

The Essential Components of a Comprehensive Ninth Grade Transition Program:
A Delphi Study

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ABSTRACT

The transition to high school is a critical juncture of a student's educational career. The type of ninth grade transition program a high school has in place can be a deciding factor regarding whether students "make it or break it" during their first year and, ultimately, have success throughout all of high school. Currently, resources are available about different aspects of the ninth grade transition, but nothing provides principals with a research-based and practitioner-endorsed comprehensive approach to designing and implementing a ninth grade transition program. A comprehensive approach starts with proper goals and objectives, includes essential specific components and ingredients needed in a ninth grade transition program, and requires data or measures to judge the effectiveness of the program. Therefore, a Delphi study was undertaken to answer the following research question: What should be the goals/objectives of a comprehensive ninth grade transition program (i.e., academic success alone or are there other things that also are important)? The secondary questions focused on the components or ingredients that are essential and how to evaluate the success of a ninth grade transition program. This Delphi study included three rounds during which data were gathered from a 20-member panel of experts that included both national leaders and education practitioners. The panel produced 21 consensus items on goals/objectives of a ninth grade transition program, 10 consensus items on essential components of a ninth grade transition program, and 15 consensus items on the data/measures to evaluate the success of a ninth grade transition program. Results indicated that transition programs need to address

both academic and social/emotional needs of students. The data provided evidence that principals need to take great care in teacher quality, instructional practices, and a systematic approach to monitoring the performance of ninth grade students as well as ensuring students make a positive connection with an adult in the school.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The Problem

In May 1999, the Prince William County School Board named me principal of Osbourn Park High School in Prince William County, Virginia. As a current assistant principal in the school, I had the advantage of already knowing much of the community. Of course, the day after the school division announced my appointment to the school community, my relationships with people changed. Everyone was quite anxious to provide me with their opinions about what I needed to do to reenergize the school and provide some necessary change to ignite the school community. I dutifully listened to everyone, but felt at ease knowing that there was a “honeymoon” period for any new principal to implement the many suggested ideas and changes.

One parent, however, did not grant me any honeymoon. As the parent of a child that was a rising twelfth grade student, she felt at ease with the school and with me. During the last week of school in June, she stopped me in the front office to let me know that next year she had another child coming to the school; her youngest son was a rising ninth grade student. This parent told me that when her older child transitioned to high school there was no support in place, no plan, and no help provided to students or families. Her child found the transition to high school challenging and struggled during the ninth grade year. Since I would officially become principal in just a matter of weeks, the parent said I should address this problem. She insisted that I needed to make sure this happened and provide some type of transition program for rising ninth grade students. I agreed with her, told her that she had a great idea, and that I would be working on changes like this during the coming year. I explained to her that implementing a ninth grade transition program was complex and needed input from faculty, parents, and students. I assured her that her idea was a good one and agreed we needed to

implement a transition program. I told her that during the coming school year we would do the necessary background work and research so we could implement it properly. I could tell by the look on her face, she did not like my answer. Looking at me directly in the eyes, she responded pointedly, “My son is in eighth grade now. He’ll be transitioning this year, not next year. He’s only transitioning to high school once. What are you going to do for him and his classmates? They can’t wait a year for you to work on changes. You need to get this done now.”

This interaction was my introduction to the need for a formalized transition program for rising ninth grade students. At 31 years old and just getting ready to start my principalship, I did not know about any research on the importance of the ninth grade transition. I did not know about the history of ninth grade and only anecdotally knew about the struggles that 14- and 15-year-olds have in transitioning to high school. As a teacher, I witnessed the academic difficulties of some ninth grade students. Of course, certain students had no problems, while others really struggled with the increased rigor and responsibility. As an administrator, I experienced firsthand the startling number of discipline referrals that ninth grade students received compared to the number upperclassman received. As an educator, I watched ninth grade students struggle to figure out where they fit in while, at the same time, parents gave these students more autonomy than ever before in their lives.

The parent that questioned me had identified an immediate need and demanded my attention. My leadership team and I quickly put together a last minute ninth grade orientation program and the parent was satisfied. As I look back on that experience now, after reading the high school transition research and having a much better understanding of the challenges and problem with high school transition, I know we could have done better that first year.

A New Perspective on the Problem

I have had a new experience going through the ninth grade transition as the parent of high school students. Last year I lived this transition when my first child went to high school and this year I experienced my eighth grade daughter transition to ninth grade. These experiences gave me a different perspective on the high school transition. This new experience is even more interesting as my tenth grade son and my eighth grade daughter will have attended the same high school where I served as principal for 11 years. Even with all of my professional experience and knowledge as well as my familiarity with the school and faculty, I can articulate that from a parent's perspective, the ninth grade transition has been the most difficult aspect of my child's educational experience. Defining and understanding my role as a parent and helping my children navigate the new experiences of high school have been challenging and eye opening. Ever since I moved into a school leadership position, I have been interested in investigating how high schools welcome parents/families into schools. Now, as a parent, I am even more fascinated and determined to make the transition process positive for parents and families.

Goal of Research

The goal of this research was to provide high school principals with specific and direct actions that they can take to enhance their ninth grade transition plan, justify the continuation of their ninth grade transition plan, and ensure that their ninth grade transition plan focuses and encompasses the essential components that increase the probability of success. This research can provide school leaders with support when dealing with the continuing problem of properly transitioning students to high school. By gaining consensus of leading researchers and practitioners, the results are researched-based but also practitioner-endorsed. Those in the field may criticize research as "ivory tower" thinking or not realistic because the reality of

implementation is too costly or too difficult, even though research may validate a potential solution.

The results of this research will assist school leaders with a solution to the ninth grade transition issue. Principals need support in focusing limited resources on the right objectives of a transition program, identifying essential components of a transition program to support those objectives, and using the appropriate data to analyze the effectiveness of any transition program developed at their school. By blending theory with practice, the results carry more legitimacy with building-based school leaders.

Background of the Problem

In reviewing the literature, it is readily apparent that a student's transition to ninth grade is a critical juncture in their educational career and their life. Often, students' experiences in their first year of high school determine their success, or lack thereof, for the rest of high school and often in their life after high school (Education Week, 2007; Williams & Richman, 2007). The type of transition program a school has in place predicts future success in the ninth grade (New York State Parental Information & Resource Center, 2010). Success in ninth grade for students ties directly to higher graduation rates, lower dropout rates, and a young person's overall positive experience in high school (Nield, 2009; Silverthorn, DuBois, & Crombie, 2005). All of this pressure is placed on a teen that is also going through significant social challenges, emotional development, and continued biological changes. At the same time, these teens usually attend schools that are larger and more impersonal than they are accustomed to, they are expected to take on classes that are more difficult, and they have added responsibility. All of these challenges are going on while the relationship with their parents is changing (Healey & Carter, 2010), such as reduced parental supervision (Nield, 2009).

Researchers have confirmed that when implementing comprehensive transition programs with multiple strategies, schools can have a positive influence on the success of ninth grade students including lowering the dropout rate and ninth grade retention (Hertzog & Morgan, 1998; Smith, 1997). Additionally, the research supports transition programs that are comprehensive and use multiple strategies (Dedmond, 2008; Mizelle, 2005).

Over the last decade, it has become a routine expectation and a common practice to have some sort of transition program or orientation for rising ninth-grade students. School communities and well-meaning principals have spent hours and money developing and putting into place support structures for ninth grade students. A parent would be quite surprised and disappointed if school leadership could not articulate their transition plan for rising ninth grade students. Now, the question is what comprises a cohesive, comprehensive transition program that will truly influence the success of rising ninth grade students.

Research Questions

The overall guiding research question in this study was, “What should be the goals/objectives of a comprehensive ninth grade transition program (i.e., academic success alone or are there other things that also are important)?” The secondary questions in this study included:

- What components or ingredients are essential in a ninth grade transition program?
- What data/measures should a school principal use to evaluate the success of a ninth grade transition program?

The purpose of this study was to gain consensus from both experts and practitioners to identify:

- the purpose of a comprehensive ninth grade transition program,

- specific ninth grade transition practices that are essential for inclusion in a successful program, and
- how a successful program is measured.

By addressing the primary and secondary questions, the study seeks to assist school leaders as they plan and/or modify their transition programs for ninth grade students.

Conceptual Framework

To positively affect rising ninth graders, transition programming must address three areas, the academic, procedural, and social (Akos & Galassi, 2004a). Figure 1 graphically depicts the ingredients that are necessary for a comprehensive ninth grade program. Ninth grade transition programs that deal with all of these components will lead to greater academic success for students than less comprehensive programs. Ideal transition programs support rising ninth graders with a whole child approach. This complete approach leads to student success.

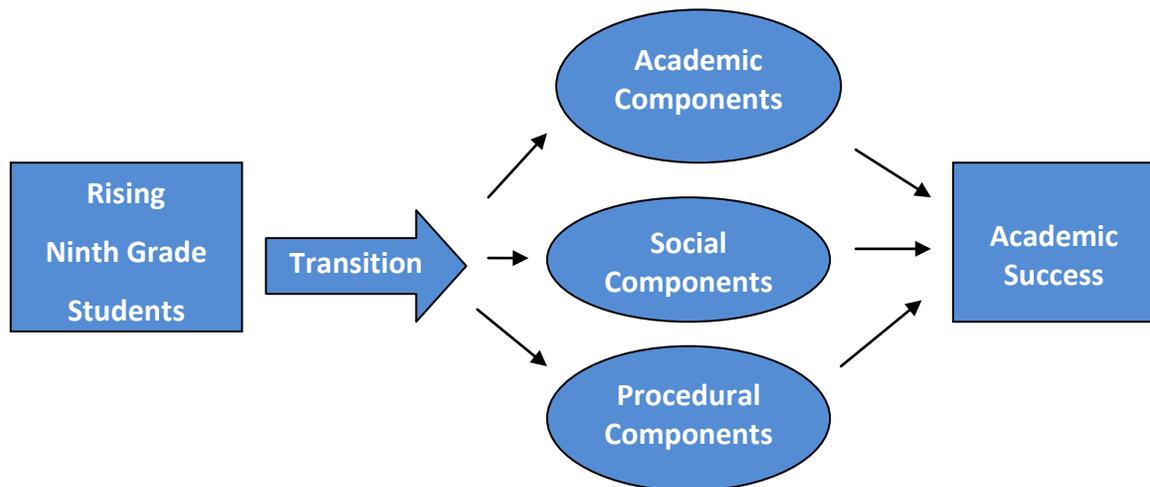


Figure 1. Adaptation of Akos and Galassi's (2004a) ninth grade transition program components.

For a successful comprehensive ninth grade transition program, school leaders need to identify specific ingredients and practices that they need to implement. Additionally, specific measures that school leaders can use to define program success need to be identified. Figure 2 depicts the conceptual framework for this study.

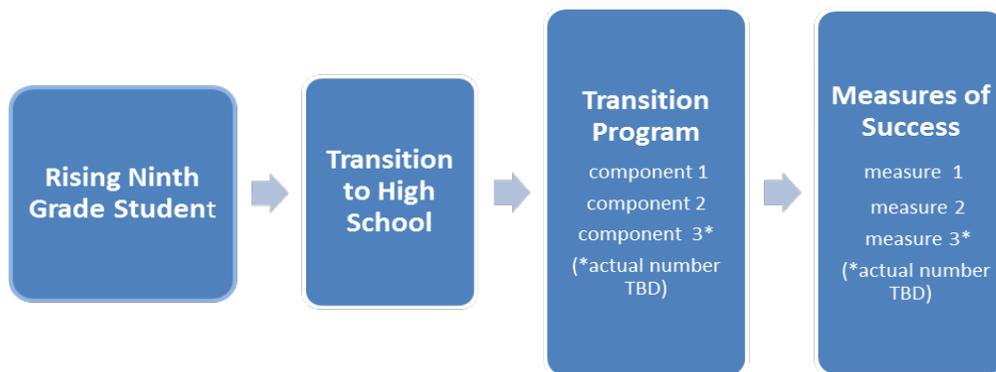


Figure 2. The conceptual framework.

Overview of Methodology

I used the Delphi Technique for this study. The United States Air Force developed the Delphi Technique in the 1950s as a way to apply the input of experts in a systematic manner (Linstone & Turoff, 2010). It is a process that collects and distills the anonymous judgments of experts by using a series of data collection, analysis, and feedback (Skulmoski, Hartman, & Krahn, 2007).

Using the Delphi Technique, I gained a consensus of leading researchers, national experts, and practitioners. Focusing and validating the information and input by these groups of people, the use of the Delphi Technique enabled me to blend research-based solutions, results-

oriented ideas, and practical solutions endorsed by those in the field. In other words, the process provided solutions validated by both researchers and practitioners. The three-round Delphi gave the panel of experts a chance to input ideas free of bias, rate the degree of importance of these ideas, and rate the ideas produced by the group.

Limitations

Potential limitations to this study included two areas centered on the panel of experts. First, the selection of the individual members of the panel relied on my review of the research and scholarly literature. Additionally, the practitioners I identified to be on the panel, have been selected based on professional connections or national and state awards. Second, while the number of panelists originally identified (27) was sufficient for a Delphi Study, 22 committed to participate. Additionally, after the study began, two panel members dropped out. One withdrew based on professional time commitments and one never responded to the Round I Delphi survey. These actions resulted in 20 total panel members.

Another potential limitation was simply the subject matter itself. Ninth grade transition is an event unique to each individual. While schools can put into action best practices and programs identified as having a high probability of success, nothing guarantees success. Each ninth grade student brings a different set of circumstances, background, and history with him/her when they walk through the schoolhouse door. While this research identified a consensus of essential components for a comprehensive ninth grade program, it does not ensure that even if each component identified is put into place by a high school principal that it will automatically translate into success for every ninth grade student in that school.

Definitions

The following terms are used throughout this study:

Dropout Rate—A percentage used to quantify those students that leave school before graduating; therefore an indication of those students that are not in school and have not graduated (Vives, 2008).

Ingredients or Components of Transition Program—A variety of practices that school leaders implement to help the ninth grade student in the transition to high school. Examples include orientation programs, small schools, ninth grade academies, and specific instructional interventions (Horwitz & Snipes, 2008).

Ninth Grade Transition Program—A ninth grade transition program refers to a program implemented in ninth grade (or the summer before ninth grade) to assist students moving from middle school to high school (Anderson, 2008).

School Transitions—A school transition is a point at which students move from one school or segment in their educational career to another (Vives, 2008).

Significance

With the growth of understanding in the importance of the ninth grade year, the plight of the ninth grade student continues to be a major focus of high school leaders across the country and they have redoubled their efforts to address the ninth grade transition (Warren, Fazekas, Rennie-Hill, Fanesali, & Jaffe-Walters, 2011). Schools are accountable more than ever for their graduation rates and a reduction of their dropout rates. The purpose of this study was to provide high school principals with specific practices that they can incorporate into their ninth grade student transition plan. I conducted this study on a national level, gathering input from a panel of experts that includes leading researchers, experts, and experienced practitioners.

Overview of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 contains the introduction and background of the problem, the rationale for study, the research questions, an introduction to the research methodology, definitions of terms, and the significance of the problem. Chapter 2 includes a review and synthesis of the relevant literature. Chapter 3 contains a description of the methodology. Chapter 4 presents the research findings including the analysis and summary of the data. Chapter 5 contains conclusions and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter provides a review of literature related to the transition of students to the ninth grade. Specifically, the research and scholarly writing examined connect the urgency of ninth grade success to graduation and future life advancement. Additionally, the literature emphasizes the unique qualities and challenges of the ninth grade student. Finally, in this chapter I explore previous efforts in identifying the essential ingredients of a comprehensive, successful ninth grade transition program.

The Ongoing Struggle of the Ninth Grade Student

Educators continue to struggle with the plight of rising ninth grade students and persist in efforts to search for the best ways to handle the students' transition into high school. Over the past decade, schools have recognized the unique issues surrounding the beginning of the ninth grade and have boosted their efforts to assist the transition of students from eighth grade to ninth grade (Warren et al., 2011). Even though the number of schools offering transition assistance to ninth graders has increased during recent years, educators need to do more (Anderson, 2008). Well-intentioned educators have been experimenting with all sorts of different programs that attempt to address the transition to high school, but these efforts have been largely unsuccessful (Dedmond, Brown, & LaFauci, 2006). Hard-working and time-stretched school principals need a source that identifies the essential ingredients of a researched-based and results-proven transition program.

Urgency of Ninth Grade

Over the last decade, the importance of the ninth grade and its relationship to students' future graduation and overall success has become clear. Ninth grade performance is highly

predictive of a student's likelihood of graduating and with each class a student fails and falls further behind; the less likely it is for the student to catch up (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). In the cities with the highest dropout rate in the United States, 40% of students repeat ninth grade and only 10-15% of the repeaters end up graduating (Balfanz & Letgers, 2004; Herlihy, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2012). In the United States, almost one out of every three eighth grade students do not graduate from high school and that figure increases to one out of every two for Black and Latino students (Orfield, 2004). Ninth grade attrition of students is more prevalent in high poverty urban school districts, where 40% of dropouts leave after their first year (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Of the students that fail ninth grade, 70 to 80% will not reach graduation (Wyner, Bridgeland, & DiIulio, Jr., 2007). Yet, even with these convincing statistics about the importance of success in ninth grade, more students fail the ninth grade year than any other grade (Hertzog & Morgan, 1998; Horwitz & Snipes, 2008; MacIver, 1990; National High School Center, 2007).

Ninth Grade Bulge

Nationally, so many students continue to fail the ninth grade, a phenomenon known as the "ninth grade bulge," as students never make it out of this grade (National High School Center, 2007). Students in the ninth grade comprise the highest percentage of the overall high school population. A national study of public school enrollment patterns shows a strong increase in the students enrolled in ninth grade over the last 30 years suggests that a larger number of students are being retained (Haney et al., 2004). The national average for ninth grade failure has tripled from 4% to 13% over this same 30-year period (Cook, Fowler, & Harris, 2008). The ninth grade bulge refers to students dropping out of high school and never graduating. In high poverty urban schools where 40% of dropouts leave after their first year, ninth grade attrition is

far more pronounced. Dropout rates are even worse for African-American and Latino students (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). “The single most predictive indicator of high school dropout is the student’s academic standing during the ninth grade” (Williamston, 2010, p. 1). The importance of ninth grade cannot be understated. Success at ninth grade leads a student to graduation and many students are not making it past this hurdle, especially minority students.

Early Studies of Ninth Grade Transition Programs

Almost 30 years ago, in 1985, the National Association of Secondary School Principals contracted with middle school experts Jon Loundsbury and J. Howard Johnston to conduct an in-depth study of ninth grade students across America (as cited in Black, 2004). Loundsbury and Johnston found that most high schools offered little or no guidance to help ninth grade students adjust academically and socially, so they predicted that ninth grade would “continue to drift” and “mirror the worst of outmoded high school practices that do little to foster positive learning for all students” (as cited in Black, 2004, p. 43). Eight years later in 1993, Anne Wheelock (as cited in Black, 2004) found similarly disheartening results when she studied high school reform. She described ninth grade as, “a minefield for the most vulnerable students” (as cited in Black, 2004, p. 42), and especially noted the concern for those students who become disengaged and who fail to develop strong bonds with teachers or the school.

The Unique Issue of the Ninth Grade Student

Ninth grade is a critically important year where teens find themselves trying to navigate large, impersonal, and competitive environments (Cook, Fowler, & Harris, 2008). The complex needs of the ninth grade student are so unique that transition help as they journey to a new school environment demands attention (Legters & Kerr, 2001). Teens deal with this major life transition at the same time they experience the normal challenges of adolescence—resulting in a

recipe for disaster. These normal challenges, combined with moving to a larger physical building, reducing the amount of personal support, and increasing the academic rigor often becomes too difficult for a ninth grade student (Smith, 2007). “Ninth-grade students have problems because they are at an unusual juncture in life. They must make decisions with long-term consequences, but they often lack the maturity and foresight to make those decisions well” (Habeb, 2013, p. 22).

The period during eighth and ninth grade is a monumental defining time in a person’s life. Isakson and Jarvis (1999) indicate several adjustment problems that can occur during this time including: decreases in grade point average, poor attendance, feelings of lack of connectedness, and reduced co-curricular participation. These authors also indicate students can experience increased anxiety concerning school procedures and older students, social difficulties, and changes in relationships with parents.

Where Does Ninth Grade Belong?

The issue of where the ninth grade student appropriately fits within the school continuum has been a struggle to the point that the ninth grade year seems like an unwanted year. The complexity of a young person at this age contributes to this challenge. Research on younger adolescent students has focused on middle school students. Research surrounding high school students fails to consider or address the unique issues regarding this younger age group (Kerr, 2002).

The dilemma of figuring out the appropriate strategies for meeting the needs of the ninth grade student is not a new one. The philosophical struggle about the placement of ninth grade students has resulted in various attempts at correctly placing these students. Early in the 20th Century, a student attended a K– 8 school followed by attendance in ninth grade in a high school

(Paglin & Fager, 1997). In the 1960s, the philosophy shifted and junior highs became popular with 80% of graduates attending a K-6 school, followed by a 7-9 junior high and a 10-12 high school (Wyant & Mathis, 2007). Today, the vast majority of schools in the United States place the ninth grade student with tenth through twelfth graders in a traditional high school model, while fewer than 400 schools group the ninth grade students with seventh and eighth grade students (Barton & Klump, 2012).

Achievement Loss

Over a decade ago, Alspaugh (1998) established that achievement struggles are connected with the transition from middle to high school. In an ex post facto study, he looked at 48 different school districts in Missouri to examine achievement loss that may be associated with this transition. Even though he looked at the different organizational models and feeder patterns of these schools, one finding was consistent across all groups: all experienced achievement loss in the transition to ninth grade.

Using the Missouri Mastery and Achievement Tests (MMAT), Alspaugh (1998) examined achievement results in all four core content areas. He found a significant achievement loss in three of the following four content areas:

- reading a ten-point loss,
- science a fifteen-point loss, and
- social studies an eight-point loss.

Mathematics was also a loss, but it was slightly less than two points.

In her dissertation study, Anderson (2008) supported the existence of academic challenge during the ninth grade transition. Conducting small focus group meetings with students, Anderson found that students cite academics as the most challenging aspect of their adjustment

to high school. While the students did mention other challenging factors of the transition, such as the size of the facility and finding their way around the facility, the emphasis was clearly on the academic support needed.

Both Alspaugh (1998) and Anderson (2008) solidify the experiential knowledge of high school educators related to the academic preparedness of rising ninth grade students. Their findings support the need for special and focused attention on academic issues for the ninth grade student. Additionally, these findings also exemplify the need to approach instruction in a comprehensive and cohesive manner with ninth graders.

Attention to the Transition Issue

High school leaders have become acutely aware of the importance of a successful transition from middle to high school. In schools with strong transition programs, specifically a focused attention on a student's successful transition from eighth grade, the dropout rate is 8% and, in schools without such a program, the dropout rate is 21% (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Schools and districts have implemented many different types of transition programs in attempts to help rising ninth graders make their way into high school (Carter & Healey, 2011). The urgency of these programs is clear—the ninth grade year has become commonly known as the “make it or break it” year or the “pivotal year” (Black, 2004). The transition into ninth grade is critically important to the future success of the student's life and academic career (Smith, 2007). By monitoring the early warning signs, educators can take proactive measures to strengthen the ninth grade transition so that fewer students will fail and more will graduate high school prepared for college and the workplace (Abbott & Fisher, 2012).

All transitions in a student's educational career are important. Clearly, the transition to high school has become the most critical. Herlihy (2007) characterizes this stage of the

educational pipeline as the leakiest juncture. The increased pressures from the academic demands combined with the social and emotional developmental needs of teenagers make the transition to high school one of the most difficult transitions a student faces during their school years (Elias, 2001). In fact, Smith, Feldwisch, and Abell (2006) cite several sources when they claim that a difficult transition from eighth grade to ninth grade leads to achievement loss (Alsbaugh, 1998; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999), behavior problems (Graber & Books-Gunn, 1996), and becoming a high school dropout (Smith, 1997).

Breaking Ranks

The original *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution* (1996), published by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), laid the foundation for high school reform, and led to a series of books addressing cornerstone strategies and recommendations for school leaders addressing specific school reforms. Two specific follow up books, *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform* (2004) and *Breaking Ranks: The Comprehensive Framework for School Improvement* (2011), continue and expand upon both publications. Each recommendation provided in these additional books fits into one of the following three major categories:

- collaborative leadership;
- personalizing the school environment; and
- curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Embedded into each of these three categories is the overarching philosophy that high schools must address both the academic needs of students as they transition to high school as well as the developmental needs of students (physical, social, emotional, and cognitive). While these publications referred to as the *Breaking Ranks* books outline specific core

recommendations, the overall framework does not prescribe a specific model that a school should follow. Rather, the emphasis is on individual school data and the development of a customized plan for school success.

The importance of ninth grade transition is prevalent throughout the *Breaking Ranks* literature. Both the core recommendations and the anecdotal examples provided in the books reflect the importance of the transition. Recommendations regarding the personalization of the school environment include:

- High schools will create small units in which anonymity is banished;
- Each student will have a personal plan for progress;
- Every high school student will have a personal adult advocate to help him or her personalized the educational experience;
- The high school will engage students' families as partners in the students' education;
- Recognizing the education is a continuum; high schools will reach out to elementary and middle level schools...to better serve the articulation of student learning and to ensure that at each stage of the continuum, stakeholders understand what will be required of students at the succeeding stage (*Breaking Ranks II*, 2004, p.18).

These recommendations ensure that, at each stage of the continuum, stakeholders understand what will be required of students at the succeeding stage. Furthermore, in the core area of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, the following recommendation states, "The school ensures a smooth academic and social transition for each student from grade to grade and school to school" (*Breaking Ranks*, 2011, p.37).

Throughout the *Breaking Ranks* series, NASSP places an emphasis on transition issues and concerns that leaders need to address. Included in the emphasis are multiple specific

anecdotal examples from exemplar schools around the country. As the leading professional organization for secondary school leaders, the NASSP places the ninth grade transition issue in the forefront as it weaves it throughout their cornerstone framework and recommendations (NASSP, 2011; NASSP, 2004).

Ninth Grade Counts

Supported with a grant by the U.S. Department of Education through the Smaller Learning Communities Program, a consortium of three organizations (The Millennium Group International, the Great Schools Partnership, and the Center for Secondary School Redesign) developed a three-part resource and supporting series of webinars called Ninth Grade Counts (2012, 2013). The Ninth Grade Counts resource documents, broken into three parts, provide schools with research-based strategies related to the ninth grade transition. The first part is a systemic overview (Abbott & Fisher, 2012), the second is directly related to the unique challenges of English language learners (ELL) during the transition to high school (Abbott & Templeton, 2013), and the third is focused on summer-bridge programs (Abbott & Hastings, 2012).

The systemic overview (Abbott & Fisher, 2012) encourages school leaders to do a self-assessment, learn about overall best practices, read about examples from schools across the country, and evaluate strategies as passive, reactive, or proactive. Strategies address all components (academic, social, and procedural), including setting a positive school culture, professional development for teachers, collaboration with middle school, orientation programs, summer bridge programs, personalized instruction, academic support, and social/emotional support (Abbott & Fisher, 2012).

The second document (Abbott & Hastings, 2012) concentrating on English language learners, uses the same format as the systemic overview document. The strategies address all three components (academic, social, and procedural), and are categorized as passive, reactive, or proactive. Strategies specific to ELL include: ELL newcomer academy, ELL curriculum and instruction, ELL interventions and support, English language development, communication and outreach to parents/families, cultural inclusion, and support programs designed for both long term ELL students and newcomer ELL students (Abbott & Hastings, 2012).

The third resource document (Abbott & Templeton, 2013) goes into greater depth specifically regarding Summer Bridge programs. This document describes in detail examples of Summer Bridge programs from three different high schools across the country. The components of a Summer Bridge program are distinguished and delineated as different from an orientation program or a summer school program. The Summer Bridge program focuses on preparing ninth grade students for developing a pathway to postsecondary opportunities, academic and social support, families as support in student success, and attempts to connect the community through service learning opportunities (Abbott & Templeton, 2013).

Even though these documents and the associated webinars carry a disclaimer by the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) that the views expressed in the videos do not necessarily reflect the official viewpoint of the USDOE, the reader/viewer can conclude that the strategies and success stories of school across the country included in the documents are supported by the USDOE. The continued attention to the ninth grade transition indicates its ongoing importance when dealing with challenges faced by high schools today in addressing the dropout rate, the country's global competitiveness, and the relatively new challenges such as the influx of ELL.

English Language Learners

The national PK-12 ELL population grew 51% over the last 10 years totaling more than five million compared to the overall PK-12 population growth of 7%. (U.S. Department of Education Webinar, 2012b). In fact, one in every 10 ninth grade students are ELL who must navigate the general complexities of the high school transition in addition to difficulties associated with learning English (U.S. Department of Education Webinar, 2012b). ELLs are at greater risk of absenteeism, failing courses, and ultimately dropping out (U.S. Department of Education Webinar, 2012b). ELLs are more likely to be at schools where academic expectations are low and they have a 50% less likelihood to have access to a rigorous curriculum that prepares them for college (U.S. Department of Education Webinar, 2012b). Large numbers of ELLs attend urban schools, which have some of the highest dropout rates, yet little information is available on how high school reforms, policies, and programs consider the distinctive linguistic, academic, and social needs of ELLs (Lara & Harford, 2010).

To compound the complexity of these issues even more, reforms and programs related to the ninth grade transition do not even consider the needs of the ELLs. “The existing body of research on the ninth-grade transition makes almost no reference to ELLs” (Lara & Harford, 2010, p.6). Certainly, all the issues that make the ninth grade transition difficult for non-ELLs would make the transition even more challenging and daunting for ELLs (Lara & Harford, 2010).

Lara & Harford (2010) examined the connection between three areas of concern for secondary educators: smaller learning communities, the ninth grade transition, and instructing ELLs. The researchers contacted 13 high schools and two middle schools based on the recommendation of the U.S. Department of Education, which deemed these schools as

innovators when working with ELLs. Of those schools contacted, eight responded and then received a survey of 26 questions regarding the structure of the school's small learning community program, ninth grade transition program, and its work with ELLs. Lara and Harford found that all the schools operated smaller learning communities (SLC) and four of the schools had at least one specifically designed for ELLs, focusing on both an instructional or career theme as well as the language proficiency level of the student. At varying degrees, each of these schools implemented best practices when working with ELLs dealing with academic transition issues including: English language development, bilingual instruction, content delivery and instruction, professional development for teachers, and appropriate instructional support. The researchers also found that other supports, in addition to academics, were implemented and necessary. These types of supports included collaboration with feeder middle schools, orientation type events, explanations of behavior expectations, mentoring, the development of independent study skills, addressing the diversity within ELLs, and engagement of parents/families. Lara and Harford (2010) concluded that although schools with higher ELL populations seem to be ahead with their programming that address both academic and social/emotional needs of their students, all schools need a systemic and well-thought-out approach to ninth grade transition.

Major Efforts

Researchers have studied only a handful of attempts at a comprehensive, systematic, major change in the approach to ninth grade transition. Usually, these efforts focus on schools that have major performance issues and other challenges or concerns. Additionally, major efforts include a sponsoring group with a specialized interest or research motivation regarding ninth grade transition.

One of these efforts surrounded the Talent Development High School Model. The Talent Development High School Model was one of the most comprehensive and well-known high school reform efforts. It targeted some of the most challenging schools in the country. These efforts started at one high school in Baltimore and then, in an ambitious attempt to scale up this small implementation, the School District of Philadelphia collaborated with the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR), the Philadelphia Education Fund, and a local education agency. This partnership allowed the School District of Philadelphia to implement this model initially at five of its high schools (Kemple, Herlihy, & Smith, 2005).

Sponsored by Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), Kemple, Herlihy, and Smith (2005) examined the initial five high schools that began this implementation in Philadelphia. While the Talent Development Model dealt with several different aspects of high school, it had an intense focus on the ninth grade. The Ninth Grade Success Academy, which totally restructured the ninth grade, was the most critical aspect of the Talent Development Model. The five schools studied consistently implemented the Success Academy. Key components of the restructuring included:

- a physical relocation of ninth grade classes to a single area in the school,
- teaming of 100 to 125 students with the same teachers in the four core subjects,
- modifying the daily schedule so that students receive two classes in math and English, and
- having each ninth grade student take a “Freshman Seminar” class focusing on study skills and on personal and social ninth grade transition issues (Kemple et al., 2005).

As mentioned, the Talent Development Model also consisted of other practices focused on students in the upper grades and providing professional development opportunities for the

faculty. The program designers also assigned additional personnel to support this model both at the school level as well as at the district level.

Kemple et al. (2005) conducted the research using a comparative interrupted time series analysis to examine the effect of the Talent Development Model on student achievement and other outcomes. This study analyzed three cohorts of ninth grade students from each of the five schools. The research followed one cohort from each school until they took the state's standardized test in math and reading in eleventh grade. Additionally, the researchers followed a cohort from two of the high schools until their expected graduation.

The researchers concluded that that the Talent Development model positively impacted first time ninth grade students by a 5.1% improvement in attendance, a 8.2% rise in academic credits earned, a 24.5% increase in Algebra I credits earned, and a 8% improvement in promotion rates to tenth grade (Kemple et al., 2005). Additionally, the researchers also concluded that the impact of credits earned and positive promotion rates sustained themselves as the first time ninth graders moved through high school. These results support the claim that the Talent Development Model produced substantial and pervasive improvements for first-time ninth grade students (Kemple et al., 2005).

Kemple et al. (2005) recognized some important drawbacks to this research despite the initial positive results. First, because some of the most underperforming and challenging high schools in Philadelphia implemented this model, even though the results are positive, these schools still had a long way to go to be considered a success. Second, the positive achievements required an additional \$250 to \$350 spending per student. In this particular case, the extra cost was covered by grant money, some local school division funds, and other funds available from CRESPAR. Third, the school had to undergo some challenging changes in school organization,

instruction, and teacher support. Finally, based on the fact that this research focused on the initial scaling up of this model, the researchers warned against extrapolating these results to a larger number of schools and in situations that are more diverse (Kemple et al, 2005).

Educators cannot dismiss the challenges of increased financial support even when the research supports a potential solution to a complex problem. The ingredients in the Ninth Grade Academy Model are extensive and expensive, “achieving these initial positive results required significant extra funds and very demanding changes to school organization, instruction, and teacher support” (Kemple et al., 2005, p.8). The support of additional personnel and the extra efforts placed on these educators was significant. The increased time on English, math, and the freshman seminar class led to a decrease in time for electives such as music, art, or career and technical education. The reality of local school districts trying to sustain the success of the Talent Development Model, both with the financial resources and the demands on the human resources was a major challenge.

Two of the same organizations involved in the previous study, Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) and the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR) were involved in another major research project concerning the ninth grade transition. Quint, Miller, Pastor, and Cytron (1999) studied the Project Transition program in the late 90s at two different high schools, one in Milwaukee, and one in Kansas City. MDRC, a private, non-profit company, developed and evaluated the Project Transition program. MDRC put this reform effort into place to deal with the ninth grade transition and improve student attendance and performance. The three primary strategies of Project Transition included:

- creating teacher teams of the four core subject teachers;
- daily teacher meetings with the teams; and

- a coach position to provide support for teachers. The program design included the coach position to provide professional development and improve teacher instructional practices. The designers considered the position critical to the success of the program.

Quint et al., (1999) concluded that both schools created a supportive environment for students and teachers, but only one of the two high schools showed modest academic improvement. The researchers also highlighted that this study provided reliable evidence that these interventions can accomplish positive impacts in a short time frame. They attribute the fact that academic gains were limited to one school because the transition program at that school was more fully implemented and well run. While the other school in the reform effort did see gains in having a supportive environment, the incomplete or poor implementation of the transition program explained the lack of academic gains (Quint et al., 1999). For example, the school did not implement all elements of the project for the full demonstration period and the person fulfilling the role of the coach position at that school was less effective at implementing change with the teachers.

Quint et al., (1999) concluded that an effectively run transition program is important, and emphasized the idea of developing teacher teams to work with ninth grade students. This component assisted the students' adjustment to high school as well as encouraging teachers to work together rather than in isolation. The researchers defined this success as:

- more students passed courses;
- greater feelings of student autonomy; and
- higher levels of school engagement.

It should be noted that Quint et al. (1999) only followed the students through the end of the ninth grade year. If the researchers followed the students for a longer time, they might have discovered further positive results or that some students who initially successfully navigated the transition later stumbled in high school (i.e., did not graduate or dropped out of school). The researchers also pointed out that, while the teaming strategy was an effective one in this research, it is just one aspect of the overall goal for improved ninth grade transition and increased high school student achievement.

Project Transition is another example of a major reform effort that produced mixed results. Certainly two components of the transition program have become increasingly commonplace since this study—teaming four teachers together in the core content areas and daily meetings with these same teachers. However, this practice, which is far more likely to occur in middle school, is not yet the norm in high school or ninth grade. Teaming teachers in the four core subjects can cause strain on a school's master schedule and result in more expensive staffing. The third component, hiring a coach to provide support and professional development to the core teachers is an expensive proposition for school districts.

Attempts at Identifying Essential Components

Researchers have made efforts to identify the essential components of an effective ninth grade transition program. Some components are isolated while others are part of a comprehensive approach to a transition program. In each situation, the research points to different measures to gauge success or lack thereof.

Multiple doctoral candidates have completed their dissertations attempting to examine existing ninth grade transition programs or identify ingredients of these programs. A few recent examples include:

- Bond's 2010 study of an existing program at one school focused on a specific required class for ninth grade students;
- Dyke's 2007 dissertation study of one transition program specifically focused on over-age, first time ninth grade students; and
- Vives' 2008 study of participants' view of integral components of a transition program including student orientation, parent orientation, tutoring, workshops, and trips to the school.

All of these studies produced mixed results, including individual success stories for children coupled with no overall statistical differences among the specific programs.

More established researchers, Akos and Galassi (2004a), attempted to define a comprehensive ninth grade transition program by examining the views of students, parents, and teachers about the middle and high school transition in a medium sized southern school district in a university community. The high school portion of the study included the participation of 320 ninth grade students, 61 parents, and 17 teachers (all from one high school). In mid-October of the students' ninth grade year, the three groups were given a checklist-style questionnaire asking them to reflect back on how they were feeling about the transition to high school. Specifically, the questionnaire asked the groups to respond to aspects of high school that they looked forward to and parts of high school that they were concerned about. The researchers gave parents and teachers a similar checklist-style questionnaire asking these same types of questions. Additionally, the questionnaire had four open-ended, short-answer questions for participants to respond to if they wanted. The researchers presented students and parents with opportunities to reflect on the feelings they were having about the transition before they or their child entered

high school and the challenges and opportunities they or their child experienced during the actual transition to high school.

The responses indicated that the transition was full of challenges but also included opportunities for students as they entered a new environment. The results of this study showed that the top concerns of both students and parents regarding the transition to high school surround academic performance (e.g., hard classes, homework). While the teachers agreed that academic pressures were a serious concern, they also ranked fitting in and making new friends as major concerns for students (Akos & Galassi, 2004a).

Based on their findings, Akos and Galassi (2004a) suggested that not only do schools need to plan for a solid transition program to assist rising ninth graders, but that the transition programming needs to focus on three distinct areas – academic, procedural, and social. In a sense, the researchers concluded that different types of programming need to be in place to assist the student in the all aspects affecting a successful transition. They also included reflections of parents and students after the transition took place. Suggestions from students included:

- asking the teachers to be nicer at first;
- ease the students in with the work expected; and
- a better orientation of the school (Akos & Galassi, 2004a).

Parents' suggestions included more open communication between teachers and students and opportunities to let their child interact with the students in the upper grade levels. The latter of these suggestions from parents could be counterintuitive to educators who might think that most parents want their ninth grade student protected or shielded from older students.

Although there are limitations to the research by Akos and Galassi (2004a) including the small number of parent and teacher participants, only one participating school, and the fact that

they asked the participants to think back about how they were feeling prior to the transition after the transition already took place, the study identified important findings for educators. Issues surrounding ninth grade transition and the attempts by schools to address the varied issues are undeniably intertwined, and clearly, these researchers identified the three critical areas of focus to address. Academic and instructional issues are at the forefront of the ninth grade transition. Among the many varied approaches that schools are attempting in support of students, the academic needs are of the utmost importance. However, educators cannot attend to the academic issues unless they also address the social/emotional issues in the transition to high school. Finally, the critical importance of involving parents/guardians and families in their child's transition is a huge aspect to be considered by schools when addressing the ninth-grade transition.

Essential Components - The Role of the Middle School

Smith (1997) studied the effectiveness of middle school transition programs geared to help students move to high school as measured by high school retention and student performance. She examined data from students in schools with no transition programs, students in schools with partial programs, and students in schools that address student, parent, and staff issues in the transition. Using data from the National Center for Educational Statistics, Smith started with a nationally represented sample of 1,035 public and private schools and then randomly selected 30 eighth grade students from each of those schools, resulting in a sample of 26,200 students. Further data restrictions, such as focusing only on students in public schools, narrowed her final sample down to approximately 8,000 students from 700 public schools to whom she conducted a survey.

Smith (1997) defined a full, comprehensive program as one that deals with all three audiences in the transition – the student, the parent, and the staff. She defined a partial transition program as one that only addresses one or two of these audiences. No transition means that a school does not have any practices or programs that they have designed to assist in the transition of eighth grade students to high school. The researcher studied specific practices of the type of program that address each audience. Examples of programs that address the student audience include:

- high school counselors meeting the eighth grade students,
- eighth grade students attending high school classes,
- incorporating a big brother/big sister type of program, and
- high school students presenting information to eighth graders.

Examples of programs that address the parent audience include parent visits to the high school and parent visits for a fall orientation. Examples of practices that address the staff audience include middle and high school teacher meetings, middle and high school administrator meetings, and middle and high school counselor meetings (Smith, 1997).

Smith (1997) concluded that any type of transition program is essentially effective in helping students transition to high school successfully. When a middle school devises a comprehensive, complete transition program, the results are real and positive. Specifically, dropout rates decrease when a partial transition program is in place, but a full transition program reduces the dropout rate by an additional 20%. High school grade point averages were also higher for the students that went through any type of high school transition program.

Although Smith's results are compelling, a major limitation in her results is the finding that most schools with full transition programs also had parent/family characteristics that reflect

higher family income, parental education, and occupational status. It is hard to factor out these mitigating circumstances that may have skewed the effects of the middle school components.

Smith's (1997) research stops short of specifically identifying essential components of a ninth grade transition program (in this case for middle schools). Rather, she leaves the practitioner with various examples of components, which the principal can choose to implement as long as the school meets the needs of the three audiences (students, parents, and staff).

Cooney and Bottoms (2002), who studied the role of the middle school in a student's transition to high school, focused on three specific components that they identify as essential to support the student. They argued that the essential components of middle school preparation are simple and should focus on academic preparedness and high expectations. Citing research done by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), these authors indicated that educators need to take steps with students in eighth grade that would help ensure these students are prepared for the academic challenges of ninth grade. They based their conclusions on a comprehensive study of close to 3,100 students from 44 different middle schools and 38 high schools. The SREB followed this cohort of students after they participated in the middle grades assessment in reading, mathematics, and science when they were in eighth grade. After these students completed their ninth grade, the SREB collected course assignments and performance information. They found that three experiences in the middle grades link students to taking and succeeding in higher-level rigorous courses in ninth grade. These experiences are:

- studying "something called algebra" in the middle grades;
- reading a great number of books in the eighth grade; and
- expecting to graduate from college (SREB cited by Cooney and Bottoms, 2002).

These conclusions support the belief that a link must occur between the middle school and the high school for the successful transition of students from one level to the next. Educators must communicate the vertical articulation of academic requirements and the rigor of academic preparedness to middle school educators, parents, and students. Not only must the educators communicate these academic requirements in eighth grade, but also they must give assistance to ensure that students who have the goal of attending college enroll in courses that support the rigor needed to accomplish this goal.

Both the research of Smith (1997) and Cooney and Bottoms (2002) support the notion that comprehensive ninth grade transition programs really start in middle school. Their research differs on identifying which ingredients are essential. Smith claims that the middle school approach needs to be comprehensive and meet the needs of three different groups—students, parents, and staff. Cooney and Bottoms say it is much simpler; if educators focus on three specific areas of academic preparedness, then students will successfully transition to ninth grade.

Essential Components Related to Social/Emotional Issues

The social/emotional needs of 14- or 15-year-old teenagers as they transition to high school are widely accepted as critically important components of the ninth grade transition process that educators must address. Programs that support and link the transition from eighth grade to ninth grade are important because they can ease the shift for the student during a period of development when they are emotionally and psychologically vulnerable (Nield, 2009). If educators diminish or overlook the impact of social/emotional issues, a key aspect of the overall development of the student is lost. Attending a school and participating in a classroom in which the student feels safe, comfortable, and connected is a basic need that ninth grade students must have to successfully transition to high school. More eloquently and simply put by Yale

professor, Dr. James Comer, “No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship” (as cited in Payne, 2008, p.48).

Barber and Olsen (2004) analyzed the transitions to middle and high school by assessing the change in perceived school and youth functioning and the extent that school environments predicted these changes. The primary purpose of their research was to provide some evidence by correlating changes in a new school environment to the changes in adolescent psychological and social functioning. The justification of their research came from what they believed to be a consensus from anecdotal, theoretical, and empirical studies that indicate that, not only did the academic functioning of students suffer at the transition points, but the personal and interpersonal functioning of students also suffered. Barber and Olsen state that on the average, teachers at higher levels are less personal and more controlling, which is completely contrary to the psychosocial needs of developing adolescents.

Barber and Olsen (2004) used data from a study by the National Institute of Mental Health that included a random sample of 933 families with children in fifth and eighth grade. These students completed an initial survey administered in classrooms. Subsequently, families received follow up surveys in the mail during the spring as the students progressed through each school year. Items in the survey fell into one of the following categories: school environment, school performance, extracurricular activities, psychological functioning, interpersonal competence, and youth problem behaviors. As related to the high school transition, the results of Barber and Olsen’s analysis indicated that there were eight specific areas reported as negative changes. These negative changes reported by the ninth graders included: less liking of school, higher perceived need of school organization, lower support from teachers, lower support from principals and assistant principals, less monitoring from teachers, lower classroom autonomy,

less involvement with school activities, lower self-esteem, and higher depression. These findings showed that students perceive a lower quality school environment as well as lower personal functioning at the ninth grade transition.

As Barber and Olsen (2004) highlighted in this research, high school transition programs must include components addressing the social and emotional needs of students. Students reported that they need to be “connected” to their teachers and want support from them. This void can contribute to a perceived poor school environment and socializing conditions. These perceptions lead to poor student functioning and affect both the academic performance of students as well as their psychological and interpersonal competence.

Connectedness

Later, when focusing on the influence of parents, a study by The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, centered on teenagers and their connections to the world, is described in detail. A special focus of the research included social connections and family connections and the role these play in teenagers overall well-being and success. However, an important conclusion derived from the research supports the view that one key measure of the high school environment that plays a positive role in students’ mental health is that the student must feel “connected” to the school. Students report that what matters the most to them is that the school creates an atmosphere in which students feel that they are treated fairly, that they feel close to each other, and that they are an important part of the school culture (Blum & Rinehart, 1997). The bottom line is that when teenagers feel connected to their school, this connectedness makes them feel more protected from all sorts of other risks including mental health issues, drug use, sexual activity, and other potentially dangerous behavior. The vast majority of students, especially in ninth grade need to make a connection with their school and their teacher to be

successful. Ninth grade students repeatedly report that they disengage from school if they feel that teachers do not care about getting to know them as individuals (Wheelock & Miao, 2005).

Students themselves reinforced these findings when Akos & Galassi (2004b) investigated the role gender and race play in the psychosocial adjustment following a school transition (either middle school or high school). Their study at one middle school and one high school in a Southeastern school district used a questionnaire to gain student perceptions about the transitions. Although results varied as they relate to the focus of the research regarding the role gender and race in the adjustment to middle or high school, one result was consistent across both genders and the races included in the study. The students identified their parents as the most helpful people to them in the transition to high school (in fact, this was true of the middle school transition as well). This information is critically important as school officials plan transition programs for students.

Resiliency

Bernard (2007) defines resiliency as an inherent part of humans that allows for the capacity of self-righting during difficult times or risks: “More than any other institution except the family, schools can and do provide environments and protective conditions that are crucial for fostering resiliency in today’s children and youth” (Henderson, 2012, p.297).

The development of resiliency in schools is connected to academic success, increased school safety, a student’s social and emotional well-being (Henderson, 2012) as well as higher morale among students and teachers, fewer student dropouts, reduced violence, better community relations, and increased institutional pride (Bryant & Kelley, 2006). Recent research that validates the power of the school climate on improved student learning, especially for students in U.S. urban schools, supports the critical role a school plays in a student’s development of

resiliency (Perkins, 2006). School classrooms and school communities tend to be rich in the six factors identified as necessary to the development of student resiliency including: providing caring and support, teaching life skills, setting clear and consistent boundaries, increasing pro social bonding, providing opportunities for meaningful participation, and setting and communicating high expectations (Henderson & Milstein, 1996).

These insights regarding the importance of the development of resiliency skills in young people supports a school environment that purposefully incorporates such factors into its culture—a culture that begins in a student’s transition into the school. Curricular, structural, and programmatic strategies critical to the development of students’ resiliency that can be part of a comprehensive ninth grade transition plan include:

- ensuring that every student has a caring and supporting relationship with at least one adult in the school;
- providing students with opportunities for meaningful participation in the school;
- social opportunities to bond in positive activities; and
- setting clear and consistent boundaries (Henderson, 2012).

Parent/Family Roles in Ninth Grade Transition

The importance of parent/guardian involvement in their teen’s transition from middle to high school cannot be overestimated (Mizelle, 1999). Parent and family involvement are linked to improved student attendance, behavior, and learning. In fact, if family involvement is effective and nurtured by the school it leads to increased math, reading, and science achievement (Epstein et al., 2009). While high schools across the country are designing special (and sometimes expensive) programs to help the transition of ninth-graders, a key ingredient is missing from many of these programs—the involvement of parents (Carter & Healey, 2010-11).

When parents are involved in the transition to high school, they most likely will become positively involved parents throughout the next four years (MacIver, 1990). Schools often forget to involve parents when planning transition programs. Unfortunately, when high school educators speak of parental involvement, often they really mean that they need parent support during fundraising (Morgan & Hertzog, 2001), working the concession stand at the Friday night football game, and being unconditionally supportive of the consequences that schools assign for discipline issues or academic problems (Carter & Healey, 2011).

Falbo, Lein, and Amador (2001) conducted research to determine what types of parental involvement help students succeed as they transition to high school. They interviewed the families of 26 students during the last half of the students' eighth grade year, by conducting the interviews in the homes and interviewing both the student and the parent. The researchers conducted follow-up interviews after the first grading period in the same manner. After the interviews, Falbo et al. (2001) used performance data from the end of the students' ninth grade year to determine success. The researchers identified five types of parental involvement that support student success:

- monitoring the teen's academic and social life;
- evaluating information received from their child;
- helping with homework;
- influencing positive peer connections; and
- being directly involved with the school (Falbo, Lein, & Amador, 2001).

The positive influence of parents is readily apparent and important for schools to utilize for the benefit of the ninth grade transition.

The Influence of Parents

The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health was the first comprehensive study to analyze the social settings of adolescent lives and the way teens connect to the world around them. Special focus of the research included social connections and family connections and the role these play in teenagers' overall well-being and success. This study affirms what parents know by instinct but often question—the power of parental influence over their child (Blum & Rinehart, 1997).

Based on a mandate by the United States Congress and funding by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and 17 other federal offices and institutes, this national, comprehensive study of adolescent health was conducted (Blum & Rinehart, 1997). The study began with a distribution of surveys to approximately 90,000 students in grades seven through 12, from 145 different schools. Next, the researchers conducted over 35,000 in-home interviews of students. Additionally, 18,000 parent interviews were completed and all participating schools completed a questionnaire, usually by an administrator (Blum & Rinehart, 1997).

The results of this study are clear. Home life makes a difference in the health of American youth. When teens have the feeling of being connected to their families, including having their parents involved in their life, they feel protected and safe. Teens feel safe when parents have high expectations for school performance. This home and family connectedness leads to protecting teens from emotional distress, reduced involvement with substance abuse, youth violence, delayed sexual involvement, and reduced teen pregnancy (Blum & Rinehart, 1997). Clearly, the message for schools is that the parents are a tremendous ally and resource when planning transition programs for rising ninth graders.

Parent Involvement in Class Selection

A common practice in the early spring of a student's eighth grade year is to select classes that the teen will take during the ninth grade year. This course selection is important for a successful transition and to accomplish future goals. Not only do parents need to understand and be an active participant in this process, they also need to comprehend the long-term impact of this course selection (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). Many parents are unaware of the long-range impact and the long term planning that should go into the thought process when selecting ninth grade courses. Parents may leave these decisions in the hands of the eighth grade counselor. Unless there has been a dialogue between the parent and the counselor and/or the counselor is well versed in the long term ramifications of ninth grade course selection, these well-meaning folks may unwittingly make choices that do not support the teen's future goals.

Mizelle (1999) suggested a multitude of ways to encourage parental involvement in the transition of their child to high school. Suggestions include conferencing with the high school counselor when the student is in eighth grade to help with high school course selection. Mizelle goes on to say that, high schools should plan activities for parents including the chance to interact with other parents who have already supported their child in the transition to high school.

Parental Knowledge of School Practices

Birmon and Espino (2007) studied the impact of parent knowledge of school practices as related to school success for immigrant and nonimmigrant high school students. They examined 240 students and their parents from a high school in the mid-Atlantic region that had an influx of newly arrived immigrants from the Soviet Union. The researchers conducted a qualitative and quantitative study that included many open-ended interviews with students, parents, and school staff. As one could have predicted, the immigrant parents reported that they had less knowledge

about school practices than their American counterparts, that the schools granted them less autonomy in their child's education, and that they had significantly less school contact than the United States born parents.

This study by Birmon and Espino (2007) supports the importance of schools involving parents in their transition programs. The researchers found that the parents who had a greater knowledge of school practices as well as parents whom the school helped develop a greater knowledge of school practices predicted fewer disciplinary infractions, a stronger sense of belonging to the school, and better grades. In fact, these correlations were stronger for the immigrant parents compared to the nonimmigrant parents. These findings support the importance of ninth grade transition programs that include educating parents—especially parents of immigrant students. According to these researchers, knowledge of school practices may help students feel more comfortable and be more involved with their school (Birmon & Espino, 2007).

Social or Procedural

Some researchers refer to a subset of social/emotional issues as “procedural” issues, which in other words, are those things about the inner workings of high school that put the student at ease and give them a level of comfort as they enter unfamiliar territory. The traditional approaches to high school transition typically address many of the procedural issues. Of 79% of Maryland high schools, almost all report that they provide middle school students with general information about high school; 94% of these schools conduct a rising ninth grade orientation program or assembly and 66% allow the eighth graders to visit the high school and get comfortable in the building and the environment (Kerr, 2002).

School Within a School

To help students feel connected to the school, a popular program is creating a school within a school model. In simple terms, any strategy that takes a large comprehensive school and attempts to break it into smaller cohesive groups fits within this description. Specifically, programs that support ninth grade students by creating a smaller environment (sometimes both physically and logistically) attempt to make connections for ninth grade students as they transition to high school. Alspaugh's (1998) research cited earlier supports this philosophy. In his ex post facto study of 48 different school districts, his findings supported the thought that if students are placed in relatively small cohort groups they will experience positive educational outcomes.

Best Practices

As previously discussed, there has been much research on the importance of ninth grade and the high school transition on a student's overall success in high school and in the future after school (Abbott & Fisher, 2012; Education Week, 2007; Silverthorn et al, 2005; Smith, 2007; Williams & Richman, 2007). However, less research exists on the adjustment of teenagers during the transition to high school (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999), nor has consensus been reached on defining what makes up a successful transition program. By default, transition programs vary widely from school to school (Dedmond et al., 2006). The following sections describe programs that research indicates are best practices.

Academic Supports

In 2002, Kerr examined practices at Maryland high schools that support success in the ninth grade and how these practices influence student achievement. She collected her primary data by distributing a school-level survey to all public high schools in the State of Maryland.

Kerr received a 79% response rate with 138 out of 174 Maryland high schools responding. She followed up her survey developing case studies at selected high schools for one week. One of her findings indicates a strong showing of different academic supports in place in Maryland high schools. The most common examples of these different types of ninth grade academic support programs in place include:

- 79% of responding schools had a summer school program in place;
- 70% of responding schools provided either before or after school tutorial help;
- 39% of responding schools had some sort of pull out program in place during the course of the regular school day;
- 33% of responding schools gave a double block of one of the core subjects;
- 63% of responding schools said that teachers gave extra work to students the needed additional help in the core subjects; and
- 13% of responding schools reported a Saturday school program to assist students academically in the transition to high school (Kerr, 2002).

Kerr (2002) also cross analyzed the academic support practices with student outcomes using available data from the Maryland State Department of Education. Based on her analysis of these data, she concluded that there is a positive relationship between the efforts described above and a reduction of dropout rates. Additionally, she concluded that there are stronger positive effects when the different efforts are in place for longer time periods.

In 2009, Johnson built upon Kerr's research in Maryland by sending surveys to 172 comprehensive high schools and receiving responses from 102 of them. His survey was an adaption of the survey used by Kerr (2002). After an analysis of the data, Johnson reported on

the most common practices used in Maryland high schools as part of the ninth grade transition.

The identified practices listed in order based on the percent of schools utilizing them are:

- extra help in core classes (84%);
- cooperative learning instruction (56%);
- extended class periods (54%);
- homeroom/advisory group (52%);
- career choices/planning (52%);
- special curriculum (52%);
- small learning community/school within a school (47%);
- mentoring program (47%);
- interdisciplinary teams (32%); and
- a Big Brother/Big Sister program (20%).

Taking the same specific transition practices, Johnson (2009) had respondents rate their perceived effectiveness using a Likert-style scale ranging from *not effective* to *very effective*. Interdisciplinary teams had the highest mean with 59% of the respondents scoring the strategy as *very effective*. The second highest mean was small learning communities with 52% of respondents rating it as *very effective*. After these top two strategies, the rest of the strategies in order of their perceived effectiveness mean rating from highest to lowest were: extended class periods, cooperative learning, extra help in core classes, Big Brother/Big Sister program, career choices/planning, mentoring program, homeroom/advisory group, and special curriculum.

Additionally, Johnson's (2009) survey questioned specifically about the transition practices that begin in eighth grade. Respondents indicated that 86% of schools responding used a summer enrichment program. Other middle school practices that happen frequently in

Maryland schools to assist with the ninth grade transition include: counselors meeting with eighth grade students, orientation program and assemblies, summer remedial programs, and high school staff presenting information to the eighth grade students.

Middle School Teaming

In research mentioned previously, Alspaugh (1998) also found that students attending larger schools needed more help in the ninth grade transition than those in smaller schools. When schools placed students in small cohort groups for long periods of time, the educational outcomes tended to be more positive. One way that high schools have attempted to use this research to support ninth grade students in the transition is through the middle school teaming approach. This approach ensures that the teachers of the core subjects operate as a team with each student. The teaming model allows the teachers to collaborate and work together to support the academic growth of each individual student. The consistency of instructional practices and protocols across the core subject classrooms allows the ninth grade student to adjust gradually to the different expectations of high school rather than needing to maneuver the different expectations of six or seven teachers.

No Consensus on Essential Ingredients

The results of Smith's (2009) research are a prime example of why more work needs to be done. They indicate that consensus needs to be built among practitioners and researchers regarding the ninth grade transition. He conducted a qualitative study to explore the best practices of ninth grade transition programs for assisting eighth grade students moving from middle school to high school. He interviewed six administrators chosen from 60 central Indiana high schools. He chose these six based in an attempt to provide a balance of school enrollment, graduation rate, and academic structure. Additionally, Smith tried to balance urban, suburban,

and rural school systems. The interview questions included mostly open-ended responses that allowed the participants the opportunity to describe their ninth grade transition programs and explain how the students respond to their programs. The questions asked about specific information related to the actual programs, the structure of the school, related professional development, scheduling of ninth graders, academic success, and parental involvement during the transition. After the interviews, Smith transcribed and then grouped answers based on common themes found.

In Smith's (2009) conclusions, he cites agreement by all six participants on several fronts. All six agreed that the transition process must start during the student's eighth grade year and include an orientation day before the beginning of the school year. All six agree that based on the fundamental differences in high school and middle school concepts, that providing information to parents/families as soon as possible to help them understand how high school works before the student enters the first semester is critical. The administrators interviewed emphasized the importance of parents/families understanding the ninth grade class schedule. Three of the administrators interviewed said that the scheduling component is the most important aspect of starting the transition process early.

The findings that Smith concluded in his dissertation study (2009) included the academic supports that schools have put into place to support ninth grade students. The interviewed participants cite after-school tutoring and credit recovery as two major ingredients in their work to support ninth grade students in the transition. Specifically, focusing on English 9 and Algebra I allows the school to intervene mid-year when ninth graders are off track in these classes rather than waiting until students fail these classes at the end of the year (Smith, 2009).

Interestingly enough, Smith (2009) sought to find common themes and best practices as they relate to the ninth grade transition, but ended up with only one tangible item that all six administrators agreed is a “must have.” The orientation day held about a week before the school year starts and including staff and upper classmen providing a welcoming atmosphere and comfort level before the first day of school emerged as a consensus best practice.

Measure of Success

Roskosky (2006) studied one school in Texas that had a ninth grade transition plan that centered on a one-week summer orientation. His hypothesis was that this specific program would support the ninth grade students’ smooth integration into the school that would then lead to an overall positive academic experience. His hypothesis then connected the overall positive academic experience and beginning to ninth grade to increased student attendance rates and a reduction in the number of classes failed by ninth grade students. He surveyed all incoming ninth grade students and current tenth grade students to gain an understanding of what students perceived to be the greatest area of concern and the areas of least concern. The tenth grade students provided a perspective to see if the perceived areas of concern matched the areas of concern for students who recently went through the transition to high school.

Roskosky (2006) indicated that the greatest concern of rising ninth grade students with starting high school fall into the categories of belongingness and love, self-esteem, and self-actualization. Students rated items such as keeping my friends, preparing for life, and getting good grades, as the areas that were of greatest concern to them as they started high school. Of little or no concern to them were categories of safety and security and some items in belongingness and love. They further described areas as those they had no concern about by these specific items: gangs, being around kids with alcohol, and people making fun of me. Tenth

grade students had a slightly different perspective on items that were of great concern. Their responses focused on the category of, self-actualization with specific items including preparing for life, and preparing for college. Tenth grade students had no concern in the categories of safety and security, and belongingness and love. Specifically, the items that tenth grade students highlighted as no concern were being physically hurt, people making fun of me, and gangs.

Roskosky (2006) cited improved attendance rates through the first 12 weeks of school as a success with this cohort of students. He did not report on the reduction of the failure rate, even though this was a measure he suggested to judge the success of the ninth grade transition program. Roskosky did report on anecdotal information regarding the ninth grade transition program including unsolicited positive comments about the freshman class as a whole. He attributed these comments as coming from the ninth grade counselor and various teachers that work with the students in the ninth grade. He insinuated that overall positive feelings about the ninth grade class as a whole reflect the faculty's thoughts on the ninth grade orientation/transition program at this school. Roskosky reported that discipline referrals for the ninth grade students are lower when compared to previous years before the ninth grade transition program. He continued with informal evaluations by interviewing students and parents about the specific components of the weeklong summer orientation program that they felt were important. The students included learning about the school, making new friends, feeling more comfortable about the school, that the teachers cared for them, and using daily planners to help stay organized. Parents also responded positively about the weeklong orientation since the school explained the difference in high school expectations, understanding the attendance policy, which of the key people were at the high school, and how to stay in contact with them.

Roskosky's (2006) interpretation of success exemplifies the anecdotal and haphazard way some practitioners are making judgments about their ninth grade transition programs and highlights the need to provide principals with a research based, practitioner supported way to measure the impact of ninth grade transition programs. These data would allow principals and school communities the opportunity to make informed decisions regarding the continuation of their transition programs and/or the needed modifications to the existing program.

Summary

This chapter provides an extensive review on related research and scholarly writing on the topic of ninth grade transition. This review highlights the importance and urgency of the ninth grade in a student's future success as well as the challenges compounded by the uniqueness surrounding the students entering ninth grade. The impact of transition programs and efforts of school leaders across the country to focus on the needs of these students is apparent in many locations. Major efforts that have focused on the ninth grade transition include the Talent Development High School Model and Project Transition, both huge undertakings that involved change and stress on systems and personnel. Researchers and practitioners alike have attempted to identify essential components or ingredients in the ninth grade transition including the role of the middle school and the impact of a teenager's social/emotional development. The literature reviewed examined the critical nature of parent and family roles in the ninth grade transition including a parent's role in the input into class selection and knowledge of school procedures. The importance of ninth graders feeling connected to their school is paramount.

Finally, this chapter examines various attempts at identifying best practices related to academic supports and the teaming of teachers as ways to assist ninth grade students in the high school transition. The fact that research and scholarly writings do not establish a consensus on

the data/measurement to use as a way to judge the success of a ninth grade program was also revealed in this literature review.

This literature review supports the need to identify the essential components of an effective ninth grade transition program rather than leaving principals to make their best guesses at what would be effective. Often these guesses can be haphazard or based on individual whims or hunches. The history of this issue as well as the incredible urgency of the problem and the uniqueness of students involved in the high school transition, require a consensus of researchers and practitioners on essential components and ingredients of an effective high school transition program.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter contains the structure of the study, a review of the research questions, a description of the design of the research, the reasoning for choosing this research method, and details regarding the research study. I chose the ninth grade transition for this study based on a comprehensive review of the literature; personal experience dealing with the ninth grade transition as a high school principal, an educator, and a parent; the numerous variables involved; and the current myriad approaches to the topic in the field (Dedmond et al., 2006).

The methodology used for this study was the Delphi technique, as it was a way to build consensus with the input of leading researchers and experts in the field of ninth grade transition as well as practitioners working in schools with students who are actually experiencing this difficult phase of schooling. Delphi studies contribute to both theory and practice as practitioners will have available to them lists of critical components, generated by experts, which they can use in their specific situations (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004). This technique builds group consensus on a difficult and challenging topic, facilitates a way to gather input from leaders in the field without having to initiate cost prohibitive and time-consuming gatherings of these people, and eliminates the potential influence of participants hearing each other's thoughts and opinions before providing input.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to provide high school principals with specific and direct actions that they can take to enhance their ninth grade transition plan, justify the continuation of their ninth grade transition plan, and ensure that their ninth grade transition plan focuses and encompasses the essential components that increase the probability of student success. The literature and research on this topic is mixed. While there are examples of successful ninth grade

transition programs, these “programs have varied widely within schools, and designs range from a one-day overview of a new school to a full school year of career-focused curriculum” (Dedmond et al., 2006, p.2). Additionally, there are examples of school principals who view their ninth grade transition program as successful but lack solid data to support these claims. These practitioners rely on anecdotal feedback or a “feeling” about the culture of a school to label their ninth grade programs as a success. The goal of this research is to provide school principals with a focused set of program goals, a prioritized list of ingredients or components of a successful ninth grade transition program, and clear measures that principals can use to judge the effectiveness of their own ninth grade transition program.

Research Questions

The overall guiding research question in this study was, “what should be the goals/objectives of a comprehensive ninth grade transition program (i.e., academic success alone or are there other things that also are important)?” The secondary questions in this study included:

- What components or ingredients are essential in a ninth grade transition program?
- What data/measures should a school principal use to evaluate the success of a ninth grade transition program?

This study used the Delphi Method to gain consensus from both experts and practitioners to identify:

- the purpose of a comprehensive ninth grade transition program,
- specific ninth grade transition practices that are essential for inclusion in a successful program, and
- how a successful program is measured.

By addressing the primary and secondary questions, the researcher seeks to assist school leaders as they plan and/or modify their transition programs for ninth grade students. Blending both the “research-based” solutions provided by experts and researchers that are critical to use and the validation of the application of these solutions by educators working in schools strengthened the results as both research-based and practical to use.

Research Design and Rationale

A primary purpose of using a Delphi study was to produce a consensus with a panel of experts (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). The Delphi technique is a process that can bring together ideas and thoughts from a group of individuals representing both researchers and practitioners. This technique allows the blending of two important perspectives on an issue. Therefore, utilizing the Delphi technique ensured the findings were supported by research, while remaining practical enough to encourage school-based leaders to implement them. Additionally, the challenge of properly supporting ninth grade students and the clear link that a successful ninth grade transition has on the overall success of a high school student (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999; Smith, 1997) makes this issue a critically important one. Based on the clear understanding that a successful ninth grade transition program has many positive effects on students and schools, individual schools and districts across the country have tried to develop and implement programs to address this critical transitional time for their students (Dedmond, 2008). According to Dedmond, Brown, and LaFauci (2006):

There are few resources and no comprehensive standards in place for classes and programs that seek to meet the personal, social, educational, and career and life-skills goals of students. As a result, principals and teachers have become caught up in well-intended, but largely unsuccessful strategies as they have tried to develop curricula with

little support and direction from districts and only vague notions of what is required to motivate the least motivated students. (p. 2)

Because of tight school budgets and continued pressure related to high stakes standardized testing, the survival of ninth grade transition programs has become complicated. Because of a lack of resources (i.e., time, money, and energy), the results of the program do not meet the expectations and, eventually, the program is abandoned (Dedmond, 2008). In other words, a program that has the potential to be an effective ninth grade transition program might face pressure to become a casualty of a budget cut, especially when the results of the transition program are not immediate or readily apparent to the decision makers. This problem is one that school principals have attempted to fix through a variety of methods, yet the problem still exists without any definitive answers. The complexity of this problem and the need for both research-based solutions, as well as solutions from practitioners in the field, supported the use of the Delphi Technique in this research project. “Delphi may be characterized as a method for structuring a group communication process so that the process is effective in allowing a group of individuals, as a whole, to deal with complex problems” (Linstone & Turoff, 1975, p. 3). This research will add to the body of knowledge regarding ninth grade transition programs; identify the essential ingredients or components of an integrated, comprehensive program; and assist principals with evaluating the success of a transition program in their school.

Yousuf (2007) described the Delphi method as “a group process involving an interaction between the researcher and a group of identified experts on a specified topic, usually through a series of questionnaires” (p. 80). Yousuf found this technique appropriate and useful when “the opinion and judgment of experts and practitioners are necessary” (p. 80). An important premise of using the Delphi method was based on the assumption that a group’s opinion is more valid

than the opinion of an individual (Keeney, Hasson, & McKenna, 2011). This type of design for research is enticing in education as Delphi studies can directly contribute to both theory and practice (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004). Okoli and Pawlowski expanded on the merits of the Delphi method by saying, “practitioners will immediately have available to them lists of prioritized critical factors, generated by experts, which they could apply to their individual situations” (p. 27).

Linstone and Turoff (1975) described the process for the standard or conventional method of a Delphi exercise as follows:

1. Design a questionnaire that was sent to a group.
2. The questionnaire was returned and the results summarized.
3. Based on the results, a second questionnaire was developed and sent to the same group.
4. Individuals in the group were given a chance to review and modify original answers based on responses from the group.
5. This procedure continued until the group reaches some level of consensus.

The Delphi method has numerous advantages. First, there is no need for the panelists to meet in person as a group. Therefore, it allows the input and expertise of national experts in different locations without the associated costs or logistical issues of physically bringing people together. Second, the panelists complete their initial responses independently and confidentially. Therefore, the first round of questions is a brainstorming of many ideas free of influence or bias. The second and subsequent round of questions is still anonymous individually, but a facilitator provides the panelists with the group's input (i.e., the analysis of the initial data). Finally, a

facilitator determines the information panelists receive in the additional rounds of questionnaires (Linstone & Turoff, 1975).

Role of the Researcher

I am currently the Associate Superintendent for Student Learning and Accountability for Prince William County Public Schools in Virginia, the second largest school division in Virginia and the 39th largest school division in the country. During my 25 years working in public education, I have been a high school English teacher, an assistant principal, and 11 years as a high school principal. In 21 of the 25 years, I worked directly with high school students and have always had a special interest in the plight of ninth grade students in a high school. I have co-authored two books on the high school transition and the ninth grade—one designed to help parents navigate this experience and one to assist students (Healey & Carter, 2010, 2011). My co-author and I wrote the books from our collective experiences as high school principals and our direct work as educators with ninth grade students and their parents. The books are a collection of practices and techniques used by both students and parents, which directly affected the success, or lack thereof, for the ninth grade student.

In my role as a principal and an author, I quickly realized how critical the ninth grade transition is to the overall success of a student and to the success of a school as a whole. Parents, especially ones that have not had a previous child experience this transition, are looking to educators for help and assistance during this challenging time. Many principals attempt to address the transition by putting into place several protocols and programs to support the ninth grade student in the transition to high school. My professional experience, feedback from parents, and suggestions from teachers or other faculty served as the genesis for many of the

strategies we attempted at my school. Each year, we modified strategies slightly based on a variety of data including formal and informal as well as quantitative and qualitative.

As a practitioner when attempting to address the ninth grade transition by using professional literature and research, I could only find possible solutions that were expensive and difficult to sustain. Examples of transition programs might include redesigning the entire school to segregate ninth grade students from the rest of the population or programs that called for creating an entire new class, such as a freshman seminar experience. These examples are solid ideas that have had some success, but not so easy to implement or sustain when existing limitations are considered. That is, the amount of hours and extra work required by educators would cause burnout and/or lead to a worse situation than the starting point before implementing such a program (i.e., key faculty members opting out of their involvement at all with ninth grade students). Additionally, the extra resources (both human and financial) necessary to fulfill some of the promise of these successful programs make them highly challenging to sustain. These attempts and frustrations as a practitioner, and my experience of how parents/families are guided through this process, have led me to a unique interest in this dilemma and a desire, through my research, to assist principals as they explore ways to support ninth grade students and their families.

Potential Bias

My previous work and experience might bias my expectation or prediction of the results of this study. As a practitioner and a former high school principal, I have personal experiences attempting to help ninth grade students navigate the ninth grade year. As a former principal and an author of two books helping parents and students with the high school transition, I have a

belief system already in place that schools do not do enough to reach out to parents and families during this time.

My previous professional experiences in the education field resulted in my knowing several of the people who served as panelists in this Delphi study. Initially, some may see this as a potential issue of bias; however, I believe it served only as an advantage to help me personally connect with the panelists, which resulted in a favorable response rate and few dropouts. Any potential bias in analyzing and reporting the data was reduced by incorporating several strategies to combat personal bias. First, I debriefed with two professional colleagues not involved in the study regarding my data collection procedures. Second, I read the data multiple times to ensure that I categorized all data correctly. Finally, I had two former principals not involved in the study review my data, notes, and responses to ensure that my work accurately depicted the data received.

The Delphi Procedures

The procedure for this research consisted of a three-round Delphi method to gain a consensus on the goals/objectives of a ninth grade transition program and the essential components or ingredients needed to achieve those objectives. Additionally, the panelists identified what data a principal should use to evaluate success and to justify the implementation or continuation of a ninth grade transition program. Figure 3 outlines the process of this research and the three-round Delphi method with associated data analysis.

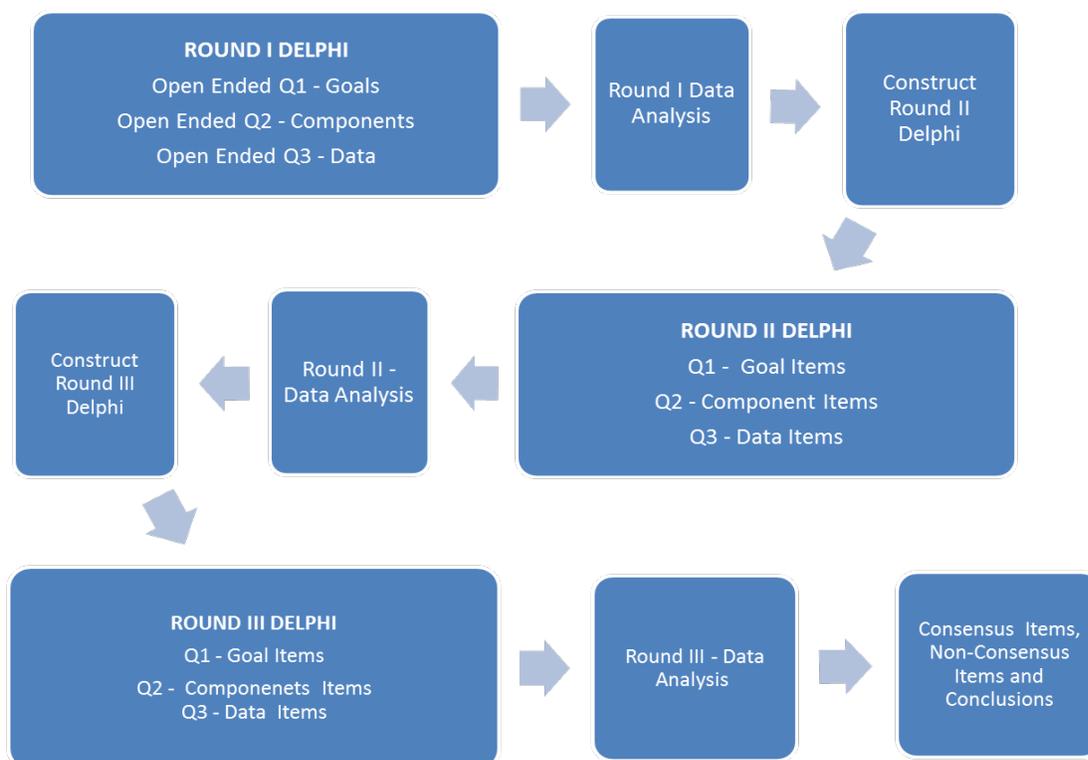


Figure 3. Procedures for the three round Delphi study.

Round I

Panelists received the Round I Delphi survey as a Microsoft Word document attachment to an e-mail. The questionnaire had three open-ended questions and did not limit the quantity of the response given. Although I offered to provide a hard copy of the questionnaire through the traditional mail service if needed, no panelist made such a request. The first round Delphi consisted of the following three open-ended questions for the panelists to answer:

1. What should be the goals/objectives of a comprehensive ninth grade transition program (i.e., academic success alone or are there other things that also are important);
2. What are the essential ingredients or components in a comprehensive ninth grade transition program (please list and provide a brief explanation if necessary); and

3. What measures or data should a high school principal use to judge the effectiveness of a ninth grade transition program?

The directions of the Round I Delphi questionnaire did not limit the responses of the panelists in any way, and they provided a few examples to questions 2 and 3 to ensure that the participants had a clear understanding of the desired data. The Round I questionnaire is included in Appendix A.

Round II

Using the compiled data from round one, I constructed the Round II Delphi survey using the Virginia Tech Survey Maker. The Round II Delphi instrument had three embedded questionnaires, one for each of the three questions used in Round I. For each of these three open-ended questions, I compiled similar responses of the panelists from Round I and listed them in random order. I sent out the Round II Delphi instrument to the same panelists and asked them to rate each item for the degree of importance (not important, slightly important, somewhat important, important, very important). Panelists had the opportunity, through an open-ended comments section, to add any additional information they deemed important to the items or the study in general. The Round II instrument is included in Appendix B.

Round III

Once I compiled and analyzed the data from the Round II Delphi questionnaires, I prepared Round III. The purpose of the Round III Delphi was to ask the panelists to re-assess borderline items. To determine consensus, I calculated the percentage of panelists that rated an item as either *very important* or *important*. I developed a questionnaire consisting of items that the panel needed to reconsider. In Round III, I gave panelists a list of items that reached the consensus level, a list of items that were too far from consensus, and a questionnaire consisting

of the items that the panel needed to reconsider. The purpose of the Round III Delphi survey was to ask expert panelists to re-assess these items. I analyzed these results to determine if the items became consensus items. The Round III survey is included in Appendix C.

Selection of Participants

The selection of participants is critical to the success of the Delphi technique (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004; Program Development and Evaluation, 2002). The number of experts selected depends on the purpose of the Delphi. “Ten to 15 people may be adequate for a focused Delphi where participants do not vary a great deal” (Program Development and Evaluation, 2002, p. 1). Linstone and Turoff (1975) suggested that the number of panelists for a standard Delphi study range from 10 to 50 people depending on the nature and specifics of the topic. Scheele (1975) believed that three types of panelists are necessary for the Delphi technique: stakeholders, people with related experience in the area of study, and a facilitator. In the Delphi technique, “participants are not selected randomly, so representativeness is not assured. Rather, they are selected for a purpose, to apply their knowledge to a certain problem...” (Hasson, Keeney, & McKenna, 2000, p. 1010). Participants, therefore, are not randomly selected but rather selected as “experts” (Keeney et al., 2011). Experts is defined as a group of “informed individuals” (McKenna as cited in Keeney et al., 2011), as a “specialist” in the field (Goodman as cited in Keeney et al., 2011), or someone who has knowledge about a specific subject (Davidson et al., 1997; Green et al., 1999; Lemmer, 1998; all as cited in Keeney et al., 2011). For the purposes of this study, I identified stakeholders as practitioners: superintendents, principals, an assistant principal, and a counselor. People with related experience in the area of the study were experts either I identified through their research on the ninth grade transition, their scholarly writing, or

leadership positions in national level organizations focused in this area. Finally, I was the facilitator.

Recruitment Procedures

This research used a national-level setting regarding the participating panelists with a concentration of the practitioners located in Virginia and the mid-Atlantic area. Through e-mail, I sent an initial letter (Appendix D) to the 27 identified potential panelists. The letter briefly described the main purpose of the research, outlined the time commitment, and requested that they participate. When they responded to my email, I confirmed their participation. For those panelists that did not respond initially, I sent a follow up e-mail again requesting their participation and commitment to be one of the expert panelists (see Appendix E).

The final panel included superintendents; principals; a school counselor; researchers; college professors; and leaders in national, state, and local organizations. I selected these panelists, based on my literature review, their accomplishments in the field, and my personal knowledge and experience in the area of transition services. Panelists include practitioners, former practitioners, award winners, and professionals associated with national and state level professional organizations. I selected practitioners with either national, state, or local awards as well as those that have written, presented, or have a deeper knowledge of the issues surrounding the ninth grade transition.

I originally identified 27 panelists. They represented two major groups: national experts and practitioners. Of the 27 potential participants, 22 agreed to participate. After distribution of the Round I Delphi questionnaire, one panelist, who originally committed to participate, did not respond initially or to multiple attempts to contact; subsequently, I considered this panelist a withdrawal. Another participant indicated that he would not be able to participate due to work

commitments. This left a panel of 20 members. Of the 20 members, 13 were practitioners (three superintendents, nine principals, and one school counselor). The other seven members were nationally recognized experts (researchers, professors, leaders in related national organizations).

Potential Bias in the Selection of Panelists

As stated above, a Delphi researcher selects participants with a purpose. It is important to note that my potential bias as the researcher could have influenced the selection of experts, leaders, and practitioners. I identified the participants based on my knowledge; research; scholarly reading; and personal knowledge of national, state, and local award winners. Another researcher may have selected a different group of participants and discovered different results to the questions based on different participants.

Panelists

The final panel consisted of 20 outstanding individuals who collectively brought a wide range of expertise and experience related to transition services for ninth graders. Panelists comprised two groups: national experts and practitioners. This section describes the individuals who participated in this Delphi study

National Experts

Each of the seven national experts is described briefly in this section. They include experts from universities, a research center, and national associations,

Dr. Patrick Akos is a professor in the School of Education at the University of North Carolina. His area of expertise is school counseling and educational leadership. The primary focus of his research is on adaptability in transitions across the lifespan.

Dr. Joseph Harris is the director of the National High School Center, a national research and technical assistance center funded by the U.S. Department of Education. He is a managing

research analyst for the American Institutes for Research and has 20 years of experience as an administrator and high school teacher.

Dr. C. Jay Hertzog is Dean Emeritus and Professor of Secondary Education, in the College of Education, Slippery Rock University, Pennsylvania. He currently serves as a doctoral advisor and committee chair for Nova Southeastern University. He is an educational consultant on student transition from middle school to high school, and president of the Pennsylvania Association of Colleges and Teacher Educators. He is the former Chair of the Department of Clinical and Professional Studies at Augusta State University and a former Professor of Educational Leadership at Valdosta State University.

Dr. Roger E. Jones is a Professor and Chair of Leadership Studies and the director of the Virginia Association of Secondary School Principals' Regional Center for Educational Leadership at Lynchburg College. He spent 32 years in public education with Lynchburg City Schools serving as a teacher, coach, middle school principal, high school principal, and assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction.

Dr. James Kemple is the executive director of the Research Alliance for New York City Schools and research professor at the Steinhart School of Culture, Education, and Human Development at New York University. Prior to joining the Research Alliance, he spent over 18 years with Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), a non-profit social policy research organization. He was the director of MDRC's K-12 Education Policy area and the principal investigator of MDRC's studies of high school interventions including the evaluation of the Talent Development Middle and High School Models.

Dr. Nettie Legters is a research scientist at the Johns Hopkins University Center for Social Organization of Schools and co-director of the Center's Talent Development High

Schools (TDHS) program. Her research focuses on equity in education, school organization, teachers' work, dropout prevention, and implementation, and impact of secondary education reform.

Dr. Kwok-Sze Wong is the executive director of the American School Counselor Association.

Practitioners

A total of 13 practitioners participated as panel members. Practitioners included three superintendent, nine principals, and one counselor. A brief description of their qualifications is given for each of the practitioners.

Superintendents

Three superintendents participated in the study. Two are from school districts and one works at a state department of education.

Alex Carter is the Superintendent of Schools for the Montezuma-Cortez School District RE-1 in Cortez, Colorado. He is a Milken Award winner and a former high school principal of two different high schools (Colorado and Virginia) and has experience as a ninth grade history teacher. He has co-authored two books on the ninth grade transition and presented at the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the National School Boards Association national conferences on the topic of the ninth grade transition.

Dr. Steve Constantino is the Superintendent of Schools for the Williamsburg–James City County School District in Williamsburg, VA. He is a former award-winning high school principal whose awards include: the Virginia State Counseling Association's 1997 Principal of the Year, the *Washington Post's* 2000 Distinguished Educational Leader Award, and the 2001 *Time* magazine's National High School of the Year award. He was a deputy superintendent in

Cobb County, Georgia, an author on several books regarding family engagement, and presented nationally on the topic of family engagement in schools. He also served as an adjunct professor at George Mason University in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies.

Dr. Henry Johnson is the Assistant State Superintendent of Curriculum and Assessment for the Maryland State Department of Education. He has served as a high school principal both in Maryland and in Virginia. His doctoral dissertation focused on the ninth grade transition.

Principals

Nine principals participated in the study. They have experience working in a variety of schools.

Eric Brent is the principal of Forest Park Senior High School in Prince William County, Virginia. Mr. Brent is a former high school counselor and has previous experience as a high school principal in Fairfax County, VA. In 2009, *The Washington Post* named him Principal of the Year in Prince William County and a Distinguished Educational Leader.

Trevor Greene is the principal of Toppenish High School in Toppenish, Washington. He is the 2013 MetLife/National Association of Secondary School Principals' National High School Principal of the Year and the 2012 Association of Washington School Principals State Principal of the Year.

Scott Habeeb is the principal of Salem High School in Salem, VA. As an assistant principal at Salem High School, he developed the freshman transition program for the school. Currently, he runs the Freshman Transition Network and is a founding partner of Solutions, Etc., an educational professional development company. He is one of the authors of *The Ninth Grade Opportunity: Transforming Schools from the Ground Up* (2008), and has been speaking nationally on ninth grade transition and other educational issues since 2002.

Dr. Sheila Harrity is the principal of Worcester Technical High School in Worcester, MA. She is the 2014 MetLife/National Association of Secondary School Principals' National High School Principal of the Year and the 2013 Massachusetts Secondary School Administrators' Association Principal of the Year. In 2011, the National Association of Secondary School Principals named her school a national Breakthrough School. Her accomplishments at Worcester Technical High School have received national accolades and recognition through the personal visit of Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education and President Obama who spoke at the school's 2014 commencement ceremony.

Denise Khaalid is the principal of Oakdale Elementary School in South Carolina. Ms. Khaalid is the 2012 Virco National Association of Secondary School Principals' National Assistant Principal of the Year. She has experience as a high school assistant principal at two different high schools in South Carolina and has taught at the high school and middle school levels.

Dr. Virginia Menshew is the principal of Park View High School in Loudoun County, VA. She has worked in public education for over 30 years. She is the 2011 MetLife/Virginia Association of Secondary School Principals' Virginia High School Principal of the Year and the recipient of the 2002 *Washington Post* Distinguished Educational Leader Award.

Jack Parker is a retired principal of three different high schools in West Virginia and Virginia and has served as an assistant principal in multiple schools. His experience includes opening a brand new school and establishing the ninth grade transition program for the school from its inception.

Dr. Jim Stemple is the principal of Mountain View High School in Stafford County, VA. He has been the principal of two different high schools in Virginia. Dr. Stemple was the

2006 Stafford County Principal of the Year. He served as the 2009-2010 Chairman of the Executive Committee for the Virginia High School League.

Major Warner is the principal of Kettle Run High School in Fauquier County, VA. He was an assistant principal opening a brand new school and he is a former high school counselor and director of school counseling.

Counselor

Dr. Diane Reese is the director of School Counseling for Osbourn High School in Manassas City Public Schools in Virginia. She is a National Certified Counselor, a National Certified School Counselor, and an American School Counselor Association Ethical and Legal Specialist. Dr. Reese brings the perspective of a practicing school counselor and a director of school counseling.

Assurances of Confidentiality

I was the only one to see the individual responses of the participants in each round of the Delphi process. During the three rounds of the Delphi data collection, I did not attribute individual responses to any individual participant. I used these data only as a way to connect responses in an attempt to gain consensus regarding the research questions. In reporting the data, I used individual responses or data from participants in an anonymous fashion. I requested and received permission from each panelist to publish his/her name and a brief summary of his/her professional background and related expertise.

Issues of Entry and Ethics

I initially contacted 27 potential panelists by e-mail requesting their voluntary participation in this study. The e-mail contained a description of the study and the use of a three round Delphi technique (see Appendix D for a copy of the e-mail). Seventeen potential panelists

responded to the initial e-mail in the affirmative. Ten recipients did not respond to the initial recruitment e-mail. After one week, I sent a second e-mail to these 10 individuals. Of these 10, five individuals responded that they would participate, one declined to participate, and four did not respond. In total, there were 22 confirmed participants, one declined, and four no responses. In the initial contact and the follow up contact, I reminded the participants that they would be part of a limited panel of national experts identified for this study and the importance of their participation and follow through.

I followed all associated guidelines in place by the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) when working with human participants. I submitted my research request to the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board and received approval under the exempt category (see Appendix F). Participation was voluntary, and I informed all panelists of their right to stop participation at any time. Participants received an informed consent document (see Appendix G). Potential for injury or unethical treatment of the subjects was limited.

Data Collection and Analysis

The goal of this study was to provide high school principals with specific and direct actions that they can take to enhance their ninth grade transition plan, justify the continuation of their ninth grade transition plan, and ensure that their ninth grade transition plan focuses and encompasses the essential components that increase the probability of student success. The fact that the expert panel was relatively small was an advantage (although it was still a satisfactory size by standards of the Delphi Technique). In the initial contact with the participants, I highlighted the importance of their active involvement by emphasizing that they were a part of a limited specialized group of experts identified for this research project. The personal appeal and connection made with each expert assisted in the high response rate to all three rounds of the

Delphi process and the willingness of the panelists to continue participation. In each e-mail to panelists (initial contact and subsequent Delphi rounds), I reminded them of the importance and uniqueness of their response. The panelists had a relatively short turnaround time (one to two weeks) to provide their input. After a period, I followed up with any non-responsive panelist with a reminder e-mail.

Delphi – Round I

Within the classic Delphi technique, the first round begins with open-ended questions that generate ideas and allows panelists to have freedom in their responses (Hassan et al., 2000). The first questionnaire of the Delphi technique is simple since it should consist of an open-ended solicitation of ideas (Okoli and Pawlowski, 2004). Within this guidance, the Delphi I questionnaire included three open-ended questions that gave panelists the opportunity to provide their knowledge and thoughts in a non-restrictive manner (see Appendix A). The purpose of the questions was to allow panelists freedom to generate lists of ideas without bias from other members. The three questions were:

1. what should be the goals/objectives of a comprehensive ninth grade transition program (i.e., academic success alone or are there other things that also are important);
2. what are the essential ingredients or components in a comprehensive ninth grade transition program (please list and provide a brief explanation if necessary); and
3. what measures or data should a high school principal use to judge the effectiveness of a ninth grade transition program?

At the end of the Round I Delphi questionnaire, panelists had an optional opportunity to add any additional thoughts that they wished.

The directions given on the questionnaire defined the purpose of the three questions and the intention to allow the respondents an opportunity to identify, free of other influences, their beliefs and ideas about the answers to the questions. Additionally, the directions articulated that the intention of the Round I questionnaire was not to rank order or prioritize their responses but rather a “brainstorming” of quality ideas. Finally, the questionnaire did not limit the panelists with an expectation of a certain number of responses. For questions 2 and 3, the instrument contained sample responses to assist participants’ clear understanding of the intention of these questions and to help them to keep all answers focused in the areas intended.

Of the original 22 panelists that initially agreed to participate in the study, 20 completed and returned the first round Delphi questionnaire. One member never responded after multiple attempts to generate a positive return of the questionnaire and was subsequently treated as a withdrawal from the research. Another panel member responded that it was necessary to withdraw from the study based on work commitments.

Content Analysis

The Delphi Round I questionnaire produced 83 responses from the expert panel for question one on goals/objectives of a ninth grade transition program. The panel provided 112 responses to question two on essential components/ingredients of a ninth grade transition program. On question three, regarding the appropriate data to use to analyze the effectiveness of a ninth grade transition program, the panel produced 144 responses.

Upon receipt of the answers from the panelists, I entered and stored the data in an Excel spreadsheet grouped by respondent and question. Next, I analyzed the data by grouping similar responses, and then I followed Yousuf's (2007) directive to “edit the results to a manageable summary of items presented in random order” (p.83). In order to reduce these data to a

manageable scale, “Round I of the classical Delphi should be content analyzed in order to group statements generated by the expert panel into similar areas (Keeney et al., 2011, p.72). Akos and Galassi’s (2004a) research built upon previous work that described a theoretical framework surrounding three elements of the ninth grade transition programming: academic, social, and procedural. I analyzed the results of each question using these elements as the coding typology scheme.

Examples by Akos and Galassi (2004a) for these three categories set the groundwork for sorting. Examples of items that these researchers categorized in the academic category related to the ninth grade transition included: amount of homework, hard classes, and pressure to do well in school. Some examples of ninth grade transition items placed in the procedural category included: getting lost in the school, riding the bus, and other concerns related to moving from a simpler environment to a more complex school environment. In the social category, some examples that Akos and Galassi included were making new friends, fitting in, getting along with peers, and coping with bullies and older students.

For data sorting and analysis, I borrowed from Akos and Galassi (2004a) and coded the responses into one of the three categories: academic, social, or procedural. For each question, I conducted the following procedure:

1. Recorded all of the responses
2. Coded each response as one of the three categories (academic, social, or procedural)
3. Tallied duplicate responses but eliminated them as separate items.
4. Combined responses that were not exact duplicates but were the same similar idea and concept.

5. Used the final list of responses for each of the three categories to construct the Round II instrument.

Using this list of items mentioned, I constructed the second questionnaire for use in Round II of the Delphi.

Delphi – Round II

Analyzing and identifying the convergence and change of panelists' judgments or opinions was the purpose of the second and subsequent rounds of the classic Delphi technique (Hassan et al., 2000). The items of the Round were constructed by using the results of the analysis of the Round I data. From the three open-ended questions in Round I, I compiled the items in no particular order (rather than any type of rank order). Using the Virginia Tech Survey Maker, I constructed three questionnaires, one corresponding to each of the three original questions in Round I. Then, I sent the Round II Delphi questionnaires to the same 20 panelists who participated in Round I. The links to the questionnaires housed on the Virginia Tech Survey Maker were sent to the panelists via an e-mail with the necessary directions. The directions guided the panelists to rate the degree of importance of each statement related to a ninth grade transition program, based on the compilation of responses from the entire panel. Additionally, the survey allowed panelists the opportunity to add additional information if they desired. In other words, if the list constructed based on the analysis of the Round I Delphi did not contain a response they felt strongly about and their belief is that it was critically important to a comprehensive ninth grade program, the panelists had the chance to provide that information as well. Finally, if a panelist felt that in the analysis of the data I misinterpreted the intention behind one of the responses previously given, he/she had the opportunity to clarify the response from the first round.

Upon receipt of Round II data from panelists, I entered the data in the Statistical Package for the Social Scientists (SPSS) to examine frequencies and perform a descriptive analysis. The major focus of this analysis was examining what percent of panelists rated each item as either *very important* or *important* on a five point Likert-type scale. Parameters set were as follows:

- If an item received 90% or higher of the panelists' rating it as *very important* or *important*, then I considered it a consensus item;
- If an item received less than 70% of the panelists' rating it as *very important* or *important*, then I considered it too far from consensus and the item was eliminated from consideration;
- If an item received at least 70% but less than 90% of the panelists' rating it as *very important* or *important*, then I deemed it necessary for the expert panel to consider again in Round III. The purpose of this inclusion was to confirm whether the item reached the consensus threshold or not.

Additionally, I noted any comments made by the panelists and, if related, included them in the data analysis.

Delphi – Round III

The Round III of a Delphi study was created using the rated or ranked items from Round II (Keeney et al., 2011). Panelists were given the opportunity to re-evaluate their answers as compared to the thinking of the group (Dalkey, 1967); with the ratings indicated from the previous round, the experts were asked if they agreed with the group consensus or discussed their reasons for not coming to consensus with the group (Pfeiffer, 1968). Along with the Round III Delphi instrument, panelists in this project received a summary of the findings from Round II in the form of a list of the consensus items (those items that received a 90% or higher rating in

Round II) and a list of the eliminated items (those items that received less than 70% rating in Round II). I instructed the panelists to review both lists before completing Round III.

In the instructions to the Round III instrument, I re-emphasized that the purpose of this research was to identify the goals and objectives of a ninth grade transition program, the essential elements of a ninth grade transition program, and the appropriate data/measures to use when evaluating a transition program.

The Round III instrument included those items from the Round II survey that were close to consensus but did not meet the established threshold. Participants examined these items again grouped in the three different surveys (goals, components, and data). The Round III questionnaire included the Round II rating for each item, and panelists were asked to examine each item using the same Likert scale from Round II. Additionally, I gave panelists the opportunity to make any final comments.

I again analyzed the data from Round III using SPSS to examine frequencies for a descriptive analysis. I considered items that reached the 90% rating (panelists rating it either very important or important) to have reached consensus from the group. I eliminated items that did not reach the 90% threshold from consensus consideration. While some items were close to the 90% threshold, because initially in Round II and then confirmed in Round III the item did not reach the consensus threshold, I eliminated the item as a consensus item. Finally, I reviewed any final comments submitted by panelists.

Reliability and Validity

Helmer (1967) supports the validity and reliability of the Delphi technique as an agreeable method for data collection from a group. Additionally, he found that the Delphi technique is effective in group decision-making research and other areas (Helmer, 1983).

Helmer (1983) further indicated that the Delphi technique is reliable when used for gathering consensus from a group of experts. The Delphi approach improves reliability simply in the decision-making process, since the expert panel does not need to meet face-to-face, therefore, eliminating group bias and group thinking (Keeney et al., 2011). Although there are challenges to the validity of the Delphi technique, such as the dangers and pressures associated with a convergence of predictions (Hill & Fowles, 1975), the selection and use of participants that are considered experts or very knowledgeable in the area studied increases the content validity of the Delphi Technique (Goodman, 1987). Further, the use of successive rounds of questionnaires helps to increase the validity (Hasson et al., 2000), although, a point of diminishing returns does occur in the Delphi technique. Three rounds is the most commonly accepted number and has “proved sufficient to attain stability in the responses; further rounds tended to show very little change and excessive repetition was unacceptable to participants” (Linstone & Turoff, 1975, p.223).

Summary

Chapter Three described the design of the study. The method used was a three-round Delphi technique designed to gather the opinions and thoughts of national experts and leading practitioners in the field. Combining the input of both groups strengthened the results to be both researched-based and outcome-based. Additionally, the input of practitioners in the field gave additional credence to the results based on the simple fact that current and former principals who have been “in the trenches” are included in the study.

Round I consisted of three open-ended questions designed to gather initial thoughts and ideas from the panelists without the influence of hearing each other’s thoughts, ideas, or knowing the reputations and titles of the other panelists. From this initial data, Round II attempted to

gather consensus of panelists by having them rate the degree of importance of the responses given by the group in Round I. Participants had the opportunity to modify or adjust their original responses if, in their opinion, the analysis of the data from the first round Delphi did not accurately reflect their input. Finally, Round III allowed panelists to validate the consensus of the group regarding the goals and objectives of a ninth grade transition program, the essential elements of a ninth grade transition program, and data for use in assessing the overall success of a transition program. The consensus items should provide practitioners, in the present challenging and difficult budget times, a method to prioritize the most successful ways to assist students during the ninth grade transition.

CHAPTER 4 ANALYSIS OF DATA

Using a three-round Delphi technique as the research methodology, I identified consensus items from an expert panel on the goals, essential components, and data for judging the effectiveness of a comprehensive ninth grade transition program. A panel of 20 national scholars and practitioners independently participated in each of the three rounds to generate a list of items within each concentrated area, narrowed the focus of these items by rating the degree of importance of each item, and came to consensus free of bias from each other's opinions and input. Panel members were recruited and selected based on their national reputation; identification as leading researchers based on the literature review; national award winners related to school leadership; well-respected practitioners in the field of working with high school students; and leaders of national organizations focused on schools, students, and the ninth grade transition.

Delphi Round I

The Round I questionnaire included three open-ended questions that gave panelists the opportunity to provide their knowledge and thoughts in a non-restrictive manner (see Appendix A). The expert panel produced 83 responses for question one on goals/objectives of a ninth grade transition program. The panel provided 112 responses to question two on essential components/ingredients of a ninth grade transition program. On question three, regarding the appropriate data to use to analyze the effectiveness of a ninth grade transition program, the panel responded with 144 items. Table 1 summarizes the number of responses.

Table 1

Number of Responses for Round 1 Questions

Question	Number of Responses
What should be the goals/objectives of a comprehensive ninth grade transition program (i.e. academic success alone or are there other things that also are important)?	83
What are the essential ingredients or components in a comprehensive ninth grade transition program?	112
What measures or data should a high school principal use to judge the effectiveness of a ninth grade transition program?	144

Question 1: Goal/Objective

The first question on the Delphi I questionnaire was, What should be the goals/objectives of a comprehensive ninth grade transition program (i.e. academic success alone or are there other things that also are important)? The number of responses from each panelist ranged from one to 10. Respondents used a variety of styles in their responses. Some panelists simply listed goals in a bulleted format. Others presented justification for their ideas or further descriptions rather than provide a simple list. One panelist, currently a principal, first described an actual ninth grade program and then listed the goals from that program.

The expert panel generated 83 responses to what the goals and objectives of a comprehensive ninth grade transition program should be (see Appendix H). Once I conducted the five-step content analysis process indicated in chapter three, 50 items remained as unique answers to the first question. To solidify the five-step content analysis process and the coding of the responses into the three categories (i.e., academic, social/emotional, procedural), I took two additional steps. First, I independently repeated the entire process of coding the data by eliminating duplicate items and combining similar items on two different additional occasions.

Next, I had two former high school principals, not involved in the study, review the process to ensure that my work accurately reflected the data received.

Using the framework described by Akos and Galassi (2004a), I coded 19 of the unique responses as academic. Examples included general ideas such as “academic success of every student” to overarching goals like “each student should graduate in four years” and “leave ninth grade with as many credits as possible.” Academic responses also included some specific ideas such as “guide ninth grade students to have a balanced academic course load” and “every student developing an individual learning plan that guides them through their eighth grade year and into high school through graduation.”

Again, using the framework described by Akos and Galassi (2004a), I coded 24 of the unique responses in the social/emotional category. Examples ranged from broad ideas to specific goals including ideas such as “each student should be encouraged and given opportunities to connect to the school—to connect to something bigger than themselves” and “decrease the students’ anxiety concerning their move to the high school thereby improving student success.”

Finally, using the same framework, I coded seven responses as procedural. Examples of these responses included “communication with students about school and school programs” and “understanding the high school environment and what to expect.”

Question 2: Component/Ingredient

The second question on the Delphi I questionnaire was, “What are the essential ingredients or components in a comprehensive ninth grade transition program (please list and provide a brief explanation if necessary)?” The number of responses from each panelist ranged from two to 20. The panelists used a variety of styles in their responses just as they had done in responding to the first question. These responses also ranged from a simple list of items to ideas

presented embedded in a descriptive paragraph. A few panelists referred to their authored books, articles published, or websites of their respective organization. Therefore, this variance led to both fully explained components and some answers that were not fully developed and open to interpretation. The expert panel generated 112 responses to this question—what the essential ingredients or components should be in a comprehensive ninth grade transition program (see Appendix I). Using the same content analysis procedure as for the first question, 80 items remained as unique answers to the second question. Using the same framework described earlier by Akos and Galassi (2004a), I categorized each of the unique items as one of the following: academic needs of students, social/emotional needs of student, and procedural needs of students.

I coded 28 of the unique responses as academic. Examples included general instructional practices such as “competency-based assessments to focus on mastery of key skills” and “students below grade level in math and English should be ‘doubled up’ during the ninth grade year in these areas.” Academic responses also included detailed practices focused on a teaming model used with ninth grade students in the core subjects. Examples included:

- a team model, selected teachers, that share a common planning period, in the core subjects that work with the same group of students, the team provides standardized expectations, coordination of efforts, increased parental contact, coordination of support for struggling students; and
- a system that allows for progress monitoring and interventions for students—usually a team consisting of an administrator, counselor, and other supporting adults that regularly meets to review student data and progress and put supports in place when needed.

Several responses in the academic category focused on academic monitoring of ninth graders like “a way to track ninth grade student achievement” or “a system, not reliant on teachers, that identifies students for remediation.”

I coded 44 of the unique responses as social. Some examples recommended that ninth graders need to be separated from older students at least for a part of the school day, “give ninth grade students their own lunch shift,” or “schools should be physically structured to keep ninth grade students in one geographic area of the school—separate them strategically throughout the day.” As was the case with previous responses, panelists also included some general philosophical ideas such as “focus on intentionally creating a just, fair, and caring school.” Some answers were highly prescriptive such as “teachers must share two positive comments about a student whenever they refer a student for discipline” or “advisor/advisee – each freshman should have an adult advocate that follows him/her throughout high school career.” Many items focused on the importance of student involvement or forming a connection with the school beyond just attending class, such as “ninth grade students should be encouraged to participate in a club, activity, theater, band, chorus, or athletic team.”

I coded eight responses as procedural. Examples of panelists' ideas of essential components included “tours of facility” and “assistance with registration/school procedures.” A couple of responses placed in the procedural category were focused on necessary elements from the school or district level such as “support from district level” or “funding to make the elements of the transition program a priority.”

Question 3: Data/Measures

The third question on the Delphi I questionnaire was, “What measures or data should a high school principal use to judge the effectiveness of a ninth grade transition program?” The

number of responses from each panelist ranged from three to nine. This question lent itself to the panelists simply listing their answers; 15 of the panelists provided their answers in a bulleted format. To explain their answers, three of the panelists embedded a list of ideas in a paragraph response. Finally, two of the panelists took a hybrid approach, first writing a brief paragraph to justify their answers and then listing specific responses.

The expert panel generated 144 items for data or measures to judge the effectiveness of a ninth grade transition program (see Appendix J). Using the same content analysis strategies used for the first two questions resulted in 52 items remaining as unique answers to the third question. This question lent itself to duplicate answers and there were more exact or near exact duplicate answers than the other two previous questions.

Using the framework of Akos and Galassi (2004a), I coded the responses into one of three categories: academic, social/emotional, or procedural. Of the unique answers, 29 of them fit into the academic category. These responses included straightforward items such as “graduation data,” “attendance data,” “retention rate,” and “review of first marking period grades.” Also included in these responses were items such as “S.A.T. /A.C.T. results,” “lexile/quantile scores—can students read at or above grade level,” and “reading and math assessment data.”

I coded 22 of the unique answers as social. Examples of these responses included “school involvement and/or community involvement,” “tracking the number of ninth grade students that meet the eligibility requirements to participate in extracurricular activities/sports,” and “parent/family engagement in the school.” Responses also included looking at “teacher morale” and “student morale.” Panelists included several responses focused on using surveys and interviews to help judge the effectiveness of the ninth grade program such as, “pre- and post-

perception surveys of parents” (another item reflected the same surveys for students), and “qualitative interviews of parents” (another item reflected the same interviews of students).

I coded one of the unique answers as procedural. Although some information generated from surveys or interviews might produce items that fit into the procedural category (i.e., tours of facility, ease of registering for classes), panelists only gave one direct response that fit directly into this category.

Delphi Round II

I constructed the Delphi Round II instruments based on the input and data analysis from Round I. I used the Virginia Tech Survey Maker to deliver the instrument to the panelists. The instrument consisted of three questionnaires, connected to the original three questions (see Appendix B for Round II instrument). Panelists completed the surveys by rating the degree of importance for each survey item. Items were in no particular order on the survey. Panelists responded based on the following five point Likert-type response scale: (a) *not important*; (b) *slightly important*; (c) *somewhat important*; (d) *important*; (e) *very important*. I sent the Round II survey to the 20 panelists who had responded to Round I. This excluded the one panelist who did not respond to the Round I questionnaires and the one panelist who withdrew during Round I. Of these 20 panelists, the response rate was 100% for the Round II Delphi instrument.

For all three questions, I entered the data returned from the Round II survey into SPSS for analysis, including frequency and descriptive analysis. I analyzed each question by the percent of panelists rating it as either *important* or *very important* on the Likert scale. I coded responses as follows:

- *not important* = 1
- *slightly important* = 2

- *somewhat important* = 3
- *important* = 4
- *very important* = 5

I used SPSS to generate the mean and standard deviation for each item.

Gaining Consensus

The goal of this research as well as the main goal of using the Delphi technique was to gain consensus among the expert panelists (Keeney et al., 2011). “It is apparent that there is no universal agreement on what the level of consensus for a Delphi study should be, or how this level of consensus should be decided” (Keeney et al., 2011, p.82). Two of the most common ways to define consensus is to use the statistical approach or percentage levels. In this research, I used the percentage of expert panelists rating items as either *important* or *very important* to determine the level of consensus. Keeney et al. (2011) further indicated that there are varying opinions and no standard threshold for consensus in the literature; the most important determinant in whether an item has reached consensus is determined by the level chosen by the researcher.

For all three questions, I used the following parameters when analyzing the data for consensus from Round II. If at least 90% of the panel rated an item as *very important* (5) or *important* (4), then I considered it a consensus item from the group. Based on the relatively small size (although acceptable by Delphi standards) of the panel, 90% agreement means that roughly 18 at of 20 panelists agreed to the importance of the item. At this level, agreement would include panelists from a combined group of the practitioners and researchers. If less than 70% of the panel rated an item *very important* or *important*, then I considered it too far from consensus. For this study, less than 70% meant that roughly 13 or fewer of the panelists rated

the item *important* or *very important*. In a study method that does not allow for discussion or debate among the participants, I considered this number to be too far away from the consensus threshold to have the panel consider the item again. If an item had between 70% and less than 90% of the panel rate it as *important* or *very important*, then it had not reached the 90% consensus threshold based on the Round II data but was close enough for the panel to consider it again, and I included the item in Round III. Again, roughly speaking, for this study this percentage threshold meant that 14 to 17 panelists out of 20 rated an item as *important* or *very important*. This number of panelists in agreement is worthy of consideration but not quite at a level for the item to be claimed as a consensus item of the group. Therefore, I asked the panel to reconsider these items in Round III. Finally, if a panelist did not rate an item by skipping the question, I treated that as a negative response. In other words, when calculating the percentage of panelists rating an item as *important* or *very important*, all items started with a denominator of 20, whether or not each panelist answered the question or not.

Goal/Objective

Of the 50 items on the Round II Goal/Objective questionnaire, all panelists (20) rated 41 of the items. For nine of the items, 19 of the 20 panelists rated the item on the five point Likert scale.

Based on the parameters described previously (90% of the panel rated the item as either *important* or *very important*), Table 2 shows that 18 of the 50 items reached consensus by the expert panel. This does not mean that these items are the highest priority, it simply means that these items have reached consensus first (Keeney et al., 2011). Since these 18 items were determined to have reached consensus, they were not included in Round III. Of the 18 goal

items that reached the consensus level based on Round II, nine items fit the academic category. Seven items fit the social/emotional category. Two items fit the procedural category.

All panelists rated three of the Goal/Objective items as either *very important* or *important*. The three items receiving 100% agreement were:

- each ninth grade student should successfully perform in their courses (especially core classes);
- incoming students need to feel a part of something in the new school environment, connect to something in the school and develop ownership or investment in the school; and
- principals must establish the importance and commitment to a system of ninth grade transition.

Table 2

Delphi II – Goal/Objective Items Determined to have Reached Consensus

Item	n	M	I	VI	C
Principal must establish the importance and commitment to a system of ninth grade transition	20	4.80	4	16	P
Incoming students need to feel a part of something in the new school environment, connect to something in the school and develop ownership or investment in the school	20	4.65	7	13	SE
Each ninth grade student should successfully perform in their course (especially core classes)	20	4.60	8	12	A
As part of the ninth grade transition program, schools should have a monitoring system in place to check student academic progress and ensure that students are provided the necessary supports to undergird their academic progress	20	4.70	4	15	A
Each student should be on track to graduate at the end of the ninth grade year (leave ninth grade with as many credits as possible)	20	4.65	5	14	A
Every student should achieve academic success	20	4.60	6	13	A
The school should provide deliberate supports to ensure academic success (study skills, organizational skills, time management, tutoring programs)	20	4.60	6	13	A
As a part of the ninth grade transition program, the school should clarify high school expectations for school work, behavior, social interactions, building norms, etc.	20	4.55	7	12	P
Individual ninth grade attendance should be above 90% (any student having less than 80% should necessitate intensive intervention)	20	4.50	8	11	A
The ninth grade transition program should support a seamless transition of the middle school student into high school readiness (academic, personal/social development, career development)	20	4.35	11	8	SE
The school's overall ninth grade attendance should be above 95%	20	4.25	12	7	A
The ninth grade transition program should make students aware of supports and resources available to help them in all areas (academic, social/emotional, substance abuse, etc.)	20	4.25	13	6	SE
The school should provide opportunities for parent involvement and engagement in their education of their child and the school in general	20	4.40	8	10	SE
Each student should set realistic short term and long term goals that focus on academic achievement skill development, building relationships, and attitude	19	4.32	11	7	SE
Each student should develop an individual learning plan that guides him/her through the eighth grade year into high school through graduation	20	4.30	10	8	A
The ninth grade transition program should address social and emotional adjustment to high school expectations, peer culture, and personal goals	20	4.30	10	8	SE
As a result of the ninth grade transition program, each student should know where to go or to whom they can speak with regards to graduation concerns	20	4.30	10	8	A
The ninth grade transition program should provide ninth graders with appropriate behavior support (students who get suspended in 9 th grade are more likely to drop out)	20	4.15	13	5	SE

Note. I = important; VI = very important; C = coding: A = academic, SE = social/emotional, P = procedural.

Based on the parameters described previously (less than 70% of the panel rating the item as either *important* or *very important*), Table 3 shows the 12 out of 50 items that were considered too far from consensus. These items were not included on the Round III survey. Of the 12 eliminated items, the percent of the panel rating them as *very important* or *important* was:

- five items received a 65% rating
- three items received a 60% rating
- two items received a 55% rating
- one item received a 50% rating
- one item received a 45% rating
- one item received a 40% rating

Of the 12 Goal/Objective items that were determined to be too far from reaching consensus level based on Round II, two items fit into the academic category. Nine items coded into the social/emotional category. One item fit into the procedural category.

Table 3

Delphi II – Goal/Objective Items Determined to be Too Far from Reaching Consensus

Item	n	M	I	VI	C
The ninth grade transition program should address literacy development, particularly reading comprehension strategies for expository text and critical analysis	20	3.80	8	5	A
The ninth grade transition program should have upperclassmen reach out and connect with incoming students	19	3.79	9	4	SE
The ninth grade transition program should prepare students to cope with different social situations that they may not have experienced before (substance use and abuse, romantic/sexual relationships, self-advocacy, driving, peer pressure and general problems of interpersonal relationships with other adolescents and adults)	20	3.75	9	4	SE
The ninth grade transition program should address social and emotional issues related to adolescent development and growth	20	3.75	9	4	SE
The ninth grade transition program should focus on study habits, self-esteem, peer relationships, decision making, healthy living	20	3.85	6	6	SE
In the student's eighth grade year, students and parents should be introduced	20	3.80	8	4	SE

to extra and co-curricular offerings at the school					
As a result of the ninth grade transition program, each student should become intrinsically motivated	19	3.58	11	1	SE
The ninth grade transition program should address mathematical and symbolic reasoning, largely through high caliber algebra instruction	20	3.65	7	4	A
Goals of program should be based on district data and contextual needs	20	3.55	8	3	P
A comprehensive ninth grade transition program needs to address social confusion, emotional stress, and loss of control	20	3.65	6	4	SE
The ninth grade transition program should help students cope with the personal issues of being an adolescent student (responsibility, self-directed learning, sexual orientation, self-awareness)	20	3.40	6	3	SE
The ninth grade transition program should focus on the whole child and incorporate information about exercise, nutrition, and how the brain works	20	3.40	5	3	SE

Note. I = important; VI = very important; C = coding; A = academic, SE = social/emotional, P = procedural.

Table 4 shows the remaining 20 items that received a rating of 70% to 85%. While these items did not meet the 90% consensus threshold, they were close enough to be included in the Round III Delphi to have the expert panel members reconsider then to determine if these could become consensus items. Therefore, these items were included in the Goal/Objective questionnaire in Round III. Of the 20 items that the panel needed to reconsider in Round III based on the data from Round II, eight items fit into the academic category. Eight items fit into the social/emotional category. Four items fit into the procedural category.

Table 4

Delphi II – Goal/Objective Items Needing Reconsideration to Determine Consensus Level

Item	n	M	I	VI	C
School should provide a rigorous and relevant curriculum that prepares students to be college and career ready	19	4.53	5	12	A
The school should enable and ensure that each ninth grade student establishes a positive connection with an adult in the building to be an additional support	19	4.42	7	10	SE
The ninth grade transition program should help students explore their interests and strengths and to understand the connection/relevance of their academic experience to their future aspirations	20	4.40	6	11	A
The ninth grade transition program should help a cohort of students transition from middle to high school	19	4.32	7	10	P
Each student should successfully complete and graduate high school in four years	20	4.25	6	11	A
In the eighth grade year, middle school teachers should begin to articulate	20	4.20	10	7	P

Item	n	M	I	VI	C
high school expectations to students and parents					
The ninth grade transition program should decrease the students' anxiety concerning their move to the high school thereby improving student success	20	4.10	12	5	SE
The ninth grade transition program should make the high school "smaller" and more nurturing – providing additional oversight and prevent them from getting "lost in the shuffle"	20	4.10	11	6	SE
Goals of program should be based on needs of school and students	19	4.47	4	12	P
The ninth grade transition program should incorporate college/career awareness and know-how early in a student's high school experience (exploration of careers and post-secondary planning)	20	4.30	6	10	A
The ninth grade transition program should help ninth grade students gain the belief set that they need to overcome obstacles and find success	19	4.26	8	8	SE
The ninth grade transition program should help student confidently integrate into the high school culture while maintaining the ability to make sound decisions that will positively impact their futures	20	4.05	11	5	SE
Each ninth grade student should receive guidance on having a balanced academic course load	19	4.16	8	7	A
Each student should be encouraged to focus on effort and persistence	20	4.10	8	7	A
As part of the ninth grade transition program, communication should be provided to the students about school and school programs	20	4.10	8	7	P
Each student should be involved in some sort of school activity, club, athletic team, theater arts, band, or chorus	20	4.05	9	6	SE
The ninth grade transition program should be very similar to a comprehensive guidance program in that it addresses the academic, personal/social, and career and college readiness need of every student	20	4.00	9	6	SE
The ninth grade transition program should develop critical thinking skills for freshmen	20	4.00	9	6	A
The ninth grade transition program should promote positive youth development outcomes (e.g. connectedness, competence)	20	4.00	8	6	SE
The ninth grade transition program should prepare each student for post-secondary success in all its dimensions (academic success, college and career awareness and readiness, social/emotional, and 21 st century skills that support academic and college and career success)	20	3.95	9	5	A

Note. I = important; VI = very important; C = coding; A = academic, SE = social/emotional, P = procedural.

Component/Ingredient

Of the 80 items on the Round II Component/Ingredient questionnaire, all 20 panelists rated 49 of the items. Twenty-six of the items had 19 panelists rate them, four items had 18 panelists rate them, and one item had 17 panelists rate it.

Table 5 shows eight of the 80 items that reached consensus since 90% of the expert panel rated them as either *very important* (5) or *important* (4). As described earlier, reaching

consensus in Round II does not mean that these items are the highest priority, it simply means that these items have reached consensus first (Keeney et al., 2011). Since these eight items were determined to have reached consensus, I did not include them in Round III.

None of the items on the Component/Ingredient questionnaire received 100% of the panel rating it as *very important* or *important*. Two of the items received a 95% rating, namely "having teachers as part of Professional Learning Communities that meet on a regular basis with an agenda, minutes, and a focus on student learning" and "constant monitoring and counseling to aid ninth grade students." Six of the items received a 90% rating, thus completing the list of eight total consensus items.

Of the eight Component/Ingredient items that reached the consensus level based on Round II, five items fit in the academic category. Three items fit the social/emotional category. None of the items fit the procedural category.

Table 5

Delphi II – Component/Ingredient Items Determined to have Reached Consensus

Item	n	M	I	VI	C
Constant monitoring and counseling to aid ninth grade students	20	4.30	12	7	SE
Having teachers be a part of Professional Learning Communities that meet on a regular basis with an agenda, minutes, and a focus on student learning	20	4.20	11	8	A
A team model – selected teachers, that share a common planning period, in the core subjects that work with the same group of students – the team provides standardized expectations, coordination of efforts, increased parental contact, coordination of support for struggling students	20	4.60	4	14	A
A way to track ninth grade student achievement	19	4.68	4	14	A
Ninth grade students need high quality teachers – ones that have a growth mindset (belief that intelligence can grow, is not static), use high-yield instructional strategies, promote active student engagement in every class, provide blended learning opportunities (i.e. lecture, on-line learning)	19	4.68	3	15	A
Assistance when students fail end of course standardized tests (e.g. Standards of Learning in Virginia)	20	4.45	7	11	A
Include faculty, counselors, administrative resources and student resources when developing transition program	20	4.30	9	9	SE
Every faculty member needs to believe in a set of non-negotiables that are foundational with all ninth grade teachers (e.g. every child can learn, every child deserves a teacher's best effort every day)	20	4.60	4	14	SE

Note. I = important; VI = very important; C = coding; A = academic, SE = social/emotional.

Based on the parameters described previously, Table 6 shows 43 of the 80 items that were too far from reaching consensus. I eliminated these items from the Round III survey since less than 70% of the panel rating them as *very important* or *important*. Of the 43 eliminated items, the percent of the panel rating them as *very important* or *important* was:

- five items received a 65% rating; six items received a 60% rating
- 11 items received a 55% rating
- six items received a 50% rating
- three items received a 45% rating
- one item received a 40% rating
- three items received a 35% rating
- three items received a 30% rating
- two items received a 25% rating
- two items received a 20% rating
- one item received a 15% rating

Of the 43 component items that were determined to be too far from reaching consensus level based on Round II, 10 items fit the academic category. There were 28 items coded in the social/emotional category. Five items fit the procedural category.

Table 6

Delphi II – Component/Ingredient Items Determined to be Too Far from Reaching Consensus

Item	n	M	I	VI	C
“Just in time” remediation and co-teaching for students who need additional supports to stay on-track	20	3.70	9	4	A
Transition program must begin in middle school (or earlier) – teachers and counselors work together to clarify student and staff misconceptions about transition (registration of classes, g.p.a., visits to high school, middle school students allowed to shadow high school students, and high school credits)	20	3.90	7	6	SE
Support for student social/emotional needs (e.g. self-esteem, academic self-confidence)	20	3.90	8	5	SE
Professional development, professional learning communities, and embedded supports for ninth grade teachers/administrators on effective team practice, adolescent development (including brain development), stress, instruction, and continuous improvement in academic and social-emotional education	19	4.00	7	6	SE
Parents should be included in the discussion of the most pressing issues related to transition	20	3.85	7	6	SE
Structured advisory program dealing with academic and social/emotional guidance to promote college and career awareness	20	3.85	9	4	SE
A required freshman 101/seminar type course providing additional support (study skills, personal/social aspects, college and career planning, decision-making)	20	3.35	10	2	A
Middle school faculty talk with 8 th grade students about upcoming transition in an attempt to determine what issues are deemed important by these students	20	3.70	7	5	SE
Create comfort level and space around the ninth grade students	20	3.60	9	3	SE
Small group advisory and/or study skills class (preferably 10 or fewer students meeting with the same adult at least two times a week)	19	3.58	10	2	SE
Assistance with registration/school procedures	20	3.75	8	4	P
Ambassador program	19	2.89	4	1	P
Spring should be focused on preparation for required end of year assessments with interventions as indicated by data	20	3.40	10	2	A
After school homework labs for students	20	3.50	9	2	A
A structured schedule that eases ninth grade students into the complexities of high school (i.e. one in which ninth graders do not have to focus on 7 different classes in one day)	19	3.32	9	2	A
A dedicated ninth grade school counselor	19	3.68	3	8	SE
Open house and tours for 8 th grade students	20	3.55	7	4	P
A team approach (sub school model) which includes grade level administrator, dean, and appropriate number of school counselors	20	3.55	7	4	SE
Dedicated time with other ninth grade students	19	3.42	7	4	SE
A master schedule that allows for student support time and assists student learning (assist in implementing the middle school model and allows focus on grade specific issues or concerns)	20	3.60	8	3	SE
Based on needs identified, two transition teams (middle school team and high school team) develop programs to	20	3.45	7	4	SE

Item	n	M	I	VI	C
address concerns					
Freshman family reception	19	3.63	8	3	SE
Middle school students should be educated about high school extracurricular and co-curricular opportunities (possible allowance of limited 8 th grade participation in high school activities)	19	3.74	7	4	SE
Adult to student mentor program	19	3.42	8	2	SE
Multiple day summer orientation program – reviewing student schedule, intensive tours, process photo I.D. card and bus pass, meet with student council, sign graduation pledge, photographed with cap and gown	19	3.47	7	3	P
College and career planning should begin as soon as possible (organized around career clusters) – including completing a career interest inventory	17	3.76	7	3	SE
Life skills	20	3.55	7	3	SE
A system, not reliant on teachers, that identifies students for remediation	18	3.22	5	3	A
Advisor/advisee – each freshman should have an adult advocate that follows him/her throughout high school career	20	3.60	4	6	SE
Transition program should continue after 9 th grade year – all students placed in low number cohort that loops through their high school career	20	3.45	7	3	SE
A summer academy which provides support in math and English, mentors to work with students individually, learn what to expect during freshmen year, and what resources are available to students	19	3.37	9	0	A
An academy type approach	19	3.21	6	3	SE
Personalized learning environment; structure could include small learning communities, common academic class scheduling, designated building space (structure may matter less as long as there is adherence to consistent adult-student contact, opportunities to build small student peer groups, and shared planning and consultation time among teachers)	18	3.61	6	3	SE
A ninth grade technical exploratory program allowing students to explore all technical programs	20	3.15	5	2	A
A rigorous academic schedule (i.e. “doubling up” in math and English)	18	3.39	5	2	A
Teachers must share two positive comments about a student whenever they refer a student for discipline	20	2.65	7	0	SE
Student to student mentor program	20	3.25	4	2	SE
Tours of facility	19	3.05	3	3	P
Developmentally organized physical education classes	20	2.55	6	0	SE
Students below grade level in math and English should be “doubled up” during the ninth grade year in these areas	18	3.22	4	1	A
Give ninth grade students their own lunch shift	19	2.32	3	1	SE
Schools should be physically restructured to keep ninth grade students in one geographic area of the school- separate them strategically throughout the day	20	2.30	3	1	SE
Blended classes with upper classmen	20	2.30	3	0	SE

Note. I = important; VI = very important; C = coding: A = academic, SE = social/emotional, P = procedural.

Table 7 shows the remaining 29 items that received a rating from 70% to 85% of the panelists rated as *very important* or *important*. While these items did not meet the 90% consensus threshold, they were close enough for the expert panel to reconsider them to determine if they could become consensus items. Therefore, I included these items in the Component/Ingredient questionnaire in Round III.

Of the 29 items that the panel needed to reconsider in Round III based on the data from Round II, 13 fit the academic category. There were also 13 items coded in the social/emotional category. Three items fit the procedural category.

Table 7

Delphi II – Component/Ingredient Items Needing Reconsideration to Determine Consensus Level

Item	n	M	I	VI	C
Rigorous and relevant learning experiences which will support equitable access and eliminate barriers (race, culture, socio-economic status, low academic skills) to academic success	20	4.35	6	11	A
Competency-based assessments to focus on mastery of key skills	20	4.05	12	5	A
There is no one size fits all approach – program should be dependent on context of situation	19	4.32	7	10	P
A system that allows for progress monitoring and interventions for students – usually a team consisting of an administrator, counselor, and other supporting adults that regularly meets to review student data and progress and put supports in place when needed (interventions can be academic or otherwise)	20	4.45	5	12	A
Enhanced support for literacy and algebra for all students, with special attention to struggling students (either through double-dose scheduling, supplemental classes or tutoring)	20	4.20	10	7	A
Systematic monitoring for on-track indicators including daily attendance, grades leading to course failures, and credit accumulation	20	4.40	6	11	A
Funding to make the elements of the transition program a priority	20	4.25	7	10	P
A model that develops positive student-teacher relationships that support student engagement (staff must be educated and/or continually retrained on the importance of positive student relationships)	19	4.37	8	9	SE
Ninth grade students should be encouraged to participate in club, activity, theater, band, chorus, or athletic team	19	4.16	11	6	SE
Credit recovery options offered during the summer or during the school year	19	4.37	5	11	A
Parent involvement	19	4.21	8	8	SE
Commitment and involvement of whole school community to do “whatever it takes” to support a successful ninth grade transition	20	4.40	4	12	SE
Support from district level	20	4.35	5	11	P
Focus on intentionally creating a just, fair, and caring school	20	4.20	7	9	SE

Item	n	M	I	VI	C
Must have a defined mission that drives the day-to-day operation of the school and individual classrooms (e.g. every child, by need, every day to graduation)	19	4.21	9	7	SE
Ninth grade teachers should promote effort by students – a never give up attitude while at the same time promoting intrinsic motivation	20	4.25	6	10	SE
Structured tutoring help available for students	20	4.00	9	6	A
Connecting career planning and counseling to course planning and selection (intentional academic focus that includes navigating the pathway to career and college readiness and 21 st century skills)	20	3.95	10	5	SE
A prescriptive program concentrating on tools for academic success (Cornell note taking, notebook organization, decision-making)	20	4.05	7	8	A
Program should emphasize core curricula and instruction	20	3.90	12	3	A
Transition program components should be connected to the vision of the school – what characteristics should ninth grade students have when they graduate	19	4.00	9	6	SE
All teachers should be familiar with their students’ academic and career plan, standardized test scores, achievement data and use them to promote academic growth	20	4.10	6	9	A
Celebration/student recognition programs	19	4.11	7	8	SE
Ninth grade teachers provide examples of “A” work so students know what it looks like	19	3.58	12	2	A
Every student should have a learning goal that he/she assists in developing	20	3.95	8	6	A
Discipline should be about changing behavior and no discipline conference should end without a discussion of academic growth	20	3.85	8	6	SE
Instructional leadership team meeting and reviewing freshman midterm grade distribution, disciplinary referrals, and attendance (twice a quarter)	19	4.05	7	7	A
Exposing students to career planning connected to productive work habits, attitude, and relationship to educational attainment	20	3.95	9	5	SE
Significant academic and social counseling	20	3.85	10	4	SE

Note. I = important; VI = very important; C = coding: A = academic, SE = social/emotional, P = procedural.

Data/Measures

There were 52 items on the Data/Measures Round II questionnaire. All 20 expert panelists rated 39 of the items. For nine items, 19 expert panelists rated them, three items received 18 ratings, and one item received 17 responses.

Table 8 shows 13 of the 52 that items reached consensus by the expert panel, since 90% of the panel rated the item as *very important* or *important*: As described earlier, this does not mean that these items are the highest priority, it simply means that the panelists have reached

consensus on these items first (Keeney et al., 2011). Since these 13 items were determined to have reached consensus, I did not include them in Round III.

All panelists rated one of the data items as either *very important* or *important*. The one item receiving 100% agreement was “promotion to 10th grade (emphasis on passing core subjects).” Ninety-five percent of the panelists rated seven other items on the data survey as either *very important* or *important* and five items had 90% of the panelists rate it as either *very important* or *important*.

Of the 13 Data/Measures items that reached the consensus level based on Round II, 11 items fit the academic category. Two items fit the social/emotional category. None of the items fit the procedural category.

Table 8

Delphi II – Data/Measures Items Determined to have Reached Consensus

Item	n	M	I	VI	C
Promotion to 10 th grade (emphasis on passing core subjects)	20	4.75	5	15	A
On-track for graduation at the end of 10 th and 11 th grade (credit accumulation and end-of-course exam scores, if relevant)	20	4.45	8	11	A
Attendance data	20	4.45	9	10	A
Monitoring of grades during year (emphasis on core classes using “D’s” and “F’s” as measure, including missed assignments)	20	4.40	10	9	A
Reduction of failures in core classes	20	4.45	8	11	A
Student dropouts (class cohorts, grade-level cohorts, school-wide)	20	4.65	5	14	A
Retention rates	19	4.68	6	13	A
Amount of courses passed in the ninth grade year (number of credits toward graduation successfully attained)	20	4.65	5	14	A
Graduation data	20	4.45	4	14	A
Review of first marking period grades	19	4.37	8	10	A
Student discipline consequences and its impact on academic performance	20	4.10	14	4	A
Student engagement in the school	20	4.55	5	13	SE
Equity/success for all students	20	4.35	8	10	SE

Note. I = important; VI = very important; C = coding; A = academic, SE = social/emotional.

Table 9 shows 23 of the 52 items that were too far from consensus. Therefore, I eliminated these items from Round III since less than 70% of the panel rated them as *very*

important or *important*. Of the 23 eliminated items, the percent of the panel rating them as *very important* or *important* was:

- six items received a 65% rating
- one item received a 60% rating
- five items received a 55% rating
- two items received a 50% rating
- three items received a 45% rating
- three items received a 40% rating
- one item received a 30% rating
- one item received a 25% rating
- one received a 15% rating

Of 23 Data/Measures items that were determined to be too far from reaching consensus level based on Round II, 10 items fit the academic category. There were 13 items coded in the social/emotional category. None of the items fit the procedural category.

Table 9

Delphi II – Data/Measures Items Determined to be Too Far from Reaching Consensus

Item	n	M	I	VI	C
Reading and math assessment data	18	4.06	7	6	A
Course selection/enrollment in advanced courses at 10 th thru 12 th grades (to determine level of rigor and analyze the percentage and demographics of students enrolling in advanced courses after 9 th grade)	20	3.85	8	5	A
Teacher morale	20	3.75	6	7	SE
Pre- and post- perception surveys of parents	20	3.55	12	1	SE
Teacher surveys	20	3.65	11	2	SE
Qualitative interviews of students	20	3.60	10	3	SE
Student completion rates of 2 year and 4 year college	20	3.60	5	7	A
Pre- and post- perception surveys of students	17	3.65	12	0	SE
Parent/family engagement in the school	19	3.68	7	5	SE
School involvement and/or community involvement	20	3.55	8	3	SE
Participation rates of ninth grade students involved in extra and co-curricular activities	20	3.45	10	1	SE

Item	n	M	I	VI	C
Data must be examined across 8 th and 9 th grade	20	3.70	7	4	A
Review of transition program to make sure that students are not being tracked by ability	20	3.60	4	6	A
End of course standardized tests (i.e. Standards of Learning in Virginia)	20	3.40	8	2	A
Qualitative interviews of parents	20	3.35	7	2	SE
Percentage of students in a 9 th grade looping cohort as compared with the same cohort at the end of the senior year (factoring out students who transfer based on family moves)	20	3.40	6	3	A
Community engagement	19	3.26	8	1	SE
Ideally data should be examined from 6 th grade to 11 th grade looking for stable outcomes for students across the growth curve	19	3.47	3	5	A
Increases in grade point average (g.p.a.)	20	3.30	7	1	A
Completion of advisory curriculum for each teacher-mentor and his/her cohort	20	3.35	6	2	SE
Track the number of ninth grade students that meet the eligibility requirements to participate in extracurricular activities/sports	20	3.25	5	1	SE
Parent attendance at school events	20	2.85	4	1	SE
S.A.T./A.C.T. results	18	2.72	2	1	A

Note. I = important; VI = very important; C = coding; A = academic, SE = social/emotional.

As shown in Table 10, the remaining 16 items received a rating from 70% to 85%. While these items did not meet the 90% consensus threshold, they were close enough that the expert panel needed to reconsider the items to determine if these were consensus items. Therefore, these items were included in Round III.

Of 16 items that the panel needed to reconsider in Round III based on the data from Round II, eight items fit the academic category. Seven items fit the social/emotional category. One item fit the procedural category.

Table 10

Delphi II –Data/Measures Items Needing Reconsideration to Determine Consensus Level

Item	n	M	I	VI	C
Discipline referral data for ninth grade students	19	4.32	9	8	SE
Growth of students (as opposed to grading or passing – grading in most high schools is subjective and incongruent with the mastery of standards)	20	4.30	8	9	A
Data used depends on goals/objectives of the program	20	4.20	9	8	P
On-track for graduation at the end of 9 th grade (credit accumulation and end-of-course exam scores, if relevant)	20	4.45	5	12	A
Student morale	19	4.53	5	12	SE
Grade trend data	20	4.30	6	10	A
Suspension/expulsion rate for ninth grade students (major discipline issues)	20	4.15	8	8	SE

Item	n	M	I	VI	C
Behavior intervention – how many ninth grade students respond to intervention and do not get another referral	20	4.15	9	7	SE
Enrollment rates to college and other post-secondary education	20	3.90	9	6	A
Student tardiness to class	20	3.75	10	5	SE
Efficacy of interventions for remedial and special needs students	19	4.16	7	8	A
Impact of attendance data on academic performance	18	4.17	9	6	A
Monitoring of individual student goals	20	3.90	11	4	SE
Percent of students that benefit from credit recovery opportunities	20	3.85	10	4	A
Number and frequency of parent/family conferences related to discipline	20	3.75	11	3	SE
Lexile /quantile scores – can students read at or above grade level	19	3.74	10	4	A

Note. I = important; VI = very important; C = coding: A = academic, SE = social/emotional, P = procedural.

Delphi III

I constructed the Delphi III instrument based on the analysis of responses from the Round II Delphi survey (see Appendix C for the Round III instrument). As with Round II, I used the Virginia Tech Survey Maker to deliver the instrument to the panelists. Again, I asked panelists to complete three surveys at one time, albeit with much fewer items this time because of the elimination of items already considered consensus items and those items too far from consensus. The Round III Delphi survey consisted of items that the expert panelists were asked to reconsider using the same five point Likert-type scale used earlier in the Round II: *not important, slightly important, somewhat important, important, very important*. In Round II, less than 90% of the panel rated these as *very important* or *important* but at least 70% of the panel rated the item as one of these two degrees. Therefore, since the items were close to, but did not meet, the 90% threshold for consensus, panelists were to rate only these items in Round III. I sent the survey to the 20 panelists that responded to both Round I and Round II. The response rate was 100% for the Round III.

I entered the responses on the Round III survey into SPSS to analyze frequencies and descriptive statistics in the same manner as I did in Round II. I analyzed each question for the percent of panelists rating it as either *very important* (5) or *important* (4). Additionally,

assigning the Likert-type responses a number (*not important* = 1, *slightly important* = 2, *somewhat important* = 3, *important* = 4, and *very important* = 5), I computed the mean and standard deviation for each item.

The goal of Round III was to determine if the panel came to consensus on the remaining items that rated at least 70% in Round II, even though they did not reach the consensus threshold. I used the following parameters in this round when analyzing the data from the remaining items for all three questions (Goal/Objective, Component/Ingredient, and Data/Measures). In this round, if at least 90% of the panel rated it *very important* or *important*, then I considered it a consensus item. If less than 90% of the panel rated it as *very important* or *important*, it did not reach consensus in this round. Since it had not received 90% agreement in the previous two rounds, I did not consider it a consensus item.

Goal/Objective

Table 11 shows the results of the analysis of the Round III Delphi Goal/Objective questionnaire. Originally, I identified 20 items for reconsideration from the Round II goals survey. Based on feedback, I created two items from one of the items in the Round II survey to help clarify the meaning. This action created 21 items that I asked panelists to rate again. All 20 panelists rated 19 items; 18 panelists rated two of the items. Round III ratings of the 21 items were as follows:

- Five items received the same percentage of panelists rating them as either *very important* or *important*;
- Eight items received a lower importance percentage rating; and
- Eight items received a greater percentage of panelists rating them *very important* or *important*,

Of the eight items receiving a higher approval percentage, three of the items reached the 90% threshold as a consensus item. Of the three items that reached the consensus level, each item represented a different one of the coding categories: academic needs, social/emotional needs, and procedural needs.

Coded as an academic need, the item, “school should provide a rigorous and relevant curriculum that prepares students to be college and career ready,” went from an 85% rating in Round II to a 95% rating in Round III. Effectively, two more panelists rated this item as *very important* or *important*. Coded as a procedural item, “goals of the transition program should be based on needs of school and students,” went from an 80% rating in Round II to a 95% rating in Round III with three more panelists rating this item as either *very important* or *important*. Coded as a social/emotional item, “the school should ensure that each ninth grade student establishes a positive connection with an adult in the building to be an additional support,” went from an 85% rating in Round II to having all panelists in Round III rate it as either *very important* or *important*—thereby achieving a 100% rating.

Table 11

Delphi III – Reconsidered Goal/Objective Items

Item	n	M	Rd. II	Rd. III	C
			%	%	
Each student should successfully complete and graduate high school in four years	20	4.30	85	85	A
Each ninth grade student should receive guidance on having a balanced academic course load	20	4.30	75	85	A
School should provide a rigorous and relevant curriculum that prepares students to be college and career ready	20	4.70	85	95	A
Goals of transition program should be based on needs of school and students	20	4.35	80	95	P
Each student should be encouraged to focus on effort and persistence	20	4.10	75	80	A
The ninth grade transition program should develop critical thinking skills for freshmen	20	3.95	75	70	A
The ninth grade transition program should help students explore their interests and strengths.	20	4.20	85	80	A
The ninth grade transition program should help students understand	20	4.35	85	75	A

Item	n	M	Rd. II %	Rd. III %	C
the connection/relevance of their academic experience to their future aspirations					
The ninth grade transition program should incorporate college/career awareness and know-how early in a student's high school experience (exploration of careers and post-secondary planning)	20	4.25	80	80	A
As part of the ninth grade transition program, information should be communicated to the students about school and school programs	20	4.25	75	75	P
In the eighth grade year, middle school teachers should begin to articulate high school expectations to students and parents	20	4.20	85	85	P
The ninth grade transition program should help a cohort of students transition from middle to high school	20	3.95	85	70	P
The school should ensure that each ninth grade student establishes a positive connection with an adult in the building to be an additional support	20	4.65	85	100	SE
Each student should be involved in some sort of school activity, e.g. club, athletic team, theater arts, band, or chorus	20	3.90	75	65	SE
The ninth grade transition program should help ninth grade students gain the belief set that they need to overcome obstacles and find success	20	4.05	80	75	SE
The ninth grade transition program should decrease the students' anxiety concerning their move to the high school thereby improving student success	20	3.95	85	75	SE
The ninth grade transition program should promote positive youth development outcomes (e.g. connectedness, competence)	20	4.25	70	80	SE
The ninth grade transition program should make the high school feel "smaller" and more nurturing – providing additional oversight and prevent them from getting "lost in the shuffle"	20	4.10	85	85	SE
The ninth grade transition program should help students confidently integrate into the high school culture while maintaining the ability to make sound decisions that will positively impact their futures	19	3.89	80	65	SE
The ninth grade transition program should be very similar to a comprehensive guidance program in that it addresses the academic, personal/social, and career and college readiness need of every student	19	4.16	75	80	SE
The ninth grade transition program should prepare each student for post-secondary success in all its dimensions (academic success, college and career awareness and readiness, social/emotional, and 21 st century skills) that support academic and college and career success	20	4.05	70	75	A

Note. C = coding; A = academic, SE = social/emotional, P = procedural.

Component/Ingredient

Table 12 shows the analysis of the Round III Delphi Component/Ingredient questionnaire. For Round III, I asked panelists to rate 29 items as essential components of a ninth grade transition program a second time. All 20 panelists rated 26 of the items, and 19 panelists rated three of the items.

Six items received the same percentage of panelists rating them as either *very important* or *important*; 17 items received a lower approval percentage, and six items received a greater percentage of panelists rating them as *very important* or *important*. Of the six items receiving a higher approval percentage, two of the items reached the 90% threshold for consensus items. Of the two items that reached the consensus level, one item fit the academic category and one item fit the social/emotional category.

Coded as an academic item, “systematic monitoring for on-track indicators including daily attendance, grades leading to course failures, and credit accumulation,” went from an 85% rating in Round II to a 100% rating in Round III. Three additional panelists rated this item as *very important* or *important*, which means that all panelists agreed on this item. Coded as a social/emotional item, “celebration/student recognition programs,” went from a 75% rating in Round II to a 90% rating in Round III.

Table 12

Delphi III – Reconsidered Component/Ingredient Items

Item	n	M	Rd. II %	Rd. III %	C
A system that allows for progress monitoring and interventions for students – usually a team consisting of an administrator, counselor, and other supporting adults that regularly meets to review student data and progress and put supports in place when needed (interventions can be academic or otherwise)	19	4.37	85	80	A
Structured tutoring help available for students	20	3.80	75	65	A
Every student should have a learning goal that he/she assists in developing	20	3.60	70	50	A
A prescriptive program concentrating on tools for academic success (Cornell note taking, notebook organization, decision-making)	20	3.80	75	70	A
Ninth grade teachers provide examples of “A” work so students know what it looks like	20	3.70	70	60	A
Credit recovery options offered during the summer or during the school year	20	3.85	80	75	A
Rigorous and relevant learning experiences which will support equitable access and eliminate barriers (race, culture, socio-economic status, low academic skills) to academic success	20	4.20	85	85	A
Competency-based assessments to focus on mastery of key skills	20	3.95	85	80	A
There is no one size fits all approach – program should be dependent on context of situation	20	4.00	85	80	P
Exposing students to career planning connected to productive work habits, attitude, and relationship to educational attainment	20	3.80	70	60	SE
Significant academic and social counseling	19	3.95	70	70	SE
Parent involvement	20	4.05	80	65	SE
Enhanced support for literacy and algebra for all students, with special attention to struggling students (either through double-dose scheduling, supplemental classes or tutoring)	20	4.00	85	75	A
Commitment and involvement of whole school community (faculty) to do “whatever it takes” to support a successful ninth grade transition	20	4.40	80	85	SE
Support from district level	20	3.90	80	55	P
Systematic monitoring for on-track indicators including daily attendance, grades leading to course failures, and credit accumulation	20	4.25	85	100	A
Sufficient funding to make the elements of the transition program a priority	20	4.35	85	85	P
Connecting career planning and counseling to course planning and selection (intentional academic focus that includes navigating the pathway to career and college readiness and 21 st century skills)	20	3.95	75	75	SE
A model that develops positive student-teacher relationships that support student engagement (staff must be educated and/or continually retrained on the importance of positive student relationships)	20	4.35	85	85	SE
Focus on intentionally creating a just, fair, and caring school	20	4.25	80	85	SE
Reviewing freshman midterm grade distribution, disciplinary	20	4.00	70	75	A

Item	n	M	Rd. II %	Rd. III %	C
referrals, and attendance data at instructional team meetings (twice a quarter)					
Ninth grade students should be encouraged to participate in club, activity, theater, band, chorus, or athletic teams	20	4.05	85	80	SE
The transition program must have a defined mission that drives the day-to-day operation of the school and individual classrooms (e.g. every child, by need, every day to graduation)	20	3.80	80	60	SE
Program should emphasize core curricula and instruction	20	3.85	75	65	A
Transition program components should be connected to the vision of the school, e.g. what characteristics should ninth grade students have when they graduate	19	3.89	75	65	SE
Ninth grade teachers should promote effort by students – a never give up attitude while at the same time promoting intrinsic motivation	20	4.15	80	75	SE
All teachers should be familiar with their students’ academic and career plan, standardized test scores, achievement data and use them to promote academic growth	20	4.05	75	85	A
Discipline should be about changing behavior and no discipline conference should end without a discussion of academic growth	20	3.85	70	70	SE
Celebration/student recognition programs	20	4.10	75	90	SE

Note. C = coding; A = academic, SE = social/emotional, P = procedural.

Data/Measures

The final survey in Round III asked panelists to relook at 16 items regarding appropriate data to use when judging the effectiveness (i.e., Data/Measures) of a ninth grade transition program. Table 13 shows the analysis from Round III. All panelists rated 13 items, while 19 of the 20 panelists rated three items.

Panelists gave four items the same rating in Round III that they did in Round II. Eight items received a lower percentage of panelists rating them either *very important* or *important*, and four received a higher rating. Of the four items that received the higher rating, two items reached the 90% consensus threshold. The coding of the two items that reached the consensus level includes one that fit in the academic category and one that fit the social/emotional category.

Coded as an academic item, “on-track for graduation at the end of 9th grade (credit accumulation and end-of-course exam scores, if relevant),” moved from an 85% rating in Round

II to a perfect 100% rating in Round III. Additionally, the general item of “student morale,” classified as a social/emotional item, had one more panelists rate it either *very important* or *important*, moving its rating from 85% in Round II to 90% in Round III.

Table 13

Delphi III – Reconsidered Data/Measures Items

Item	n	M	Rd II %	Rd. III %	C
Enrollment rates to college and other post-secondary education	20	3.65	75	65	A
Grade trend data	20	4.00	80	70	A
Discipline referral data for ninth grade students	20	4.25	85	85	SE
Suspension/expulsion rate for ninth grade students (major discipline issues)	20	4.20	80	85	SE
Student tardiness to class	20	3.50	75	60	SE
Behavior intervention – how many ninth grade students respond to intervention and do not get another referral	20	4.00	80	80	SE
Number and frequency of parent/family conferences related to discipline	20	3.50	70	55	SE
Lexile/quantile scores – can students read at or above grade level	20	3.95	70	70	A
Efficacy of interventions for remedial and special needs students	19	3.89	75	65	A
Growth of students based on mastery (as opposed to grading or passing – grading in most high schools is subjective and incongruent with the mastery of standards)	20	4.35	85	85	A
Data used depends on goals/objectives of the program	19	4.11	85	80	P
On-track for graduation at the end of 9 th grade (credit accumulation and end-of-course exam scores, if relevant)	20	4.70	85	100	A
Student morale	20	4.30	85	90	SE
Impact of attendance data on academic performance	20	4.25	75	85	A
Percent of students that benefit from credit recovery opportunities	19	3.63	70	60	A
Monitoring of individual student goals	20	3.75	75	70	SE

Note. C = coding: A = academic, SE = social/emotional, P = procedural.

Consensus

Since the main purposes of using the Delphi technique is to gain consensus (Keeney et al., 2011), it is important to summarize the consensus items for the three research questions in this study. Achieving consensus on these items does not necessarily mean that the researcher discovered the correct answers, rather it means that the panel of participants has reached

consensus (Keeney et al., 2011). Additionally, just because items were deemed to reach consensus in Round II as opposed to Round III, does not mean that they are the highest research priorities, it simply means that they have reached consensus first (Keeney et al., 2011).

Goal/Objective

Starting with the open-ended research question, “What should be the goals/objectives of a comprehensive ninth grade transition program (i.e., academic success alone or are there other things that also are important),” the 20 panelists generated 83 responses. By grouping similar responses, I used the 50 identified items in Round II. Of these, 18 items in Round II were consensus items (i.e., 90% of the panel rated the item as either *very important* or *important*). In the Round III survey, I asked the panel to re-evaluate an additional 21 items and three more items reached the 90% consensus threshold. As a result, the panel identified 21 items as consensus items in response to the first research question. Of these items, 10 fit the academic needs category, eight items fit the social/emotional needs category, and three fit the procedural needs category. Table 14 shows the final consensus items for the research question on goals/objectives.

Table 14

Goal/Objective Consensus Items

Item	Rd. II %	Rd. III %	C
Each ninth grade student should successfully perform in his or her courses (especially core classes).	100	--	A
Incoming students need to feel a part of something in the new school environment, connect to something in the school, and develop ownership or investment in the school.	100	--	SE
The school should ensure that each ninth grade student establishes a positive connection with an adult in the building to be an additional support.	85	100	SE
Principal must establish the importance and commitment to a system of ninth grade transition.	100	--	P
Each student should be on track to graduate at the end of the ninth grade year (leave ninth grade with as many credits as possible).	95	--	A
Every student should achieve academic success.	95	--	A

Item	Rd. II %	Rd. III %	C
The school should provide deliberate supports to ensure academic success (study skills, organizational skills, time management, tutoring programs).	95	--	A
The school's overall ninth grade attendance should be above 95%.	95	--	A
Individual ninth grade attendance should be above 90% (any student having less than 80% should necessitate intensive intervention).	95	--	A
School should provide a rigorous and relevant curriculum that prepares students to be college and career ready.	85	95	A
Goals of the transition program should be based on needs of school and students.	80	95	P
As part of the ninth grade transition program, schools should have a monitoring system in place to check student academic progress and ensure that students are provided the necessary supports to undergird their academic progress.	95	--	A
As a part of the ninth grade transition program, the school should clarify high school expectations for school work, behavior, social interactions, building norms, etc.	95	--	P
The ninth grade transition program should make students aware of supports and resources available to help them in all areas (academic, social/emotional, substance abuse, etc.).	95	--	SE
The ninth grade transition program should support a seamless transition of the middle school student into high school readiness (academic, personal/social development, career development).	95	--	SE
Each student should develop an individual learning plan that guides him/her through the eighth grade year into high school through graduation.	90	--	A
The ninth grade transition program should address social and emotional adjustments to high school expectations, peer culture, and personal goals.	90	--	SE
As a result of the ninth grade transition program, each student should know where to go or to whom they can speak with regards to graduation concerns.	90	--	A
The school should provide opportunities for parent involvement and engagement in education of their child and the school in general.	90	--	SE
The ninth grade transition program should provide ninth graders with appropriate behavior support (students who get suspended in 9th grade are more likely to drop out).	90	--	SE
Each student should set realistic short term and long term goals that focus on academic achievement, skill development, building relationships, and attitude.	90	--	SE

Note. C = coding: A = academic, SE = social/emotional, P = procedural.

Component/Ingredient

The second research question posed to the panelists was, “What are the essential ingredients or components in a comprehensive ninth grade transition program?” The panel generated 112 responses to this open-ended question. I grouped similar responses to construct Round II of 80 items for the panel to rate. Eight items were consensus items (i.e., 90% of the panel rated them as either *very important* or *important*). I asked the panel to re-evaluate 29 items

in Round III, and two more items reached the threshold as consensus items. As a result, 10 items reached the consensus level for the research question on program components. Of these items, six fit the academic category, four fit the social/emotional needs category, and no items fit the procedural category. Table 15 shows the final consensus items for the components research question.

Table 15

Component/Ingredient Consensus Items

Item	Rd. II %	Rd. III %	C
Systematic monitoring for on-track indicators including daily attendance, grades leading to course failures, and credit accumulation	85	100	A
Having teachers be a part of Professional Learning Communities that meet on a regular basis with an agenda, minutes, and a focus on student learning	95	--	A
Constant monitoring and counseling to aid ninth grade students	95	--	SE
A team model - selected teachers, that share a common planning period, in the core subjects that work with the same group of students - the team provides standardized expectations, coordination of efforts, increased parental contact, coordination of support for struggling students	90	--	A
A way to track ninth grade student achievement	90	--	A
Celebration/student recognition programs	75	90	SE
Ninth grade students need high quality teachers - ones that have a growth mindset (belief that intelligence can grow, is not static), use high-yield instructional strategies, promote active engagement in every class, provide blended learning opportunities (i.e. lecture, on-line learning)	90	--	A
Assistance when students fail end of course standardized tests (e.g. Standards of Learning in Virginia)	90	--	A
Every faculty member needs to believe in a set of non-negotiables that are foundational with all ninth grade teachers (e.g. every child can learn, every child deserves a teacher's best effort every day)	90	--	SE
Include family, counselors, administrative resources and student resources when developing transition program	90	--	SE

Note. C = coding; A = academic, SE = social/emotional.

Data/Measures

I asked the expert panel, the third and final research question, “What measures or data should a high school principal use to judge the effectiveness of a ninth grade transition

program?” The 20 member panel produced 144 responses to this open-ended question. Since many responses were the same, I eliminated duplicates and group similar responses, which left 52 items for the panel to rate in Round II. I applied the same parameters to the results of Round II, i.e., if an item had 90% of the panel rate the item as either *very important* or *important*, I considered it a consensus item. Using this parameter, 13 items were consensus items. I asked the panel to re- evaluate 16 items in Round III, and two more items reached the threshold as consensus items. As a result, 15 items reached consensus for the data/measures research question. Of these items, 12 fit the academic category, three fit the social/emotional category, and no items fit the procedural category. Table 16 shows the final consensus items for the Data/Measures research question.

Table 16

Data/Measures Consensus Items

Item	Rd II %	Rd III %	C
Promotion to 10 th grade (emphasis on passing core subjects	100	--	A
On-track for graduation at the end of 9 th grade (credit accumulation and end-of-course exam scores, if relevant)	85	100	A
Attendance data	95	--	A
Retention rates	95	--	A
Amount of courses passed in the ninth grade year (number of credits toward graduation successfully attained)	95	--	A
Monitoring of grades during year (emphasis on core classes using, “D’s” and “F’s” as measure, including missed assignments	95	--	A
Reduction of failures in core classes	95	--	A
Student dropouts (class cohorts, grade-level cohorts, school-wide)	95	--	A
On-track for graduation at the end of 10 th and 11 th grade (credit accumulation and end-of-course exam scores, if relevant)	95	--	A
Graduation data	90	--	A
Review of first marking period grades	90	--	A

Item	Rd II %	Rd III %	C
Student discipline consequences and its impact on academic performance	90	--	A
Student engagement in the school	90	--	SE
Equity/success for all students	90	--	SE
Student morale	85	90	SE

Note. C = coding: 1 A = academic, SE = social/emotional.

Summary

I used the Delphi method to identify the goals of a ninth grade transition program, the essential components of a ninth grade transition program, and the appropriate data/measures to use to judge the effectiveness of a ninth grade transition program. A panel of 20 experts agreed to participate in the three-round process. The Round I Delphi instrument consisted of three open-ended questions related to the respective research questions. During this round, the panel generated 50 goal items, 80 component items, and 52 data items. I used these items to create the Round II Delphi survey. This round, which consisted of three separate questionnaires (goals, components, data), included the 182 items from Round I. Panelists used the following five-point Likert-type scale to judge the degree of importance for each item: (1) *not important*; (2) *slightly important*; (3) *somewhat important*; (4) *important*; (5) *very important*. I determined that 39 items reached consensus (at least 90% of panelists rated them *very important* or *important*), 78 items were too far from consensus, and 65 items were close enough to consensus for the panel to rerate them in the third round. Round III included only those items (N = 65) that the panel needed to reconsider. I arranged the items into three separate questionnaires for the three research categories (goals, components, and data). Using the same percentage threshold used for Round II, I identified seven additional items that reached consensus.

In summary, the expert panel generated the largest number of consensus items for the goal/objective (n=21) of a ninth grade transition program. These items tended to be more general or of the big picture type thinking that led to more agreement among experts. The least amount of consensus came from the essential components (n=10) of a ninth grade transition program. Although, this question initially resulted in the largest number of items, many of the ideas were specific, and the panel scrutinized these details. Educators should still consider items that did not reach consensus from this research question as potentially viable options when developing a ninth grade transition program. The expert panel generated 15 consensus items related to data/measures to judge the effectiveness of a ninth grade transition program.

The consensus items from the research question on the goal/objective of a ninth grade transition reflected an academic focus (n=10), such as "student performance in core subjects," "academic supports provided to ninth grade students," and "students staying on track for graduation". Other areas of focus from these consensus items centered on social/emotional supports (n=8) for students to include "establishing a positive connection to the school and adults in the building," "understanding expectations," "knowledge of available resources," and "overall adjustment to high school."

The consensus items from the research question on essential components/ingredients of a ninth grade transition program centered on two major areas, namely academic and social/emotional. Academic items (n=6) centered on systematic monitoring of ninth grade students, teacher quality, instructional practices of the teachers, and academic assistance. Social/Emotional items (n=4) focused on aid provided to ninth grade students, student recognition programs, teacher beliefs in student success, and the inclusion of multiple stakeholders in the planning process to include family, school counselors, and students.

Finally, consensus items on the correct data/measures to use when judging the effectiveness of a ninth grade transition program overwhelmingly clustered on the academic area (n=12). Almost all consensus items were measures that specifically connected to academic success (promotion, grades, attendance, courses passed). Other consensus items (n=3) focused on student engagement, student success, and student morale, but without the specifics of how exactly these items could be measured.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This chapter contains a summary of the three-round Delphi study on the ninth grade transition. It includes a discussion on the findings of the study by connecting consensus items to the literature. This chapter also includes a discussion of the implications for practice and recommendations for further research.

Description of the Study

I conducted a three-round Delphi study in an attempt to gain consensus from an independent panel on issues related to the ninth grade transition. National experts and practitioners made up the 20-member panel. In each of the three rounds, panelists responded to the following questions based on the three research questions:

- What should be the goals/objectives of a comprehensive ninth grade transition program (i.e., academic success alone or are there other things that also are important);
- What are the essential ingredients or components in a comprehensive ninth grade transition program; and
- What measures or data should a high school principal use to judge the effectiveness of a ninth grade transition program?

In Round I of the Delphi study, panelists independently generated answers in response to the three research questions. The panelists could provide input as they wished based on the open-ended questions and they were free of any bias from hearing each other's opinions. Based on these responses, I created the Round II Delphi survey consisting of one questionnaire for each research question—goals, components, and data/measures.

In the Round II survey, panelists rated the degree of importance of each item. If 90% of the panel rated an item as *very important* or *important*, it was a consensus item from the group. If less than 70% of the panel rated an item as *very important* or *important*, I eliminated it because it was too far from the consensus threshold. Finally, I used items that did not meet the threshold to be a consensus item but were close to 90% to create the Round III survey (goals, objectives, data/measures).

In Round III, before panelists re-evaluated any items, I provided them the list of items that reached consensus and the list of items that were no longer under consideration because they were too far from consensus. I also gave panelists the Round II rating of each item they were to re-consider and then asked the panelists to re-evaluate each item on the same rating scale used in Round II.

Findings Related to the Literature

Many of the consensus items from this study connect to the available literature on the ninth grade transition. While other consensus items do not directly connect on the surface to the relevant literature, at some level they each can connect, albeit indirectly or after some discussion of the true meaning of the consensus item.

Goal/Objective

The 21 consensus items from this study related to the question on ninth grade transition goals present the most balanced approach related to Akos and Galassi's (2004a) assertion that an effective comprehensive ninth grade transition program must address three areas: academic needs of students, social/emotional needs of students, and procedural needs of students. Ten of the consensus items fit the academic category, eight consensus items fit in the social/emotional category, and three items fit the procedural category.

Academic needs. Ninth grade transition goals directly related to the academic needs of students are important, necessary, and proven. This research confirmed their priority. Student academic success must be a goal of an effective ninth grade transition program. Addressing academic needs of students includes deliberate supports (i.e., study skills, organizational skills, time management skills) to ensure their academic success (Johnson, 2009; Kerr, 2002; Smith, 2009). High school academic readiness must start before the student arrives in ninth grade. High schools with comprehensive transition programs vertically articulate with their feeder middle school(s) to ensure that, at the beginning of eighth grade, students prepare personal learning plans from eighth grade to graduation (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004). This vertical articulation also ensures that the middle school properly prepares their students for the rigors and expectations of high school courses by taking the appropriate prerequisite classwork (Alspaugh, 1998; Anderson, 2008; Cooney & Bottoms, 2002; Smith, 1997). Once the ninth grade students begin their high school course work, the school must have a systematic monitoring program in place to focus on their academic performance in the core classes that includes appropriate interventions that are timely and targeted.

Social/Emotional needs. Ninth grade transition program goals that address the social/emotional needs of students are vital to the success of the program. Addressing the social/emotional needs of students will benefit student and school academic success (Akos and Galassi, 2004a). One without the other sabotages the success of the transition program and the student.

All panel members agreed that a goal of an effective ninth grade transition program must center on the importance of the incoming students connecting to the high school in some way. This connection enhances a student's ownership and investment in the school and is important to

a student's emotional well-being and feeling of support as they transition to high school (Barber & Olsen, 2004; Blum & Rinehart, 1997; Wheelock & Miao, 2005). Ensuring that each ninth grade student establishes a positive connection with an adult in the building enhances the probability of student success in the high school transition (Henderson, 2012; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004). For some students, these connections happen naturally; for others, the school community must ensure that it happens by taking deliberate and purposeful actions.

Resiliency is the capacity in individuals that enables them to self-correct during difficult times or risks (Bernard, 2007). The panel did not develop a goal overtly related to students' resiliency during the transition to ninth grade. However, several of the consensus items encompass the concept of resiliency. Specifically, students need be aware of supports and resources available to them including who they can see with graduation concerns, how they can modify behavior to support their academic success, and how to focus on short term and long-term goals. In a sense, these items give students the necessary skills to build resiliency. All of these consensus items play a role in developing resiliency in students that assist them to be successful during the ninth grade transition, in high school, and in life (Bernard, 2007; Henderson, 2012).

One of the panel's consensus goals encapsulates the importance of parent involvement in a student's transition to high school (Akos & Galassi, 2004a; Birmon & Espino, 2007). Involvement of parents in the student's course work (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000), educational plan, and the school in general is critical in meeting the social/emotional needs of the student and to assist the successful navigation of the ninth grade year (Birmon & Espino, 2007). The consensus of the expert panel to include parents in the transition program is not to be underestimated.

Parents are an underutilized resource that can make a tangible difference in a child's high school success.

Procedural needs. Akos and Galassi (2004a) defined meeting the procedural needs of students as anything that helps address student concerns related to moving from a simpler environment to a more complex school environment. These researchers cite examples such as getting lost in the school and riding the bus as two procedural needs of students. The expert panel's consensus goals did not center on these specific issues but did address the importance of the school setting the stage for high school expectations, behavior, social interactions, and an understanding of building norms. Other specific procedural needs surfaced in initial answers in Round I, but they did not make it to the consensus threshold.

Component/Ingredient

The 10 consensus items from this study related to identifying the essential components of a ninth grade transition program address two of the three areas that Akos and Galassi (2004a) contend need attention in an effective comprehensive ninth grade transition program. Of the panel's 10 consensus items, six fit into the academic category and four fit into the social/emotional category. The consensus items themselves did not provide any surprises based on the connection to the literature and all items either can directly or indirectly connect with the literature. Notably absent in the consensus items was any component related to the procedural needs of students. Additionally, no consensus item or even one item submitted by any panel member in Round I for identifying essential components addressed the needs of special populations, such as English Language Learners.

Academic needs. The focus on a ninth grade student's academic preparedness, progress, and support is paramount in a successful transition (Akos & Galassi, 2004a; Alspaugh, 1998;

Anderson, 2008; Kerr, 2002; Smith, 2009). Having a systematic monitoring plan for ninth grade students is a critical component of a ninth grade transition program (Abbott & Fisher, 2012; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2011, 2004). The expert panel specified that any systematic monitoring plan needs to keep track of crucial indicators like daily attendance, student grades, and the accumulation of credits toward graduation.

The selection of teachers, the makeup of the structures that support ninth grade teachers (to include the use of a teaming model or collaborative teams within professional learning communities), and the guiding philosophy in working with transitioning students were consistent themes in several of the consensus component items. This idea includes a middle school-like teaming approach, with teachers having common planning time to work together on expectations, parental contact, and coordination of effort for the benefit of the students (Alspaugh, 1998; Kemple et al., 2005; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004; Quint et al., 1999).

Social/Emotional needs. Embedded in two of the four consensus items that fit into the social/emotional category is the concept of including professional school counselors in meeting the needs of ninth grade students. First, the idea that counselors, students, and families must be integral in the development of a transition program highlights the need for a balanced approach in assisting ninth grade students with their transition. Second, ensuring that students receive constant monitoring and counseling to support them indicates the necessity to oversee and support the ninth grade student during this difficult phase of their school career.

Teacher quality related to the ability to build rapport with students and attend to their social/emotional needs only surfaces slightly in the literature. Akos and Galassi's (2004a)

research indicated students' wishing teachers would be nicer at first. Wheelock and Miao (2005) spoke to the importance of ninth grade teachers connecting with students.

Ensuring that principals assign quality teachers that have the ability to build positive rapport with ninth grade students is an often-overlooked component of a transition program. In this research, the expert panel identified the need for every faculty member working with ninth grade students to share a belief system that every child can learn and that every child deserves a teacher's best effort every day. The academic category of essential components references several other items related to teacher quality. The fact that ninth grade students need high quality teachers, ones that can meet all the needs of the ninth grade student, is a theme that permeates throughout the results of this study.

Data/Measures

The 15 consensus items from this study related to the question about the appropriate data/measures to use in judging the effectiveness of a ninth grade transition program lean heavily to the academic category. For this question, it was surprising that the expert panel reached consensus mostly on items heavily centered on academics. The literature indicated that it is important to ensure that a ninth grade transition program encompasses academic, social/emotional, and procedural components (Akos & Galassi, 2004a); therefore, it is equally important that there are data to measure the effectiveness in all three areas.

Of the panel's 15 consensus items, 12 fit into the academic category and three fit into the social/emotional category. The literature supported all of the consensus items that fit into the academic category. Of the social/emotional category consensus items, the literature also supports student engagement as a measure for the effectiveness of a ninth grade transition

program. As with the consensus items for the previous question, absent in the consensus items for this question are any items related to the procedural needs of students.

Academic needs. The expert panel's consensus items deliver direct, straightforward, pragmatic ways for a school principal to examine the success of a ninth grade transition program. The consensus items include determining that students are passing classes (especially core classes), have enough credits to make it to tenth grade, and are on-track to graduate (Kemple et al., 2005; Quint et al., 1999). Other important data include student attendance rates (Kemple et al., 2005; Roskosky, 2006) and student dropout rates (Smith, 1997).

Social/Emotional needs. The expert panel did not identify many measures that address the social/emotional needs of students. Of the three items identified, the literature supports two of them. The ability to measure student engagement in the school is important when determining the success of the ninth grade transition program (Quint, 1999). Equally important is determining student morale during the adjustment of these students to high school (Roskosky, 2006). This research did not define the specifics of how to measure student engagement or student morale; there are myriad ways to accomplish this task. While, these measurements may take a little more time to plan and analyze than some of the academic measures, and the techniques to obtain these data may not be as easy or clean as the academic data, the expert panel's message is clear; it is important to incorporate these data points in determining the overall effectiveness of the transition program.

Special Populations

The panel did not identify any consensus items that related to the specific needs of special populations of students. With the dramatic increase in the English Language Learner (ELL) population, the literature addresses the need for ninth grade transition programs to target

specifically these learners (Abbott & Hastings, 2012; Lara & Harford, 2010). The lack of consensus items in this research and lack of any items mentioned in Round I is surprising. Many different reasons could attribute to the dearth of items related to ELLs in this study, but, based on the literature review and the emergence of challenges with on-time graduation rates for high schools, I had an expectation for someone on the panel to bring forth specific items related to ELLs.

Implications for Practice

Findings from this study give school principals and leaders some guidelines from which to develop or modify a comprehensive ninth grade transition program. Based on the makeup of the Delphi panel, high school educators should feel confident in the findings because both leading researchers across the country as well as some of the top practitioners involved with high schools contributed to the development of items and determined the consensus items. These elements should provide the basis of any quality program.

The most serious implication of this research for school principals is the importance of creating goals and including components of a ninth grade transition program that address both the academic needs of students and the social/emotional needs of students. The consensus items for both these areas reflect a balanced approach when designing and creating an effective program. The temptation in today's climate of over-testing and the pressures associated with standardized testing might be to overemphasize the academic needs of the student, at the expense and detriment in addressing all the needs of the teen transitioning to high school. Principals must stand firm in the knowledge that student success in high school and in life occurs when a school meets the social/emotional developmental needs of the student, the academic needs of the student, and the procedural needs of the student.

This research did not specify which consensus items would be more effective with the struggling student or the disengaged learner; however, educators can still learn much from the results of this study when working with these students. Previously, some have attempted to work with these students by “doubling up” on algebra instruction or English class. While providing appropriate academic support for these students is important, this specific solution did not reach the consensus level. Clearly, this research shows that ensuring that students feel “connected” to the school and have a positive connection with an adult in the building are just as important as providing academic support. Again, the key to success is that these items work together to assist students. One, in isolation without the other, will only lead to frustration and not meet the needs of these learners.

In the development of ninth grade transition programs, it is essential that principals and school communities recognize that there must be alignment when developing goals, deciding on components, and choosing the appropriate measures. Components developed should support the overall goals of the program. Once a school develops the goals and creates the components, then the choice of the correct data/measures for analysis will assist principals and school communities in determining the effectiveness of the program, and what modifications they need to make in the future.

Goal/Objective

As discovered in this study, it is easy to include many items as goals of a ninth grade transition program. In response to the Round I Delphi, panelists identified a multitude of items as possibilities. For example, an item such as, “ninth grade students should become intrinsically motivated” is certainly a worthwhile aspiration, but is it a goal of a ninth grade transition program or an overall goal of a student’s time in high school? Many educators would agree that

having all high school students become intrinsically motivated is a desired characteristic of a high school graduate. As educators define goals of a ninth grade transition program, there is a danger of blurring the lines between overall goals for a high school graduate and a ninth grade transition. The ninth grade transition program cannot accomplish everything, and if educators focus too broadly on the goals of the program it might not have the immediate outcomes needed to support the successful transition of ninth grade students into high school. In practice, it is important for those designing a ninth grade transition program to define specifically the goals of the program as opposed to the characteristics of a high school graduate.

The 21 consensus items on goals should be a starting point for a principal or school community designing a ninth grade transition program or modifying an existing one. The fact that researchers, national leaders, and award winning practitioners have endorsed these items gives credibility to the items. However, even though they all reached consensus level, realistically speaking, 21 goals are too many for an individual ninth grade transition program. Thus, a school based leadership team might consider these in the beginning of their discussions as they specifically design a program that is the right fit for their community.

The four items from the goals question that received 100% consensus are an excellent foundation for any program. These goals address all three areas identified by Akos and Galassi (2004a) as being necessary for a comprehensive ninth grade transition program. The first item clearly includes the academic needs of students and purpose of a ninth grade transition program for students to do well in classes and ultimately progress to the 10th grade. In fact, promotion to the 10th grade, on-track for graduation, and achieving academic success all support the facts related to dropouts and graduation. That is, to enhance the probability of students graduating, it is imperative that they move through school with their peer group. Nationally, the “ninth grade

bulge” indicates that for many students they never make it out of 10th grade. The next two consensus items show that to reach this academic goal, a school must meet the social/emotional needs of students. Feeling the connection to school and connecting with an adult advocate in the building are important to transition students successfully. In short, meeting the academic needs of the student becomes significantly more challenging without these connections. When discussing students that were not successful in school previously, or became disengaged in middle school, then I cannot understate the importance of these items.

Principals would do well to start their discussions on program development with these four goals:

- Each ninth grade student should successfully perform in their courses (especially core classes);
- Incoming students need to feel a part of something in the new school environment, connect to something in the school and develop ownership or investment in the school;
- The school should ensure that each ninth grade student establishes a positive connection with an adult in the building to be an additional support.
- Principals must establish the importance and commitment to a system of ninth grade transition;

To fit the needs of an individual school’s situation, a school community might revise these statements or add additional items, but, as written, they encompass the major goals that a ninth grade transition program should strive to accomplish. Again, the goals of a ninth grade transition program must address the academic needs, the social/emotional needs, and the procedural needs of the students.

Component/Ingredient

After the Round I Delphi, panelists identified a large number of potential essential components for a ninth grade transition program. Progressing through rounds II and III to reach consensus with the group caused many items to fail to achieve the threshold established. The final 10 consensus items include six focused on the academic needs of students and four on the social/emotional needs. The consensus items do not include any procedural items that an educator would quickly name as components in a ninth grade transition program (e.g., tours of the building, what to do for early dismissals or when you are absent, how to handle lunchtime, or open lockers). It is important to note that these items might be important, but the expert panel did not reach consensus on these when determining the most essential components of a comprehensive program. A principal and/or school community should not discount the importance of these items if they are determined to be such by the school community.

In this category, the one item that received 100% of panel agreement is that a ninth grade transition program should include a “systematic monitoring for on-track indicators including daily attendance, grades leading to course failures, and credit accumulation.” School leaders should note that all panelists (researchers, national leaders, and school practitioners) highly rated the importance of this item. Based on this agreement, incorporating a monitoring system for ninth grade students’ progress is critical for the success of any ninth grade transition program.

The importance of a principal’s careful selection of teachers working with ninth grade students is a clear mandate by the expert panel. Consensus items include the fact that ninth grade students need high quality, progressive teachers working in collaborative teams as part of a Professional Learning Community. Setting up a master schedule that allows teachers the time to share a common planning period to meet regularly to focus on student learning is a key to

success. Creating the ninth grade core classes in a team model, while challenging in certain situations, will pay off for student success. Ninth grade students need teachers that can balance the need to engage students with quality lessons and high expectations but also develop the necessary rapport with students to forge a positive connection with them. This connection provides ninth grade students with an adult support in the building and someone that understands their social/emotional needs during this difficult transition time.

In a ninth grade transition program, a principal must include components that address the social/emotional needs of the student. The inclusion of professional school counselors in this aspect of the planning is critical to ensuring that the school meets these needs of the student. Components that ensure students know the resources available to them to include teachers, counselors, the social worker, school nurse, the school psychologist, and others will help address all the needs of students.

Data/Measures

It should be no surprise that in an era of data emphasis, this category received the highest number of raw items of the three questions. While a number of items were duplicates or similar to each other, the fact that this research question had the largest number indicates that educators have become well versed in understanding the importance of measuring the performance of any program. Again, the results of this study and the 15 consensus items in this category can help principals define the purpose of their ninth grade transition program. While the items in this category ranged from the specific (e.g., “promotion to 10th grade”) to the general (e.g., “equity/success for all students”), it is important for the practitioner to remember that the ninth grade transition program cannot fix all ills in education.

The two items to receive complete 100% endorsement from the expert panel included:

- promotion to tenth grade (emphasis on passing core subjects); and
- on-track for graduation at the end of ninth grade (credit accumulation and end-of-course exam scores, if relevant).

These two items are easily measured, direct, and pragmatic. However, principals should realize that comprehensive ninth grade transition programs contain elements that focus on academic, social, and procedural needs (Akos & Galassi, 2004a); therefore, data used to measure effectiveness should include tools to encompass all three elements.

Recommendations for Further Research

The investment of further research can strengthen and validate the importance and relevance of these findings. First, a replication of this study using the Delphi method with a different panel of educational experts and practitioners would provide important verification. By comparing and contrasting the data from this study with the data from a replicated one would either strengthen the findings or lead to different consensus items.

Further research to clarify the implementation timing of certain ninth grade transition program components could enhance the findings of this study. For example, clarifying what components a transition program should accomplish during a student's eighth grade year, during the summer prior to high school entrance, in the first month of high school, and by the end of the ninth grade year.

Research to address the specific ninth grade transition needs of English learners, students with special needs, students identified as gifted and talented, students identified in middle school as disengaged, and other special populations is needed and would serve as a complement to this study. The increase in English learners nationally and the emphasis on all graduation rates of all student groups links the need to ensure that schools are meeting the needs of these populations of

students as well. The discovery of unique goals and components in transitioning these students to high school would greatly assist school principals.

Finally, replicating this study but using a panel made up of different stakeholders could expand the findings of my research. Using a panel made up of teachers, parents, and/or students addressing the same three questions could give school administrators a more complete analysis of the appropriate approach to designing and implementing their ninth grade transition programs.

Concluding Remarks

The importance of the ninth grade transition is not under debate (Cook et al., 2008; Habeeb, 2013; Legters & Kerr, 2001; Smith, 2007). For many students, this juncture is the most important aspect of their schooling and determines their success in school as well as in the future (Herlihy, 2007). The care at which a principal establishes a comprehensive transition program is essential in ensuring that students are successful in high school. Administrators must pay attention to the whole child during the transition. In my experience as a high school principal, a student's success or failure during the transition influences both academic issues and social issues. Those students who connect to the school usually do well in the classroom. In my experience as a parent going through the high school transition with children, this research has solidified my belief that parents are an underutilized resource during the ninth grade transition.

The findings of this research provide high school principals with concrete ideas to consider when designing, revising, implementing, and evaluating a ninth grade transition program. School administrators and school communities should strongly consider the consensus items as well as the other items contributed by the panel in this research. Ultimately, an administrator needs to put together a comprehensive transition plan that best suits the needs of the community served.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A	Round I Delphi Survey
Appendix B	Round II Delphi Survey
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Appendix A Round I Delphi Survey

Dear _____,

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this research study. As explained to you previously, you are one of 22 national panelists selected to participate so your input is extremely valuable. This study is simple and straightforward. Your participation should not require you to invest a significant amount of time.

As a quick review, the research is a three round Delphi study centered on the ninth grade transition. Specifically, through the research, I will be examining the goals/objectives of a comprehensive ninth grade transition program, the essential components of a ninth grade transition program, and the appropriate data to examine the success of a ninth grade transition program. The Delphi method supports the blending of the thoughts and opinions of national experts, researchers, and practitioners.

The attached survey is round one of the three round Delphi. It consists of three open-ended questions. The remaining two Delphi rounds will be formulated based on the compiled answers from all panel members. Your responses will be anonymous to the rest of the panel members and no response will be attributed directly to you. With your permission, your name and title will appear in the final report as a panelist.

Although the return of the questionnaire will imply your consent to participate in this research, I have attached the same consent information provided in the initial recruitment email to ensure complete transparency. This document is simply provided for your information.

Do not hesitate to contact me with any questions. Please email this questionnaire back to healey@pwcs.edu by October 25, 2013, or you may fax the completed questionnaire to my attention at (703) [REDACTED]. If you would prefer to receive this questionnaire in hard copy through the U.S. Mail, please let me know and I will be happy to provide this to you.

Sincerely,
Tim Healey

Doctoral Candidate - Virginia Tech
healey@pwcs.edu

Directions: Please answer the three open-ended questions as completely as you wish. Feel free to add additional thoughts as necessary. Individual quotes will not be attributed to anyone specifically, but may be used as part of reporting data. Please use space below each question to answer. Answers may be in any form you wish (narrative, list, etc.)

Question #1 – What should be the goals/objectives of a comprehensive ninth grade transition program (i.e., academic success alone or are there other things that also are important)?

Question #2 - What are the essential ingredients or components in a comprehensive ninth grade transition program (please list and provide a brief explanation if necessary)?

Sample Answers:

- *All ninth grade students should be on a team in their four core subjects. That is, similar to the middle school teaming concept, students rotate through the same teachers with a group of their peers.*
- *The schools should physically be restructured to keep ninth grade students in one geographic area of the school away from the older students.*

Question #3 – What measures or data should a high school principal use to judge the effectiveness of a ninth grade transition program?

Sample Answers:

- *Success of a ninth grade transition program is measured by the amount of courses passed in the ninth grade year.*
- *Promotion to 10th grade (however that is defined in a local school district).*
- *Graduation Rate*

Additional Thoughts? - Please add any additional thoughts based on the above questions as related to the ninth grade transition

Thank you for completing this questionnaire! Please save your answers in this word document and then attach in an email to healeyt@pwcs.edu. If more convenient, print a hard copy of your responses and fax to (██████████) attn: Tim Healey. Please return completed questionnaire by October 25, 2013. Thank you.

Appendix B Round II Delphi Survey

Dear _____,

Thank you for your response to the first Delphi round questionnaire on the ninth grade transition. You are participating in this research as one of 22 expert panelists and your input remains critically important to this study.

As a quick review, this research is a three round Delphi study centered on the ninth grade transition. Specifically, the research is examining the goals/objectives of a comprehensive program, the essential components of a ninth grade transition program, and the appropriate data to examine the success of a ninth grade transition program. The Delphi method supports the blending of the thoughts and opinions of national experts, researchers, and practitioners.

The Delphi II instrument utilizes the Virginia Tech Survey Maker. Clicking the link embedded in this email will take you directly to the second round surveys. This instrument was created based on the data provided by all 22 panelists in round one. For each of the original questions, the answers have been grouped into three categories: goals, components/ingredients, and data. Please read the directions carefully and indicate the appropriate response for each item. Each survey should take you approximately 10 minutes.

Once you complete the three surveys, I will automatically be notified by the system. Please complete the three surveys by February 10, 2014.

Survey #1 - Goals (50 questions) -

<https://survey.vt.edu/survey/entry.jsp?id=1390849535267>

Survey #2 - Components (80 questions) -

<https://survey.vt.edu/survey/entry.jsp?id=1390848245382>

Survey #3 - Data (52 questions) -

<https://survey.vt.edu/survey/entry.jsp?id=1390849238082>

Thank you again for your participation, time, and expertise. Do not hesitate to contact us with any questions at healeyt@pwcs.edu or by phone at [703-791-8710](tel:703-791-8710) or [571-238-6167](tel:571-238-6167).

Sincerely,

Tim Healey
Doctoral Candidate - Virginia Tech

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Delphi Round II - Question #1 - Goals/Objectives

The following items are the aggregate results of panel members' responses to the Round 1 Delphi question #1, "What should be the goals/objectives of a comprehensive ninth grade transition program (i.e. academic success alone or are there other things that also are important)?"

DIRECTIONS: For each item, rate the degree of importance as a goal or objective of a comprehensive ninth grade transition program.

1. Each student should successfully complete and graduate high school in four years

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

2. Each student should be on track to graduate at the end of the ninth grade year (leave ninth grade with as many credits as possible)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

3. Each student should develop an individual learning plan that guides him/her through the eighth grade year into high school through graduation

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

4. Every student should achieve academic success

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

5. Each ninth grade student should receive guidance on having a balanced academic course load

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

6. School should provide a rigorous and relevant curriculum that prepares students to be college and career ready

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

7. Goals of program should be based on needs of school and students

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

8. Goals of program should be based on district data and contextual needs

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

9. Each student should be encouraged to focus on effort and persistence

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

10. The school should provide deliberate supports to ensure academic success (study skills, organizational skills, time management, tutoring programs)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

11. The ninth grade transition program should develop critical thinking skills for freshmen

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

12. Each ninth grade student should successfully perform in their courses (especially core classes)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

13. The ninth grade transition program should help students explore their interests and strengths and to understand the connection/relevance of their academic experience to their future aspirations

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

14. The ninth grade transition program should incorporate college/career awareness and know-how early in a student's high school experience (exploration of careers and post-secondary planning)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

15. The school's overall ninth grade attendance should be above 95%

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

16. Individual ninth grade attendance should be above 90% (any student having less than 80% should necessitate intensive intervention)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

17. As part of the ninth grade transition program, schools should have a monitoring system in place to check student academic progress and ensure that students are provided the necessary supports to undergird their academic progress

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

18. The ninth grade transition program should address social and emotional adjustment to high school expectations, peer culture, and personal goals

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

19. As part of the ninth grade transition program, communication should be provided to the students about school and school programs

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

20. As a part of the ninth grade transition program, the school should clarify high school expectations for school work, behavior, social interaction, building norms, etc.

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

21. In the eighth grade year, middle school teachers should begin to articulate high school expectations to students and parents

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

22. As a result of the ninth grade transition program, each student should become intrinsically motivated

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

23. As a result of the ninth grade transition program, each student should know where to go or to whom they can speak with regards to graduation concerns

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

24. The ninth grade transition program should help a cohort of students transition from middle to high school

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

25. The school should enable and ensure that each ninth grade student establishes a positive connection with an adult in the building to be an additional support

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

26. The ninth grade transition program should make students aware of supports and resources available to help them in all areas (academic, social/emotional, substance abuse, etc.)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

27. The school should provide opportunities for parent involvement and engagement in their education of their child and the school in general

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

28. Each student should be involved in some sort of school activity, club, athletic team, theater arts, band, or chorus

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

29. In the student's eighth grade year, students and parents should be introduced to extra and co-curricular offerings at the high school

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

30. Incoming students need to feel a part of something in the new school environment, connect to something in the school and develop ownership or investment in the school

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

31. The ninth grade transition program should have upperclassmen reach out and connect with incoming students

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

32. The ninth grade transition program should help ninth grade students gain the belief set that they need to overcome obstacles and find success

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

33. The ninth grade transition program should support a seamless transition of the middle school student into high school readiness (academic, personal/social development, career development)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

34. The ninth grade transition programs should prepare students to cope with different social situations that they may not have experienced before (substance use and abuse, romantic/sexual relationships, self-advocacy, driving, peer pressure and general problems of interpersonal relationships with other adolescents and adults)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

35. The ninth grade transition programs should decrease the students' anxiety concerning their move to the high school thereby improving student success

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

36. The ninth grade transition programs should focus on the whole child and incorporate information about exercise, nutrition, and how the brain works

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

37. The ninth grade transition program should promote positive youth development outcomes (e.g. connectedness, competence)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

38. The ninth grade transition program should help students cope with the personal issues of being an adolescent student (responsibility, self-directed learning, sexual orientation, identity, self-awareness)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

39. The ninth grade transition program should make the high school "smaller" and more nurturing - providing additional oversight and prevent them from getting "lost in the shuffle"

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

40. The ninth grade transition program should provide ninth graders with appropriate behavior support (students who get suspended in 9th grade are more likely to drop out)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

41. A comprehensive ninth grade transition program needs to address social confusion, emotional stress, and loss of control

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

42. The ninth grade transition program should help students confidently integrate into the high school culture while maintaining the ability to make sound decisions that will positively impact their futures

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

43. Each student should set realistic short term and long term goals that focus on academic achievement, skill development, building relationships, and attitude

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

44. The ninth grade transition program should address social and emotional issues related to adolescent development and growth

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

45. The ninth grade transition program should focus on study habits, self-esteem, peer relationships, decision-making, healthy living

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

46. The ninth grade transition programs should be very similar to a comprehensive guidance program in that it addresses the academic, personal/social, and career and college readiness need of every student

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

47. The ninth grade transition program should prepare each student for post-secondary success in all its dimensions (academic success, college and career awareness and readiness, social/emotional, and 21st century skills that support academic and college and career success)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

48. Principal must establish the importance and commitment to a system of ninth grade transition

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

49. The ninth grade transition programs should address literacy development, particularly reading comprehension strategies for expository text and critical analysis

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

50. The ninth grade transition program should address mathematical and symbolic reasoning, largely through high caliber algebra instruction

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

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Delphi Round II - Question #2 – Components/Ingredients

The following items are the aggregate results of panel members' responses to the Round 1 Delphi question #2, "What are the essential ingredients or components in a comprehensive ninth grade transition program (please list and provide a brief explanation if necessary)?"

DIRECTIONS: For each item, rate how important it is for a high school principal to include the identified ingredient or component as part of a comprehensive ninth grade transition program.

1. A team model - selected teachers, that share a common planning period, in the core subjects that work with the same group of students - the team provides standardized expectations, coordination of efforts, increased parental contact, coordination of support for struggling students

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

2. A way to track ninth grade student achievement

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

3. Having teachers be a part of Professional Learning Communities that meet on a regular basis with an agenda, minutes, and a focus on student learning

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

4. A system that allows for progress monitoring and interventions for students - usually a team consisting of an administrator, counselor, and other supporting adults that regularly meets to review student data and progress and put supports in place when needed (interventions can be academic or otherwise)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

5. A system, not reliant on teachers, that identifies students for remediation

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

6. After school homework labs for students

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

7. Structured tutoring help available for students

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

8. Students below grade level in math and English should be "doubled up" during the ninth grade year in these areas

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

9. A rigorous academic schedule (i.e. "doubling up" in math and English)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

10. A structured schedule that eases ninth grade students into the complexities of high school (i.e. one in which ninth graders do not have to focus on 7 different classes in one day)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

11. Every student should have a learning goal that he/she assists in developing

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

12. A prescriptive program concentrating on tools for academic success (Cornell note taking, notebook organization, decision-making)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

13. Ninth grade students need high quality teachers - ones that have a growth mindset (belief that intelligence can grow, is not static), use high-yield instructional strategies, promote active student engagement in every class, provide blended learning opportunities (i.e. lecture, on-line learning)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

14. A dedicated ninth grade school counselor

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

15. A ninth grade technical exploratory program allowing students to explore all technical programs

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

16. Ninth grade teachers provide examples of "A" work so students know what it looks like

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

17. Adult to student mentor program

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

18. Student to student mentor program

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

19. A required freshman 101/seminar type course providing additional support (study skills, personal/social aspects, college and career planning, decision-making)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

20. A summer academy which provides support in math and English, mentors to work with students individually, learn what to expect during freshman year, and what resources are available to students

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

21. Credit recovery options offered during the summer or during the school year

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

22. Assistance when students fail end of course standardized tests (e.g. Standards of Learning in Virginia)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

23. Rigorous and relevant learning experiences which will support equitable access and eliminate barriers (race, culture, socio-economic status, low academic skills) to academic success

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

24. Competency-based assessments to focus on mastery of key skills

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

25. "Just in time" remediation and co-teaching for students who need additional supports to stay on-track

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

26. Tours of facility

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

27. Multiple day summer orientation program - reviewing student schedule, intensive tours, process photo I.D. card and bus pass, meet with student council, sign graduation pledge, photographed with cap and gown

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

28. Open house and tours for 8th grade students

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

29. Give ninth grade students their own lunch shift

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

30. Developmentally organized physical education classes

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

31. Schools should be physically restructured to keep ninth grade students in one geographic areas of the school - separate them strategically throughout the day

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

32. A team approach (sub school model) which includes grade level administrator, dean, and appropriate number of school counselors

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

33. Blended classes with upperclassmen

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

34. Dedicated time with other ninth grade students

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

35. A master schedule that allows for student support time and assists student learning (assist in implementing the middle school model and allows focus on grade specific issues or concerns

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

36. Middle school faculty talk with 8th grade students about upcoming transition in an attempt to determine what issues are deemed important by these students

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

37. Based on needs identified, two transition teams (middle school team and high school team) develop programs to address concerns

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

38. There is no one size fits all approach - program should be dependent on context of situation

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

39. Transition program must begin in middle school (or earlier) - teachers and counselors work together to clarify student and staff misconceptions about transition (registration of classes, g.p.a., visits to high school, middle school students allowed to shadow high school students, and high school credits)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

40. Include faculty, counselors, administrative resources and student resources when developing transition program

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

41. Support for student social/emotional needs (e.g. self- esteem, academic self-confidence)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

42. Create comfort level and space around the ninth grade students

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

43. An academy type approach

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

44. College and career planning should begin as soon as possible (organized around career clusters) - including completing a career interest inventory

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

45. Exposing students to career planning connected to productive work habits, attitude, and relationship to educational attainment

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

46. Professional development, professional learning communities, and embedded supports for ninth grade teachers/administrators on effective team practice, adolescent development (including brain development), stress, instruction, and continuous improvement in academic and social-emotional education

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

47. Life skills

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

48. Significant academic and social counseling

Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
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49. Parent involvement

Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
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50. Parents should be included in the discussion of the most pressing issues related to transition

Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
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51. Freshman family reception

Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
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52. Enhanced support for literacy and algebra for all students, with special attention to struggling students (either through double-dose scheduling, supplemental classes or tutoring)

Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
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53. Commitment and involvement of whole school community to do "whatever it takes" to support a successful ninth grade transition

Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
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54. Constant monitoring and counseling to aid ninth grade students

Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
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55. Support from district level

Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
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56. Systematic monitoring for on-track indicators including daily attendance, grades leading to course failures, and credit accumulation

Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
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57. Small group advisory and/or study skills class (preferably 10 or fewer students meeting with same adult at least two times a week)

Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
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58. Personalized learning environment; structure could include small learning communities, common academic class scheduling, designated building space (structure may matter less as long as there is adherence to consistent adult- student contact, opportunities for building small student peer groups, and shared planning and consultation time among teachers)

Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
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59. Assistance with registration/school procedures

Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
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60. Ambassador program

Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
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61. Advisor/advisee - each freshman should have an adult advocate that follows him/her throughout high school career

Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
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62. Funding to make the elements of the transition program a priority

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

63. Structured advisory program dealing with academic and social/emotional guidance to promote college and career awareness

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

64. Connecting career planning and counseling to course planning and selection (intentional academic focus that includes navigating the pathway to career and college readiness and 21st century skills)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

65. A model that develops positive student-teacher relationships that supports student engagement (staff must be educated and/or continually retrained on the importance of positive student relationships)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

66. Focus on intentionally creating a just, fair, and caring school

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

67. Instructional leadership team meeting and reviewing freshman midterm grade distribution, disciplinary referrals, and attendance (twice a quarter)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

68. Every faculty member needs to believe in a set of non-negotiables that are foundational with all ninth grade teachers (e.g. every child can learn, every child deserves a teacher's best effort every day)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

69. Middle school students should be educated about high school extracurricular and co-curricular opportunities (possible allowance of limited 8th grade participation in high school activities)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

70. Ninth grade students should be encouraged to participate in club, activity, theater, band, chorus, or athletic team

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

71. Must have a defined mission that drives the day-to-day operation of the school and individual classrooms (e.g. every child, by need, every day to graduation)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

72. Transition program should continue after 9th grade year - all students placed in a low number cohort that loops through their high school career

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

73. Program should emphasize core curricula and instruction

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

74. Transition program components should be connected to the vision of the school - what characteristics should ninth grade students have when they graduate

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

75. Ninth grade teachers should promote effort by students - a never give up attitude while at the same time promoting intrinsic motivation

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

76. All teachers should be familiar with their students' academic and career plan, standardized test scores, achievement data and use them to promote academic growth

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

77. Teachers must share two positive comments about a student whenever they refer a student for discipline

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

78. Discipline should be about changing behavior and no discipline conference should end without a discussion of academic growth

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

79. Celebration/student recognition programs

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

80. Spring should be focused on preparation for required end of year assessments with interventions as indicated by data

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

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Delphi Round II - Question #3 – Data

The following items are the aggregate results of all panel members' responses to the Round 1 Delphi question #3, "What measures or data should a high school principal use to judge the effectiveness of a ninth grade transition program?"

DIRECTIONS: For each item, rate how important it is for a high school principal to use the measure to judge the effectiveness of a ninth grade transition program.

1. End of course standardized tests (i.e. Standards of Learning in Virginia)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

2. Attendance data

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

3. Graduation data

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

4. Enrollment rates to college and other post-secondary education

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

5. Student completion rates of 2 year and 4 year college

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

6. Retention rates

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

7. Amount of courses passed in the ninth grade year (number of credits toward graduation successfully attained)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

8. Promotion to 10th grade (emphasis on passing core subjects)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

9. S.A.T./A.C.T results

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

10. Review of first marking period grades

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

11. Grade trend data

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

12. Monitoring of grades during year (emphasis on core classes using "D's" and "F's" as measure, including missed assignments)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

13. School involvement and/or community involvement

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

14. Discipline referral data for ninth grade students

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

15. Suspension/expulsion rate for ninth grade students (major discipline issues)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

16. Student tardiness to class

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

17. Behavior intervention - how many ninth grade students respond to intervention and do not get another referral

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

18. Student discipline consequences and its impact on academic performance

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

19. Number and frequency of parent/family conferences related to discipline

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

20. Track the number of ninth grade students that meet the eligibility requirements to participate in extracurricular activities/sports

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

21. Parent/family engagement in the school

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

22. Student engagement in the school

Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
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23. Community engagement

Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
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24. Lexile/quantile scores - can students read at or above grade level

Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
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25. Reduction of failures in core classes

Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
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26. Student dropouts (class cohorts, grade-level cohorts, school-wide)

Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
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27. Efficacy of interventions for remedial and special needs students

Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
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28. Participation rates of ninth grade students involved in extra and co-curricular activities

Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
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29. Equity/success for all students

Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
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30. Growth of students (as opposed to grading or passing - grading in most high schools is subjective and incongruent with the mastery of standards)

Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
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31. Reading and math assessment data

Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
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32. Data used depends on goals/objectives of the program

Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
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33. Course selection/enrollment in advanced courses at 10th thru 12th grades (to determine level of rigor and analyze the percentage and demographics of students enrolling in advanced courses after 9th grade)

Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
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34. Percentage of students in a 9th grade looping cohort as compared with the same cohort at the end of the senior year (factoring out students who transfer based on family moves)

Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
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35. Data must be examined across 8th and 9th grade

Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
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36. Ideally data should be examined from 6th grade to 11th grade looking for stable outcomes for students across the growth curve

Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
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37. Review of transition program to make sure that students are not being tracked by ability

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

38. On-track for graduation at the end of 9th grade (credit accumulation and end-of-course exam scores, if relevant)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

39. Increases in grade point averages (G.P.A.)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

40. Parent attendance at school events

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

41. Teacher morale

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

42. Student morale

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

43. Impact of attendance data on academic performance

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

44. Percent of students that benefit from credit recovery opportunities

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

45. Monitoring of individual student goals

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

46. Pre- and post- perception surveys of students

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

47. Pre- and post- perception surveys of parents

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

48. Teacher surveys

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

49. Qualitative interviews of students

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

50. Qualitative interviews of parents

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

51. Completion of advisory curriculum for each teacher-mentor and his/her cohort

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

52. On-track for graduation at the end of 10th and 11th grade (credit accumulation and end-of-course exam scores, if relevant)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

Appendix C Round III Delphi Instrument

Dear _____,

Thank you for your response to the Round II Delphi survey on the ninth grade transition. You are participating in this research as one of 20 expert panelists and your input remains critically important to this study. This round is the **last** scheduled data collection for the study.

As a quick review, this research is a three round Delphi study centered on the ninth grade transition. Specifically, the research is examining the goals/objectives of a comprehensive program, the essential components of a ninth grade transition program, and the appropriate data to examine the success of a ninth grade transition program. The Delphi method supports the blending of the thoughts and opinions of national experts, researchers, and practitioners.

The Round III instrument was created based on the data provided by all panelists in Round II. The following parameters were used in analyzing the data from Round II.

- If 90% to 100% of the panel rated an item as "Very Important" or "Important," then it was considered already to be a consensus item from the group. These items are not included in the Round III survey, but are listed in the respective attachment to this email for your reference.
- If less than 70% of the panel rated an item as "Very Important" or "Important," then it was considered too far from consensus. These items are not included in the Round III survey, but are listed in the respective attachment to this email for your reference.
- If between 70% and less than 90% of the panel rated an item as "Very Important" or "Important," then it did not reach the 90% consensus threshold, but is close enough for the panel to consider again. These items are included in the Round III survey for your second review.

As with the Round II Delphi, the Round III Delphi instrument utilizes the Virginia Tech Survey Maker. By clicking the links below you will automatically be taken to the three different surveys. Once you complete the three surveys, the system will notify me by email. Each survey will take you less than 10 minutes. Please complete the three surveys by **March 26, 2014**.

Survey #1 – Goals: <https://survey.vt.edu/survey/entry.jsp?id=1393859248719>

Survey #2 – Components: <https://survey.vt.edu/survey/entry.jsp?id=1393869337183>

Survey #3 – Data: <https://survey.vt.edu/survey/entry.jsp?id=1393864398267>

Also, please complete the enclosed "Publication of Professional Information." The information you provide will be included in the listing of study participants in the final dissertation. Your individual responses will remain confidential.

Please accept my sincere thanks for your time and participation during this study.
Sincerely,

Tim Healey
Doctoral Candidate - Virginia Tech

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Delphi Round III - Question #1 – Goals/Objectives

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This Round III Delphi Survey on the Goals/Objectives of a comprehensive ninth grade transition program includes 21 items. Before you respond to these items please review the information below regarding the data analysis from the Round II Survey.

The goal of a Delphi study is to reach consensus among the expert panel. The following parameters were used when analyzing the data for consensus from the Round II Survey:

- * If 90% of the panel rated an item as "Very Important" or "Important," then it was considered a consensus item from the group. These 18 items are not included in this survey, but are listed in the "Goals" attachment to the directions email for your reference.
- * If less than 70% of the panel rated an item as "Very Important" or "Important," then it was considered too far from consensus. These 12 items are not included in this survey, but are listed in the "Goals" attachment to the directions email for your reference.
- * If between 70% and less than 90% of the panel rated an item as "Very Important" or "Important," then it did not reach the 90% consensus threshold, but is close enough for the panel to consider again. These 21 items are included below for your second review in the Round III Survey.

DIRECTIONS FOR ROUND III SURVEY:

For each of the following 21 items, rate the degree of importance as a goal or objective of a comprehensive ninth grade transition program.

In the Round II Survey, these 21 items received at least 70% but less than 90% of the expert panel rating it as either "Very Important" or "Important" (actual rating percentage listed). For this study, these items are being considered again by the expert panel to see if any items reach the consensus level.

1. (85%) Each student should successfully complete and graduate high school in four years.

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

2. (85%) Each ninth grade student should receive guidance on having a balanced academic course load.

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

3. (85%) School should provide a rigorous and relevant curriculum that prepares students to be college and career ready.

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

4. (80%) Goals of the transition program should be based on needs of school and students.

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

5. (75%) Each student should be encouraged to focus on effort and persistence.

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

6. (75%) The ninth grade transition program should develop critical thinking skills for freshmen.

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

7. (85%) The ninth grade transition program should help students explore their interests and strengths.

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

8. (85%) The ninth grade transition program should help students understand the connection/relevance of their academic experience to their future aspirations.

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

9. (80%) The ninth grade transition program should incorporate college/career awareness and know-how early in a student's high school experience (exploration of careers and post-secondary planning).

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

10. (75%) As part of the ninth grade transition program, information should be communicated to the students about school and school programs.

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

11. (85%) In the eighth grade year, middle school teachers should begin to articulate high school expectations to students and parents.

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

12. (85%) The ninth grade transition program should help a cohort of students transition from middle to high school.

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

13. (85%) The school should ensure that each ninth grade student establishes a positive connection with an adult in the building to be an additional support.

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

14. (75%) Each student should be involved in some sort of school activity, e.g. club, athletic team, theater arts, band, or chorus.

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

15. (80%) The ninth grade transition program should help ninth grade students gain the belief set that they need to overcome obstacles and find success.

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

16. (85%) The ninth grade transition program should decrease the students' anxiety concerning their move to the high school thereby improving student success.

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

17. (70%) The ninth grade transition program should promote positive youth development outcomes (e.g. connectedness, competence).

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

18. (85%) The ninth grade transition program should make the high school feel "smaller" and more nurturing - providing additional oversight and prevent them from getting "lost in the shuffle."

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

19. (80%) The ninth grade transition program should help students confidently integrate into the high school culture while maintaining the ability to make sound decisions that will positively impact their futures.

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

20. (75%) The ninth grade transition program should be very similar to a comprehensive guidance program in that it addresses the academic, personal/social, and career and college readiness need of every student.

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

21. (70%) The ninth grade transition program should prepare each student for post-secondary success in all its dimensions (academic success, college and career awareness and readiness, social/emotional, and 21st century skills) that support academic and college and career success.

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

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Delphi Round III - Question #2 – Components/Ingredients

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This Round III Delphi Survey on Essential Components/Ingredients of a comprehensive ninth grade transition program includes 29 items. Before you respond to the items please review the information below regarding data analysis from the Round II Survey.

The goal of a Delphi study is to reach consensus among the expert panel. The following parameters were used when analyzing the data for consensus from the Round II Survey:

* If 90% of the panel rated an item as "Very Important" or "Important," then it was considered a consensus item from the group. These 8 items are not included in this survey, but are listed in the "Components" attachment to the directions email for your reference.

* If less than 70% of the panel rated an item as "Very Important" or "Important," then it was considered too far from consensus. These 43 items are not included in this survey, but are listed in the "Components" attachment to directions email for your reference.

* If between 70% and less than 90% of the panel rated an item as "Very Important" or "Important," then it did not reach the 90% consensus threshold, but is close enough for the panel to consider again. These 29 items are included below for your second review in the Round III Survey.

DIRECTIONS FOR ROUND III SURVEY:

For each of the following 29 items, rate the degree of importance as an essential component or ingredient of a comprehensive ninth grade transition program.

In the Round II Survey, these 29 items received at least 70% but less than 90% of the expert panel rating it as either "Very Important" or "Important" (actual rating percentage listed). For this study, these items are being considered again by the expert panel to see if any items reach the consensus level.

1. (85%) A system that allows for progress monitoring and interventions for students - usually a team consisting of an administrator, counselor, and other supporting adults that regularly meets to review student data and progress and put supports in place when needed (interventions can be academic or otherwise)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

2. (75%) Structured tutoring help available for students

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

3. (70%) Every student should have a learning goal that he/she assists in developing

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

4. (75%) A prescriptive program concentrating on tools for academic success (Cornell note taking, notebook organization, decision-making)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

5. (70%) Ninth grade teachers provide examples of "A" work so students know what it looks like

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

6. (80%) Credit recovery options offered during the summer or during the school year

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

7. (85%) Rigorous and relevant learning experiences which will support equitable access and eliminate barriers (race, culture, socio-economic status, low academic skills) to academic success

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

8. (85%) Competency-based assessments that focus on mastery of key skills

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

9. (85%) There is no one size fits all approach - program should be dependent on situational context.

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

10. (70%) Exposing students to career planning connected to productive work habits, attitudes, and relationships to educational attainment

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

11. (70%) Significant academic and social counseling

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

12. (80%) Parent involvement

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

13. (85%) Enhanced support for literacy and algebra for all students, with special attention to struggling students (either through double-dose scheduling, supplemental classes or tutoring)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

14. (80%) Commitment and involvement of whole school community (faculty) to do "whatever it takes" to support a successful ninth grade transition

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

15. (80%) Support from district level

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

16. (85%) Systematic monitoring for on-track indicators including daily attendance, grades leading to course failures, and credit accumulation

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

17. (85%) Sufficient funding to make the elements of the transition program a priority

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

18. (75%) Connecting career planning and counseling to course planning and selection (intentional academic focus that includes navigating the pathway to career and college readiness and 21st century skills)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

19. (85%) A model that develops positive student-teacher relationships which supports student engagement (staff must be educated and/or continually retrained on the importance of positive student relationships)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

20. (80%) Focus on intentionally creating a just, fair, and caring school

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

21. (70%) Reviewing freshman midterm grade distribution, disciplinary referrals and attendance data at instructional team meetings (twice a quarter)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

22. (85%) Ninth grade students should be encouraged to participate in clubs, activities, theater, band, chorus, or athletic teams

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

23. (80%) The transition program must have a defined mission that drives the day-to-day

operation of the school and individual classrooms (e.g. every child, by need, every day to graduation)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

24. (75%) Program should emphasize core curricula and instruction

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

25. (75%) Transition program components should be connected to the vision of the school, e.g. what characteristics should ninth grade students have when they graduate

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

26. (80%) Ninth grade teachers should promote effort by students - a never give up attitude while at the same time promoting intrinsic motivation

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

27. (75%) All teachers should be familiar with their students' academic and career plan, standardized test scores, achievement data and use them to promote academic growth

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

28. (70%) Discipline should be about changing behavior and no discipline conference should end without a discussion of academic growth

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

29. (75%) Celebration/student recognition programs

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

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Delphi Round III - Question #3 – Data

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This Round III Delphi Survey on the Data to use to judge the effectiveness of a comprehensive ninth grade transition program includes 16 items. Before you respond to these items please review the information below regarding the data analysis from the Round II Survey.

The goal of a Delphi study is to reach consensus among the expert panel. The following parameters were used when analyzing the data for consensus from the Round II Survey:

* If 90% of the panel rated an item as "Very Important" or "Important," then it was considered a consensus item from the group. These 13 items are not included in this survey, but are listed in "Data" attachment to the directions email for your reference.

* If less than 70% of the panel rated an item as "Very Important" or "Important," then it was considered too far from consensus. These 23 items are not included in this survey, but are listed in "Data" attachment to the directions email for your reference.

* If between 70% and less than 90% of the panel rated an item as "Very Important" or "Important," then it did not reach the 90% consensus threshold, but is close enough for the panel to consider again. These 16 items are included below for your second review in the Round III Survey.

DIRECTIONS FOR ROUND III SURVEY:

For each of the following 16 items, rate the degree of importance of using the data or measure to judge the effectiveness of a comprehensive ninth grade transition program.

In the Round II Survey, these 16 items received at least 70% but less than 90% of the expert panel rating it as either "Very Important" or "Important" (actual rating percentage listed). For this study, these items are being considered again by the expert panel to see if any items reach the consensus level.

1. (75%) Enrollment rates to college and other post-secondary education

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

2. (80%) Grade trend data

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

3. (85%) Discipline referral data for ninth grade students

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

4. (80%) Suspension/expulsion rate for ninth grade students (major discipline issues)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

5. (75%) Student tardiness to class

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

6. (80%) Behavior intervention - how many ninth grade students respond to intervention and do not get another referral

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

7. (70%) Number and frequency of parent/family conferences related to discipline

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

8. (70%) Lexile/quantile scores - can students read at or above grade level

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

9. (75%) Efficacy of interventions for remedial and special needs students

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

10. (85%) Growth of students based on mastery (as opposed to grading or passing - grading in most high schools is subjective and incongruent with the mastery of standards)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

11. (85%) Data used should be driven by the goals/objectives of the program

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

12. (85%) On-track for graduation at the end of 9th grade (credit accumulation and end-of-course exam scores, if relevant)

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

13. (85%) Student morale

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

14. (75%) Impact of attendance data on academic performance

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

15. (70%) Percent of students that benefit from credit recovery opportunities

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

16. (75%) Monitoring of individual student goals

Not Important Slightly Important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

Appendix D Initial E-mail to Potential Panelists

Dear _____,

My name is Tim Healey and I am a doctoral candidate at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) and an Associate Superintendent with Prince William County Public Schools in Virginia. I am contacting you to request your participation in my dissertation study as one of only 27 expert panelists across the country. I have selected you based on your expertise and knowledge of the ninth grade transition. The potential panel of 27 is a blend of professors, researchers, national leaders, and practitioners.

My research will examine the ninth grade transition starting with the goals and objectives of a comprehensive program, identifying essential components of a program, and pinpointing data a school leader should use to judge the success of such a transition program. I will be using the Delphi Technique to conduct this research. The Delphi Technique is used to gather the opinions of experts and practitioners alike, while not having to bring the panelists together geographically.

My specific request for your participation is to respond to a brief questionnaire three different times. Each time the questionnaire should take you less than 30minutes. After the initial questionnaire you will be able to see the compiled responses from the group (without the individuals identified) and react to these data).

Your responses will be kept confidential from other panelists and in my reporting of the data. I do plan to use some direct quotes from the feedback without identification of the individual respondent.

I will utilize email attachments to deliver the questionnaires and receive your responses. If this is not acceptable to you, I will be happy to send you a hard copy via the U.S. Mail. Although, for this research your informed consent will be implied from the return of the questionnaires, I have attached to this email specific information regarding your participation.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. I would be honored to have someone of your stature participate in this study. Please let me know if I can answer any questions you may have about the study or your time commitment. Feel free to email or call me with any questions or thoughts.

If you are agreeable to participate, please respond to this email. Again, with a panel of 27 experts, your participation is critically important to me and the validity of the results.

Sincerely,

Tim Healey
healey@pwcs.edu

Appendix E Follow-Up E-mail to Potential Panelists

Hi _____,

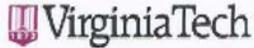
On October 7, 2013, I sent the attached email asking you to consider an invitation to be one of only 27 panelists on my dissertation study surrounding the ninth grade transition. So far, I have commitments from 15 out of 27 panelists. I specifically selected you based on your expertise and knowledge. Please consider the attached request.

Thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely,

Tim Healey
healeyt@pwcs.edu

Appendix F Virginia Tech IRB Approvals



Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board
North End Center, Suite 4120, Virginia Tech
300 Turner Street NW
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959
email irb@vt.edu
website <http://www.irb.vt.edu>

MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 2, 2013
TO: Walt Mallory, Timothy Healey
FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires April 25, 2018)
PROTOCOL TITLE: The Essential Components of a Comprehensive Ninth Grade Transition Program:
A Delphi Study
IRB NUMBER: 13-822

Effective October 2, 2013, the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) Administrator, Carmen T Papefuss, approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As: **Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 2**
Protocol Approval Date: **October 2, 2013**
Protocol Expiration Date: **N/A**
Continuing Review Due Date*: **N/A**

*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

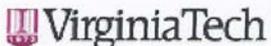
FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

Invent the Future

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution



Office of Research Compliance
 Institutional Review Board
 North End Center, Suite 4120, Virginia Tech
 300 Turner Street NW
 Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
 540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959
 email irb@vt.edu
 website <http://www.irb.vt.edu>

MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 22, 2014
TO: Walt Mallory, Timothy Healey
FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires April 25, 2018)
PROTOCOL TITLE: The Essential Components of a Comprehensive Ninth Grade Transition Program:
 A Delphi Study
IRB NUMBER: 13-822

Effective January 22, 2014, the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the Amendment request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As: **Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 2**
 Protocol Approval Date: **October 2, 2013**
 Protocol Expiration Date: **N/A**
 Continuing Review Due Date*: **N/A**

*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

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Appendix G Informed Consent Document

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University Informed Consent for Participants

Note: For this research, informed consent will be implied from the return of the completed questionnaire(s). The information below is provided to participants for complete transparency.

Title of Project: The Essential Components of a Comprehensive Ninth Grade Transition Program: A Delphi Study

Investigators:

Tim Healey healeyt@pwcs.edu
Walt Mallory, Ed.D wmallory@vt.edu

I. Purpose of this Research Project

The purpose of this research project is to examine the ninth grade transition. The goal is to identify objectives of a comprehensive program, the essential components of a transition program, and the data a school leader should use to measure the success of a ninth grade transition program. Results will be used in the publication of a dissertation. Participants include a potential panel of 27 identified experts. This panel blends leading researchers, national leaders, and practitioners.

II. Procedures

This research will utilize The Delphi Technique. The Delphi Technique is used to gather opinions of experts and practitioners without having to bring people together geographically. Should you agree to participate, you will be asked to respond to three different brief questionnaires related to the ninth grade transition. These questionnaires will be delivered as attachments to an email. Each questionnaire should take less than 30 minutes to complete.

III. Risks

There are no identified risks for your participation. This research is asking your professional opinion related to the subject of ninth grade transition.

IV. Benefits

There are no identified direct benefits for your participation. Your participation will add to the body of research related to the ninth grade transition of which you may indirectly benefit based on your professional role. No promise of guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage you to participate.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

All data collected by the research team will be kept confidentially. Specific responses and information will not be attributed to any panelist. At no time will the researchers release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent.

With your permission, you will be included in a list of panelists in the final dissertation; however, no specific responses will be connected to any one panelist.

The Virginia Tech (VT) Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view the study's data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

VI. Compensation

There is no compensation associated with your participation.

VII. Subject's Consent

Informed consent will be implied from the return of the completed questionnaire(s).

VIII. Freedom to Withdraw

It is important for you to know that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. You are free not to answer any questions that you choose or respond to what is being asked of you without penalty.

Please note that there may be circumstances under which the investigator may determine that a subject should not continue as a subject.

Should you withdraw or otherwise discontinue participation, you will be compensated for the portion of the project completed in accordance with the Compensation section of this document.

IX. Questions or Concerns

Should you have any questions about this study, you may contact one of the research investigators whose contact information is included at the beginning of this document.

Should you have any questions or concerns about the study's conduct or your rights as a research subject, or need to report a research-related injury or event, you may contact the VT IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore at moored@vt.edu or (540) 231-4991.

Appendix H Round I - Goal Responses and Coding

Round I – Goals		
Coding Scheme = Academic (A); Social/Emotional (SE); Procedural (P)		
1	successful completion of the high school years	A
2	each student should graduate in four years	A
3	each student should be on track to graduate at the end of the ninth grade year	A
4	leave ninth grade with as many credits as possible	A
5	course performance – more than one semester F (especially in a core academic course) is a strong predictor of dropping out	A
6	academic success of every student	A
7	guide ninth grade students to have a balanced academic course load	A
8	provide a rigorous and relevant curriculum that prepares students to be college and career ready	A
9	each student should graduate college and career ready	A
10	provide and encourage students to take, and successfully complete, a rigorous course of study	A
11	each student should be encouraged to focus on effort and persistence	A
12	provide deliberate supports to ensure academic success (how to study, how to organize, tutoring program)	A
13	support students in their academic endeavors (tutoring, organization, time management)	A
14	help students prepare for more rigorous academic classes than they may experience in elementary and middle school – this includes developing skills such as organizational skills, study skills, time management skills	A
15	train freshmen to be students – provide them with study/organizational skills and strategies	A
16	organizational skills for academic success	A
17	development of freshman critical thinking skills	A
18	every student developing an individual learning plan that guides them through their eighth grade year and into high school through graduation	A
19	help students explore their interests and strengths and to understand the connection/relevance of their academic experience to their future aspirations	A
20	lay a foundation that helps students not only succeed in high school but prepare for success after high school graduation (exploration of careers and post-secondary planning)	A
21	incorporate college/career awareness and know-how early in students' high school experience	A
22	9 th grade attendance above 95%	A
23	attendance – less than 80% attendance is a strong predictor of dropping out and requires intensive intervention – less than 90% attendance (2 days of school a month) should prompt a targeted intervention	A
24	monitoring points for a student's academic progress and ensure that students are provided the necessary supports to undergird their academic progress	A
25	building healthy academic behaviors and skills including study habits, time management, and seeking help	A
26	literacy development, particularly reading, comprehension strategies for expository text and critical analysis	A
27	mathematical and symbolic reasoning, largely through high caliber algebra instruction	A
28	program should be ongoing beyond an orientation day - students need to know where to go or to whom they can speak with regards to graduation concerns	A
29	Move the middle school student into high school readiness (including academic, personal/social development, career development)	SE
30	Make the transition to 9 th grade a seamless transition and to prepare students to be academically and socially successful ninth graders	SE
31	Help students adjust to their new environment so they succeed during the rest of their high	SE

	school years, not just academically, but also socially and emotionally	
32	Assist ninth grade students to develop a vision for their high school career and put the ninth grade year in perspective	SE
33	Enable each rising ninth grader to have a basis to form a significant relationship with one or more adults in the building who will act as additional supports	SE
34	Make sure the students are connected to caring adults	SE
35	Each student should be connected to an adult he/she can see himself/herself becoming	SE
36	Establishment of a positive connection with an adult	SE
37	Each student should be involved in some type of school activity, club, athletic team, theater/arts, band, and/or chorus	SE
38	Create opportunities to get students involved in one or more extra or co-curricular activities	SE
39	Inform and emphasize the importance of being well rounded	SE
40	In the student's eighth grade year, students and parents should be introduced to extra and co-curricular expectations and offerings at the high school	SE
41	Students connected to the extra-curricular program of the school	SE
42	each student should be encouraged and given opportunities to connect to the school - to connect to something bigger than themselves	SE
43	activities should be encouraged to allow students to be a part of the school	SE
44	develop ownership or investment in the school	SE
45	incoming students need to feel a part of something in the new school environment - inclusion	SE
46	building a sense of class identity/unity, create opportunities for ninth graders to create healthy friendships, provide near-peer mentors/tutors	SE
47	upperclassmen reach out and connect with incoming students	SE
48	individual students feeling of belonging or connectedness as well as dealing with the anxieties of larger schools, teacher expectations, increased rigor, and older students	SE
49	make students aware of supports and resources available to help them in all areas (academic, social/emotional, substance abuse, etc.)	SE
50	help ninth grade students gain the belief set they need to overcome obstacles and find success	SE
51	help students cope with different social situations than they may have experienced before (substance abuse, alcohol, tobacco, illegal & prescription drugs, romantic and sexual relationships, self-advocacy, driving, peer pressure and the general problems of inter-personal relationships with other adolescents as well as with adults)	SE
52	help students cope with the personal issues of being an adolescent students (responsibility, self-directed learning, sexual orientation, identity, self-awareness)	SE
53	help students confidently integrate into the high school culture while maintaining the ability to make sound decisions that will positively impact their futures	SE
54	each student should become intrinsically motivated	SE
55	each student should set realistic short term and long term goals that focus on academic achievement, skill development, building relationships, and attitude	SE
56	to equip ninth graders with an understanding of the skillset needed to be successful in high school (study skills, time management, understanding social constructs)	SE
57	teach students the necessary skills and habits (study skills, time management skills, decision-making skills) to successfully navigate a rigorous learning environment in the high school	SE
58	to focus on study habits, self-esteem, peer relationships, decision-making, healthy living	SE
59	promoting positive youth development outcomes (e.g. connectedness, competence)	SE
60	social and emotional issues related to adolescent development and growth	SE
61	preparing each student for post-secondary success in all its dimensions (academic success, college and career awareness and readiness, and the social/emotional and 21st century skills that support academic and college and career success)	SE
62	development of freshmen understanding career pathways	SE
63	each student should be encouraged to explore what they can become - career exploration should	SE

	be meaningful, authentic, and relevant	
64	increase the percentage of parent involvement and engagement	SE
65	provide for parent engagement	SE
66	facilitate parental involvement in the education of the student and in the high school in general	SE
67	make the high school "smaller" and more nurturing - providing additional oversight and prevent them from getting lost in the shuffle	SE
68	decrease the students' anxiety concerning their move to the high school thereby improving student success	SE
69	very similar to a comprehensive guidance program in that it addresses the academic, personal/social, and career and college readiness need of every student	SE
70	a comprehensive transition program needs to address social confusion, emotional stress, and loss of control	SE
71	a program that focuses on the whole child and incorporates information about exercise, nutrition, and how the brain works	SE
72	behavior - Students suspended in 9th grade are more likely to drop out	SE
73	social and emotional supports for ninth grades and understanding the relevance of high school for future success	SE
74	social and emotional adjustment to high school expectations, peer culture, and personal goals	SE
75	clarify high school expectations for school work, behavior, social interaction, building norms, etc.	P
76	communication with students about school and school programs	P
77	understanding the high school environment and what to expect	P
78	in the student's eighth grade year, middle school teachers begin to articulate high school expectations to students and parents	P
79	principal must establish the importance and commitment to a system of transition	P
80	goals should be based on district data and contextual needs	P
81	goals/objectives should match identified problems with school's ninth grade students	P
82	goals/objectives should be based on needs assessment at individual school	P
83	help a cohort of students transition from middle to high school	P

Appendix I Round I – Component Responses and Coding

Round I – Components		
Academic (A) ; Social/Emotional (SE); Procedural (P)		
1	a teaming model - highly qualified and carefully selected teachers in core subjects who are responsible to monitor behavior, attendance, and teach note-taking, organization, and study skills	A
2	dividing students into groups with the same core teachers (75 students taught by the same English, social studies, science teachers)	A
3	all ninth grade students on team in the four core subjects	A
4	team concept with ninth grade students that allows teachers to collaborate and talk about weaknesses of students	A
5	teaming - content area teacher teams should share the same students so they can provide continuity with curriculum and connections, monitor progress more efficiently and communicate with parents	A
6	team of teachers who meet regularly, share a group of students and focus on: standardizing expectations, creating strong classroom atmospheres, teaching students learning skills, providing organizational and time management strategies, creating appropriate avenues for parent/teacher contact, recognizing students, growing professionally together, providing necessary supports for struggling students.	A
7	teacher teams (with team leaders) who share the same students and a common planning period	A
8	a way to track ninth grade students and their achievement and success in school (teams, groups, etc.)	A
9	teaches should be a part of Professional Learning Communities that meet on a regular basis with an agenda, minutes, and which focus on student learning	A
10	progress monitoring and intervention system where teams together with administrator, counselor and other supporting adults meet on a regular basis to review student data and activate interventions for students that are falling off track (and celebrate those who are improving or doing well). Extra help and wrap around services (sometimes provided by community-based organizations/partners) for off-track students.	A
11	appropriate interventions for all students, safety nets, that prevent students from getting too far behind... there needs to be a trigger that automatically moves students into an intervention or safety net	A
12	response to Intervention with tiered academic interventions is important	A
13	spring focused on preparation with interventions as indicated by data	A
14	should not rely on teachers to identify for remediation because some do not have that skill	A
15	after-school homework labs for students	A
16	structured extra help - tutoring available to students	A
17	students below grade level in math and English should be "doubled up" during the ninth grade year	A
18	rigorous academic schedule (doubling up on math and English)	A
19	core curricula and instruction	A
20	grade 9 technical exploratory program allowing students to explore all technical programs	A
21	every student should have a learning goal that he/she assists in developing	A
22	teachers must have a growth mindset - they have to believe that intelligence can grow- it is not static..they have to model, promote, and encourage such a mindset	A
23	ninth grade teaches should provide examples of "A" work so students know what it looks like	A
24	teachers should use high yield instructional strategies	A
25	teachers should promote active student engagement in every class	A
26	providing blended-learning opportunities (i.e. lecture, on-line learning)	A

27	assistance when students fail Standards of Learning end of course tests	A
28	credit recovery options should be offered during the summer or during school	A
29	a structured schedule that eases them into the complexities of high school - i.e. one in which ninth graders do not have to focus on 7 different classes in one day	A
30	a prescriptive program concentrating on tools for academic success (Cornell notetaking, notebook organization, study skills)	A
31	Freshman 101/seminar course - all ninth grade students should be required to take this course to provide additional transition support (study skills, personal/social aspects, college and career planning, decision-making)	A
32	has an elective course such as a Freshman Seminar	A
33	summer academy which provides support in math and English, mentors to work with students individually, learn what to expect during freshman year, resources available	A
34	rigorous and relevant learning experiences which will support equitable access and eliminate barriers (race, culture, SES, low academic skills) to academic success	A
35	"just in time" remediation and co-teaching for students who need additional supports to stay on-track	A
36	competency-based assessments to focus on mastery of key skills	A
37	instructional Leadership Team meeting an reviewing of freshmen midterm/grade distribution, disciplinary referrals, and attendance (twice a quarter)	A
38	enhanced support for literacy and algebra for all students, with special attention to struggling students, either through double-dose scheduling , supplemental classes, or tutoring	A
39	systematic monitoring for on-track indicators including daily attendance, grades leading to course failures, and credit accumulation	A
40	all teachers of individual schools should be familiar with their students' academic and career plan, Standards of Learning scores, achievement data and use it to promote academic growth	A
41	a teaming model that develops positive student-teacher relationship	SE
42	authentic relationships with school staff to support student engagement	SE
43	staff must be educated and/or continually re-trained about the importance of establishing positive student/mentor-teacher relationships	SE
44	mentor program (adult to student)	SE
45	mentor program (peer to peer)	SE
46	mentor system which is ongoing throughout the first year	SE
47	all ninth grade students must be introduced and have regular and ongoing high school contact with an adult-mentor at the school	SE
48	advisor/advisee - each freshmen should have an adult advocate that follows them throughout their high school career	SE
49	ninth grade teacher advisory	SE
50	advisories or extended homeroom periods that provide opportunities for enhanced academic and social emotional guidance and curricula that promote college and career awareness and 21st century skills	SE
51	a structured advisory program for ninth graders	SE
52	needs to be a set of non-negotiables that are foundational with all ninth grade teachers (every child can learn, every child deserves a teacher's best effort every day) whatever is decided, but every faculty member needs to believe them	SE
53	involvement of the extra and co curricular organizations in the school	SE
54	students should be encouraged to participate in a club, activity, theater, band, chorus, or athletic team	SE
55	intentional extracurricular activities if connectedness is needed	SE
56	middle school students should be educated about high school extracurricular opportunities and encouraged to participate in activities that particularly start during the summer before ninth grade year - also possible allowance of limited 8th grade participation in high school activities	SE

57	reports from Faculty advisors and coaches on the number of grade 9 students participating in extracurricular activities	SE
58	transition program should be connected to the vision of the school. What characteristics should ninth grade students have when they graduate - where does four years of high school lead you.	SE
59	teachers should promote effort by students - a never give up attitude while at the same time promoting intrinsic motivation - students should not be bribed into doing what they need to do	SE
60	asking teachers to share two positive comments about a student whenever they refer a student for discipline	SE
61	discipline should be about changing behavior and no discipline conference should end without discussion of academic growth	SE
62	focus on intentionally creating a just, fair, and caring school	SE
63	commitment and involvement of all school community to do "whatever it takes" to support a successful ninth grade transition	SE
64	small group advisory and/or study skills class, preferably 10 or fewer students meeting with the same adult (teacher/administrator/counselor) at least 2x per week	SE
65	middle school faculty talk with 8th grade students about upcoming transition in an attempt to determine what issues are deemed important by these students	SE
66	must have a defined mission that drives the day to day operation of the school and individual classrooms, i.e. every child, by need, every day to graduation	SE
67	coordinated effort with feeder middle schools to begin transition process early in the 8th grade	SE
68	based on these issues, two transition teams (middle school team and high school team) develop programs to address these concerns	SE
69	include faculty, counselors, administrative resources and student resources when developing programs	SE
70	transition program must begin in middle school (or earlier) - teachers and counselors work together to clarify student and staff misconceptions about transition (registration of classes, G.P.A., and high school credits)	SE
71	support for student social/emotional needs	SE
72	create a comfort level and space around the ninth grade students	SE
73	a program to develop self-esteem and academic self-confidence	SE
74	constant monitoring and counseling to aid students	SE
75	dedicated time with other ninth grade students	SE
76	blended classes with upperclassmen	SE
77	dedicated ninth grade counselor	SE
78	an academy approach	SE
79	smaller learning community structure where students spend most of their day in one part of the building with their own dedicated administrators, counselor, and teachers	SE
80	give the ninth grade students their own lunch shift	SE
81	developmentally organized physical education classes	SE
82	a team approach (sub school model) which includes grade level administrator, dean, and appropriate number of school counselors	SE
83	a small school or smaller learning community within a larger building where ninth grade students are housed together independent of older students.	SE
84	schools should be physically restructured to keep ninth grade students in one geographic area of the school	SE
85	create a school within a school to separate them strategically throughout the day	SE
86	effective transition programs should continue after 9th grade year - all students placed in a low number cohort that loops through their high school career	SE
87	build student support time into a master schedule (grade specific to focus on grade specific	SE

	issues and concerns)	
88	principal needs to create master schedule that supports student learning (to assist in implementing the middle school model)	SE
89	college and career planning - students should begin planning and exploring college and career options as soon as possible	SE
90	college and career exploration organized around career clusters	SE
91	career planning, productive work habits, attitude and its relationship to educational attainment	SE
92	complete career interest inventory	SE
93	efforts should included intentional academic focus that includes navigating the pathway toward career and college readiness	SE
94	life skills	SE
95	involvement in career planning and counseling and connecting this to course planning (i.e. freshman transition courses)	SE
96	significant academic and social counseling	SE
97	celebration/student recognition programs	SE
98	parent involvement	SE
99	parents should be included in the discussion of the most pressing issues related to transition	SE
100	freshman family reception	SE
101	professional development, professional learning communities, and embedded supports for ninth grade teachers/administrators on effective team practice, adolescent development (including brain development and stress), instruction, and continuous improvement in academic and social-emotional education	SE
102	personalized learning environment: structure could include small learning communities, common academic class scheduling, designated building space, etc., however structure may matter less as long as there is adherence to consistent adult-student contact, opportunities for building small student peer groups, and shared planning/consultation time among teachers	SE
103	registration	P
104	tours	P
105	ambassador programs	P
106	orientation to new school - including continuum of interventions from short orientation to full 9th grade academy with advisory	P
107	“Jump Start” (3 day summer Orientation Program - reviewing student schedule, intensive tours, received photo ID and bus pass, meet with student council, sign graduation pledge, photographed with cap and gown	P
108	8th grade open house and tours	P
109	funding to make the elements of the transition program a priority	P
110	support from the district	P
111	middle school coordination - ninth grade transition program should begin in 8th and 7th grade - meetings with school counselors about course selection, visits to the high school, middle school students shadow high school students	P
112	no one size fits all - dependent on context	P

Appendix J Round I – Data Responses and Coding

Round I – Data		
Academic (A) ; Social/Emotional (SE); Procedural (P)		
1	Standards of Learning (end of course tests)	A
2	Standards of Learning (end of course tests)	A
3	Standards of Learning (end of course tests)	A
4	Standards of Learning end of course scores - individual student scores	A
5	enrollment in advanced courses at 10 - 12th grades	A
6	course selection (to determine level of rigor)	A
7	percentage and demographics of students enrolling in advanced courses after ninth grade year	A
8	absenteeism rates	A
9	absenteeism rates	A
10	absenteeism rates	A
11	attendance data	A
12	attendance data	A
13	attendance data	A
14	attendance rate of ninth grade students	A
15	attendance - less than 80% attendance requires intensive intervention, less than 90% attendance should prompt target intervention	A
16	daily attendance	A
17	daily attendance	A
18	daily attendance	A
19	daily attendance	A
20	daily attendance	A
21	daily attendance	A
22	daily attendance	A
23	decreases in absences	A
24	school attendance and its impact on academic performance	A
25	graduation rate (within 4 years)	A
26	graduation rate (within 4 years)	A
27	graduation rate (within 4 years)	A
28	graduation data	A
29	graduation data	A
30	graduation data	A
31	graduation rate	A
32	graduation rate	A
33	graduation rate	A
34	graduation rate	A
35	graduation rate	A
36	graduation rate	A
37	graduation rate	A
38	four year cohort graduation rate	A
39	graduation rate (adjusted for special populations such as English Language Learners)	A
40	completion of 2yr./ 4yr. college	A
41	enrollment rates to college and other post-secondary education	A
42	percentage of students who go on to a post-secondary education	A
43	retention rates	A
44	number/percentage of credits successfully attained	A
45	number/percentage of credits successfully attained	A

46	number/percentage of credits successfully attained	A
47	number/percentage of credits successfully attained	A
48	amount of courses passed in the ninth grade year	A
49	amount of courses passed in the ninth grade year	A
50	amount of courses passed in the ninth grade year	A
51	promotion to 10th grade with particular emphasis on passing core subjects	A
52	credits earned to progress to the next grade level (on-track for graduation)	A
53	promotion rates	A
54	successful completion of ninth grade	A
55	student promotions to the next grade	A
56	promotion to 10th grade	A
57	promotion to 10th grade	A
58	promotion to 10th grade	A
59	promotion to 10th grade	A
60	promotion to 10th grade	A
61	promotion and retention rates	A
62	retention rate/transfers	A
63	SAT/ACT results	A
64	percent of students who benefit from credit recovery opportunities	A
65	review of first marking period grades	A
66	grades	A
67	grade reports	A
68	course performance - more than one F per semester (especially in a core academic course) is a strong predictor of dropping out	A
69	number of "D" and "F" grades at designated intervals throughout the year (every two weeks)	A
70	student grades (including missed assignments)	A
71	increases in GPA's	A
72	grade trend data	A
73	reduction of failures in core courses	A
74	lexile/quantile scores - can students read at or above grade level; do they possess grade level mathematical skills at the end of the ninth grade year	A
75	data must be examined across 8th grade and 9th grade	A
76	ideally data from 6th grade through 11th grade - looking for stable outcomes for students across the growth curve	A
77	review transition program to make sure that students are not being tracked by ability	A
78	reading and math assessment data	A
79	student dropouts	A
80	drop out rate by advisory class cohort, grade-level cohort, and school-wide	A
81	percentage of students in 9th grade looping cohort as compared with the same cohort at the end of the senior year (factoring out students who transfer based on family moves)	A
82	increase in promotion and graduation rates	A
83	efficacy of interventions for remedial and special needs students	A
84	equity/success for ALL students	A
85	growth (as opposed to grading or passing - grading in most high schools is subjective and incongruent with the mastery of standards)	A
86	9th grade, first semester attendance rates (interim attendance if possible)	A
87	9th grade, first semester course grades (first quarter progress reports if possible)	A
88	on-track for graduation at the end of 9th grade (credit accumulation and end-of-course exam scores, if relevant)	A
89	on-track for graduation at the end of 10th and 11th grades (credit accumulation and end-of-course exam scores, if relevant)	A

90	graduation rates	A
91	college readiness and enrollment	A
92	student discipline/consequences and its impact on academic performance	A
93	involvement in extra and co curricular activities	SE
94	involvement in extra and co curricular activities	SE
95	involvement in extra and co curricular activities	SE
96	involvement in extra and co curricular activities	SE
97	involvement in extra and co curricular activities	SE
98	involvement in extra and co curricular activities	SE
99	percentage of ninth grade students involved in extra-curricular activities	SE
100	activities and co-curricular involvement	SE
101	participation rates in extra-curricular activities	SE
102	school involvement and/or community involvement	SE
103	reduction in number of discipline infractions	SE
104	reduction in number of discipline infractions	SE
105	reduction in number of discipline infractions	SE
106	reduction in number of discipline infractions	SE
107	discipline referrals	SE
108	discipline referrals- specifically how many are "one and done" meaning that the intervention made a difference	SE
109	behavior- students suspended in ninth grade are more likely to drop out	SE
110	fewer behavioral referrals	SE
111	discipline reports	SE
112	discipline data	SE
113	discipline data	SE
114	discipline data	SE
115	discipline data	SE
116	disciplinary referrals, suspensions and expulsions	SE
117	major discipline	SE
118	discipline rates	SE
119	number and frequency of parent conferences related to discipline	SE
120	suspension rate	SE
121	student tardiness to class	SE
122	pre- and post- perception surveys of students and parents	SE
123	teacher surveys	SE
124	ninth grade teacher surveys	SE
125	qualitative interviews and/or survey groups of students and/or parents (non-academic focus...feelings of inclusion, involvement in school and school-related activities, sense of belonging)	SE
126	student surveys around school climate and how students are supported	SE
127	student surveys around school climate and how students are supported	SE
128	student surveys around school climate and how students are supported	SE
129	student surveys around school climate and how students are supported	SE
130	student surveys around school climate and how students are supported	SE
131	parent surveys about their perception of the school	SE
132	parent surveys about their perception of the school	SE
133	parent surveys about their perception of the school	SE
134	parent surveys about their perception of the school	SE
135	student survey about how they feel about the transition program	SE
136	eligibility rates by quarter - tracking whether students meet the requirements to participate in extracurricular activities	SE

137	monitoring of individual student learning goals	SE
138	completion of advisory curriculum for each teacher-mentor and his/her cohort	SE
139	school climate and student/teacher morale	SE
140	parent and community engagement	SE
141	parent & student engagement	SE
142	family engagement	SE
143	parent attendance at school events, parent engagement and involvement	SE
144	data used depends on goals/objectives of program	P