the ninth grade. Furthermore, the researcher found out how the academic performance of specific groups of students was impacted by the program to determine if the program was meeting the needs of the students who need the most support as suggested by the review of literature.

Overview of the Research Design

This study was a case study utilizing a mixed method approach. Creswell (1998) asserted that a “bounded system or case such as process, activity, event, program, or multiple individuals” is traditionally studied in a case study (p. 113). The single transition program that was used in the study categorizes this study as a within-site study (Creswell, 1998). This study was also categorized as an intrinsic case study because the case was chosen because of unique qualities of the school and transition program to get an in-depth understanding of the case (Creswell, 1998).

This study utilized a mixed method approach. It “involved the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods and data to study the same phenomena within the same study or in different complementary studies” (Tashakkori & Teddie, 1998, p. 18). Creswell (1998) called this approach equivalent status design in which the researcher conducts the study using both the qualitative and the quantitative approaches about equally to understand the phenomenon under study. I triangulated quantitative and qualitative data to get an in-depth understanding of whether or not the transition program impacted ninth grade students’ performance. Creswell (1998) asserted that triangulating multiple sources of data provides “corroborating evidence to shed light on a theme or perspective” (p.202). For the study, the multiple sources were: teacher perceptions, administrator perceptions, material culture (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) and program documents, students’ information, and high stakes test scores.

The qualitative method approach consisted of the usage of in-depth interviews and the review of material culture and program documents. On page nine, Seidman (2006) stated, “interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience.” The ninth grade teachers and high school administrators provided a valuable insight by sharing how they feel the transition program impacted ninth grade students’ performance. The data showed the perceptions of the interviewees regarding the

program and opened up a dialog for suggestions of transition programming. Material culture such as program documents relating to the transition program such as curriculum, program structure, and program details were reviewed.

The quantitative method approach was consistent with the quasi-experimental design. Vogt (2007) asserted that quasi-experiments are used when the researcher lacks control over the experimental situation and is working in a field setting. In addition, quasi-experimental designs do not include the use of random assignment (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). For this study, the quasi-experimental design utilized was the matching-only pretest and posttest control group design (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000).

Qualitative Method Approach

Role of the Researcher

Qualitative research requires the researcher to “reject the notion that bias can be eliminated and that anyone can be completely disinterested” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 51). Spending several years as a ninth grade English teacher in a rural and urban setting shaped my approach to this study. As part of my experience, I have taught many over-aged ninth grade students, ninth grade repeaters, and ninth grade dropouts. In addition, I have seen various programs designed to address the needs of these students; however, most of them had little to no impact on the students’ academic performance. I have also witnessed school administrators engage in push out practices as described by Haney and colleagues (2004) to avoid testing lower achieving students. Needless to say, my passion for pursuing strategies to help ninth grade students intensified. I saw how these students struggled their first year of high school, and as a result, I also saw how many did not graduate.

Reliability and Validity

Rossman and Rallis (2003) asserted that the standards used to determine reliability and validity of qualitative data differ from those used for quantitative data. The standards in determining the reliability and validity of a qualitative study are credibility and rigor (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). To determine if a study is credible, the “readers depend on how adequately multiple understandings are presented and whether they ring true” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 66). Rossman & Rallis (2003) suggested that triangulating data and relying on multiple methods to gather data ensure credibility and rigor of the study. In this case study, I triangulated the data

from multiple resources such as the views from the participants, the program documents, and quantitative data. In addition, Rossman & Rallis (2003) suggested that the researcher make her position clear throughout the study. Remaining reflexive as I interview participants and making all of my purposes explicit, resolved any issues of reliability and validity (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). I remained reflexive by stating my explicit and implicit assumptions as a limitation in this study. I also kept in perspective my feelings and bias when constructing the interview questions so that I could remain objective.

Selection Process

One of the primary focuses of this research is to examine the teachers' and administrators' perceptions of how the transition program impacted the ninth grade students' performance. The interviews of ninth grade teachers and high school administrators and the field notes from the interviews and program documents make up the qualitative data.

The teachers and administrators interviewed were selected by using purposive sampling. Fraenkel and Wallen (2000) defined purposive sampling as "a nonrandom sample selected because prior knowledge suggests it is a representative, or because those selected have the needed information" (p.669). My current role as an assistant principal in Dean County school division (pseudonym used in study) of the high school of study gave me the knowledge to select potential participants. I selected the ninth grade teachers who were involved in the transition program and taught the transition program students for the 2006-2007 school year and who also taught previous cohorts of students who did not participate in the transition program. In addition, all of the building-level administrators, which included an assistant principal and principal, were selected. Phone calls were made to each selected person, requesting participation for the study (see Appendix A for telephone script). The willing selected individuals and I decided on a time and location for the interview. My current role in the school division allowed me access to the transition program documents such as program details and curriculum.

Setting

In this study, I studied the perceptions of the ninth grade teachers and administrators in a rural high school in Virginia regarding how the transition program impacted ninth grade students' performance. The comprehensive high school, Dean County High School (pseudonym used in this study), was the only one in Dean County. It served approximately 500 students

consisting of a racial composition of nearly 79% African American, 20% White, and 1% Hispanic. Nearly 60% of the students received free or reduced lunch. In addition, the high school had a full transition model program that was implemented under the guidelines of the Virginia's Commonwealth of Access: Transition, Readiness, and Access Initiative.

According to Rossman and Rallis (2003) the ideal site is one where:

1. Entry is possible
2. There is a rich mix of the processes, people, programs, interactions, structures of interest, or all of these
3. You are likely to be able to build strong relations with the participants
4. Ethical and political considerations are not overwhelming at least initially (p. 136).

Entry was possible because I am an administrator in the school division, which made it less difficult for me to get permission to enter. My position as an assistant principal in the school division allowed me access to the potential participants of this study and quantitative data that was used in this study. In addition, I had support from the school division's superintendent and the high school administrator to conduct this research because of their focus on providing support to ninth grade students due to the high retention rate and declining academic performance of ninth grade students of previous cohorts. The transition program was newly implemented for the 2006-2007 school year, and there had not been a formal evaluation of the program. The results of this study can be used to evaluate the program.

There are several reasons why Dean County High School offered a rich mix of processes, people, programs, and structures of interest. For one, the transition program was implemented in this high school because it was a recipient of the Virginia Honors School Grant. Schools that received this grant were characterized by low test scores, high retention rates, and high dropout rates. A part of the grant requirement was to implement a transition program to improve ninth grade students' performance. Examining if the transition program affected any of these variables warranted further study. Two, Dean County High School was a good place to conduct the study because there is only one feeder school. In Dyke's (2007) study, which examined the impact of transition programs on over-age ninth grade students, a limitation of the study was that the students came from different middle schools which may have had an impact on the students' academics and conduct. Three, the cohort in this study was the first to participate in the transition program. Studying the first year of the implementation of a program could determine if the

program had an immediate impact. Four, the high school is in a rural area. Most transition studies have been in urban settings; therefore, this study offered uniqueness to the existing body of literature. Five, the population of the high school was highly characterized by students whom the literature review suggested should be considered when establishing transition programs. The specific needs of minority and low socioeconomic students should be addressed when establishing transition programs. Determining whether or not this program impacted their performance warranted further study. Last, the teachers and administrators who were participants had various levels of experience with the transition program.

Also, I was able to build strong relationships with the participants because they viewed me as a colleague who also wanted the best for the students in the county. In particular, the teachers may have felt comfortable in discussing their opinion of the transition program to me because I was not affiliated with the transition program and because I was not their administrator. They may have expressed concerns with me that they may not have said to a person who helped developed the program or who directly supervised them. Adversely, a limitation is that because I worked in the school system, the teachers and administrators may not have been as open to me about their concerns. However, assuring confidentiality assisted in this matter.

Because Dean County High School is in the county in which I had worked, ethical and political considerations may be questioned. However, making clear to central office and the high school administration the purpose of the study before they granted me permission assisted in this matter. The data revealed if the program improved ninth grade students' outcomes which were worth knowing to evaluate and improve the program. In addition, the data were valuable to the middle school administration so that decisions could be made to improve the transition process for entering freshman. Regardless of the results of the study, the data can be beneficial to the administrators and students of the school division.

Participants

The participants for the qualitative portion of the study consisted of four teachers and two administrators. The selected ninth grade teachers were members of the interdisciplinary team who taught the transition program students in the ninth grade cohort from the 2006-2007 school year and the previous ninth grade cohort from the 2005-2006 school year. The selected

administrators consisted of the entire administrative team for the 2006-2007 school year which was one assistant principal and one principal.

After receiving permission from the Dean County High School principal, I contacted the teachers during their planning period to schedule the interview at the high school. All participants were allowed to select another location for the interview if they did not want to interview at the high school. To not interfere with instructional time, interviews were scheduled during the participants' planning period or before or after school. At the conclusion of each interview, each participant received a gift card in the amount of twenty dollars to a retail business.

Informed Consent and Permission Procedures

I sought approval to conduct the research from the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB). Creswell (1998) asserted that IRB approval protects participants from harm. After the IRB approval, participants gave consent to participate in the study. I issued a consent form based on the Virginia Tech's consent form template (Informed consent procedures) and that addressed Creswell's (1998) following suggestions:

1. Their right to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time
2. The central purpose of the study and the procedures to be used in data collection
3. Comments about protecting the confidentiality of the respondents
4. A statement about known risks associated with participation in the study
5. The expected benefits to accrue to the participants in the study
6. A place for them to sign and date the form and a place for the researcher to sign (p. 115).

The consent form (see Appendix B) was given to participants in person. They received an adequate amount of time to read and review the form. If necessary, I answered questions and clarified any concerns. Once each participant agreed to participate in the study, they were asked to sign the consent form.

Assurance of Confidentiality

According to Fraenkel & Wallen (2000), "all of the participants should be assured that any data collected from or about them will be held in confidence" (p. 44). To assure confidentiality, the data collected was not linked to the participant, and the names of participants

were not used in any publications to describe the research (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). Therefore, I used pseudonyms instead of the participants' names when transcribing the interview. The pseudonyms were used in all written documentation. In addition, the only people who had access to the transcripts were the co-investigator and me. This was outlined in the consent form to the participants. Although, much effort was made to ensure confidentiality and to minimize the risk of revealing the identity of participants; there is no guarantee that the participants remained unidentifiable. This also was outlined in the consent form to participants. Pseudonyms for the school and school division were used as well. For the purpose of this study, the high school pseudonym was Dean High County School and the county pseudonym was Dean County.

Data Collection

According to Rossman and Rollis (2003), "in-depth interviewing is the hallmark of qualitative research" (p. 180). Interviewing is essential to (a) understand individual perspectives, (b) probe or clarify, (c) deepen understanding, (d) generate rich descriptive data, (e) gather insights into participants thinking, and (f) learn more about the context (Rossman & Rollis, 2003). Therefore, interviewing was an appropriate data collection method for this study because I wanted to know the teachers and administrators feelings about how the transition program impacted the ninth graders' academic performance. To get a rich understanding of how the teachers and administrators felt about the program and its results, I conducted creative depth interviews which consist of a single lengthy interview (Miller & Crabtree, 2004). Miller and Crabtree (2004) stated that, "the creative depth interview is an entranceway to narrative understanding" (p.200). The data collected from the interviews, along with the students' data and test scores (quantitative data) will offer a deeper insight of the impact of the transition program.

In addition, Rossman and Rallis (2003) suggested that qualitative researchers study material culture. This consisted of gathering and analyzing documents to better understand the phenomena under study (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Documents to further explain the transition program was examined. The documents and archival data consisted of program information that included the schedule and structure of the program, specialized curriculum for the program, Virginia Honors School Grant information, and any other pertinent documents that enriched the understanding of the transition program. These documents and information were obtained from the high school's principal or designee and the Virginia Department of Education website.

Interview Protocol

The teachers who taught the transition program students and non-transition program students and the administrators were interviewed. All of the questions asked of all the participants were open-ended. “Standardized open-ended interviews are tightly prefigured having fixed questions that are asked of all participants and because of the nature of the questions, participants can respond freely” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 182). For the purpose of this study, the primary open ended questions for the teachers were:

1. What are the skills that ninth graders need to be successful in high school?
2. What are some specific issues of ninth grade students that made this program necessary?
3. Compare the behavior of the students who participated in the transition program and students from the previous cohorts who did not participate in the transition program.
4. Tell me about the test preparedness and academic performance of students who participated in the transition program and students from previous cohorts who did not participate.
5. Tell me about the attendance of the students who participated in the transition program and students from previous cohorts who did not participate.
6. Tell me about a time when you felt a student’s needs were not being met by the transition program.
7. Tell me how you feel about the transition program’s resources and support available to you.
8. Tell me how parents are involved with the transition program.
9. Tell me about the strengths of the transition program.
10. Are there any other changes that occurred during the 2005-2006 or 2006-2007 school years that could have impacted the students’ educational outcomes?

The principal of the high school was new to the division when the transition program was implemented. He did not have any experience with the non-transition program ninth grade students of the previous cohorts. However, he had experience with the non-transition program students as tenth graders. His perceptions of his first time experience of overseeing a ninth grade transition program were valuable for the evaluation of the program. The following questions were asked:

1. What are some challenges that ninth grade students face?
2. What are the skills that ninth graders need to be successful in high school?
3. Tell me what you look for to determine if the transition program is effective.
4. Tell me about the resources and support offered to the teachers involved in the program.
5. Tell me about the behavior of the transition program students.
6. Tell me about the test preparedness of the transition program students.
7. Tell me a time when you felt a student's needs were not being met by the program.
8. Tell me how parents are involved with the transition program.
9. Tell me about the strengths of the transition program.
10. Are there any other changes that occurred during the 2005-2006 or 2006-2007 school years that could have impacted the students' educational outcomes?

The assistant principal was at the high school during the years of transition and non-transition program students. Therefore, the questions constructed were as follows:

1. What are the skills that ninth graders need to be successful in high school?
2. What are some specific issues of ninth grade students that made this program necessary?
3. Tell me what you look for to determine if the transition program is effective.
4. Tell me about the behavior of the students who participated in the transition program and students from the previous cohorts who did not participate in the transition program.
5. Tell me about the test preparedness of students who participated in the transition program and students from previous cohorts who did not participate.
6. Tell me about a time when you felt a student's needs were not being met by the transition program.
7. Tell me about the resources and support offered to the teachers involved in the program.
8. Tell me how parents are involved with the transition program.
9. Tell me about the strengths of the transition program.
10. Are there any other changes that occurred during the 2005-2006 or 2006-2007 school years that could have impacted the students' educational outcomes?

Rossman and Rallis (2003) said that the use of follow-up questions “elicit elaborations and clarifications from the participant” (p.185). Rossman and Rallis (2003) emphasized Ulin, Robinson, Tolley, and McNeil’s (2002) assertion that follow-up questions were a “natural part of any conversation” (p. 186). Therefore, the follow-up questions were not scripted but they were asked during the interview. After the interviews, each participant was thanked for their participation in the study. To ensure accuracy of reporting the interview data, Creswell (1998) suggested the use of taking interview notes, audio taping the interviews, and transcribing the interviews; therefore, this was done for the study. The interviews were transcribed shortly after each interview was completed.

To analyze the data, the data was coded. “Coding is the formal representation of categorizing and thematic analysis” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 284). Rossman & Rallis (2003) recommend coding the data several times to find the true essence of the phenomena. Once the themes were categorized, I found and organized evidence for each category from the interview responses and material culture (program documents and archival data) for interpretation. To accomplish this, I created a color-coded system for each interview question. Anytime that I saw similar responses from the participants I highlighted the text in the transcript the same color. For example, when the teachers were asked to tell me about a time when they felt a student’s needs were not being met, I highlighted similar responses the same color. Continuing with the example, every time it stated in the transcript that the curriculum used for the Leadership Class did not meet students’ needs, I highlighted the text blue. This was done for each interview question. Then I read the text for each color and developed a theme. Using the same example, I decide that based on the highlighted text in blue the theme would be called “Revise Curriculum.” In reviewing the program documents, when I saw text that discussed a theme, I highlighted the information in the program documents the same color as the theme. Needless to say, many colored highlighter and markers were utilized during this extensive process.

Quantitative Method Approach

Sample

As mentioned above, the participants of this study were the 2005-2006 school year ninth grade cohort who did not participate in the transition program and the 2006-2007 ninth grade cohort who participated in the transition program. The study was limited to first time ninth

graders of each cohort. In addition, special education students were not included in the study to compare like groups. Although, special education was a subgroup indicated by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and special education students' performance is important, this study focused on the regular education students for several reasons. One, the policies and procedures of dealing with the discipline of special education students varied. In some cases, special education students received manifestation hearings, behavior intervention plans, or alternative placement for behavior issues. Therefore, one could not fairly compare the conduct as measured by the number of out-of-schools suspensions of a regular education student to a special education student. Two, special education students' testing varied. Some special education students took the alternative assessments rather than the SOL tests. Three, the classroom structure of special education student may have varied. Some special education students were in self-contained classes (consisting only of special education students) while others were in Inclusion classes (consist of special education and regular education students). Four, information about special education students was not easily accessible because it was in the students Individual Education Plan (IEP). Vogt (2007) explained that researchers can be more confident in their comparisons if the groups are similar. One hundred and nineteen students from the 2005-2006 cohort and 86 from the 2006-2007 cohort fit the criteria.

Informed Consent and Permission Procedures

In addition to the IRB approval, I sought the approval of Dean County school division's superintendent to gain access to the school division's data base (SASI) and to get assistance from the data specialist. The data specialist of Dean County Public Schools retrieved data from the students' records that was necessary for this study and pre-coded it before giving it to me.

Quasi-Experiment Design

A quasi-experiment was conducted in this study. As suggested by Vogt (2007), to reduce problems associated with not using random assignment and to ensure validity, I matched the transition program students' characteristics with non-transition program students. In other words, the participants from each cohort fit the same criteria. The cohort participants were first time freshman, and did not include special education or English as Second Language (ESL) students. The transition program students were from the 2006-2007 ninth grade cohort and the non-transition students were from the previous year's (2005-2006) cohort. Pretests are important in

quasi- experiments (Vogt, 2007); therefore I looked at the performance of the cohort who did not participate in the transition program. For the posttest, I examined the performance of the cohort of students who participated in the transition program.

Variables

Vogt (2007) defined a dependent variable as the thing that is to be explained or predicted, or the outcome variable. In this study, the outcome variable was the ninth grade students' academic performance as measured by the pass rate of Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) tests and by the number of credits that was earned. Vogt (2007) also asserted that the dependent variable can be thought of as an effect and the independent variable as the cause. In this case, I sought to find if there were any significant differences in the SOL test pass rate and the number of earned credits of students who participated in the transition program as compared to the students who did not. Thus, the variables were the transition program and the non-transition program. To determine if the transition program impacted specific groups of students, the variables included gender, race, and free or reduced lunch status. In addition, other variables were included such as the ninth grade students' retention status, number of out-of-school suspensions, number of ninth grade dropouts, and attendance rate.

Data Sources

The information came from the Dean County Public School's data specialist. The Superintendent of Dean County Public Schools did not allow access to individual students' records. Thus, this was the primary reason why chi-square tests were used for analysis. The data received was summary data and did not include any individual student's information to protect the identity of the students. The data included a summary of the students' race, gender, free and reduced lunch status, out-of- school suspensions, ninth grade retention status, attendance, dropout status, SOL pass rate, and number of earned credits of each cohort. Microsoft Excel 2007 was used to analyze the data.

Data Analysis Procedures

One quantitative technique was utilized in this study. In particular, chi square tests were used since the summary information that was given by the school division's data specialist did not provide individual student's records. The data received was nominal data. Creighton (2007)

defined nominal data as data that report a category, frequency, or count. Because there was no interval-type number, nonparametric tests were conducted such as the chi square analysis (Creighton, 2007). Although, the chi-square test does not rely on assumptions such as having continuous normally distributed data such as parametric tests, the chi-square test still has two important assumptions (Field, 2005). According to Field (2005) for the test to be meaningful it is imperative that each person, item, or entity contributes to only one cell of the contingency table, and the expected frequencies in each cell must be greater than 5. If less than 5 exists in any one cell, there is a loss of statistical power and leads to meaningless interpretation (Field, 2005). Based on explanations provided by Creighton (2007) and Field (2005), chi square tests were best utilized for this study.

Data Reliability and Validity

Assuring reliability and validity of data is important. To increase the power of the data, Creighton (2007) offered several suggestions. One suggestion was that the expected frequencies should not be less than five because there may be a loss in statistical power and effect (Creighton, 2007). Another suggestion was to make sure that each person or response was counted once in a frequency table (Creighton, 2007). The data specialist was informed to make sure that the data was accurate and also received notice of the information that was necessary for the study. Careful attention was focused on the data to draw reliable and valid conclusions.

Conclusion

I used this case study to attempt to clarify whether or not the transition program impacted the performance of ninth grade students. A mixed method approach and triangulation to get an in depth understanding of the transition program's impact. The qualitative data included the interview responses from open-ended questions asked of the administrators and teachers and included the material culture and program documents. Results of the interview responses were presented as themes resulting from the analysis. The quantitative data consisted of the use of chi square tests. The variables included the ninth grade students' SOL pass rate, number of earned credits, conduct, retention status, dropout status, and attendance. Because several researchers in the review of literature suggested that gender and socioeconomic status be considered when establishing transition programming, this study provided a closer look at these variables as well to see if any specific group of students was impacted more by the program.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this case study was to examine the impact of a full transition model program on ninth grade students' performance at a rural high school. A mixed method approach was used in this study. The qualitative data consisted of the ninth grade teachers and administrators' perceptions of how the transition program impacted ninth grade students' performance. In addition, program documents were examined to further explain the full transition model. The quantitative data consisted of the ninth grade students' Standards of Learning (SOL) pass rate and the number of earned ninth grade credits. Included as well was an examination of the ninth grade students' retention status, number of out-of-school suspensions, dropout status, and attendance. This study also examined if specific groups of students, categorized by gender, race, and socioeconomic status, were impacted more by the program.

Chapter four is divided into three sections. Section one highlights information about the student, teacher, and administrator participants involved in the study. The second section details the qualitative data which consist of the review of the program documents. This section explains the transition program's curriculum, schedule, and activities. In addition, it provides background knowledge of why the program was developed. It also offers information about the school's participation with the Commonwealth of Access: Transition, Readiness, and Access Initiative. Section three represents the teacher and administrators' perceptions, coding procedures, and results. The qualitative data also answers the first two research questions. Section three contains the quantitative results. In this section the statistical analysis of the data related to research questions three and four are presented. The final section provides the summary.

Participants

Teachers

The criteria for the teacher participants were as follows: the teacher must have taught the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 ninth grade cohorts; the teacher must have taught a core subject (English, math, history, or science); and the teacher must have been a part of the interdisciplinary team for the ninth grade transition program. Six teachers were eligible to interview for the study. However, one teacher left the school division, and left no further information about their

whereabouts, and one teacher chose not to participate in the study. The remaining four teachers agreed to be interviewed.

Administrators

The entire administrative team, which consisted of one principal and one assistant principal, was eligible for the study. Both of them agreed to participate in the study. The assistant principal was there during both cohort years. The principal was there for the 2006-2007 school year; however, he had experience with the 2005-2006 cohort of students as tenth graders. His perceptions of his first time experience of overseeing a ninth grade transition program are valuable for the evaluation of the program.

Students

Based on the criteria that were developed to give to the school division's data specialist, 118 students from the 2005-2006 cohort (non-transition program students) and 87 students of the 2006-2007 cohort (transition program students) met the criteria. She retrieved the data from the school division's SASI database which was a software program that was used to store the school system's data. Students who were first time ninth graders and could not be involved in the special education or English as Second Language (ESL) program were selected for the study. Of the 118 non-transition program students, 53 were females, 65 were males, 79 received free or reduced lunch, 98 were Black, and 20 were White. Of the 87 transition program students, 42 were females, 45 were males, 58 received free or reduced lunch, 72 were Black, and 15 were White.

Qualitative Results

Program Documents

The program documents that were available came from the administrative designee who was person appointed by the principal to provide me with the information, the school division's program of studies, and the Virginia Department of Education. The documents provided details about the nontransition and transition educational programs. The information is highlighted in the following subsections. The first three subsections address specifics about both school years.

Retained Students

There are two ways that a student could have been retained in a grade level in Dean County High School. First, if a student did not pass at least five courses, which means the same as earning five credits, the student was retained in the same grade. Also, if a student missed more than 18 days and within the discretion of administration, the student could be retained in the same grade.

Sophomore Classification

A ninth grade student must earn five standard units of credit to become a tenth grader. Standard units of credit were the required credits that students had to receive to earn a standard or advanced diploma. A ninth grade student could earn the following standard units of credit: Algebra I, English 9, World History I, foreign language, Health and Physical Education, or fine arts. Even though, there was an SOL test linked to several of the standard units of credit, the passing of the test was not required to earn the standard units of credit for sophomore classification. Students who did not earn five credits took tenth grade courses, but were classified as freshman, and had to repeat the course in ninth grade.

Earned Credits, Standard Units of Credits, & Verified Credits

To understand these findings, it is necessary to know how Dean County High School defined earned credits, standard units of credits, and verified credits. Earned credits was defined as passing a course with a letter grade of A, B, C, or D. Standard units of credit were obtained if a student passed the required course to receive a standard or advanced diploma. To receive a standard diploma, students must have earned at least six verified credits. The six must have included one verified credits from each subject area (science, math, social studies) in addition to the two tests in English. Verified credits were earned by passing the SOL tests.

2005-2006 Nontransition Program

The nontransition program students participated in all four core subject classes (English, math, science, and history), two electives, and a health and physical education class in ninth grade. In particular, they were offered Algebra I, Earth Science, and World History I which were required ninth grade courses. The high school operated on an eight period schedule on Monday and odd-even double blocked alternating days on a yearly plan (Dean County Public Schools,

2005). However, some courses were double-blocked which meant that a student was able to take Algebra I, English 9, or World History I every day for 90 minutes rather than every other day. If double blocking occurred, this meant that students lost the opportunity to take an elective or health and physical education that year. Typically, low performing students were double blocked. Ninth graders had to earn five credits out of their eight total credits to be promoted as tenth graders (Program of Studies, 2005). To earn an advanced diploma the students must earn 24 units of credits and nine verified credits. Verified credits were earned after passing the course and the Standards of Learning End-of-Course test (Program of Studies, 2005). Students were eligible for a standard diploma if they earned 22 units of credit and six verified credits.

2006-2007 Transition Program

There were several similarities and dissimilarities between the transition and nontransition program. Both programs had the same diploma and credit requirements. The transition program students were offered the same courses as outlined for the nontransition program students; however instead of two electives, one of the electives was replaced with a Teen Leadership class which was a freshman transition seminar. The students had the Teen Leadership class every other day for 90 minutes. During this class, students received information about how to be a successful ninth grader. They were taught social, communication, and study skills to improve their performance as a ninth grade student. Contrary to the nontransition program, there were no double blocked classes offered for the transition program students. Any type of remediation for lower performing students was done during the Teen Leadership class or after school tutorial. The Teen Leadership class was taught by a ninth grade core teacher or guidance counselor. In addition, the transition program students had the same four core teachers who were called the interdisciplinary team. This team also had common planning time.

Before they entered as freshman, the transition students participated in freshman orientation during the summer in which they were introduced to the high school staff, learned the expectations of the high school, and toured the high school. Also during this event, students were engaged in team building activities. Parents were invited to this event as well. In addition, there was a family night in which the parents and students received a spaghetti dinner and information for the upcoming ninth grade year.

Each transition program student received a peer mentor. The peer mentors were upperclassmen who were trained during the summer. Over the summer, the peer mentors called

via telephone the rising ninth graders to give them helpful reminders and tips for the upcoming year. The peer mentors were also utilized during the school year. The overall full transition model program was called Dean County High Success Academy.

The Rationale for a Transition Program in Dean County High School

As described in Chapter two, Virginia implemented an initiative called the Virginia's Commonwealth of Access: Transition, Readiness, and Access Initiative. Some of the goals included decreasing ninth and tenth grade retention in high school, increasing the number of graduates, and decreasing the number of dropouts. High schools in Virginia that were characterized by high retention and dropouts and low performance were eligible to be an Honors School (Virginia Department of Education, n.d.) The high school in this study was a recipient of the Honors School Grant, and in particular, a recipient of the Ninth Grade Transition Grant. With the Ninth Grade Transition Grant, the high school officials had to develop and implement a transition program or expand an existing transition program.

The program documents revealed several reasons why the transition program was necessary for Dean County High School. Specifically, in Dean County High School's grant proposal, grant money was needed to implement the transition program due to many discipline referrals from ninth graders, over half of the ninth graders failed one or more subjects at the end of their first semester, only 70% of the students graduated on time, and many of the ninth graders failed SOL tests (Ninth Grade Transition Grant Proposal, 2006).

In another program document, the leadership team which consisted of the principal, counselor, teachers, and Dean of Secondary Education of the high school, identified the top reasons why they felt that the ninth grade students struggled. There were four broad categories: perception, habits, environment, and attitude. Responses for perception included "students do not see the relevance of learning," "school incentives do not work," "they think that their teachers do not care," and "they think classes are unconnected to the real world and do not make sense to them" (Ninth Grade Transition Grant Proposal, 2006). In regard to habits, the team responded that the "students lack time management skills," "they lack prerequisite academic knowledge and skills," "they do not study at home," and "they have poor work habits" (Ninth Grade Transition Grant Proposal, 2006). In the area of environment, the team indicated that "the students' family had low expectations," "their parents were not successful in school," and "their peers are not good role models" (Ninth Grade Transition Grant Proposal, 2006). Under the category of

attitude, the team concluded that “the students are immature,” “they have limited goals,” and “outside issues and temptations distract them” (Ninth Grade Transition Grant Proposal, 2006).

Teachers and Administrators Perceptions

The open-ended questions allowed the interviewee to give his or her thoughts on how he or she felt that the program impacted the indicators of success. After the interviews were transcribed, I organized the data by looking for themes in the text that emerged from each question. I coded the data by hand, using colored sticky notes and highlighters. The results are presented under each research question.

Research Question 1

What are the ninth grade teachers’ perceptions of how the transition program impacted ninth grade students’ performance?

The teachers were asked ten questions. I developed themes from the responses of each interview question. The themes and teacher responses that correlate to the themes are described in the text below.

For the first question, teachers were asked to discuss the skills that they felt that ninth grade students needed to be successful in high school. All of the teachers indicated that communication skills were important. All aspects of communication such as public speaking, reading and comprehending, and writing were discussed. Three of the four teachers indicated that ninth grade students needed to be able to communicate to diverse populations that included peer and adult groups. Half of the teachers asserted that students need to have more positive interpersonal skills. The teachers felt that learning to resolve conflicts and managing negative emotions would help the students. One teacher stated that, “they need to be able to resolve conflicts through mediation as opposed to the use of violence and inappropriate language.”

Another theme that emerged from all the teachers’ responses was the ninth grade students’ need to be intrinsically motivated. Specifically, the teachers said that ninth graders need to develop skills that enable them to want to be the best that they can be and that they need to be able to do things for themselves. Establishing a sense of independence and responsibility was what most of the teachers wanted from the students. One teacher attested that he had to constantly reward students to get them to do something. He preferred that students be taught that

rewards are a privilege and not a right that has to be given all the time. Students' lack of motivation was a consistent concern from all the teachers.

The teachers mentioned other skills that they thought students needed to be successful in high school. Organizational skills were suggested. The teachers indicated that students need to be more organized in high school because the "schedules are not easy to follow" and they may "get lost in the shuffle". Other imperative skills noted by the teachers were study skills, test taking skills, and critical thinking skills.

For the second interview question, teachers told me the specific issues of ninth grade students that made a transition program necessary. All of the teachers indicated that students' behavior and poor conduct was a top reason that made the program necessary. "Lack of social skills, bullying, talking back, and apathy" were some of the concerns. In addition, all of the teachers said that ninth grade students were not academically prepared for the rigor of high school. In particular, they stated that the students' lack of motivation and study and test taking skills contributed to their unpreparedness. The teachers also focused on the differences between middle and high school. Because the middle school and high school operated differently, the teachers indicated that ninth graders have difficulty adjusting to the routines and procedures such as changing classes, block scheduling, and expectations of high school. They suggested that a program would be necessary to "teach the operation and procedures of the high school before ninth grade students enter." Attendance was also a specific issue that the teachers thought that the program should address.

One of the teachers made a point to say that the high school did not have a system in place to identify students who are at risk or have special needs. He indicated that the teachers did not have a way "to collectively deal with student issues." He suggested that a transition program would allow common planning time for teachers who taught the same students. In addition, he indicated that the Leadership Class in a transition program would allow a time for teachers to determine students' needs by talking to them in a nonacademic setting. It appeared from the data that not only were students' issues a reason for the transition program, but the organizational structure of the high school posed a need for a transition program as well.

Another teacher suggested the students' negative influences from the students' families and community made the program necessary. He further explained that because students are coming from "broken homes, poverty, and uneducated parents," they come to school without

knowing the importance of education. He also discussed that because their parents may have had negative experiences in school, they were projecting that outlook onto their children. According to the teachers, the students were coming to high school without a plan for success which deemed a transition program necessary to help in changing the students' perceptions.

The next several questions asked the teachers to compare the performance of the transition program students to the nontransition program students on the indicators of success. The first indicator was behavior. The teachers felt that the students involved in the transition program had improved communication with staff and peers. They also perceived the transition program students as being more cohesive as a cohort. One teacher linked the cohesiveness of the cohort "to the program's efforts in helping to build group identity." In addition, the teachers offered that the transition program's students' behavior was better as measured by their participation in school activities. Behavior is a factor in determining whether or not students can participate in school activities.

From the teachers' observations, transition program students were more involved in athletics, after school activities, and clubs. Also, based on teachers' observations, transition program students adjusted quicker to the high school norms. One teacher suggested that it was because the freshman orientation component of the program allowed the students to know what was expected of them before they entered. Another teacher suggested that the peer mentoring program component "allowed them to get involved with the greater school community;" while another teacher asserted that "by taking the Leadership Class the students understood what it took to excel in ninth grade." The teachers also indicated that the transition program students received less discipline referrals. A teacher explained that "their names were seen less on the suspension list and "the nontransition program students acted out more." The overall perception of the teachers seemed to favor the behavior of the transition program students; however, three out of four of the teachers indicated that the nontransition program students had some unique characteristics that contributed to their poor conduct. The teachers said that the nontransition program students had more over-aged students who were two or three grade levels behind. One teacher stated that "they had students who were approaching 18 and did not care about school." Overall, the teachers perceived that the behavior of the transition program students was better than the cohort who did not participate in the program.

The second indicator of success was test preparedness and academic performance. All of the teachers agreed that the transition program students were more test prepared and performed better academically than the nontransition program students. They also had various reasons why they thought the program impacted the students' performance. One of the teachers stated that it was "the communication amongst the teachers and students that helped us prepare them for the tests." Another teacher suggested that "during the Leadership Class, they were able to create lessons for test preparedness and address specific content areas." In addition, it was noted that the program "allowed the teachers to discuss strategies, time management, and organization" during the Leadership Class. The same teacher stated that they could address other issues at that time such as "the importance of eating breakfast and getting rest." Another teacher indicated that "the nontransition group did not do well on the SOL for the subject that he taught." In fact, he observed that the nontransition group had the lowest scores for his subject in four or five years. Overall, all the teachers felt that the transition program students understood the importance of studying and passing tests better than the nontransition program students. As one teacher suggested, the main reason was the program allowed the teachers to "speak the same language to the students." As they perceived, everyone was instilling the importance of passing the SOL tests.

When asked about the attendance of each cohort, half of the teachers felt the program had impacted attendance and the other felt that it did not impact attendance at all. One of the teachers reported that the program did not address attendance. The teachers who felt the program impacted attendance indicated that the transition program students had better attendance and they had more perfect attendance recipients. They also stated that the nontransition program students had more absences due to suspensions or truancy.

The sixth question addressed the teachers' perspective on a time when they felt the students' needs were not met by the program. Several themes emerged from the teachers' responses. One common theme amongst all the teachers' responses was that the curriculum for the Leadership Class did not meet the students' needs. A teacher stated that the curriculum was generic and it was not geared to the demographics of the Dean County High School. Other teachers suggested that the curriculum lacked real world connections and life skills. Likewise, they said that the curriculum did not emphasize character building skills. One teacher argued that

the teachers were not given the time to make corrections to the curriculum to fit the students' needs because core content issues took precedence.

The other themes that were generated came from the responses of individual teachers. For instance, one teacher felt that needs of the students were not being met because they had a disconnection with the community and central office staff. He felt that community leaders and central office staff should serve as role models to the students and be more involved with the program. He stated that "knowing these people would give students someone to aspire to be like." Another teacher indicated that he felt the students' needs were not being met by the peer mentor program. Although, he embraced the idea of having a peer mentor program, he indicated that they were not utilized as much during the school year. He further explained that conflicts arose when the peer mentors had to be pulled from other classes to help the transition program students. It caused conflicts amongst the teachers. Finally, one of the teachers perceived that the program did not meet the needs of over-aged males. She stated that over-aged males were more challenging. In particular, she expressed that these students were unprepared for class, apathetic, talked back to females, and had a "thug-like" mentality. Overall, each teacher offered different insight about times he or she thought the program did not meet students' needs.

I wanted to know about how the teachers' felt about the resources and support that was available to them. Three teachers stated that they enjoyed the training that was offered. The teachers and peer mentors were trained in the curriculum and mentor program. The training started during the summer before the ninth grade students entered high school and continued during the school year. Most of the teachers also indicated that they had a great deal of support from the building level administration. Adversely, all of the teachers felt that they did not receive adequate support with the curriculum. They felt that the curriculum did not meet the needs of the students and that they did not have enough time to revise the curriculum as SOL testing demanded so much of their time. One teacher suggested that "it would benefit the students if a teacher trained in leadership taught the students instead of a teacher who taught in a content area." Another teacher stated that the time he was allotted for planning was better spent by developing plans for the SOL curriculum rather than the Leadership Class curriculum. This teacher also expressed that he received no monetary compensation for his additional work with the transition program. He also indicated that the teachers did not have any say in how the money

was spent for the transition program. Overall, there were mixed responses of how well they thought the resources and support were available to them.

The teachers were also asked how the parents were involved with the transition program. All four of the teacher participants indicated that there was a lack of parental involvement. According to the teachers, few parents came to the transition program's activities even though they were invited. However, half of the teachers indicated that the communication between the school and parents was poor and that they may have not done all they could to involve parents. On the other hand, the other half said that parents were invited they just did not come. One of these teachers jokingly stated that "the only involvement of parents was when they sent their child to school." It was also indicated that they received few positive responses about the program in a form of a congratulatory word or a discussion about improved student behavior. Lack of parental involvement was a major concern for the teacher participants.

In addition, the teachers were asked about what they thought were the strengths of the transition program. Amongst all the teachers' responses, five themes emerged. One of the strengths of the program was that the expectations of high school were conveyed before students entered ninth grade and continuously during the Leadership Class. A few things that the teachers mentioned were that the students knew before entering high school their class schedules, the location of classrooms and offices, the number of credits they needed, and how many SOL tests they needed to pass for graduation. Another of the strengths was that the program helped to enhance the students' communication skills. They indicated that a component of the curriculum in the Leadership Class weighed heavily on public speaking. They also saw improvement in the students' communication with adults. Furthermore, a teacher expressed that the mentor program was one of the strengths. Most of the teachers indicated that they enjoyed the flexibility of the Leadership Class. During that time they could remediate, teach life skills, and invite public speakers. In addition, the teachers indicated that the students' enjoyed the flexibility of the Leadership Class. The teachers perceived that students liked having a "pressure-free period" in which they could have an "informal time to get things off their chests" and did not have the pressure of a test or earning a credit. As indicated, the strengths of the transition program varied.

The last question that was asked was imperative because I wanted to know if there were other variables that could have impacted the students' educational outcomes. I asked the teachers if there were other changes besides the transition program that occurred during the 2005-2006

and 2006-2007 school years. All of the teachers indicated that the new principal for the 2006-2007 impacted the students' educational outcomes. The teachers indicated several reasons why the change in leadership impacted the students. For one, one teacher indicated that his leadership style was different from the former principal. Another teacher stated that he took an active role in discipline and resolved issues from the previous year, while another teacher stated that he changed the climate of the building. In regards to climate, the teachers indicated that the school climate and culture changed, impacting the students' outcomes. Some responses were that the students in the transition program had the desire to pass the SOL tests and they had less behavioral issues. Another teacher expressed that less behavioral issues occurred because of the effort from the faculty and administrators to make the students feel welcome and to make them feel that the adults of the building were accessible. Other changes that the teachers indicated were still related to the transition program. For instance, a teacher indicated that in 2006-2007 they established an in-school remediation program; however, that was made possible during the Leadership Class. Also, another teacher indicated that the ninth grade teachers were more cohesive, but it was because they had common planning time which was a component of the transition program. All of the teachers agreed that the change in leadership and culture impacted educational outcomes.

Research Question 2

What are the high school administrators' perceptions of how the transition program impacted ninth grade students' performance?

I interviewed the principal and assistant principal of Dean County High School. As mentioned in Chapter 3, specific questions were asked of both of them and the other questions were specific to each participant. First, presented are the questions that were asked of both administrators with the specific questions following.

The administrators were asked to name the skills that ninth graders need to succeed in high school. They both felt that communication skills were important. The principal indicated that students need to be able to talk to teachers, while the assistant principal discussed the need for them to be active, critical listeners. Also, they both stated that ninth grade students must have a foundation of the basic concepts of core content. In particular, the assistant principal asserted that they need to have the basics in reading, vocabulary, writing, and math. Furthermore, she expressed that they need to be able "to read information, dissect it, make inferences, summarize

and paraphrase it.” The principal suggested that to be successful, students need to have study skills as well as be self-motivated; whereas, the assistant principal discussed organizational skills such as prioritizing and time management and organizing resources and notes.

They both were asked what they look for to determine if the transition program was effective. They both seemed to focus on the aspect of improved behavior and less discipline referrals. Also, they emphasized improvement in academic performance as measured by grades and SOL tests. The principal also indicated that he wanted to see more ninth grade students coming to school regularly. More ninth graders involved in extra-curricular activities were suggested by the assistant principal. Overall, they measured the effectiveness of the program by looking at the students’ conduct, academic performance, attendance, and activity involvement.

The administrators were also asked to talk about the resources and support offered to the teachers who were involved with the transition program. The responses from both of them varied. The principal indicated that the peer mentors were a resource to teachers as they assisted the teachers by helping them with the ninth grade students. In addition, he discussed the administrative support that the teachers had. He stated that the administrators met with the teachers to discuss the ninth grade students and needs of the program. Funding resources for the program was discussed. The principal talked about how the money from the Virginia Honors School Grant was used to pay for print resources, field trips, speakers, transportation, and trainings. He also noted that the parents were a resource to the teachers because of their involvement with the activities. However, the assistant principal thought that the resources that were provided to the teachers were the training and workshops that they attended throughout the school year. She also felt that allowing the teachers to have time to meet together such as common planning time was a means of support.

When asked about the behavior of transition program students, both administrators had the same response. They both responded by saying that the transition program students had improved behavior. Specifically, they stated that the transition program students took responsibility for their actions, were more focused, and confident. They both addressed the fact that the students’ improved behavior led to improved academics. More importantly, the principal indicated that these students had more open dialogue with administrators and counselors and were more career and goal driven. Overall, their perceptions were that the transition program positively impacted the behavior of the ninth grade students.

The administrators' responses were also complimentary when they were asked to talk about the test preparedness and academic performance of the transition program students. As compared to the nontransition program students, they both agreed that the remediation done during the Leadership Class better prepared the transition students for the SOL tests. The principal noted that the transition program students were also seeking more advanced classes as upper classmen.

The purpose of the program was to meet the needs of the ninth grade students; however, I asked the administrators if there was a time when they thought the program did not address students' needs. The assistant principal did not recall a time, but the principal could. He said that the program was not designed to allow teachers, counselors, or administrators to have a great deal of one-on-one time with students. Therefore, students with personal or individualized needs were not being met by the transition program. He further stated that the program did not have a process in place to help resolve students' personal situations that could not be addressed during a class time.

From the next question, I wanted to know how they felt about parents involvement with the transition program. The assistant principal and principal indicated that the parents were involved during the summer and school year activities of the transition program. Summer activities that they cited were Freshman Orientation, summer registration, and spaghetti dinner kick-off. School year activities that they cited were Open House, report card pick-up, parent-teacher conferences, ice cream social, and parent surveys. They did not state a percentage or number of parents who attended the events or give any measure of attendance.

Two themes emerged from the responses about the strengths of the transition program. The assistant principal indicated that the strength was the transition team which consisted of the ninth grade teachers and counselor. She stated that the team was "motivational to the students and enthusiastic about the program." The principal felt inclined to believe that the flexibility of the transition program was the strength. He said that the Leadership Class was utilized in many ways to meet the needs of the students. It was used for SOL remediation, and assemblies to give ninth graders information. Overall, the administrators perceived that the strengths were the transition team and flexibility of the transition program.

The last question that I asked both administrators was their view about any other changes that occurred during those years that could have impacted ninth grade students' educational

outcomes. Both of them said that the change in leadership impacted students. The 2006-2007 cohort had a new principal which was the present principal. Both administrators stated that the principal was more student-centered and had a stronger rapport with the students. The assistant principal discussed how the principal changed the school's climate. She indicated that because of the new leadership the students were driven more towards success and positivity. Another change that the principal indicated was that the line items on the budget were shifted. He used the funds that were budgeted for administration and outside training for staff on student resources. Instead of outside training, he stated that he adopted the train-the-trainer approach in which a staff member was sent to the training and he or she had to present the information to the other staff members that did not attend the training. Therefore, the changes in leadership and budget could have contributed to the educational outcomes of the ninth grade students.

Specific questions were asked of each participant. The principal was asked to talk about some challenges that ninth grade students face. First, he stated that the emotional transition was difficult for ninth grade students. He further explained that since they are no longer the top dogs in the school and would take some adjusting. Explaining further, he indicated that it was emotional for students to meet new friends and staff and it was emotional for students to make choices about life after high school. Second, he suggested that the rigor of high school work was a challenge for ninth graders. He described that SOL tests were required for graduation and that he understood how overwhelming that can be for students. Third, he indicated that the lack of parental support was an issue for ninth grade students. He explained that students wanted their parents to be more involved; however, he perceived that the parents that they needed to be more involved with their elementary level children rather than their high school level children. Last, he focused his discussion on how the expectations of the high school were different from the middle school and that the students had a difficult time adjusting.

Because the assistant principal was at the high school during both ninth grade cohorts in the study, I asked her to tell me specific issues of ninth graders that made the transition program necessary. She gave me five reasons. She stated that students needed help in adjusting to high school expectations. She echoed that a program was necessary to bridge the gap between middle and high school. Her second reason was that ninth graders lacked motivation and they needed work on "maximizing their potential." Her third and fourth reason emphasized the students' lack of study skills and low academic performance. The assistant principal's last reason centered the

idea of ninth graders having negative self-image and poor self-esteem. She did not offer great detail about specifics of what the students did to give her the perception of poor self-esteem. She stated that a program was necessary to address these issues.

Quantitative Data Results

This section presents the answers to the last two research questions. Chi-square analysis was used to determine if there was a significant difference between the performance of the nontransition and transition program students because the data received was categorical data and the researcher was not allowed access to individual students' data. An alpha level of 0.05 was used for all of the statistical tests. Before presenting the results of the research questions, Table 1 presents the summary of descriptions of each cohort.

Table 1

Summary of Cohort Descriptions

Program Type	Gender		Socioeconomic Status		Race		
	Total	Female	Male	FRL	NonFRL	Black	White
Nontransition	118	53	65	79	39	98	20
Transition	87	42	45	58	29	72	15

Note. Socioeconomic status was measured by the students' participation in the free or reduced lunch (FRL) program or non participation (NonFRL).

Research Questions 3 and 4

The results of this research question show how the nontransition and transition program students performed on the indicators of success. The focus of the study was also to determine if particular groups of students were impacted more by the program; therefore, the subgroups were determined by race, gender, and free or reduced lunch status. Each indicator and its relative results are highlighted in the following subsections.

Students' Ninth Grade Earned Credits

Two factors were looked at to determine the impact the transition program had on the number of credits students earned. One, I looked at the number of students who earned credit in each of the core subjects (math, English, history, and science). All ninth grade students in the nontransition and transition programs were required to have all four core subjects. Two, I looked at the number of students who earned five or more credits and those who earned less. Students who earned five or more credits out of eight possible credits were classified as sophomores. It was important to see if the transition program had any relationship with increasing the number of students classified as sophomores.

The chi-square analysis was conducted. The results indicated that there was no significant interaction between nontransition program and transition program students that earned an English credit ($\chi^2(1, N = 205) = 1.68, p = 0.19$). There was no significant relationship for the other subjects such as math ($\chi^2(1, N = 205) = 0.31, p = 0.58$), science ($\chi^2(1, N = 205) = 0.01, p = 0.92$), and history ($\chi^2(1, N = 205) = 0.50, p = 0.48$). There was no relationship associated with students earning credits that suggested that the transition program favorably changed students' performance.

In addition, a chi-square analysis was performed to determine if the transition program had any relationship on earned credits of students of a specific race. It was found that there was no significant relationship associated with the nontransition and transition programs' Black students who earned credits in each subject area. The results were as follows: English ($\chi^2(1, N = 170) = 1.16, p = 0.28$), math ($\chi^2(1, N = 170) = 0.15, p = 0.69$), science ($\chi^2(1, N = 170) = 0.05, p = 0.80$), and history ($\chi^2(1, N = 170) = 0.49, p = 0.48$). Similar results were found for the White students. There was no significant relationship in the number of students who had credits in English ($\chi^2(1, N = 35) = 0.58, p = 0.45$), math ($\chi^2(1, N = 35) = 0.22, p = 0.64$), science ($\chi^2(1, N = 35) = 0.06, p = 0.83$), and history ($\chi^2(1, N = 35) = 0.03, p = 0.87$). Overall, the findings suggested that there was no relationship associated with the transition program and earned credits of Black or White students.

A chi-square analysis was calculated to determine if the transition program impacted female and male students' earned credits by subject. There was no significant relationship found between the females of each program for earned credits in English ($\chi^2(1, N = 95) = 0.003, p = 0.96$), math ($\chi^2(1, N = 95) = 0.05, p = 0.82$), science ($\chi^2(1, N = 95) = 0.05, p = 0.82$), and history

($\chi^2(1, N = 95) = 0.08, p = 0.77$). Likewise, there was no significant relationship found between the nontransition and transition program male students' earned credits in English ($\chi^2(1, N = 110) = 3.56, p = 0.06$), math ($\chi^2(1, N = 110) = 0.37, p = 0.54$), science ($\chi^2(1, N = 110) = 0.21, p = 0.65$), and history ($\chi^2(1, N = 110) = 0.42, p = 0.52$). Overall, a relationship did not exist with transition program and the female and male students earned credits.

Similar results were calculated for the students who participated and those who did not participate in the free or reduced lunch program. There was not a significant relationship found for the nontransition and transition programs' free or reduced lunch students' earned credits in English ($\chi^2(1, N = 137) = 2.34, p = 0.13$), math ($\chi^2(1, N = 137) = 0.37, p = 0.54$), science ($\chi^2(1, N = 137) = 0.05, p = 0.81$), and history ($\chi^2(1, N = 137) = 0.20, p = 0.65$). The transition program also did not have a significant relationship with the non free or reduced lunch students' earned credits in English ($\chi^2(1, N = 68) = 0.02, p = 0.88$), math ($\chi^2(1, N = 68) = 0.01, p = 0.91$), science ($\chi^2(1, N = 68) = 0.01, p = 0.91$), and history ($\chi^2(1, N = 68) = 0.33, p = 0.57$). Therefore, there was no significant relationship found for the earned credits of the low and high socioeconomic students in the nontransition and transition programs.

The second factor that was explored was the number of credits the students earned to be classified as a sophomore. Students who earned five or more credits during their freshman year became sophomores. Those who did not earn enough credits were either retained or had to repeat ninth grade classes during their tenth grade. Chi-square analysis was done to determine if a significant relationship existed between transition program and the number of students who were classified as sophomores.

Overall, there was no significant relationship between the number of transition and nontransition program students who were promoted ($\chi^2(1, N = 205) = 0.42, p = 0.52$). Also, there was no significant relationship found for the Black students ($\chi^2(1, N = 169) = 0.56, p = 0.46$), White students ($\chi^2(1, N = 35) = 0.01, p = 0.92$), FRL students ($\chi^2(1, N = 137) = 0.28, p = 0.60$), NonFRL students ($\chi^2(1, N = 68) = 0.14, p = 0.71$), male students ($\chi^2(1, N = 110) = 0.15, p = 0.70$), and female students ($\chi^2(1, N = 95) = 0.20, p = 0.65$). The transition program did not increase the number of students earning five or more credits. Expected and observed outcomes of the number of students earning five or more credits are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Expected and Observed Outcomes of Students Earning Five or More Credits

Program Type	Black		White		FRL		NonFRL		Female		Male	
	EX	OB	EX	OB	EX	OB	EX	OB	EX	OB	EX	OB
NonTrans	78	74	17	18	62	59	34	33	49	47	47	45
Trans	57	61	13	13	45	30	26	27	39	41	32	34

Note. Expected (EX) and Observed (OB)

SOL Test Pass Rate

For the second indicator of success, the students' ninth grade SOL test pass rate as compared to the SOL test pass rate of students who did not participate in the transition program were examined. Earth Science, World History I, and Algebra I were the Standards of Learning (SOL) tests that were offered to ninth grade students. A chi-square analysis was done for the other SOL tests. There was no significant relationship found between the SOL pass rate for Earth Science, World History I, and Algebra I and the students who participated in the transition program. Data for each SOL test are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

SOL Test Pass Rate Chi-square Analysis

SOL Test	N			df	x ²	P
		Pass	Fail			
Earth Science	193	141	52	1	0.02	0.89
World History I	200	161	39	1	0.04	0.84
Algebra I	166	136	30	1	0.18	0.67

Also, there was no significant interaction found between the SOL pass rates of Black students in the nontransition and transition programs. Data are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Black Students SOL Test Pass Rate Chi-square Analysis

SOL Test	N			df	x ²	P
		Pass	Fail			
Earth Science	159	113	46	1	0.02	0.86
World History I	165	128	37	1	0.00	0.99
Algebra I	137	110	27	1	0.02	0.88

There was no significant relationship found between the transition program and White students' performance on the SOL tests. Data are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

White Students SOL Test Pass Rate Chi-square Analysis

SOL Test	N			df	χ^2	P
		Pass	Fail			
Earth Science	31	30	1	1	0.04	0.85
World History I	33	30	3	1	0.46	0.50
Algebra I	29	26	3	1	0.42	0.51

In addition, the transition program did not have a statistically significant relationship with the female students' SOL pass rate. Data are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Female Students SOL Test Pass Rate Chi-square Analysis

SOL Test	N			df	χ^2	P
		Pass	Fail			
Earth Science	93	68	25	1	0.24	0.62
World History I	92	77	15	1	0.09	0.76
Algebra I	77	67	10	1	0.36	0.55

Similar results were found for the male students. Data are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Male Students SOL Test Pass Rate Chi-square Analysis

SOL Test	N			df	χ^2	p
		Pass	Fail			
Earth Science	100	73	27	1	0.08	0.77
World History I	108	84	24	1	0.00	1.00
Algebra I	89	69	20	1	0.00	1.00

Low socioeconomic (FRL) students' SOL pass rate was not significantly associated with the transition program as well. Data are presented in Table 8.

Table 8

FRL Students SOL Test Pass Rate Chi-square Analysis

SOL Test	N			df	χ^2	P
		Pass	Fail			
Earth Science	127	83	44	1	0.02	0.87
World History I	133	101	32	1	0.00	0.95
Algebra I	109	83	26	1	0.03	0.85

High socioeconomic (NonFRL) students were not significantly associated with the transition program. Data are presented in Table 9.

Table 9

NonFRL Students SOL Test Pass Rate Chi-square Analysis

SOL Test	N			df	χ^2	P
		Pass	Fail			
Earth Science	76	58	18	1	1.24	0.27
World History I	65	59	6	1	0.02	0.89
Algebra I	67	53	14	1	2.62	0.11

Retained Ninth Grade Students

The third indicator of success was measured by the number of students retained in the ninth grade. Even though, the transition program did not have a significant relationship with the number of students retained ($\chi^2(1, N = 205) = 3.50, p = 0.06$), it was worth noting that the probability was close to being significant, with fewer transition program students who were retained in the ninth grade. In addition, similar results were found for the number of Black students retained ($\chi^2(1, N = 170) = 3.53, p = 0.06$), and the number of FRL students who were retained ($\chi^2(1, N = 137) = 3.07, p = 0.07$) although there was not a significant relationship, the probability was close to 0.05. However, the transition program did not have a significant relationship with the other subgroups. The results indicated that White students ($\chi^2(1, N = 35) = 0.11, p = 0.74$), and NonFRL students ($\chi^2(1, N = 68) = 0.57, p = 0.45$) did not have a relationship. In addition, the results indicated that there was not a relationship between gender of the students and the transition program. There was no significant relationship between the number of female students ($\chi^2(1, N = 95) = 1.58, p = 0.21$), and male students ($\chi^2(1, N = 110) = 2.09, p = 0.15$) retained. Overall, the transition program had various relationships with the number of students who were retained in ninth grade.

Ninth Grade Students' Attendance

The fourth indicator was attendance. Chi-square tests were calculated to determine if there was a relationship between the number of days missed by the students in the nontransition

and in the transition program. Because the sample size of the White and NonFRL students were small, they were omitted from the chi-square analysis. There was no significant difference found between the transition and nontransition students' attendance ($\chi^2(15, N = 205) = 22.63, p = 0.09$). In addition, the transition program did not significantly report a relationship with the attendance of Black students ($\chi^2(15, N = 170) = 16.87, p = 0.32$), FRL students ($\chi^2(15, N = 137) = 19.78, p = 0.18$), male students ($\chi^2(15, N = 110) = 15.98, p = 0.38$), and female students ($\chi^2(15, N = 95) = 9.40, p = 0.86$). The participation in the transition program did not have a relationship with the days missed of ninth grade students.

Ninth Grade Students' Conduct

The fifth indicator of success was student conduct. The students' conduct was measured by the number of out-of-school suspensions (OSS). Chi-square tests were conducted to determine if the transition program had a relationship that decreased the number of out-of-school suspensions of ninth grade students. The results indicated that there was a significant relationship between the numbers of students receiving OSS from the transition program and the nontransition program ($\chi^2(1, N = 205) = 9.63, p = 0.00$) which favored the transition program. In addition, the results indicated that there was not a significant relationship found for the number of incidents that occurred by Black students ($\chi^2(1, N = 170) = 21.26, p = 0.00$) favoring the transition program, White students ($\chi^2(1, N = 35) = 14.00, p = 0.00$) favoring the nontransition program, FRL students ($\chi^2(1, N = 137) = 15.50, p = 0.00$) favoring the transition program, and female students ($\chi^2(1, N = 95) = 11.58, p = 0.00$) favoring the transition program. However, there was not a significant relationship found for NonFRL students ($\chi^2(1, N = 68) = 0.60, p = 0.44$) and male students ($\chi^2(1, N = 110) = 1.54, p = 0.21$).

Ninth Grade Dropouts

For the last indicator of success, I examined the number of dropouts from each program. Overall, the transition program did not have a significant relationship with the number of dropouts ($\chi^2(1, N = 205) = 1.47, p = 0.22$). There were no nontransition or transition program White, NonFRL, or female students who dropped out, so there was no data calculated. Furthermore, there was no significant relationship found for Black students ($\chi^2(1, N = 170) = 1.47, p = 0.22$), FRL students ($\chi^2(1, N = 137) = 1.47, p = 0.22$), and male students ($\chi^2(1, N = 110) = 0.24, p = 1.38$).

Summary

This summary highlights the results found from the three types of data obtained. One, transition program documents were examined. Two, teachers and administrators involved in the transition program were interviewed. Three, quantitative data were analyzed to determine the ninth grade students' performance of the indicators of success which included earned credits, Standards of Learning (SOL) pass rate, retention status, attendance, conduct, and dropout rate. Chi-square tests were conducted for all of the quantitative data. In addition, the alpha level was set at 0.05 to determine statistical significance. The purpose of this mixed method, case study was to examine the impact of a full transition model program on ninth grade students' performance in a rural high school.

The first type of data collected was the program documents. The program documents such as the high school's Program of Studies explained the structure of the nontransition and transition programs. Components such as the curriculum, courses, activities, and schedules of each program were examined. In addition, the program documents such as the grant proposal to the Virginia's Honors School Grant revealed the high school's need for the transition program. For example, the high school was characterized by low graduate rates, high dropout rates, and high ninth grade retention rates. Overall, the program documents offered details about the transition program and its purpose.

The second type of data obtained was the teachers and administrators' perceptions about how the transition program impacted students' performance. The open-ended questions asked of the teachers and administrators paralleled with the quantitative data that was sought for the study. The answers to the interview questions revealed the perceptions of how they felt the transition program impacted the students' performance on the indicators of success: academic performance and test preparedness, attendance, and conduct.

In regards to academic performance and test preparedness, teachers and administrators felt the transition program students performed better than the nontransition program students. Their responses indicated that the communication, time management, test-taking, and organization skills that the students learned from the transition program helped them to become better prepared academically. In addition, they indicated that the transition program students performed better on their Standards of Learning (SOL) tests. They all agreed that the Leadership

Class and in-school remediation components of the transition program enabled the ninth grade students to be more academically prepared than the students not involved with the program.

When asked about the attendance, their responses varied. When determining the success of the transition program, the administrators said that they were looking for improved attendance of ninth grade students. However, half of the teachers felt that the transition program improved the attendance of ninth grade students and the other half stated that the program did not address attendance or did not impact the students' attendance. Overall, their perceptions revealed mixed feelings about the program's impact on improving ninth grade students' absenteeism.

The interview responses of the teachers and administrators indicated that the transition program improved conduct of students. According to all the participants, the transition program had a focus on improving students' communication with staff and peers, which as a result enabled the students to mediate and resolve conflicts appropriately. In addition, some of the teachers indicated that the team building activities taught in the Leadership Class made the transition program students more cohesive as a freshman class. Others discussed that the peer mentoring component of the transition program improved students' behavior. Several teachers suggested that the nontransition program students' were characterized by over-age students and that was the reason that they had poor conduct. Overall, the respondents talked about various reasons of how the implementation of the transition program led to the improved behavior of ninth grade students.

The third type of data collected was the quantitative data. The chi-square analysis results showed how that transition program had a statistical relationship on the indicators of success which were academic performance, retention status, attendance, conduct, and dropout rate. Academic performance was measured by the ninth grade students' earned credits and SOL test pass rate. There was no significant relationship found between the nontransition and transition program students' earned credits by subject, number of earned credits to determine sophomore classification, or SOL test pass rates. Also, the transition program did not have a relationship with the retention rate of ninth grade students. In addition, the transition program did not statistically show a relationship that improved attendance as well. In regards to conduct, the analysis revealed a statistically significant relationship between specific groups such as the Black, White, FRL, and female students in the nontransition and transition program. These specific groups had positive association with the transition program. Lastly, there was no significant relationship in

the number of dropouts in the nontransition and transition program. Statistically, except for conduct, the transition program did not have a relationship with the indicators of success.

The next chapter is the Discussion which details the triangulation of the three types of data. Chapter 5 presents the discussion of the results, implications, and suggestions for further study.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

Chapter 5 is divided into three sections. The first section provides a summary of the findings. It also details the conclusions drawn from the findings in which the triangulation of the results is discussed and the research questions are revisited to determine the impact of the transition program on ninth grade students' performance. In addition, this section incorporates the review of literature as it relates or refutes the findings. This section is entitled the Discussion. The second section features the recommendations for practice. The last section provides suggestions for further study.

The purpose of this case study was to examine the impact of a full transition model program on ninth grade students' performance on the indicators of success. A mixed method approach was used in this study. The qualitative data consisted of the ninth grade teachers and administrators' perceptions of how the transition program impacted ninth grade students' performance. In addition, program documents were examined to further explain the full transition model. The quantitative data consisted of the ninth grade students' Standards of Learning (SOL) pass rate and the number of earned ninth grade credits. In addition, an examination of the ninth grade students' retention status, number of out-of-school suspensions, dropout status, and attendance was conducted. This study also examined if specific groups of students as categorized by race, gender, and socioeconomics were impacted more by the program.

Discussion

This section triangulates the three forms of data to get a full explanation of the transition program's impact on ninth grade students' performance. The three forms of data that were used to answer the research questions were program documents, interview results, and quantitative data. As a means to check the veracity of the teacher and administrators' comments and to compare perceptions to reality, the data was triangulated. The subsections in this section were developed from themes that emerged as a result of the triangulation.

Indicators of Success

This section offers the reasons to examine the impact of the transition program by examining the indicators of ninth grade students' success. All three forms of data and the review of literature were explored to draw conclusions for this rationale.

The success of students in ninth grade can determine whether or not they graduate from high school. There are certain indicators that increase the likelihood of ninth grade students completing high school. One indicator of success is academic achievement. Academic success can be measured by test scores, grades, or earned credits. Students who experience academic success have a greater chance of completing high school (Alspaugh, 1998). The second indicator is the retention status of a student. Students who are retained in ninth grade have an increased risk of dropping out (Haney et al., 2004). A third indicator is attendance. Chronic absenteeism is a characteristic of students who are at risk of failing and dropping out-of-school (Mayer & Mitchell, 1993). Another indicator is conduct. According to Butts and Cruzeiro (2005), ninth grade students who had good classroom behavior, avoid negative influences, and have self-discipline are more likely to be successful students. The last indicator is the students' dropout status in ninth grade. Neild and Farley's (2004) study revealed that ninth grade students are at higher risk of dropping out. In addition, Haney and colleagues (2005) asserted that dropout reports indicate that students are more likely to dropout in the ninth and tenth grade than any other grade. Therefore, ninth grade is deemed a critical year for students.

The findings of this study were aligned with the indicators of success from the review of literature. The first two research questions asked the perceptions of the teachers and administrators about how the transition program impacted ninth grade students' performance. During the interviews, teachers were asked to discuss the skills they felt ninth grade students needed to be successful in high school. Their answers were mostly related to conduct in which they indicated that students needed to be more positive and motivated. They further discussed the need for students to manage negative emotions and resolve conflicts. In regards to academic performance, they all echoed the importance of ninth grade students having study, organization, and test-taking skills to improve academic performance. Likewise, the administrators felt that ninth grade students needed to be grounded in the basic concepts of core content to be successful in ninth grade. Overall, the teachers and administrators perceived that freshman needed good behavior and academics to be successful.

The teachers also stated the specific issues of ninth grade students that made a transition program necessary. Responses complemented the indicators of success from the review of literature. The teachers felt that poor attendance, conduct, and academic achievement made the program necessary.

In addition, the administrators' perceptions of the "look-fors" of an effective transition program were aligned with the indicators of success from the review of literature. Conduct seemed to be a primary concern. They both seemed to focus on the idea that the effectiveness of the program should be measured by the improved behavior of students and less discipline referrals. Also emphasized was improvement in academic performance as measured by grades and Standards of Learning tests. Virginia is a high stakes-testing state whereas high-stakes tests are required for a student to graduate. A program document indicated that students who wanted to receive a standard diploma must earn six verified credits which meant that student must pass six required SOL tests to receive a standard diploma. To measure the effectiveness of the transition program, the administrators also talked about looking for improved attendance of ninth grade students. Overall, administrators agreed that conduct, academic performance, and attendance should be measured.

In addition, some of the program documents revealed the need for a transition program at Dean County High School which gave focus of what should be measured to determine its effectiveness. For example, to receive the Ninth Grade Transition Grant, the grant proposal stated that: "the money was needed to implement a program due to many discipline referrals from ninth grade students, over half of the ninth graders failed one or more subjects at the end of first semester, only 70% of the students graduated on time, and a significant number of ninth grade students failed SOL tests." These reasons are aligned with the review of literature described in Chapter 2.

The following subsections detail how the transition program impacted ninth grade students' performance based on each indicator of success by looking at all three forms of data. A summary of the findings for each specific indicator is included, followed by the drawn conclusions.

Ninth Grade Students' Academic Performance

The quantitative data and interview data showed different results regarding how the transition program impacted ninth grade students' academic performance. While the teachers and

administrators felt that the students who participated in the transition program performed better academically than the nontransition program students, the quantitative data did not reflect a difference between them. For the quantitative data, the academic performance was measured by the SOL pass rate and number of earned credits. The chi-square tests calculated for the pass rate of the SOL tests and number of earned credits did not show a significant difference between the nontransition program and transition program's student performance. These results are similar to Dyke's (2007) study in which a significant difference was not found in the academic performance of over-aged ninth grade students who participated in a transition program to those who did not. This does not mean that the teachers and administrators were wrong in their perceptions. The teachers and administrators' may have really felt that the transition program students' academic performance was better because of the extra support they received from the transition program. Some of their reasons for their responses may have been based on their feelings towards the nontransition program students. One teacher stated that it is "hard to compare groups because they have their own identity." For example, some of the teachers indicated that the nontransition program students were more challenging because of their behavior and because they were over-age. So when asked to compare both groups, they naturally may have said that the performance of the transition program students was overall better. However, the transition program did not statistically impact the number of earned credits students' needed to be classified as a sophomore, the number of earned credits by subject, or the pass rate of the SOL tests.

Ninth Grade Retention

The transition program seemed to have an impact on the number of students retained in the ninth grade. Dyke's (2007) study concluded that the transition program was effective in reducing the number of students recycled in an urban high school. Indeed, the transition program presented in this study seems to have the same effect in a rural high school. With the alpha level set at 0.05 there was no significant difference found between the numbers of students retained in each program; however, the results were very close to being significant ($\chi^2(1, N = 205) = 3.50, p = 0.06$). The expected and observed outcomes are presented in Table 10. There was a decrease in the number of retained students who participated in the transition program.

Table 10

Expected and Observed Outcomes of Retained 9th Grade Students (N=205)

Program	Students Retained	
	Expected	Observed
NonTransition	13	17
Transition	9	5

Ninth Grade Students' Attendance

Overall, the transition program did not affect the attendance of ninth grade students. Although the principal indicated that improved attendance would be a measurement in determining the effectiveness of the transition program, some of the teachers indicated that the transition program did not address attendance. The teachers who did feel that the transition program students had better attendance than the nontransition program students said that it was due to the nontransition program students having more out-of-school suspensions. In addition, the program documents such as the grant proposal did not indicate that attendance was a reason behind implementing a transition program, but the teachers and administrators did say that attendance was an issue that made the program necessary. Similar to Dyke's (2007) findings, this transition program did not have an impact on attendance.

Ninth Grade Students' Conduct

The transition program positively associated with the conduct of ninth grade students as measured by the number of out-of-school suspensions ($\chi^2(1, N = 205) = 9.63, p = 0.00$). The expected and observed outcomes of the out of school suspensions are presented in Table 11.

Table 11

Expected and Observed Outcomes of Out of School Suspensions (N=205)

Program	Students Out of School Suspensions	
	Expected	Observed
NonTransition	155	180
Transition	114	89

This was a different outcome than Dyke's (2007) study. Her results did not indicate a significant difference in the number of out-of-school suspensions and the transition program did not impact the number of OSS referrals of over-age ninth grade students. However, the teachers in this study stated that the nontransition program had many students who were over-aged ninth graders. This could be the reason that a significant relationship existed that favored the transition program students.

However, the teachers and administrators also indicated that they heavily emphasized improving ninth grade students' conduct. The administrators felt that the effectiveness of the transition program should be measured by a decrease in referrals. The teachers stated that they emphasized improving conduct by teaching communication and conflict resolution skills in the Leadership Class and preparing entering freshman for the adjustment from middle to high school through various summer activities. Butts & Cruzeiro (2005) suggested that conflict resolution skills be a part of a transition program, and Akos and Galassi (2004b) asserted that providing information to students before they enter ninth grade eases the transition.

In addition, certain aspects of the transition program that were considered strengths by teachers and administrators could have impacted the students' behavior. For one, they felt that the peer mentor program was a strength. Akos and Galassi (2004b) stated that making new friends and fitting in were major concerns of ninth grade students. The peer mentor program could have allowed for those opportunities. The teachers also indicated that the common planning time helped them to identify at risk students and to meet with parents and students about behavior issues. In addition, the teachers and administrators also thought that the flexibility

of the Leadership Class enabled them to address issues immediately. Even though the teachers and administrators agreed that student behavior improved, it is not certain that the improvement can be attributed to the transition program because the change in leadership also impacted student discipline. The teachers and assistant principal indicated that the 2006-2007 principal resolved issues that were prevalent during previous years with the former administration.

Ninth Grade Dropouts

Neild and Farley (2004) concluded that ninth grade students are at higher risk of dropping out-of-school. However, there was no significant difference found between the number of nontransition and transition dropouts. Yet, there were no ninth grade dropouts in the transition program and there were two in the nontransition program. There was no finding in the program documents that indicated that dropouts were an issue in Dean County High School. However, a significant relationship was not found, there still was a decrease in the number of dropouts.

Specific Groups Impacted by the Transition Program

Gender. When establishing a transition program, it is suggested that gender differences are considered (Akos & Galassi, 2004a; Dyke, 2007; Fulk, 2003). Akos and Galassi (2004a) concluded that males are more connected to school than females. Students who do not feel connected to school have a higher risk of having behaviors indicative of dropping out. One of these behaviors is poor conduct. The transition program statistically have a relationship with the conduct of female students ($\chi^2(1, N = 95) = 11.58, p = 0.00$). The transition program's female students received less OSS referrals than the nontransition program students. In addition, the teachers and administrators had a vested interest in reducing the amount of ninth grade referrals.

Dyke's (2007) study revealed that the transition program was effective in reducing the number of absentees for females, and that males in the transition program were more likely to be absent than males in the traditional program. However, there is no evidence to conclude that the transition program helped male or female students' attendance improve.

Race. It is also suggested that race be considered when establishing transition programs. Minority students are overrepresented as compared to their white counterparts as students who do not graduate, who are retained in the ninth grade, and who drop out (Neild & Farley, 2004;

Orfield, 2004; Swanson, 2004; Warner, 2005a). Therefore, it is imperative to design programs that embrace cultural and race sensitivity and address all students' needs.

There was only one indicator of success that the transition program statistically impacted students of a specific race and that was student conduct. The teachers and administrators' responses and program documents revealed that the transition program was designed to heavily focus on improving students' behavior. The activities of the transition program helped Black students to receive fewer OSS referrals than the Black students in the nontransition program.

However, White students in the transition program received more OSS referrals than expected. This could be linked to the teachers and administrators' perceptions about times when they felt a student's need were not being met by the transition program. Some teachers indicated that the curriculum taught in the Leadership Class did not meet all students' needs, and that they were not provided enough time to make changes to the curriculum. In addition, the principal indicated that one-on-one time with students was limited in the transition program. It also could be linked to the White students being the minority in Dean County High School. In Akos and Galassi's (2004a) study, White students' felt connected to the new school as compared to the other ethnic groups in the study. However, White students made up 80% of the population. In Dean County High School, White students made up approximately 20% of the population. Overall, the transition program positively impacted the Black students' behavior and did not have an effect on White students' behavior.

SES. Socioeconomic status should be considered when establishing transition programs (Kerr, 2002; Smith, 1997). Students who are identified as low socioeconomic have a greater tendency of dropping out-of-school (Orfield, 2004). In this study, low socioeconomic status was measured by the students' participation in the free or reduced lunch program (FRL). The transition program reduced the number of OSS referrals of students with low income. Kerr (2002) and Smith (1997) asserted that accounting for socioeconomic status, students who have access to a full or partial transition programs were less likely to drop out and performed better in high school. The findings of this study echoed their findings.

Recommendations for Practices

This section offers several recommendations that need to be looked at when implementing transition programs. Because there is limited research about the effects of

transition programs on ninth grade students' performance, these recommendations are based on the findings of this study.

Attendance of ninth grade students is a critical issue. For one, students who are chronically absent are at greater risk of dropping out (Mayer & Mitchell, 1993) and students tend to drop out more in the ninth grade than any other grade (Haney et al., 2004). Therefore, transition programs should address attendance. Based on the findings, the teachers and administrators perceived that attendance was an issue of ninth grade students, but there was not a component of the program to specifically address attendance problems. Revising or implementing new attendance policies may be necessary.

Ways to increasing parental involvement should be looked at when establishing a transition program. All of the teacher participants agreed that parental involvement lacked in the school; thus, this could be the reason that the transition program did not significantly impact other areas. However, the administrators felt that the parents were involved in all of the activities, but they did not specify the number of parents who attended. In addition, because the administrators and teachers disagreed about the parental involvement in the school, a suggestion would be to define what parental involvement means amongst all parties. It is also suggested that school officials look at alternative means to get parents involved in their child's education. For example, offering a morning and afternoon time for parent information meetings to accommodate parent work schedules. One of the teachers in the study stated that transportation was an issue for their parents. Therefore, school officials may want to look at providing transportation for parents to attend school. Also, parents may have to be offered incentives to come to the school. For example, if parents attend the school for a certain number of meetings, then they will receive a form of compensation. Some will argue that parents should not have to be promised anything to attend their child's school; however, unorthodox practices are necessary to improve students' performance. Because entering freshman are concerned with building relationships with peers (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005), it is important to develop peer mentor programs. One of the issues founding the Dean County High School program was that students who were selected as peer mentors did not have time to meet with their mentees. One teacher indicated that teachers of the peer mentors did not like when the peer mentors had to be pulled out of their class for transition program activities. Therefore, when

establishing peer mentor programs, an emphasis should be on providing the mentors more time to meet with their ninth grade mentees.

Another concern was the teachers' role in establishing the transition program. Although, most of the teachers indicated that building level administration was very supportive, they also felt that they were not given the opportunity to make decisions about the establishment of the transition program. Some indicated that with the demands of high stakes testing, they did not have enough time to change the program to meet students' needs as necessary. Others indicated that they were not compensated for the extra task of being a part of the transition program. One teacher suggested that the Leadership Class would have been better taught by someone trained in leadership. If schools do not have such personnel, than outside consultants may be necessary. In addition, one teacher indicated that the teachers did not have a say in how the grant money was spent. If teachers had more input in the establishment of the transition program and roles were defined at the start of the program, then these concerns may not have been raised.

Another issue that was raised was about the curriculum offered in the Leadership Class. The teachers felt that the curriculum did not offer real world connections to their students. More importantly, they felt that they did not have the opportunity to revise the curriculum to meet the students' needs. It is important that when establishing a transition program, the curriculum adopted caters to the needs of the students. There is no one-size-fits-all program that should be relied upon to improve students' performance.

Staff training that provides staff with strategies to help improve minority students' conduct should be considered when establishing a transition program. In this context, minority students are defined as the ethnic group that has the lowest percentage of students in a given school. Whites were the minority and their behavior did not improve, so perhaps the school needs to consider the needs of the minority and majority. In a study examining factors leading to success in ninth grade as perceived by students, good classroom behavior and self-discipline were some of their top choices (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005). Therefore, careful attention should be placed on implementing practices that focus on improving student behavior so that they can better reach success.

Suggestions for Future Study

There are several suggestions for future study. For one, a longitudinal study of the transition program students would be interesting. This study should focus on how they perform

on each indicator of success during their tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade years. It would also be interesting to see how many of them graduate from high school. In addition, it would be interesting to compare the nontransition and transition program students' pass rate of the English Standards of Learning (SOL) test that is required in the tenth grade because there was no required English SOL test for ninth grade. Often the teachers indicated that over-age males were more challenging. In Dyke's (2007) study, the impact of transition program on over-aged ninth grade students was addressed. Her findings suggested that the transition program had little impact on the success on over-aged students (Dyke, 2007). Therefore, transition program practices should have a focus on supporting the needs of these students. Further study of this phenomenon is suggested. Further study should focus on strategies to increase parental involvement in low-income rural areas. Also, it would be interesting to determine if the results of this study would be the same if teachers received a stipend to be a part of the transition program's interdisciplinary team. In addition, a study conducted with a more rigorous statistical analysis would warrant further study if a researcher is able to gain access to individual student data. Last, it would be worthy to note the nontransition and transition programs students' involvement in extra-curricular activities to see if there was a significant difference. Because there are few studies that look at the impact of transition programs, the possibilities of future study are endless.

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APPENDIX A

TELEPHONE SCRIPT TO REQUEST PARTICIPANTS

Hello, my name is Shawnrell Blackwell. I am a graduate student at Virginia Tech and also an assistant principal at Dean County Middle School. I really need your help. I would like to interview you for my research study. I want to find out how you feel about the transition program implemented in the 2006-2007 school year. The purpose of my study is to find out how the program impacted students' educational outcomes. I believe the perception of a (teacher or administrator) is important. Are you willing to share your opinion and participate? (If the answer is no, I will thank the potential participant for his or her time. If the answer is yes, I will continue with the rest of the script.) Thank you for agreeing to participate.

The interview will take approximately 90 minutes of your time. It will be recorded. At the conclusion of the interview you will receive a gift card. Is there a time or day of the week that is best for you? I recommend that we use the conference room in the high school for the interview. If you are not comfortable with that, you can offer another location.

Everything you say will be confidential. Your name will not be used in the study. After I transcribe the interview, you will be allowed to read it so that I will not make any mistakes about the words you intended to say.

Do you have any questions?

Are you willing to participate?

What time and day should we schedule the interview?

Where would you like to meet?

Thank you so much for your time, and I look forward to seeing you!

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent for Participants in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

Title of Project: The Impact of a Transition Program on Ninth Grade Students' Performance

Investigators: Shawnrell Blackwell and Dr. William Glenn

I. Purpose of the Research/Project

The purpose of this study is to determine if a transition program impacted ninth grade students' performance. I want to know how you feel about the transition program and its impact on ninth grade students' performance. This information will be used to complete my dissertation.

Six teachers and two administrators will be interviewed. The teachers and administrators are over the age of 21 and English speaking.

II. Procedures

You will be interviewed for approximately 90 minutes. The interview will be recorded using a tape recorder and cassette tapes. You will only be asked to sit for one interview. The interview will take place in the high school conference room or a location of your choice.

You are asked to be open and honest about your experiences with the transition program and the ninth grade students. You will be asked specific questions based on your job title. The questions are listed below, under the job title.

Teachers

The following questions will be asked of you (teachers only):

1. What are the skills that ninth graders need to be successful in high school?
2. What are some specific issues of ninth grade students that made this program necessary?
3. Compare the behavior of the students who participated in the transition program and students with the previous cohorts who did not participate in the transition program.
4. Tell me about the test preparedness of students who participated in the transition program and students from previous cohorts who did not participate.

5. Tell me about the attendance of the students who participated in the transition program and students from previous cohorts who did not participate.
6. Tell me about a time when you felt a student's needs were not being met by the transition program.
7. Tell me how you feel about the transition program's resources and support available to you.
8. Tell me how parents are involved with the transition program.
9. Tell me about the strengths of the transition program.
10. Are there any other changes that occurred during the 2005-2006 or 2006-2007 school years that could have impacted the students' educational outcomes?

Assistant Principal

The following questions will be asked of you:

1. What are the skills that ninth graders need to be successful in high school?
2. What are some specific issues of ninth grade students that made this program necessary?
3. Tell me what you look for to determine if the transition program is effective.
4. Tell me about the behavior of the students who participated in the transition program and students from the previous cohorts who did not participate in the transition program.
5. Tell me about the test preparedness of students who participated in the transition program and students from previous cohorts who did not participate.
6. Tell me about a time when you felt a student's needs were not being met by the transition program.
7. Tell me about the resources and support offered to the teachers involved in the program.
8. Tell me how parents are involved with the transition program.
9. Tell me about the strengths of the transition program.
10. Are there any other changes that occurred during the 2005-2006 or 2006-2007 school years that could have impacted the students' educational outcomes?

Principal

The following questions will be asked of you:

1. What are some challenges that ninth grade students face?
2. What are the skills that ninth graders need to be successful in high school?
3. Tell me what you look for to determine if the transition program is effective.
4. Tell me about the resources and support offered to the teachers involved in the program.
5. Tell me about the behavior of the transition program students.
6. Tell me about the test preparedness of the transition program students.
7. Tell me a time when you felt a student's needs were not being met by the program.
8. Tell me how parents are involved with the transition program.
9. Tell me about the strengths of the transition program.
10. Are there any other changes that occurred during the 2005-2006 or 2006-2007 school years that could have impacted the students' educational outcomes?

After the interview, the researcher will type a transcript of the interview. You will be invited to read the transcript and make comments. A time and place to read the transcript will be selected. You may read the transcript in the presence of the researcher. If necessary, the researcher will read the transcript to you.

III. Risks

There are minimal risks associated with this study. You are allowed to state that you do not wish to answer a question that is asked of you at anytime.

IV. Benefits

Society will benefit from hearing your story because it may lead to the development of transition programs designed to better meet the needs of students who are at risk of dropping out-of-school or under achieving in school.

No promises or guarantees of benefits have been made to encourage you to participate.

You may contact the research as a later time for a summary of the research results.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

Every effort will be made to hide your identity in any written work resulting from this study. Pseudonyms will be used to identify you in any written materials. The researcher will try to minimize the possibility of identifying other people you may mention. In addition, the school will not be mentioned in any written materials.

In the transcripts you will be identified by a pseudonym (i.e. Mr. Purple).

Cassette tapes made from recordings of the interview will be stored in a locked file box at the researcher's house. The researcher is the only individual who will have access to the recordings. Copies of the transcripts may be viewed by the researcher or other members of her dissertation committee.

It is possible that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view this study's collected data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

All data will be destroyed after the dissertation defense, publication of any articles resulting from the study, or presentations made related to the study.

If child abuse is known or strongly suspected, the researcher is required to notify appropriate authorities. If you are believed to be a threat to yourself or others, the researcher must notify the appropriate authorities.

VI. Compensation

After the interview and after the reviewing of the transcripts, you will receive a \$20 gift card to a retail business. The researcher will come to the high school to give you the gift card.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you choose to withdraw, you will be compensated for the portion of the time you invested in the study (\$5 gift card per 18 minutes to not exceed \$20 gift card). If there are circumstances that arise and it is determined that you should not continue as a subject, the interview will end. If that is the case, you will be compensated for the portion of the interview completed.

VIII. Subject's Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the following responsibilities:

- I agree to answer questions honestly Initial _____
- I agree to allow the researcher to record the interview Initial _____

IX. Subject's Permission

I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

_____ Date _____
Subject Signature

Should I have any pertinent questions about this research or its conduct, and research subjects' rights, and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury to the subject, I may contact:

Shawnrell Blackwell

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Chair, Virginia Tech Institutional Review

Telephone/ e-mail

Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Office of Research Compliance

2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2006 (0497)

APPENDIX C

LETTER TO SUPERINTENDENT REQUESTING PERMISSION TO USE SCHOOL DATA

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] MIDDLE SCHOOL
Shawnrell Blackwell, Assistant Principal
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Superintendent
P.O. Box [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED],

I am requesting to use [REDACTED] County Public Schools data for my dissertation. My research question is as follows:

What is the impact of implementing a 9th Grade Transitional Program on ninth grade student' educational outcomes?

I plan to review the following data of the 2005-2006 ninth grade cohort and 2006-2007 ninth grade cohort with your approval:

- Attendance record
- Discipline record
- SOL test scores from grade eight and nine
- Academic record
- Student demographic information
- Transition program documents (schedules, curriculum, program information, etc.)

In addition, I will interview the ninth grade teachers and administrators to get their perceptions of the program. The questions will be available to you and the high school principal for review before the interview.

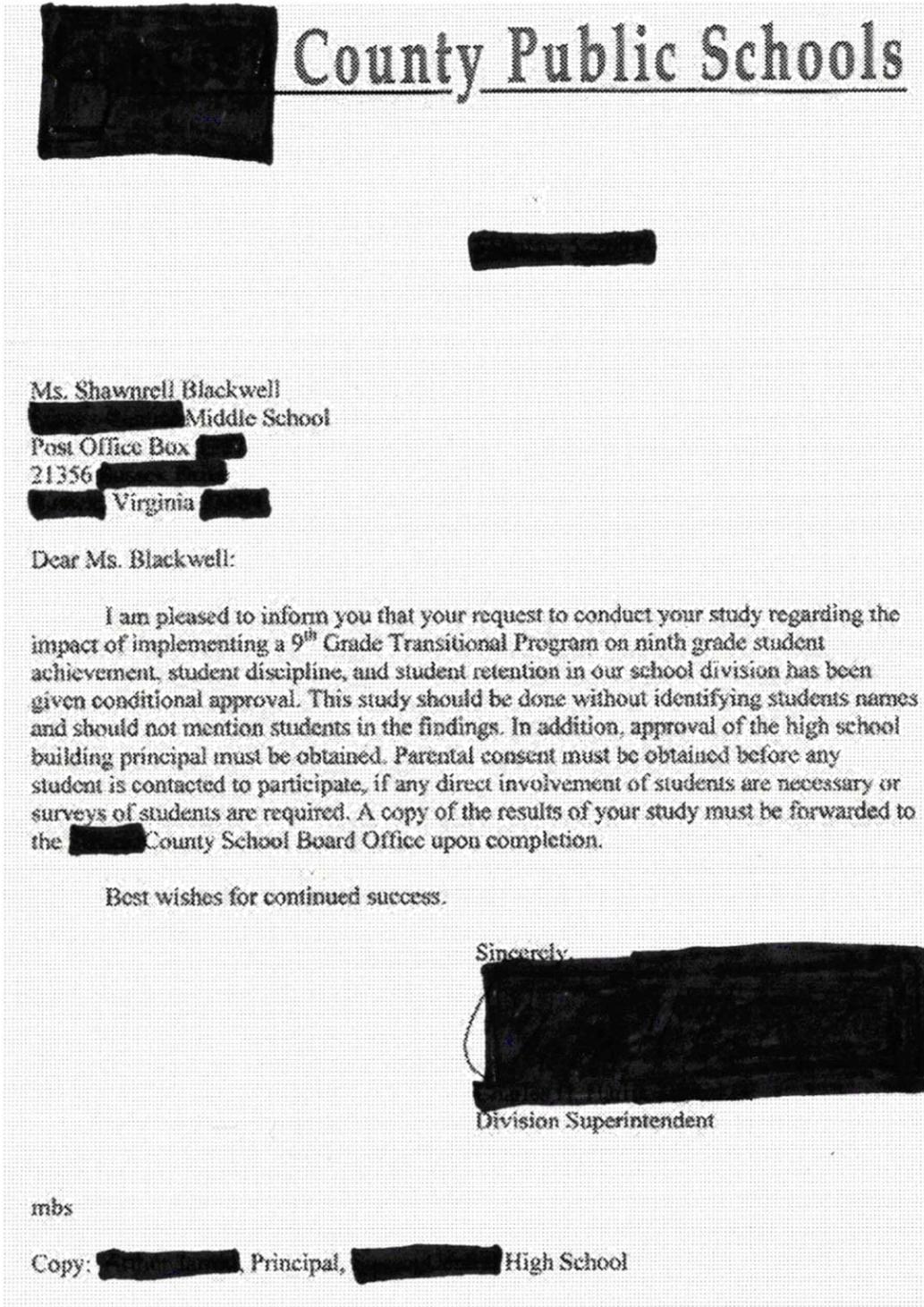
I think this research would serve beneficial to [REDACTED] County Public Schools to determine the efficacy of the program or at least assess the strengths and weaknesses of the program.

Sincerely,

Shawnrell Blackwell
Shawnrell Blackwell

APPENDIX D

SUPERINTENDENT'S LETTER GRANTING PERMISSION



APPENDIX E

PRINCIPAL'S LETTER GRANTING PERMISSION

May 7, 2008

[REDACTED]
Principal
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

I am currently working on my Ph.D. in Educational Leadership. In order to complete my dissertation, I am doing a mixed method case study on the impact of transition programs on ninth grade students' performance. I am requesting your permission to use data from [REDACTED] High School. The superintendent has given me conditional approval until I seek permission from you. A copy of his letter is enclosed. The research questions guiding this inquiry are:

1. What are the ninth grade teachers' perceptions of how the transition program impacted ninth grade students' performance?
2. What are the high school administrators' perceptions of how the transition program impacted ninth grade students' performance?
3. How did students in the transition program perform on indicators of student success as compared to the students who did not participate in the transition program, including:
 - a. Students' ninth grade earned credits for tenth grade promotion
 - b. Students' ninth grade SOL test pass rate
 - c. The number of students retained in the ninth grade
 - d. Ninth grade students' attendance
 - e. The student conduct as measured by the number of out of school suspensions
 - f. The number of ninth grade dropouts
4. Are any specific groups of students impacted more by the transition program?

This study will be a mixed method case study. I want to use the following data with your approval. I plan to review the following data from the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 ninth grade cohorts:

- Attendance record
- Discipline record (number of out of school suspensions)
- SOL test scores from grade eight and grade nine)
- Academic record (grade point average from grade eight and nine; retention status)
- Student demographic information (race, socioeconomic status, gender, etc.)
- Dropout status

I will not have any direct involvement with students. I am requesting that the data be pre-coded without students' names to maintain confidentiality. Also, pseudonyms will be used for the school, county, and interview participants.

I will also need to review program documents (i.e.: program curriculum, program events, program goals, etc.)

Furthermore, I want to interview the principal, assistant principal, and the teachers who taught the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 cohorts. The informed consent form for participants is enclosed for your review.

If you would agree to allow me access to this information, please initial and sign the statement below. If you have any questions or would like to know more about my study, please feel free to contact me at work (434-262-9042) or via email (sblackwell@vt.edu).

Thank you for your continuing support

Sincerely,


Shawnrell Blackwell

I give my approval for Shawnrell Blackwell to have access to data for the purposes of the study described above.

I do not give my approval for Shawnrell Blackwell to have access to data for the purposes of the study described above.

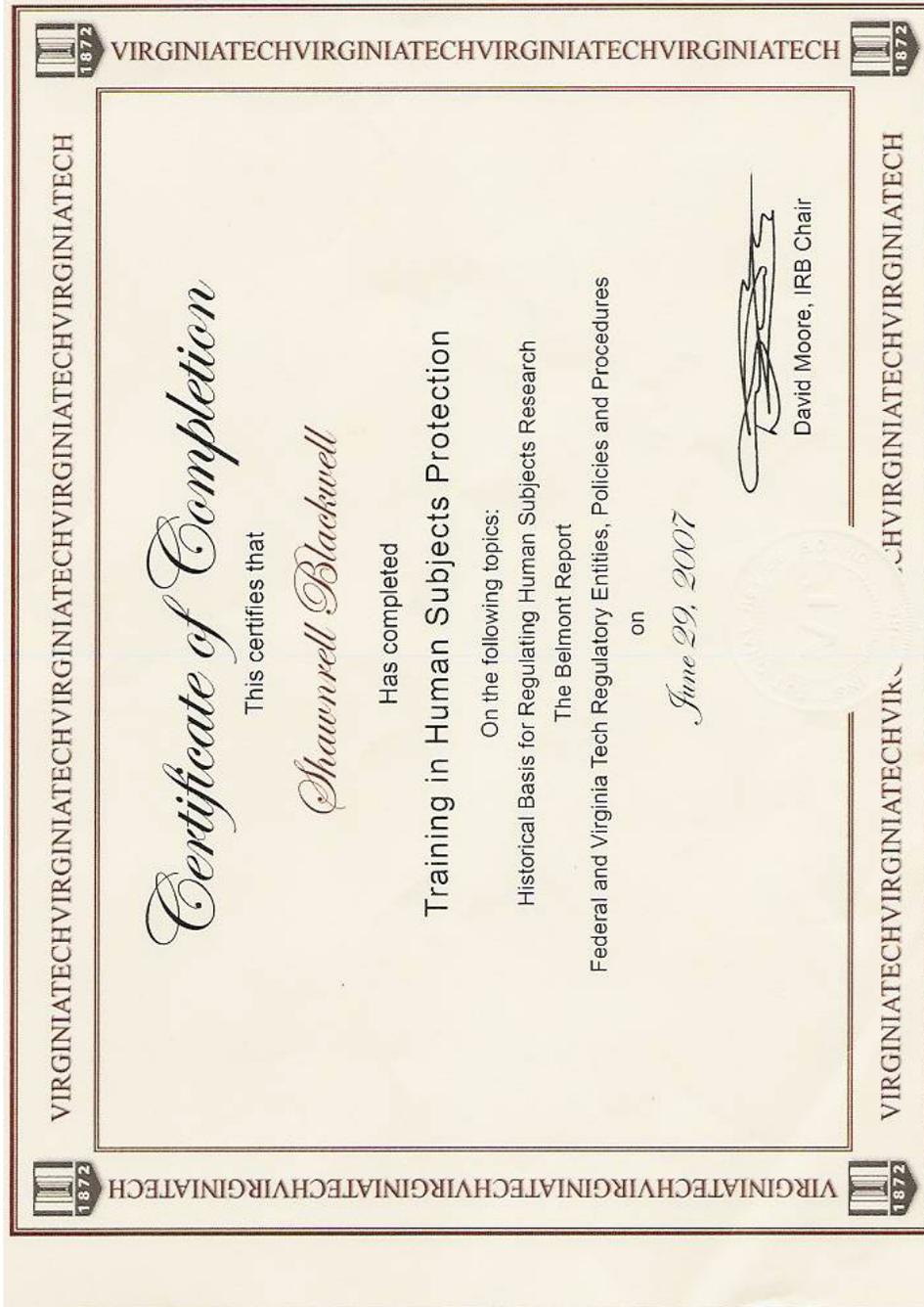

Signature


Date



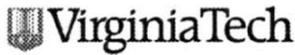

APPENDIX F

CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION OF TRAINING IN HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION



APPENDIX G

IRB APPROVAL



Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board
2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2000 (0497)
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
540/231-4991 Fax 540/231-0959
e-mail moored@vt.edu
www.irb.vt.edu

FWP000006713 expires 5/20/2010
IRB # is IRB00000687

DATE: May 21, 2008

MEMORANDUM

TO: William Glenn
Shawnrell Blackwell

Approval date: 5/21/2008
Continuing Review Due Date: 5/6/2009
Expiration Date: 5/20/2009

FROM: David M. Moore 

SUBJECT: **IRB Expedited Approval:** "The Impact of a Transition Program on Ninth Grade Students' Performance", IRB # 08-320

This memo is regarding the above-mentioned protocol. The proposed research is eligible for expedited review according to the specifications authorized by 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. As Chair of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board, I have granted approval to the study for a period of 12 months, effective May 21, 2008.

As an investigator of human subjects, your responsibilities include the following:

1. Report promptly proposed changes in previously approved human subject research activities to the IRB, including changes to your study forms, procedures and investigators, regardless of how minor. The proposed changes must not be initiated without IRB review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.
2. Report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.
3. Report promptly to the IRB of the study's closing (i.e., data collecting and data analysis complete at Virginia Tech). If the study is to continue past the expiration date (listed above), investigators must submit a request for continuing review prior to the continuing review due date (listed above). It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain re-approval from the IRB before the study's expiration date.
4. If re-approval is not obtained (unless the study has been reported to the IRB as closed) prior to the expiration date, all activities involving human subjects and data analysis must cease immediately, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.

Important:

If you are conducting **federally funded non-exempt research**, please send the applicable OSP/grant proposal to the IRB office, once available. OSP funds may not be released until the IRB has compared and found consistent the proposal and related IRB application.

cc: File

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