A Study of Ninth-Grade Transition Practices Across the Commonwealth of Virginia

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Abstract

Concerns over the academic success of first-time ninth-grade students transitioning into the high school setting continue to stimulate substantial interest in identifying the various factors that cause the ninth-grade bottleneck. Extensive research shows that when ninth-grade students transition into the high school setting, students have a difficult time navigating the more academically rigorous, less nurturing, usually larger and anonymous high school setting. Studies have shown that transition practices to help ninth-grade students are successful in making this transition smoother and more successful for incoming freshmen, thereby leading to more credits and a stronger chance for students to earn a diploma.

This dissertation is a replication of a previous Virginia Tech study completed by Henry Johnson titled *High School Transition Practices for Ninth Graders: A Descriptive Study of Maryland Public High Schools,* but it focuses on public schools in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The primary data collection method was a survey that was sent to all Virginia principals. First, results from the survey were analyzed to develop a description of the various transition practices existing in Virginia's public high schools in relation to school size, demographics, and community type. Second, the survey data were analyzed to determine the various perceptions of school officials concerning the effectiveness of reported transition practices. The data provide a description of the transition practices in Virginia's public schools. Results from this study give administrators and policymakers an idea of what type of transition practices exist in the

various public schools in Virginia as well as the perceived effectiveness of the practices in place.

Dedication

To my parents, Geraldine Ida and Richard Alfred Pardue, who always taught me the importance of setting monumental goals, dreaming big, and enjoying the adventure!

windblown ideas

a win
to begin
in the wind
stops at the sheet
drying on the line

an end
to begin
in the mind
gains
with the wind
and leaves hind
but gives future

~R. W. Childress

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Chapter 1 Introduction

In the 1950s and 1960s, a student who left high school without a diploma in the United States had the opportunity of obtaining a well-paying job to support a family; however, times have changed. In today's global economy, jobs require an educated workforce (Wolfe & Haveman, 2002). Young men and women who do not obtain a high school diploma in the economy earn less, are less healthy and die earlier, are at higher risk of facing problems with the law, and have a higher likelihood of needing government assistance (Wolfe & Haveman, 2002). This cycle of poverty continues because the children of high school dropouts are at an increased risk of being dropouts themselves, thereby further perpetuating the dropout crisis (Amos, 2008).

In the United States, 70% of high school students on average receive a high school diploma in 4 years (Amos, 2008). Nationally, the graduation rates of White students and Asian American students are 20 percentage points higher than those of African American, American Indians, and Hispanic students (Amos, 2008). Socioeconomic status (SES) is the strongest predictor of low student performance. Compared to poor students, for example, students from wealthy backgrounds are seven times more likely to earn a high school diploma (Editorial Projects in Education, 2008).

The pressure to raise achievement and graduation rates to create better prepared and better educated graduates inundates school district educators and leaders across the nation. Educators have researched many areas that might help improve graduation rates among the nation's high school students and have discovered correlations between specific behaviors and students who do not graduate. For example, students with frequent absences, discipline issues, and retention rates throughout school are at greater

risk of not graduating at all, let alone graduating on time. Much of the research pinpoints the ninth-grade year as a decisive year for students to either make it to graduation or not (Neild, Stoner-Eby, & Furstenberg, 2008).

Students entering the ninth grade move from a middle school environment, which is typically smaller and more nurturing. Middle schools support adolescent needs whereas the comprehensive high school setting is less supportive of students' emotional development. Students enter high school with a feeling of loneliness and anonymity (Blyth, Simmons, & Carlton-Ford, 1983). Students moving from middle school into high school face various academic and social challenges that become distractions to their achieving academically and graduating from high school. Many are not ready for the transition to the impersonal high school setting and become more disengaged and disinterested in achieving academically (Roderick & Camburn, 1999). Thus districts have made attempts to address the ninth-grade year by reforming the structure of the traditional high school to help ninth-grade students make the move into the high school setting successfully.

This study replicated a previous Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University study completed by Johnson titled *A Study of Different Ninth Grade Practices Across the State of Maryland: A Descriptive Study of Maryland Public Schools*; the purpose of the current study was to evaluate the perceptions of principals concerning the varying transitional practices of high schools in the Commonwealth of Virginia and to determine if certain ninth-grade transitional practices influence promotion and affect the high school dropout rate. The following research questions were adapted from Johnson's

questions to reflect the fact that that the study was conducted in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

1. What transition practices exist for ninth-grade students in Virginia public schools? What are the perceptions of school officials regarding the effectiveness of these practices?
2. How do the transition practices vary according to socioeconomic status (SES) and race or ethnicity throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia?
3. What differences exist among transition practices in urban, rural, and suburban communities throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia?
4. What are the transition practices in small (1000 or fewer students), medium (1001-1500 students), large (1501-2000 students), and very large (more than 2000 students) high schools in the Commonwealth of Virginia?

School Factors that Influence Transition Practices

The conceptual framework depicted in Figure 1 indicates the influences transition practices and perceptions of transition practices within SES, race or ethnicity, community type, and school size. The transitional practices, as reported in survey, may present different outcomes within the variables of SES, race or ethnicity, community type, and school size.

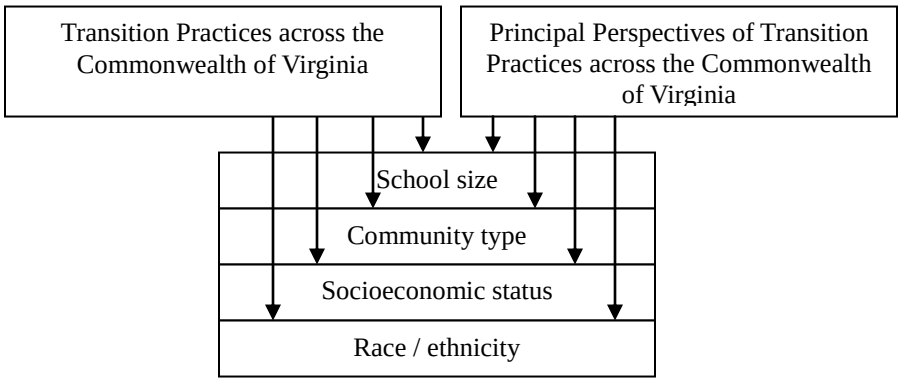

Figure 1. School factors that influence transition practices.

Secondary schools have used several transitional practices to help students navigate through the high school in a successful manner. Nevertheless, school size, community type, SES, and race or ethnicity influence the respective features and overall effectiveness of these practices.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, reauthorized as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2002, mandated the development of plans by states to ensure that schools are adequately progressing toward the goal of 100% achievement on state standardized tests. In Virginia, the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) objectives measure proficiency in math and reading, participation rates in state testing, high school graduation rates, and attendance. In 2009, the State Board of Education approved the Graduation and Completion Index as a new measurable objective that schools, districts, and states must meet. The 2011-2012 AYP ratings are based upon the 2010-2011 state's reading and math Standards of Learning (SOL) tests. Only 3% of Virginia's school divisions met AYP during the 2011-2012 school year. Ultimately, schools not making AYP for consecutive years must develop and implement specific plans to address areas of

weakness and students must be given the option to transfer to another public school within the district. Schools could face more severe consequences involving complete takeover and reorganization (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Socioeconomic status (SES) and race or ethnicity. The political mandates cause pressure for districts to create successfully academic schools in which all students achieve regardless of status, ethnicity, or other challenges. With the ever increasing political and accountability pressures, schools must address academically unsuccessful students. One key focus is academic deficiencies with low-SES and minority students. According to researchers, low SES is the strongest predictor of low academic success and dropping out of high school (Amos, 2008). The link between poverty and high school diploma attainment is so profound that recent data show that only 50% of impoverished students are likely to graduate (Swanson, 2008).

Legters and Kerr (2001) found that ninth-grade students had higher promotion rates in low-poverty, low-minority high schools. In contrast, students from high-poverty, high-minority high schools were at greater risk of not earning enough credits to be promoted to 10^{th} grade. Specifically, of 100 ninth-grade students, 13 students failed to be promoted to the tenth grade (Legters & Kerr, 2001).

Additionally, studies have showed that minority students are more likely to be academically behind White students, thereby creating a barrier for high school diploma attainment (Heck & Mahoe, 2006). Furthermore, the dropout rate for minority students, including African American, Hispanic, and Native American students, during or near the end of the ninth-grade year is greater when compared to Whites (Heck & Mahoe, 2006).

Minority and impoverished students are at greater risk of dropping out of high school; therefore, the implementation of greater support systems for transitioning to the high school setting is needed (Zvoch, 2006). Legters and Kerr (2001) found in their research that dropout rates in high-minority, high-poverty schools were 10% higher compared to low-minority, low-poverty schools.

Community type. Researchers have discovered that transition practices in secondary schools are dependent upon the type of community and high school demographics. Urban school districts have needs and resources different from those of suburban and rural school districts; thus, a one-size-fits-all practice is inadequate.

Rural schools, for example, have higher enrollments of impoverished students and are often provided financial grants to help enhance programs that target students at risk of academic failure. Suburban schools, on the other hand, are less likely to have the same issues as rural schools; additionally, they have different areas of resources to help fund particular programs geared to academic achievement. Urban districts with high-minority and high-SES populations require a different type of program to address their needs (Legters & Kerr, 2001).

School size. Zvoch's (2006) research determined that school organization and size affect the dropout rate. In a study involving 11 high schools in a large urban district serving more than 90,000 students, Zvoch examined the characteristics of students who dropped out across the high schools as well as the different high school organizational environments, specifically those designed to address ninth-grade students in a systemic and consistent manner. Zvoch's findings revealed that students who attended school in an academically and socially supportive structured environment had lower dropout rates

compared to students in organizations less structured and systemic. A specifically relevant finding was that ethnic populations attending a smaller learning community with a structured organization had a much lower dropout rate (Zvoch, 2006).

Overview of Methodology

This study was a replication of a dissertation completed by Johnson (2009) titled *High School Transition Practices for Ninth Graders: A Descriptive Study of Maryland Public High Schools.* It was a descriptive study with the purpose of surveying Virginia high schools to describe the ninth-grade transition practices offered as well as the perceived effectiveness of such practices. This study determined the perceived effectiveness of the reported transition practices with regard to SES, race or ethnicity, community type, and high school size. Data were gathered through the use of a survey of 274 high school principals in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Ninth-grade transition practices vary in approach based upon demographics, SES, size, and community type; consequently, they have varied results. Johnson's (2009) research originated as one of the recommendations from Kerr's 2002 dissertation research, *Easing the Transition to High School: The Effects of School Organization on Ninth Grade Success*. Surveying Maryland secondary principals, Johnson found that

> administrators in high schools in the State of Maryland recognized the need for effective transition practices, but [noted that] creating practices that are a traditional part of the high school program is more practical than creating practices that are based on organizational reform efforts. (Johnson, 2009, p. 57)

This descriptive study involved quantitative analysis of the survey data to

determine the perceptions of transition practices as reported by secondary administrators. The survey asked respondents to provide general information about their respective schools, community types, and ninth-grade students, including demographics, SES, and specific transition practices.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used in this study.

Ninth-grade academy. The ninth-grade academy, or freshman academy, is a smaller learning community in which a larger school designs a small learning community (SLC) to bridge the eighth- to ninth-grade transition (Bernstein, Millsap, Schimmenti, & Page, 2008).

Ninth-grade campus. The ninth-grade school is an independent school serving only ninth-grade students (Aldine Independent School District, n.d.).

Rural community. A rural community has a significantly lower population and large parcels of property without closely built structures that are typical of urban areas (United States Government, 2012).

School size. The definition of school size varies among experts and has changed because of population growth (Page, Layzer, Schimmenti, Bernstein, & Horst, 2002). According to one study, the optimal size of a high school is 600-900 students (Irmscher, 1997). Johnson's (2009) definition regarding designation of school size are presented below:

- A very large high school is a school with a student enrollment of 2001 or higher.

- A large high school is a high school with an enrollment between 1501 and 2000 students.
- A medium-sized high school has an enrollment between 1001 and 1500 students.
- A small high school has an enrollment of fewer than 1000 students.

Small learning community. A small learning community (SLC) restructures the larger setting into a smaller units; it can be represented by many forms: school within a school, career academy, house plan, or magnet school (Bernstein et al., 2008).

Socioeconomic status (SES). SES is a measure representing family income, parents' education level and occupation, and social status within the community (Demarest, Reisner, Anderson, & Humphrey, 1993).

Suburban community. A suburban community is an area with a population of 250,000 or more, located on the outskirts of a bigger city or urban area; it does not typically have the large number of buildings close together that are typical of the city. Most suburbanites commute to the city for employment (Jaret, 2009; U.S. Census Bureau, 2007).

Traditional high school. The traditional high school is a comprehensive school setting.

Urban community. An urban area generally represents a large city having some type of public transportation, several buildings close together, and high population. An urban community is described as having 1000 people per square mile (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007).

Significance

According to Johnson (2009), the ninth-grade transitional year is an important year in helping students to become academically successful and ultimately to earn a high school diploma; therefore, specific programs need to be in place to address the specific developmental and academic needs of this susceptible group of students. Johnson's research also revealed a perception that secondary Maryland principals have other distractions that prevent them from focusing on a prescribed transition program for ninth-grade students.

Researchers have revealed that the developmental stage of adolescents entering high school requires specific attention and practices. Because of the simultaneous timing of entrance into adolescence and high school, the transition process impacts student success. In a study of 800 students in grades five to nine conducted by Midgley et al. (2000), a definable impact on success in transitioning was noted. Their research determined that student academic achievement declined during the transition through middle school and into high school (Midgley et al., 2000). Wheelock (1993) found evidence of a lack of professional development and training geared toward teachers working with students at this critical point.

Overview of the Dissertation

This research was a replicated study of Johnson's (2009) original dissertation *High School Transition Practices for Ninth Graders: A Descriptive Study of Maryland Public High School*, but this study focused on ninth-grade transition practices in Virginia public secondary schools. Based upon survey results, this dissertation was a descriptive study designed to describe the ninth-grade transition practices, as well as perceptions of

their effectiveness, in Virginia's secondary public schools. The dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction and overview of the dissertation topic, the methodology used in the dissertation, definition of terms, and significance of the ninth-grade problem. Chapter 2 presents analysis of the literature regarding ninth-grade transition practices with regard to the specific topics of SES, race or ethnicity, community type, and school size. The methodology and research design of the survey are discussed in Chapter 3, and Chapter 4 provides analysis of the results of the collected data in a descriptive and quantitative approach. Chapter 5 presents conclusions related to the findings of the collected and analyzed data with regard to the current literature and provides personal reflections on the findings as well as discussion of implications for further research.

Chapter 2 Review of Literature

This study was a replication of a recent Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University dissertation completed by Johnson (2009) titled *High School Practices for Ninth Graders: A Descriptive Study of Maryland Public High Schools*. This study, however, examined the practices in public high schools of the Commonwealth of Virginia. The study examined the following questions:

1. What transition practices exist for ninth-grade students in Virginia public schools? What transition practices exist for ninth-grade students in Virginia public schools? What are the perceptions of school officials regarding the effectiveness of these practices?
2. How do the transition practices vary according to socioeconomic status (SES) and race or ethnicity throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia?
3. What differences exist among transition practices in urban, rural, and suburban communities throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia?
4. What are the transition practices in small (1000 or fewer students), medium (1001-1500 students), large (1501-2000 students), and very large (more than 2001students) high schools in the Commonwealth of Virginia?

Research in this study was completed after reviewing Johnson's (2009) references and research, using the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University library. Keywords included in the search for this study included high school dropouts, ninth-grade transition practices, ninth-grade failures, ninth-grade academy, and ninth-grade dropouts.

Students entering adulthood without a high school diploma influence considerably the economic and social growth of the nation. This chapter broadly identifies the impact of the dropout situation on global progress. To prevent students from dropping out of high school, schools identify trends associated with students not earning adequate credits and attempt to address the situation by helping students earn the necessary credits toward graduation. Throughout history, districts have utilized the reorganization of grade levels to focus attention on issues relating to the educational and economic needs of the nation and to implement best practices. This chapter examines the history of grade-level organization in schools as well as the factors influencing reorganization throughout the history of education. As literature has indicated, the ninth grade is a pivotal year during which students exhibit academic and social struggles that often prevent credit accrual. Various schools and districts have chosen to restructure the ninth-grade year to address these struggles and increase academic success. This chapter reveals the significance of the ninth-grade year. The adolescent developmental years relate to the transitional issues facing ninth-grade students as they transition into the high school setting. This chapter explains several other factors that relate to the ninth-grade transition.

In the United States, the effect of student dropout on economic progress is dramatic. A high school dropout has less chance of being employed, earns less annual and lifetime income, has a higher chance of being incarcerated, and is in worse health compared to an individual with a high school diploma (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007). According to the United States Census Bureau (2010), persons aged 18 through 65 who had not completed high school averaged an annual salary of $23,608 in 2009. In comparison, persons aged 18 through 65 who completed a high school credential

program, including a General Educational Development (GED) certificate, averaged $33,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). In a 2009 address to Congress, President Barack Obama said, "This is a prescription for economic decline because we know the countries that out-teach us today will out-compete us tomorrow" ("Remarks of President Barack Obama," 2009).

President Obama further stated that 75% of the fastest growing occupations will need an education beyond a high school diploma ("Remarks of President Barack Obama," 2009). According to the United States Department of Labor, dropouts are 40% less likely to be in the labor force than individuals with high school credentials or higher; the unemployment rate for dropouts is 14.6% compared to unemployment rates of 9.7% and 5.2% for high school graduates and college degree holders, respectively (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010). Dropouts older than age 24 tend to report being in worse health than do adults with a high school diploma, regardless of income (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). A high school dropout costs the nation approximately $260,000 during his or her lifetime with a total approximate loss of $3 trillion (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007). In his February 24, 2009 address to a Joint Session of Congress, President Obama stated,

> Right now, three quarters of the fastest-growing occupations require more than a high school diploma. And yet, just over half of our citizens have that level of education. We have one of the highest high school dropout rates of any industrialized nation. And half of the students who begin college never finish. ("Remarks of President Barack Obama," 2009)

To compete globally, the emphasis is on obtaining technical training and college degrees (Neild, 2007).

The percentage of dropouts who become involved in crime and remain in the cycle of poverty is alarming. State and federal prisons have a huge population of high school dropouts. According to a piece aired on NPR in 2006, 75% of state prisoners and 59% of federal inmates were high school dropouts (Grant, 2006). In a study titled *The Consequence of Dropping Out of High School*, researchers found that a high school dropout is 63 times more likely to be incarcerated than an individual with a 4-year college degree (Sum, Khatiwada, McLaughlin, & Palma, 2009). Although dropping out is not an automatic route to prison, a high school dropout is more likely than a high school graduate to be arrested (Amos, 2008). Because dropouts have less earning power, on average, financial uncertainty increases the chances of incarceration (Amos, 2008). The cost of crime is staggering. Victims' medical expenses and the reduced tax revenue associated with their loss of income as well as police and court costs are only a few of the expenses related to criminal activity (Amos, 2008). The greatest expense resulting from criminal activity is the cost of incarcerating criminals. Economist Lance Lochner, who researched the cost benefits of high school and college attainment for society, estimated that almost $8 billion would be saved each year if only an additional 5% of the male population earned high school diplomas and college credits, with $2.8 billion earned income entering the economy (Amos, 2008). Although dropping out of high school does not guarantee a road to crime and incarceration, not obtaining an education puts an individual at a higher risk of poverty and crime. The reasons are unknown but researchers have hypothesized that people with high school diplomas commit fewer

crimes. According to Amos, a high school graduate (a) has the potential to earn higher wages, which reduces the need to commit a crime; (b) has a higher chance of obtaining a professional career whereas a criminal conviction carries a strong stigma; (c) has spent longer hours inside the classroom, thus being instilled with the values of education versus the life of crime; and (d) is less likely to participate in youthful criminal behavior. Staying in the classroom keeps students off the streets (Amos, 2008).

There is a distinct link between the cycle of poverty and high school diploma attainment. The annual dropout rate for the United States has remained flat over the past 20 years (Amos, 2008). Recent data show that students in poverty attending a high-poverty school are only 50% likely to graduate with a high school diploma (Swanson, 2008).

Dropping out of high school is not a quick decision; rather, it is a process that evolves through several complex experiences in life and education. Researchers Neild et al. (2008) found several social and academic factors characteristic of students at risk of not graduating. Poor attendance, failure in core subjects, weak math and reading skills, and previous retentions are factors that put students at higher risk of becoming disengaged from school and not graduating from high school. A longitudinal study in Baltimore identified predictors encompassing even the early elementary school years (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997). Specifically, the Baltimore study identified family stress, increased disengagement from school, and reading level as early predictors of dropping out of high school (Alexander et al., 1997). The dropout process has been described by researchers as a combination of social- and academic-related events that often lead to decreased school engagement (Neild et al., 2008).

History of Grade-Level Organization

The reorganization of grade levels changed as the political framework and the economic needs of the United States transformed. As the country changed, education focused on the social and academic needs of students. The restructuring and organization of secondary programs changed, and they continue to do so as social, economic, and political focuses of the United States shift to meet global challenges.

In the early 20th century, the second Industrial Revolution gave rise to white-collar employment, thereby increasing demands for educated employees. Because of this movement, the United States experienced a shift toward high schools in which students could choose core classes to prepare them for a career. By the mid-1900s, high schools were better funded, and students were given the choice of staying in school to obtain a diploma (Bennett, 1919).

Following the separation of elementary, junior high school, and senior high school students in the early 20th century, the middle school model emerged in the mid-1980s. In this model, students in sixth through eighth grades were housed together and ninth-grade students were moved to the high school (Lounsbury, 1996). Because of the dropout issue during the past two decades, researchers have focused to a great extent on the ninth-grade year as the time of intervention for potential high school dropouts.

The junior high school movement became popular in the public school system during the early 20th century in an effort to improve the education of students in seventh, eighth, and ninth grades. The intent was to decrease the number of students dropping out at an early age, encourage vocational careers suitable for the workforce, shorten the vocational preparation time so that males could begin working at an earlier age, and use

the school system as a means to police the "moral evils that accompany and grow out of adolescence" (Bennett, 1919, pp. 2-3).

Junior high school model. Departmentalization of high schools confused new students, and more difficult lessons caused students to fail. According to Bennett (1919), high school teachers were indifferent to student success or failure; therefore, students' responsibility for their own success increased. To students, 4 years seemed too long for completing high school; their desire to complete school was lost. School systems began to reorganize their grades and place seventh-, eighth-, and ninth- grade students together to create the junior high school. The junior high school movement was initiated at the turn of the 20th century to help reduce dropouts, encourage positive vocational choices, and provide more extensive and better instruction in the vocational choices (Bennett, 1919).

By the mid-1980s, most junior high schools had transformed into middle schools (Cuban, 1998). A junior high school model, according to Horn (2006), is a subject-centered school similar to a high school setting wherein disciplines are separated rather than a student-centered middle school that focuses on the adolescent. In 2000, only 2000 junior high schools existed nationally, compared to 16,000 middle schools.

The middle school movement. The middle school movement emerged in the late 1950s as educators noted that junior high schools were not organized to deal appropriately with young adolescent learners unready to deal with the academic and social rigors of high school (Anfara & Waks, 2001). In 1969, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development established the Council on the Emerging Adolescent Learner to work with formal and informal groups to indicate the rationale and

significance of the change from the junior high school into something more appropriate for the adolescent learner (Anfara, 2001).

The committee noted gaps between the school organization, with its intended curriculum, and the intellectual and emotional needs of the adolescent. Researchers described seven basic needs of an adolescent learner: positive social interactions with adults and peers, structure and clear limits, physical activity, creative expression, competence and achievement, meaningful participation in family and school, and opportunities for self-definition; adolescents need to trust adults and peers to grow personally and develop intellectually (Anfara, 2001). The middle school concept rapidly replaced junior high schools across the United States.

Many school districts, however, continued to build large high schools. A number of studies in the 1970s and 1980s recommended that a high school be no larger than 2000 students (Raywid, 1996). Many large high schools are still operable. Instead of building more schools, many school districts have investigated creating small learning communities (SLCs) to address ninth graders' transition into the high school setting.

Adolescent Development

Ninth-grade students are at a phase of adolescence in which many face peer and social pressures as well as academic challenges. Physically and emotionally, teenagers change their roles in life as they move from dependent children to autonomous adults. Adolescence is the stage when students are not wholly dependent upon their parents but not completely ready for independence from their parents (Stearns & Glennie, 2006). Adolescents continue to identify and attempt to gain control of their world by trying to understand their physical changes, varying abilities, and social roles in life (Stearns &

Glennie, 2006). Educational and social transitioning from a middle school setting in eighth grade to a high school setting in ninth grade poses many challenges that require difficult navigation through the complexities of high school (Barber & Olson, 2004). In comparison to their middle school experiences, freshmen take more courses, have classes with higher teacher–student ratios, and must assume more responsibility for their academics (Schiller, 1999). Researchers have found that the academic rigors of assignments in high school are more difficult and lengthier than what middle school students experience and relationships wane as students leave middle school (Newman, Myers, Newman, Lohman, & Smith, 2000). The ninth-grade year becomes particularly difficult for students at risk of dropping out of high school (Legters & Kerr, 2001).

A transition is a definable moment during which a person travels between two varying points. Human beings transition from one developmental stage to the next; for example, humans travel from childhood to adulthood through various points (Wattenberg, 1973). The intermediary time, however, between childhood and adulthood is adolescence. An adolescent is defined as "a young person whose reproductive system has matured, who is economically dependent upon adults, whose chief source of need gratification is his peers…and for whom status and roles as defined for children and adults in his culture are confused" (Wattenberg, 1974, p. 22). The transitional stage prior to adolescence usually includes individuals ages 10-15. The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (CCAD) reported that during these years schools "…have the potential to make a tremendous impact on the development of their students—for better or for worse" (Russell, 1996, pp. 12-13). Adolescents experience physical and emotional changes and are greatly influenced by peer and adult relationships. Relationships change

drastically through this stage as students navigate the environment to establish their own identity (Erikson, 1963). Adolescents at this point must try to connect with their new roles of becoming adults with their limited knowledge of the world. During this transitional stage into adulthood, teenagers struggle with role confusion; guidance and positive relationships are crucial (Erikson, 1963). The physiological changes adolescents encounter further complicate the ninth-grade year, making it a critical pivotal year for adolescents as the adolescent world collides with an intensely different and difficult adult world of changed expectations.

The Significance of Ninth-Grade Transition

Transition from a middle school setting to a high school setting during adolescence poses several academic, social, and peer challenges for students. The struggling student typically has a higher truancy rate, thereby making it more difficult to learn the necessary material to pass courses and earn credits toward promotion and a diploma (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009).

Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morison (2006) reported that 45% of dropouts indicated that they had entered high school unprepared for rigorous studies. According to Stearns & Glennie (2006), when ninth-grade students are unsuccessful academically in their first year of high school, they are at a higher risk of not graduating with a high school diploma. Comparison of high school dropouts' and graduates' ninth-grade first-semester grade point averages (GPAs) has indicated a significant difference. High school dropouts' ninth-grade first semester GPA average was 1.27 compared to high school graduates' GPA of 2.75 on a 4-point grade scale (Hickman, Bartholomew, & Mathwig, 2008; Stearns & Glennie, 2006). Disaggregated by race, sex, and socioeconomic status,

the statistics show even more disparity: Boys are at a higher risk of being retained in a grade level than are girls, and minorities are more likely to be retained than Whites (Stearns & Glennie, 2006).

According to Bottoms (2008), high school students being unprepared academically for high school coursework and failing courses in the ninth grade have a greater chance of dropping out of high school. Allensworth and Easton, (2007) found that ninth-grade first-quarter grades were strong predictors of subsequent success in graduation; those ninth graders failing more than one academic course and having been retained were 85% more likely not to graduate. Repeat ninth graders were more likely to drop out of high school; in fact, a student's being held back in the ninth grade was the strongest predictor of not graduating (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). In cities with the highest dropout rates, close to 40% repeat the ninth grade; of those repeating ninth-grade students, only 10%-15% ultimately graduate from high school (Balfanz & Legters, 2001; Kennelly & Monrad, 2007). According to Editorial Projects in Education (2008), more than one third of all dropouts are lost in ninth grade because of the insufficient support needed to smooth the transition into high school.

Based upon national averages, the largest numbers of high school students are in the ninth grade. In the 2008-2009 school year, there were close to 3.7 million eighth-grade students, more than 4.1 million ninth-grade students, and 3.8 million tenth-grade students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). Virginia's statistics were proportionally similar, with 92,881 eighth-grade students, 106,252 ninth-grade students, and 97,466 tenth-grade students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009). Thus,

the larger number of ninth-grade students indicates that the retention rate is higher in the ninth grade.

Factors Related to Ninth-Grade Transition

The ninth-grade transitional year has been coined the "make it or break it" year for completing high school. It is during this time that first-time high school students must learn to navigate through a complex comprehensive high school system. Many ninth-grade students, for the first time, must learn to understand that passing grades earn credits and credit accrual is what is necessary to earn a high school diploma (Fulk, 2003). Not only do ninth-grade students take more courses then they did in middle school, these early high school courses are often more rigorous. The increased course load with the addition of standardized tests to verify course credit often adds to the difficulty of academic performance (Schemo, 2004). According to Stearns (2006), ninth-grade academic preparation and improved achievement at the ninth-grade level can lead to higher graduation rates. Chmelynski (2004) found that students will more likely graduate from high school if they make it to the 10^{th} grade. As a result, educational reformation practices target the ninth-grade year not only to identify and predict potential dropouts but to prevent them from dropping out of high school.

Researchers Neild, Stoner-Eby, and Furstenberg conducted a study in 2008 to determine if there was a connection between the ninth-grade transition year and dropping out of high school. Using student record data from a group in Philadelphia public schools and a survey of this cohort, the study revealed several predictors of dropping out of high school during the transition year (Neild, Stoner-Eby, & Furstenberg, 2008). Furthermore,

the researchers examined the correlation of academic outcomes and attendance during the first year of high school to the likelihood of dropping out of high school.

The large data set included students from the Philadelphia Education Longitudinal Study, which analyzed information on students in one urban school district during the 1995-1996 school year. Researchers analyzed survey responses from students, parents, and school officials, as well as specific student information gathered from the school records. They discovered that academic failure and weak attendance contribute to the likelihood of dropping out of high school within 6 years (Neild et al., 2008).

With regard to academics, the study revealed that students with stronger math skills were more likely to stay in school versus those who showed weak math scores on the Pennsylvania standardized test at the end of the ninth-grade year. Moreover, students who earned Ds and Fs as well as those with higher attendance problems in the eighth grade were at higher risk of dropping out of high school (Neild et al., 2008). The probability of dropping out of high school increases with course failures in the ninth grade. For example, ninth-grade students taking five courses and failing one class increased the probability of not graduating by one third (Neild et al., 2008). Students entering high school older than their peers were found to double their odds of dropping out of school. The study concluded that ninth-grade students entering high school experience academic failure as a result of their difficulties moving into the high school setting where there are different academic and social expectations (Neild et al., 2008). The researchers concluded that "the dropout epidemic cannot be ameliorated unless high schools organize themselves to help students through the transition to high school" (Neild et al., 2008, p. 559).

SES and race or ethnicity and ninth-grade transition. In a 2001 longitudinal study on the Maryland public high schools, *Easing the Transition to High School: An Investigation of Reform Practices to Promote Ninth Grade Success*, researchers surveyed all public high schools to examine the types of school reform practices specifically for ninth-grade students statewide and then analyzed state data on the reporting high schools to determine if there was a positive impact on student outcomes, specifically attendance, promotion, and dropout rates.

Through the use of a survey, Legters and Kerr (2001) determined that Maryland's high schools used a variety of transition practices aimed at helping ninth-grade students make a successful transition to the high school setting. The researchers surveyed all of Maryland's high school principals to determine the types of practices and programs in the 9-12 high schools. The survey also asked high school principals to report outcome measures of ninth-grade attendance and promotion rates. The researchers then analyzed achievement data (ninth-grade state test scores) as well as SES, race or ethnicity, and school size data retrieved from the Maryland Department of Education (Legters & Kerr, 2001).

In comparing survey results regarding transition practices among the high schools to the respective high schools' data, Legters and Kerr (2001) discovered that such practices positively affected student performance. Specifically, Legters and Kerr categorized schools by demographics and socioeconomic status to determine the impact of transition practices on promotion and dropout rates. Schools considered high-poverty, high-minority (at least 25% students eligible for free or reduced-price meals and at least 50% minority population) were more likely to have a transition practice in place that was

aimed at personalizing the learning environment. Nearly all of the schools in this category used an extended class period for the core subjects or for mentoring. High-poverty, high-minority schools were greater than four times more likely to have interdisciplinary teams in place and twice as likely to have a school-within-school design targeted at ninth-grade transition (Legters & Kerr, 2001).

In comparison, schools categorized as low-poverty, low-minority (no more than 10% of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals and no more than 20% minority population) had higher promotion rates. Of 100 ninth-grade students in a high-poverty, high-minority school, 13 more students failed to be promoted to the tenth grade in comparison to students at low-poverty, low-minority schools. Nearly all students attending low-poverty, low-minority schools passed the Maryland Functional Math Test versus only two thirds of students in the high-poverty, high-minority schools. Dropout rates were 10% higher in the high-poverty, high-minority schools versus those categorized as low-poverty, low-minority (Legters & Kerr, 2001). The study examined sustained practices for ninth-grade transition and discovered that the high-poverty, high-minority schools with a widespread school-within-a-school transition had higher promotion rates and lower dropout rates versus high-poverty, high-minority schools that did not have a viable and pervasive practice (Legters & Kerr, 2001).

Urban, rural, and suburban communities and ninth-grade transition. Schools within urban, rural, and suburban communities face different challenges and issues for ninth grade students. Urban communities have specific needs to help ninth-grade students navigate the high school environment but often have practices in place that are unsuccessful in helping ninth-grade students successfully transition into the high

school setting (Balfanz & Legters, 2001; Neild et al., 2001). Because of student diversity, suburban high schools with ninth-grade transition practices in place direct the focus on individual students versus treating the entire ninth-grade class (Case, 2006). Rural areas, however, have high schools that are closely tied to their communities; thus transition practices are neither as prevalent nor as necessary. Johnson (2010) surveyed principal perspectives on transition practices and the effect on student success. He found that in Maryland "there is no clear distinction between the ratings of transition practice and community type. Only one, extended class periods was rated lower in comparison to urban and suburban schools" (Johnson, 2010, p. 56). Thus, there was not consistent evidence to clearly support the notion that specific ninth-grade transition practices are more or less successful depending upon community type.

School size. Large schools create a difficult environment for students, especially first-time ninth-grade students, to succeed academically (Kerr, 2002; Lee & Smith, 1996; Smith-Mumford, 2004). Zvoch (2006) studied data from a large school district in Las Vegas, NV to determine the relationships between school and student characteristics (demographics, ethnicity, SES, and participation in special education) and ninth-grade dropouts. Specifically, Zvoch examined a large ninth-grade cohort from a large urban district serving approximately 90,000 students. From 100 high schools, 11 high schools serving 20,000 students were involved in the study. Zvoch examined the student dropout status across the 11 high schools to determine if select aspects of the schooling organizational environment to address ninth grade (mentorship, team teaching, freshman academies) systematically related to school dropout outcomes. Zvoch's research determined that overage students, impoverished students, minority students, students with

low academic achievement on standardized tests, and special education students were at greatest risk of dropping out of high school. In addition, Zvoch found that the school organization affected dropout status. For example, the odds for members of various ethnic populations to drop out were lower in schools with smaller learning communities (Zvoch, 2006).

There were several limitations within Zvoch's (2006) study. Only 11 schools were used in this study, thereby increasing the possibility of a sampling error. The results of the study showed a reduction in dropout rates for schools with an academy compared to schools without an academy; however, there were only two schools that had an academy. It was also difficult to tease out the reasons for the effects of a smaller learning community on student outcomes.

Chapter Summary

The review of literature explains the global effect of dropouts on the economy of the United States as well as the effect of the country's economic health and legal system on dropouts. There are many factors that influence the economy; one of those factors is the educational attainment of individuals.

The transformation of the junior high school to the middle school model began as a result of educators' not believing that the junior high school was addressing the social needs of adolescents as they transitioned into the high school setting. As states began tightening graduation requirements, school districts began to examine the various reasons for students dropping out of high school; one reason noted was that the ninth-grade year seemed to be a difficult year for students to navigate successfully. The research on the transitional ninth-grade year has revealed challenges for students as they enter high

school for the first time. Academic issues, credit accrual, attendance, and discipline problems often plague ninth-grade students, thereby resulting in slow movement toward diploma completion. Students who fail in the ninth grade are at a higher risk of not graduating from high school.

In this dissertation, the researcher examined transition practices in the 274 high schools in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The researcher reviewed results from a survey to determine if there is any type of relationship between transition practices and achievement by analyzing the effects of transition practices on various factors: SES, school size, race, and community type (rural, urban, suburban).

Chapter 3 Methodology

This study measured the perceptions of school administrators regarding the varying transitional practices of high schools in Virginia to determine if a ninth-grade transitional practice is associated with promotion or dropping out of high school. Specifically, the researcher surveyed the 274 high school principals (or designees) in Virginia to determine the type and effectiveness of transition practices in place. Furthermore, survey results were used to determine if ninth-grade transition practices varied according to school size, school demographics, and SES. In addition, this study investigated the relationship between eighth- to ninth-grade transition practices and promotion from ninth to tenth grade based upon survey responses. Finally, this study sought to find existing differences among transition practices in urban, rural, and suburban communities in Virginia.

Research Design

A survey instrument was sent to high school principals in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The survey had been used in a previous research study by Johnson (2009), *High School Transition Practices for Ninth Graders: A Descriptive Study of Maryland Public High Schools.* Johnson adapted the survey from one used in Kerr's (2002) research study titled *Easing the Transition to High School: The Effect of School Organization on Ninth Grade Success*. Both research studies were conducted in Maryland. This study replicated the quantitative methodology in Johnson's research to explore the following research questions:

1. What transition practices exist for ninth-grade students in Virginia public schools? What are the perceptions of school officials regarding the effectiveness of these practices?
2. How do the transition practices vary according to socioeconomic status (SES) and race or ethnicity throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia?
3. What differences exist among transition practices in urban, rural, and suburban communities throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia?
4. What are the transition practices in small (1000 or fewer students), medium (1001-1500 students), large (1501-2000 students), and very large (more than 2001students) high schools in the Commonwealth of Virginia?

The survey questions included specific questions regarding demographics of each school, including SES, race or ethnicity, community type, and high school size (independent variables), as well as the various transitional practices offered to ninth-grade students (dependent variable). Furthermore, the survey measured the perceived effectiveness of reported transitional practices.

This research study utilized a survey, which was interpreted through a quantitative research design. The study determined the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Pedhazur and Schmelkin (1991) explained that descriptive methodology is a means to describe what the data are or are not. Data from the survey were entered into statistical software and described and explicated based on the survey responses. Johnson's (2009) research generated a 59% return rate for survey responses. For validity and reliability purposes, the survey for this study was sent to all 274 high school principals with the intention of attaining at least a 65% return rate.

Study participants. According to the U.S. Department of Education there are 362 public high schools in the Commonwealth of Virginia (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Virginia's schools are located in cities, suburbs, rural areas, and towns (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). The largest percentage (45.6%) of Virginia's high schools are located in the rural areas of the commonwealth; only 11.7% are located in towns (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Of the 362 high schools in the commonwealth, 34 are magnet schools and two are charter schools; 35 high schools include the eighth grade in their high school setting, whereas only 4 high schools include Grades 10 through 12. Virginia's four junior high schools include the eighth and ninth grades in one building (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Study participants included in this research included 274 high schools grades 9 through 12.

Instrumentation

The survey is divided into five sections; it was distributed to the 274 principals in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The first section requested general school information on ninth-grade students as well as the overall student population, including freshman attendance rates, rates of promotion from ninth to tenth grade, courses and credits needed for promotion to the tenth grade, types of schedules, and transition practices. The second section addressed the use and effectiveness of a small learning community for ninth-grade students. The third section of the survey addressed interdisciplinary team organization for ninth-grade students. The questions referred to the effectiveness and frequency of these practices, as well as the effectiveness of particular practices. Johnson's survey instrument included a fourth section not addressed in this study,

concentrating on staff development and training at the surveyed school with an option to describe programs or practices to support ninth-grade students not mentioned in the survey. The fifth section requested input on the demographics of the school to gather information regarding the size of the high school, community type, SES status, and ethnic framework of the school body.

Data collection. To develop a descriptive and analytical research study, the survey was sent to all comprehensive public high school principals in Virginia; principals (or designees) were given the opportunity to complete the survey via SurveyMonkey. The data from the survey were used to analyze and describe the transition practices in Virginia's public schools as well as the principals' perceptions of the usefulness of these practices. To collect data using the survey, the following process was used. After Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, each comprehensive, traditional Virginia public high school principal received an e-mail explaining the research study and the survey process and providing directions for accessing and completing the survey via SurveyMonkey. Each e-mail included a link to access the survey. By week two, principals were sent a follow-up e-mail reminding them to complete the survey. Those principals who had not returned the survey by week three were called. Those principals who had not completed the survey by week four received another e-mail reminder as well as a phone call in an effort to increase participation. A postcard was mailed with a link to the survey. School principals had the option to designate an alternate person to complete the survey and were requested to identify such a designee from a list of positions included on the survey.

Data analysis. Results from the survey instrument were coded into SPSS software for analysis. Quantitative descriptive statistics were used to portray the survey results. The quantitative statistics used the transition practices reported as the dependent variable and the rate of promotion from eighth grade to ninth grade, graduation rate, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, community type, and school size as the independent variables. Like Johnson's study, the researcher used a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and the Pearson coefficient to determine relationships between the dependent variable and the independent variables indicative of perceived effectiveness of the transition practices by the various reported groups. Unlike Johnson's study, the researcher used Chi-Square test of association to examine the relationships between independent variables and perceived effectiveness ratings.

Table 1 displays the methods for analysis of the collected survey data.

Table 1. *Methods of Analysis*

Independent variable	Method for dependent variable
SES range > 60%, 25% - 59%, < 25%	One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) of perceived effectiveness of reported transition practices
	Chi-square test of association
Race or ethnicity percentage Asian, African American, Hispanic, White, other	Pearson correlation coefficient
	Chi-square test of association
Type of community Urban, rural, suburban	One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) of perceived effectiveness of reported transition practices
	Chi-square test of association
Size of school Small, medium, large, very large	One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) of perceived effectiveness of reported transition practices
	Chi-square test of association

(Johnson, 2009, p. 29)

Chapter 4 presents the frequencies of the various practices as well as the perceptions of their effectiveness based upon an analysis of the survey responses. To address the independent variables in Questions 2, 3, and 4, the reported survey responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations. Each research question was analyzed using two different methods. The first method of analysis examined the distribution of practices in relationship to the independent

variables, whereas the second method of analysis consisted of a one-way ANOVA to determine the perceived effectiveness of the reported transition practices. The second research question identified the various transition practices, focusing on the differences between practices according to SES and race or ethnicity; in addition, the question identified the perceptions of principals regarding the effectiveness of transition practices as related to SES and race or ethnicity. For this question, the Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to determine if there is a relationship between race or ethnicity and the perceived effectiveness of transition practices.

Johnson's (2009) survey included two questions relating to professional development and interdisciplinary teaming. His research, however, did not address the analysis of the responses to these two questions. This research followed Johnson's method and concentrated only on the data relating to perceived effectiveness of transition practices in relation to SES, race or ethnicity, community type, and school size.

Chapter Summary

This research study was a replication of Johnson's (2009) research but addressed high schools in Virginia instead of Maryland. The research measured the perceived effectiveness of reported transition practices in high schools across the Commonwealth of Virginia. The dependent variable consisted of the different types of ninth-grade transition practices; the independent variables included SES, race or ethnicity, community type, and school size. The research study also measured the perceptions, as reported by survey respondents, of transition practices. Chapter 3 details the methodologies to analyze the collected survey responses from Virginia high school principals involved in this

descriptive research study. Data were collected through SurveyMonkey as well as paper format to increase the participation rate. Data were analyzed using SPSS software.

Chapter 4 Data Analysis

For this replicated study, the researcher surveyed public high school principals in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Johnson's (2009) earlier study, *High School Transition Practices for Ninth Graders: A Descriptive Study of Maryland High Schools*, focused on high schools in the State of Maryland whereas this survey was completed with Virginia high school principals. The purpose of the study was to determine the various types of existing transition practices according to SES, race or ethnicity, school size, and community type. This study also solicited Virginia high school principals' perceptions of the transition practices in their high schools. The following research questions were developed to focus this study:

1. What transition practices exist for ninth-grade students in Virginia public schools? What are the perceptions of school officials regarding the effectiveness of these practices?
2. How do the transition practices vary according to socioeconomic status (SES) and race or ethnicity throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia?
3. What differences exist among transition practices in urban, rural, and suburban communities throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia?
4. What are the transition practices in small (1000 or fewer students), medium (1001-1500 students), large (1501-2000 students), and very large (more than 2001students) high schools in the Commonwealth of Virginia?

After obtaining permission to do so, the replicated survey was sent to 274 comprehensive public high school principals in Virginia. High schools categorized as alternative, magnet, or charter schools were not included. The survey, divided into five

sections, asked respondents to provide general information about the school as well as specific information about their ninth-grade students and particular transition practices. The first section of the survey requested general information about ninth-grade attendance, promotion rates to tenth grade, subjects needed for promotion, schedule type, current transition practices, and whether or not ninth-grade students were grouped by ability their first year of high school. Part two of the survey asked respondents to rank their perceived effectiveness of the current transition practice using the following descriptors: *not offered*, *not effective*, *slightly effective*, *somewhat effective*, and *very effective*. This section also included specific follow-up questions about extended class periods, mentorship programs, school within a school options, smaller learning community options, and other specific groupings. The third section of the survey was completed by school officials and who reported team teaching ninth grade as a transition practice. This section included specific questions about the perceived effectiveness of the interdisciplinary teams or team teaching. The fourth section asked respondents about special ninth-grade professional development. The fifth and final section asked school officials to report the school size, community type, and ethnic diversity statistics. From the 274 comprehensive high schools in Virginia to which surveys were sent, 101 school officials responded. This resulted in a 37.4% response rate. At 95% confidence level, the sample size had a 7.5% confidence value, which does not fall in the standard for generalizability. At the 90% confidence level, the sample size had a 6.5% confidence value.

Survey Results

Ninth-grade transition practices vary according to the demographics and various needs of high schools. The research questions centered on the demographic information; therefore, respondents were asked to identify specific demographic information about their respective schools. Each respondent was asked to report the size, community type, and socioeconomic status of his or her particular high school. The first research question required the collection of socioeconomic status and race or ethnicity information about each school.

Demographic Information

Respondents were asked to provide demographic information pertaining to their respective schools' SES, racial or ethnic composition, community type, and size. To determine the SES, respondents were asked to indicate the percentage of students who qualified for free or reduced-price meals, using the following response options: *less than 25%*, *25%-60%*, or *greater than 60%*. Table 2 displays the frequency of responses based on the percentage of students who qualified for free or reduced-price meals.

Table 2. *Frequency Distribution of Responses by Percentage Category of Free or Reduced-Price Meals (N = 101)*

Category	*n*	*%*
Less than 25%	28	27.2%
25% - 60%	56	55.4%
Greater than 60%	17	16.8%

Of the 101 school respondents, 17 (17%) reported that greater than 60% of the student population were eligible for free or reduced-price meals. More than half (*n* =56,

55%) of the respondents reported that between 25% and 60% of their students qualified for free or reduced-price meals. Twenty eight respondents (28%) reported that fewer than 25% of their students qualified for free or reduced-price meals.

Survey respondents were asked to indicate ethnic group percentages based on school membership. Table 3 displays the mean percentages and standard deviations of responses. Of the 101 respondents, 95 completed this section of the survey.

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics for Reported Ethnic or Racial Composition of Responding Schools*

Category	Mean %	Overall % (n = 9200)	Standard deviation
Asian	3.72	3.3	6.049
African American	25.76	25.4	24.174
Hispanic	6.90	6.2	9.900
White	64.32	64.3	26.584
Other	2.58	.9	2.525

*Note. Respondents provided the ethnic or racial composition of their respective schools by total membership.

Of the 101 responding school officials, 92 completed this question on the survey. Each respondent was asked to provide the student body racial or ethnic composition as a percentage of the school's total membership. Asians and "other" ethnicities were two of the smallest percentages reported. Asians made up less than 4% of the total; other ethnicities represented less than 1% of the total reported ethnic composition. Hispanic or Latino populations made up slightly more than 6%. Blacks and Whites made up the larger percentages with Whites representing the largest at 64%; Blacks were reported as making up more than 25% of the total population of the reporting schools.

School officials also were asked to indicate if their respective schools were located in rural, suburban, or urban districts. Table 4 displays the frequency of responses with regard to community type.

Table 4. *Frequency of Responses by Community Type*
(*N* = 101)

Category	*n*	*%*
Rural	52	51.5%
Urban	30	29.7%
Suburban	19	18.8%

Of the 101 respondents, just over half (51%, *n* = 52) described their respective communities as rural. Only 19 respondents (18.6%) reported being located in a suburban district; the remaining 30 respondents described their school communities as urban.

Respondents were asked to verify the size of their respective schools by the number of students enrolled at the time of survey. Definitions for small, medium, large, and very large high schools were provided. A small school was defined as having 1000 or fewer students; a medium school was defined as having between 1001 and 1500 students; a large school was defined as having between 1501 and 2000 students; and a very large high school had more than 2001 students enrolled. Table 5 displays the frequency of responses regarding school size.

Table 5. *Frequency of Responses by Size of School*
(N = 101)

Category	*n*	*%*
Small (< 1001)	24	23.8%
Medium (1,001-1,500)	22	21.8%
Large (1,501-2,000)	47	46.5%
Very Large (> 2,000)	8	7.9%

Of the 101 respondents, 47% indicated that their schools were large. Almost a fourth (22%) indicated medium-sized high schools, whereas 24% of respondents were from small high schools. Only 8% of the high schools were considered very large.

Other School Information

Survey respondents were asked to estimate the percentage of ninth-grade students who attended on a daily basis as well as the percentage of students who were promoted at the end of the ninth-grade year. Two respondents entered numbers that were opposite of the expected numeric values and, therefore, were outliers. For example, two respondents reported that an average of 5% and 10%, respectively, of the ninth-grade students attended their schools daily and that 7% and 8% of ninth-grade students were promoted to the tenth grade at the end of the ninth-grade year. The researcher recognized these as errors and changed the percentages to 95% and 90% attendance rates and 93% and 92% promotion rates, respectively. On average, 94% (*SD* = 3.9) of ninth-grade students attended school every day, and 93% (*SD* = 5.8) of ninth-grade students were promoted from ninth grade to the tenth grade at the end of their ninth-grade school year. The survey asked school officials to report the specific courses needed for promotion; results

varied. Promotion requirements from the ninth to the tenth grade vary among Virginia high schools as displayed in the survey results. Table 6 shows the frequency of courses ninth graders need to be promoted to the tenth grade.

Table 6. *Frequency of Schools Requiring Specific Courses for Promotion to Tenth Grade* (N = 101)

Course	*n*	*%*
English	83	82.2%
Social studies	62	61.4%
Science	67	66.3%
Mathematics	72	71.3%
Foreign language	4	4.0%
Physical education	55	54.5%
Technology	7	6.9%

More than four fifths (82%) of respondents reported English to be the number one core subject needed for promotion. Mathematics, social studies, and science followed with 71%, 66%, and 61% of respondents, respectively, stating that these courses were needed for promotion. Only 55% of respondents indicated that physical education was required for promotion; foreign language and technology followed, with less than 7% of respondents reporting them to be required subjects for promotion.

School officials also were asked to report the different schedule types offered in their high schools; they were given several choices from which to choose. Table 7 displays the frequencies for types of high school schedules reported by respondents.

Table 7. *Frequency of Respondents Reporting by Type of Schedule* (*N* = 100)

Course	*n*	%
Alternate day block (A-B)	36	36.0%
Hybrid or modified	15	15.0%
Semester (4x4) block	37	37.0%
Single-period	11	11.0%
Other	1	1.0%

*Note. One participant did not respond.

Of the 101 respondents, 100 completed this section of the survey. More than a third reported that their respective high schools used a semester (4x4) block schedule (37%) or an alternate day block (A-B) schedule (36%). Only 15% of respondents reported the use of a hybrid or modified schedule, and only 11% reported use of the single-period schedule. One school official reported a schedule that was not listed among the response options.

Research question one. What transition practices exist for ninth-grade students in Virginia public schools? What are the perceptions of school officials regarding the effectiveness of these practices?

The focus of this research was to determine the various transition practices in Virginia's high schools and to report the perceived effectiveness of these transition practices as reported by school officials. Two types of analyses were conducted; the first was a frequency analysis of reported transition practices and the second was a descriptive analysis of the perceived effectiveness ratings of the reported practices. Respondents were asked to indicate their perceptions of the effectiveness of the practices by selecting

from the following choices: *not offered*, *not effective*, *slightly effective*, *somewhat effective,* and *very effective*. Table 8 displays the frequency of various transition practices

Table 8. *Frequency of Respondents Reporting Various Transition Practices* (*N* = 101*)*

Course	*n*	%
Small learning community or school within a school	22	21.8%
Interdisciplinary teams	43	42.6%
Extra help in core classes	93	92.1%
Mentoring program	29	28.7%
Homeroom or advisory group	44	43.6%
Career choices or planning	82	81.2%
Cooperative learning instruction	79	78.2%
Special curriculum	49	48.5%
Extended class periods	24	23.8%
Big brother–Big sister program	32	31.7%

As did requirements for promotion to the tenth grade, transition practices from eighth to ninth grade varied among respondents. Only a minority of the respondents claimed that their respective high schools offered smaller learning communities, mentor programs, extended class periods, or big brother or big sister programs. Less than a fourth (22%) of the respondents claimed that their respective schools offered a smaller learning community or a school within a school, 29% indicated a mentoring program, 24% extended class periods, and 32% a big brother or big sister program. Almost all respondents (92%) claimed their high schools offered extra help in core courses, 81.2% indicated career choices or planning, and 78.2% cooperative learning.

School officials were asked to report their perceptions regarding the effectiveness of listed transition practices. School officials were provided the following response options: *not offered* (0), *not effective* (1), *slightly effective* (2), *somewhat effective* (3), and *very effective* (4). Each rating was assigned a specific number for data purposes. Table 9 displays the rating percentages as well as a mean rating for each transition practice.

Table 9. *Descriptive Statistics for Respondents' Perceived Effectiveness of Transition Practices*
(N = 101)

Course	*n*	Not effective (1)	Slightly effective (2)	Somewhat effective (3)	Very effective (4)	Mean rating
Small learning community or school within a school	22	0.0%	4.5%	45.5%	50.0%	3.45
Interdisciplinary teams	43	2.3%	11.6%	41.9%	44.2%	3.28
Extra help in core classes	93	1.1%	12.9%	46.2%	39.8%	3.25
Mentoring program	29	3.4%	17.2%	51.7%	27.6%	3.03
Homeroom or advisory group	44	4.5%	13.6%	52.3%	29.5%	3.07
Career choices or planning	82	3.7%	32.9%	41.5%	22.0%	2.82
Cooperative learning instruction	79	0.0%	13.9%	45.6%	40.5%	3.27
Special curriculum	49	2.0%	16.3%	53.1%	28.6%	3.08
Extended class periods	24	8.3%	20.8%	41.7%	29.2%	2.92
Big brother–Big sister program	32	3.1%	34.4%	34.4%	28.1%	2.87

Of the 22 respondents who reported having a small learning community or school within a school within their buildings, 50% rated the practice as *very effective*, 45.5%

rated the practice as *somewhat effective*, and 4.5% rated it as *slightly effective*. More than 90% of respondents reported that their schools offered extra help in core classes. Of those respondents, 40% rated the practice as *very effective*, 46.2% as *somewhat effective*, and 12.9% as *slightly effective*. More than 80% of respondents reported offering career choices or planning; 22% perceived this practice to be *very effective*, 41.5% as *somewhat effective,* and 32.9% as *slightly effective*. Respondents reported that 78.2% of the schools offered cooperative learning as a practice. Almost 41% of the reporting respondents perceived this practice as *very effective*, 46% perceived it as *somewhat effective*, and 14% considered it to be a *slightly effective* transition practice. Interdisciplinary teams were reported as offerings in 42.6% of schools and perceived to be *very effective* by 44.2% of those respondents; 42% perceived interdisciplinary teams as *somewhat effective* and 11.6% as *slightly effective*.

Research question two. How do transition practices vary according to socioeconomic status (SES) and race or ethnicity?

School officials were asked to indicate the transition practices offered in their high schools, and they were given the option to indicate as many as applicable. Three types of analyses were conducted. First, the data showed the distribution of transition practices by SES. The second analysis, the ANOVA, was conducted between perceived effectiveness of transition practices and SES. The third analysis involved the computation of the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient to assess the relationship between transition practices and race or ethnicity as well as the relationship between transition practices and Whites or non-Whites. Table 10 represents the distribution of transition practices correlated to reported SES. Figure 2 displays a

distribution graph of the various transition practices correlated to the SES ratings reported by the schools. Socioeconomic status was measured by the percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced-price meals; respondents were given three response options: *less than 25%*, *25%-60%, greater than 60%*.

Table 10. *Distribution of Transition Practices by Free or Reduced-Price Meals*

Transition practice	Greater than 60% *n* = 18	25%-60% *n* = 56	Less than 25% *n* = 28
Small learning community	29.4%	21.4%	17.9%
Interdisciplinary teams	35.3%	50.0%	17.9%
Extra help in core classes	88.2%	94.6%	89.3%
Mentoring program	29.4%	25.0%	50.0%
Homeroom or advisory group	41.2%	44.6%	89.3%
Career choices or planning	82.4%	85.7%	71.4%
Cooperative learning	76.5%	76.8%	82.1%
Special curriculum	64.7%	50.0%	35.7%
Extended class periods	47.1%	19.6%	17.9%
Big brother–Big sister practices	17.6%	26.8%	50.0%

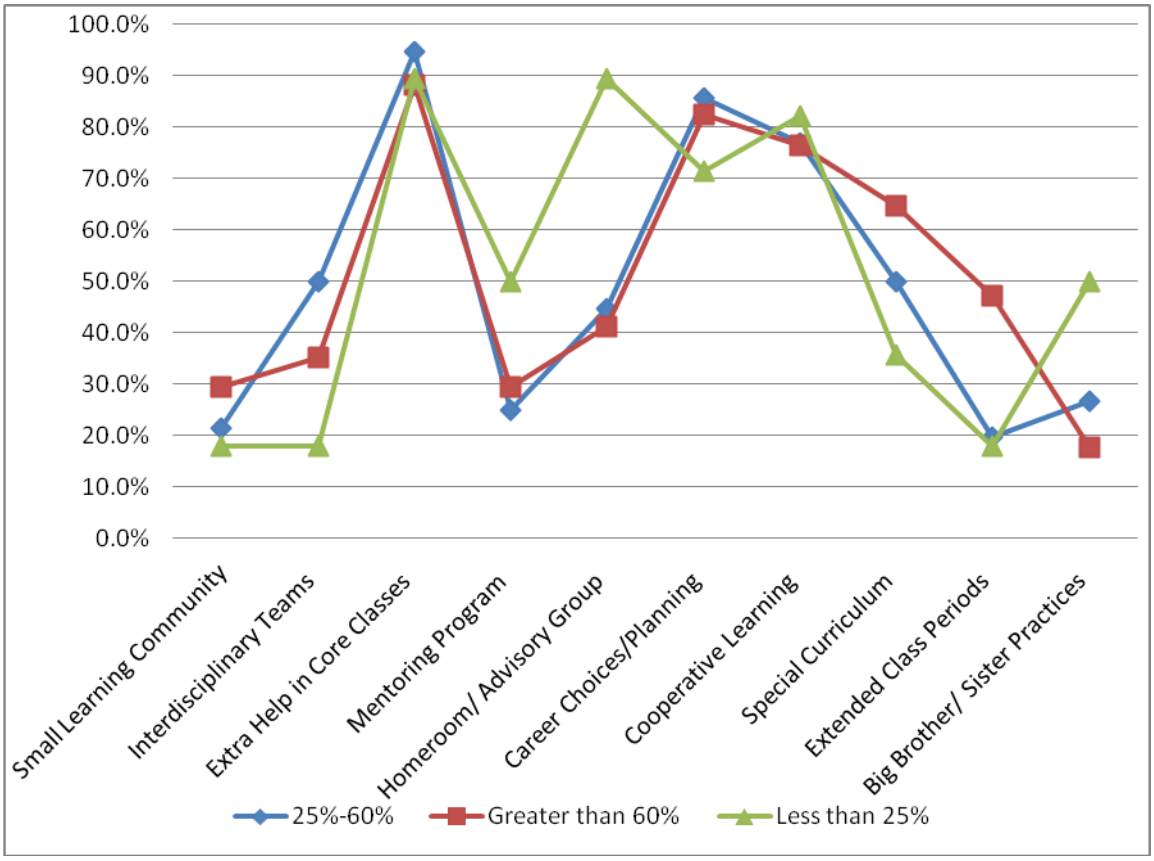

Figure 2. Graph of reported transition practices by SES.

Of the schools reporting more than 60% of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals, three transition practices were reported most frequently: extra help in core classes (88.2%), career choices or planning (82.4%), and cooperative learning (76.5%). The least frequently reported transition practices for schools reporting more than 60% of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals included smaller learning community or school within a school (29.4%), mentoring program (29.4%), and big brother–big sister practices (17.6%). In schools reporting populations of 25%-60% eligible for free or reduced-price meals, the most frequently indicated transition practices were extra help in core classes (94.6%), career choices or planning (85.7%), and cooperative learning instruction (76.8%). The least frequently reported transition practices for schools

reporting 25%-60% of students qualifying for free or reduced-price meals included extended class periods (19.6%), small learning community or school within a school (21.4%), mentoring programs (25%), and big brother-big sister programs (26.8%). Schools with less than 25% of their student population qualifying for free or reduced-price meals reported four practices most frequently: extra help in core classes (89.3%), homeroom or advisory group (89.3%), cooperative learning instruction (82.1%), and career choices or planning (71.4%). The least reported transition practices for schools with less than 25% of the student population qualifying for free or reduced-price meals were small learning community or school within a school (17.9%), interdisciplinary teams (17.9%), and extended class periods (17.9%).

A one-way, between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the perceived effectiveness of transition practices to SES. Significant findings are in bold at the $p<.10$ significance level. Table 11 displays the results.

Table 11. *One-Way ANOVA of Perceived Effectiveness Ratings by Free or Reduced-Price Meal Categories*

Transition practice	Less than 25% *n* = 28	25%-60% *n* = 56	Greater than 60% *n* = 17	*F*	*p(F)*
	Mean rating	Mean rating	Mean rating		
Small learning community or school within a school	3.80	3.50	3.00	2.71	**0.09**
Interdisciplinary teams	3.56	3.25	3.00	1.00	0.38
Extra help in core classes	3.40	3.15	3.33	1.16	0.32
Mentoring program	3.10	3.07	2.80	0.26	0.77
Homeroom or advisory group	3.17	3.08	2.86	0.34	0.72
Career choices or planning	3.15	2.71	2.71	2.26	0.11
Cooperative learning	3.30	3.28	3.15	0.21	0.81
Special curriculum	3.30	3.00	3.09	0.61	0.55
Extended class periods	3.60	2.64	2.88	2.03	0.16
Big brother–Big sister program	2.79	2.93	3.00	0.13	0.88

$p < .10$

A one-way, between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the perceived effectiveness of transition practices to SES. There was not a significant effect of perceived effectiveness of transition practices with regard to SES at the $p < .05$ level. Nevertheless, there was a significant effect at the $p < .10$ level for the perceived effectiveness of a small learning community or school within a school for schools with less than 25% of the student population qualifying for free or reduced-price meals. A post hoc Bonferroni test was conducted and indicated a significant difference in ratings by free and reduced meals. School officials with student populations greater than 60% who

qualified for free and reduced meals rated small learning community or school within a school significantly lower than did school officials with student populations that have less than 25% to qualify for free and reduced meals.

The first research question disaggregated the reported data to discover the transition practices according to race or ethnicity as reported with regard to specific ethnic choices. The data also were coded to represent ethnicity as White or non-White. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between the transition practices and race or ethnicity. Table 12 displays relationship data between race or ethnicity and transition practices. Significant findings are in bold at the $p<.10$ significance level. Table 13 depicts the information regarding correlations between transition practices and White or non-White students.

Table 12. *Pearson Correlations Between Race or Ethnic Group Percentages and Transition Practices*

Transition practice	Asian		African American		Hispanic		White		Other	
	R	*(p)r*	*R*	*(p)r*	*R*	*(p)r*	*r*	*(p)r*	*R*	*(p)r*
Small learning community or school within a school	0.336	0.13	-0.37	**0.09**	0.08	0.74	0.27	0.23	-0.90	**0.02**
Interdisciplinary teams	0.339	**.04**	-0.13	0.43	0.23	0.16	-0.09	0.56	-0.23	0.44
Extra help in core classes	0.085	0.46	0.09	0.44	-0.11	0.31	-0.04	0.74	0.34	**0.06**
Mentoring program	0.145	0.52	-0.03	0.87	-0.01	0.97	0.00	1.00	-0.18	0.60
Homeroom or advisory group	0.107	0.55	0.10	0.54	0.22	0.18	-0.19	0.22	-0.25	0.30
Career choices or planning	0.094	0.44	0.09	0.43	0.06	0.61	-0.08	0.47	-0.03	0.88
Cooperative learning	0.07	0.59	-0.04	0.75	-0.10	0.42	0.05	0.65	0.18	0.39
Special curriculum	0.181	0.25	-0.17	0.25	0.10	0.50	0.11	0.46	-0.35	0.19
Extended class period	0.191	0.43	-0.04	0.86	-0.26	0.22	0.14	0.53	-0.09	0.83
Big Brother–Big-sister program	0.207	0.32	0.01	0.97	0.15	0.46	-0.17	0.36	-0.26	0.42

p < .10

There were two correlations significant at the $p < .05$ level between specific race or ethnic groups and transition practices. A correlation was noted between small learning community or school within a school and students of other ethnicities ($p < .02$). The second correlation was noted between interdisciplinary teams and Asian students ($p < .04$). At the level of $p < .10$, there were two further correlations. The first was a correlation between schools with other ethnicities and extra help in core classes at $p < .06$, and the second was between small learning communities and African American

students at the $p < .09$ level. The data revealed no further correlations between specific race or ethnic groups and transition practices.

When race or ethnicity data were grouped into White and non-White categories, no correlations were found at the $p < .05$ or $p < .10$ level of significance. These data are displayed in Table 13.

Table 13. *Pearson Correlations Between Race or Ethnic Group (White or Non-White) Percentages and Transition Practices*

Transition practice	White		Non-White	
	r	*(p)r*	*r*	*(p)r*
Small learning community or school within a school	0.27	0.23	-0.27	0.23
Interdisciplinary teams	-0.09	0.56	0.09	0.56
Extra help in core classes	-0.04	0.74	0.04	0.74
Mentoring program	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.00
Homeroom or advisory group	-0.19	0.22	0.19	0.22
Career choices or planning	-0.08	0.47	0.08	0.47
Cooperative learning	0.05	0.65	-0.05	0.65
Special curriculum	0.11	0.46	-0.11	0.46
Extended class period	0.14	0.53	-0.14	0.53
Big brother–Big sister program	-0.17	0.36	0.17	0.36

$p < .10$

Research question three. What differences exist among transition practices in urban, rural, and suburban communities throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia?

To answer the third research question, two types of analytical procedures were conducted. First, the data were analyzed to determine the distribution of transition practices offered by community type. Table 14 and Figure 3 display the distribution of transition practices offered by school community type (rural, suburban, or urban setting)

as reported by respondents. Second, the data were analyzed using a one-way ANOVA to determine the perceived effectiveness by community type.

Table 14. *Distribution of Transition Practices by Community Type*

Transition practice	Rural *n* = 52	Suburban *n* = 19	Urban *n* = 30
Small learning community or school within a school	9.6%	47.4%	26.7%
Interdisciplinary teams	44.7%	57.9%	30.0%
Extra help in core classes	86.5%	100%	96.7%
Mentoring program	19.2%	47.4%	33.3%
Homeroom or advisory group	48.1%	42.1%	36.7%
Career choices or planning	82.7%	94.7%	70.0%
Cooperative learning	67.3%	89.5%	90.0%
Special curriculum	44.2%	47.4%	56.7%
Extended class period	21.2%	31.6%	23.3%
Big brother–Big sister program	23.1%	47.4%	36.7%

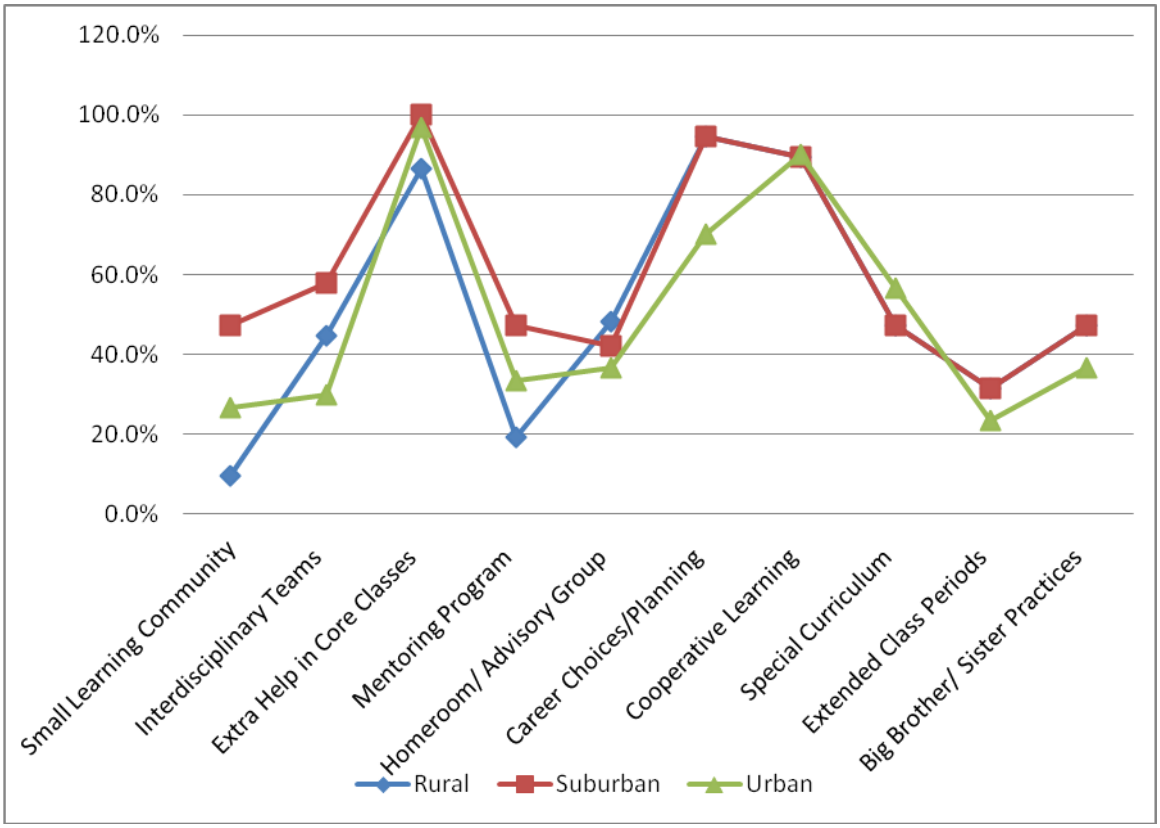

Figure 3. Distribution of transition practices offered by school community type (rural, suburban, or urban setting) as reported by respondents.

More than half of the respondents described their high schools as rural. The two most frequently reported transition practices in rural high schools were giving students extra help in core classes (86.5%) and helping students with career choices or planning (82.7%). The least frequently reported transition practices in rural schools were extending class periods (21.2%), offering a mentoring program (19.2%), and having a small learning community or school within a school model (9.6%).

Suburban schools had the highest reported frequency of transition practices in comparison to rural and urban schools. The three highest reported transition practices in

suburban schools were offering students extra help in core classes (100%), career choices or planning (94.7%), and cooperative learning instruction (89.5%). The least frequently reported practices in the suburban schools were extending class periods (31.6%) and homeroom or advisory groups (42.1%). Almost 48% of the suburban schools offered a small learning community or school within a school, a mentorship program, special curriculum for ninth-grade students, and a big brother–big sister program.

For urban schools, the most frequently reported transition practices were offering students extra help in core classes (96.7%), cooperative learning instruction (90.0%), and career choices or planning (70.0%). The least frequently reported transition practices in urban schools were extending class periods (23.3%), small learning community or school within a school (26.7%), and interdisciplinary teams (30.0%).

A one-way, between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the perceived effectiveness of transition practices in urban, suburban, and rural schools. Respondents were asked to indicate their community type from three response options: *urban*, *suburban*, or *rural*. The designated school officials then indicated their perceptions of the effectiveness of transition practices based upon the following response options: 0 = *not offered*, 1 = *not effective*, 2 = *slightly effective*, 3 = *somewhat effective*, and 4 = *very effective*. Table 15 depicts the results of the ANOVA. Significant findings are in bold at the $p<.10$ significance level.

Table 15. *One-Way ANOVA of Perceived Effectiveness Ratings by Community Type*

Transition practice	*Rural* *n* = 52 Mean rating	*Suburban* *n* = 19 Mean rating	*Urban* *n* = 30 Mean rating	*F*	*p(F)*
Small learning community or school within a school	3.20	3.75	3.33	1.74	0.20
Interdisciplinary teams	3.00	3.89	3.36	5.37	**0.01**
Extra help in core classes	3.22	3.21	3.37	0.34	0.71
Mentoring program	2.90	3.00	3.22	0.40	0.67
Homeroom or advisory group	3.00	3.36	2.88	1.11	0.34
Career choices or planning	2.74	2.95	2.83	0.45	0.64
Cooperative learning	3.43	3.11	3.18	1.82	0.17
Special curriculum	3.13	3.12	2.89	0.37	0.69
Extended class period	2.73	3.00	3.17	0.45	0.64
Big brother–Big sister program	2.67	3.09	2.89	0.67	0.52

p<.10

The one-way ANOVA of perceived effectiveness ratings by community type revealed significance for interdisciplinary teams ($p < .05$). A post hoc Bonferroni test was conducted and indicated a significant difference in ratings by community type. Rural schools rated the interdisciplinary team transition practice significantly lower than did suburban schools.

Chi square tests showed statistically significant results in three crosstabulations for community type. Table 16 displays a crosstabulation of community type and the perceived effectiveness of school within a school, academy, or other small learning community for ninth-grade students. Significant findings are in bold at the p<.10 significance level.

Table 16. *Crosstabulation of Community Type and Perceived Effectiveness of School Within a School, Academy or Other Small Learning Community for Ninth Grade*

Dependent variable	Community type			X^2
	Rural (n = 52)	Suburban (n = 30)	Urban (n = 19)	
Not offered	47	22	10	**17.868**
Not effective	0	0	0	
Slightly effective	0	0	1	
Somewhat effective	4	2	4	
Very effective	1	6	4	

$p < .10$

A chi-square test of association was performed to examine the relation between the type of community of the school and the perceived effectiveness of school within a school, academy, or other small learning community for ninth grade. The relationship between these variables was statistically significant, X^2 (6, N = 101) = 17.868, $p < .05$ (p = .007). A higher percent of urban schools rated school within a school, academy, or other ninth-grade smaller learning community somewhat effective or very effective. The chi square data indicates that there is a relationship. Therefore, the data indicate that the likelihood the perceived effectiveness of school within a school, academy, or other ninth-grade small learning community types is related to the community type, specifically urban communities.

Table 17 displays a crosstabulation between community type and perceived effectiveness of mentoring programs. Table 17 displays these results. Significant findings are in bold at the p<.10 significance level.

Table 17. *Crosstabulation of Community Type on Perceived Effectiveness of Mentoring Program for Students Involving Members of the Community*

Dependent variable	Community type Rural (n=52)	Suburban (n=30)	Urban (n=19)	X^2
Not offered	42	20	10	**21.397**
Not effective	0	0	1	
Slightly effective	1	3	1	
Somewhat effective	9	4	2	
Very effective	0	3	5	

$p < .10$

A chi-square test of association was performed to examine the relationship between the type of community of the school and the perceived effectiveness of mentoring program for students involving members of the community. The relation between these variables was statistically significant, X^2 (8, N = 101) = 21.397, p <.05, (p = .006). A higher percent of urban schools rated mentoring programs as somewhat effective or very effective. The chi square data indicates that there is a relationship. Therefore, the data indicate that the likelihood the perceived effectiveness of mentoring program is related to the community type, specifically urban communities. However, due to the small sample size, the data were insufficient.

A significant finding resulted when the dependent variable "not offered" was removed from the crosstabulation between community type and perceived effectiveness of mentoring programs. The "not offered" option removed schools that did not offer the program. This subset of the schools that offered the program was used in calculating the

crosstabulations. Significant findings are in bold at the $p < .10$ significance level. Table 18 displays these results.

Table 18. *Crosstabulation of Community Type on Perceived Effectiveness of Mentoring Program for Students Involving Members of the Community*

Dependent variable	Community type			X^2
	Rural (n=10)	*Suburban (n=10)*	*Urban (n=9)*	
Not effective	*0*	*0*	*1*	***13.611***
Slightly effective	1	3	1	
Somewhat effective	9	4	2	
Very effective	0	3	5	

$p < .10$

A chi-square test of association was performed to examine the relation between the type of community of the school and the perceived effectiveness of mentoring program for students involving members of the community. The relationship between these variables was statistically significant, X^2 (6, N = 29) = 13.611, $p < .05$, (p = .034). A higher percent of urban schools rated school within a school, academy, or other ninth-grade smaller learning community somewhat effective or very effective. The chi square data indicates that there is a relationship. Therefore, the data indicate that the likelihood the perceived effectiveness of mentoring programs for ninth grade students is related to the community type, specifically rural communities. However, due to the small sample size, the data were insufficient.

Research question four. What are the transition practices in small (1000 students or fewer), medium (1001-1500 students), large (1501-2000 students), and very large (more than 2001 students) high schools in the Commonwealth of Virginia?

The final research question addresses the different transition practices in Virginia by school size, as reported by respondents. Two statistical tests were used; the first was a test to determine the distribution of transition practices by school size, and the second was a one-way, between-subjects ANOVA to compare the perceived effectiveness of transition practices by school size. Principals or their designees were asked to identify whether their schools were small (< 1001), medium (1001-1500), large (1501-2000), or very large (> 2000). Table 19 and Figure 4 present the distribution of school transition practices by school size.

Table 19. *Distribution of Transition Practices by School Size*

Transition practice	Small (< 1001) *n* = 24	Medium (1001-1500) *n* = 22	Large (1501-2000) *n* = 47	Very large (> 2000) *n* = 8
Small learning community or school within a school	29.2%	40.0%	12.8%	12.5%
Interdisciplinary teams	41.7%	45.5%	44.7%	25.0%
Extra help in core classes	95.8%	100%	87.2%	87.5%
Mentoring program	41.7%	31.8%	19.1%	37.5%
Homeroom or advisory group	45.8%	36.4%	48.9%	25.0%
Career choices or planning	83.3%	68.2%	87.2%	75.0%
Cooperative learning	79.2%	95.5%	66.0%	100%
Special curriculum	70.8%	36.4%	46.8%	25%
Extended class period	20.8%	22.7%	27.7%	12.5%
Big brother–Big sister program	41.7%	31.8%	25.5%	37.5%

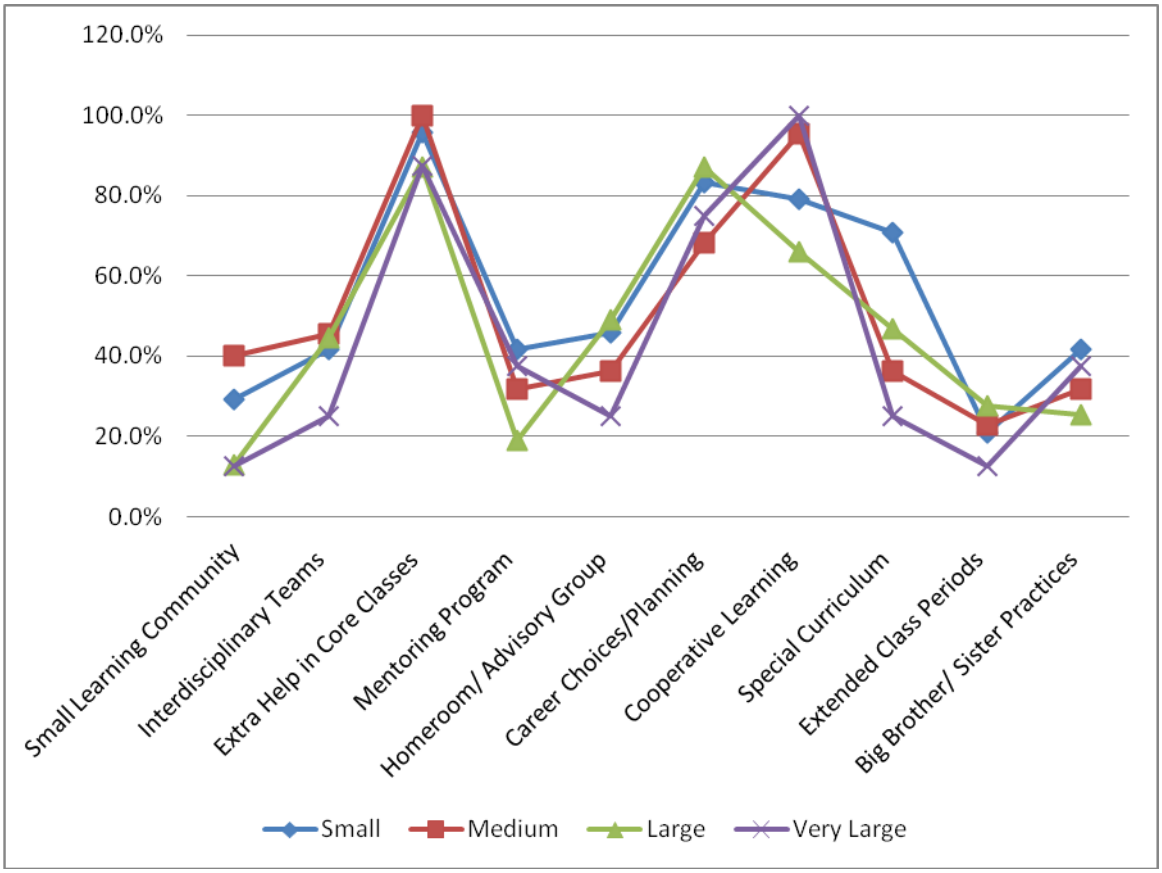

Figure 4. Distribution of school transition practices by school size.

Transition practices in small high schools (< 1001 students) varied. The most frequently reported transition practices were providing students extra help in core classes (95.8%), helping students with career choices or planning (83.3%), and cooperative learning instruction in the classroom (79.2%). The least frequently reported practices included extending class periods (20.8%) and small learning community or school within a school (29.2%). Medium-sized high schools (1001-1500 students) reported providing extra help in core classes (100%), cooperative learning (95.5%), and career choices or planning (68.2%) as the three most frequent practices; however, extending class periods (22.7%), big brother–big sister program (31.8%), and mentoring programs (31.8%) were the least frequently reported transition practices in medium-sized high schools.

Large high schools (1501-2000 students) reported most frequently three of the transition practices: providing students extra help in core classes (87.2%), providing students guidance in career choices or planning (87.2%), and incorporating cooperative learning instruction (66.0%). The two least frequently reported transition practices in large schools were small learning community or school within a school (12.8%) and mentorship program (19.1%). Very large high schools (> 2000 students) reported most frequently three transition practices: cooperative learning (100%), providing extra help in core classes (87.5%), and providing career choices or planning with students (75.0%). The least reported practices in very large high schools included small learning community or school within a school (12.5%), extending class periods (12.5%), interdisciplinary teams (25.0%), homeroom or advisory group (25.0%), and special curriculum (25.0%).

An ANOVA of perceived effectiveness ratings by school size was conducted. School officials were asked to rate the transition practice offered. Transition practices were given one of the following specific ratings: 1 = *not effective*, 2 = *slightly effective*, 3 = *somewhat effective*, or 4 = *very effective*. Table 19 depicts the ANOVA data. Significant findings are in bold at the $p<.10$ significance level.

Table 20. *One-Way ANOVA of Perceived Effectiveness Ratings by School Size*

Transition practice	Small (< 1001) *n* = 24	Medium (1001-1500) *n* = 22	Large (1501-2000) *n* = 47	Very large (> 2000) *n* = 8	*F*	*p*(*F*)
	Mean rating	Mean rating	Mean rating	Mean rating		
Small learning community or school within a school	3.33	3.50	3.57	3.00	0.35	0.79
Interdisciplinary teams	3.05	3.30	3.70	3.50	1.80	0.16
Extra help in core classes	3.24	3.05	3.39	3.43	1.04	0.38
Mentoring program	3.00	2.71	3.50	2.33	2.89	**0.06**
Homeroom or advisory group	2.96	2.88	3.45	3.00	1.21	0.32
Career choices or planning	2.71	2.80	3.05	2.83	0.78	0.51
Cooperative learning	3.39	3.10	3.26	3.25	0.74	0.53
Special curriculum	3.14	2.75	3.18	3.00	0.68	0.57
Extended class periods	2.85	3.20	3.00	2.00	0.48	0.70
Big brother–Big sister program	2.75	2.86	3.10	2.67	0.34	0.80

p<.10

The one-way, between-subjects ANOVA conducted to compare the perceived effectiveness by school size revealed no difference at the $p < .05$ significance level; however, there was one significant difference in the compared means at the $p < .10$ level. There was a significant effect of perceived effectiveness of a mentoring program at the $p > .10$ level for large and very large high schools ($p < .06$). Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni test indicated that the mean rating score for the perceived effectiveness of mentorship programs was significantly different between the large high schools (1501-2000) and the very large high schools (> 2000). Large high schools rated the mentorship program significantly lower than did very large high schools.

Table 20 displays the crosstabulation of school size and perceived effectiveness of mentoring programs. The option *not offered* was deleted in this analysis. Significant findings are in bold at the p<.10 significance level.

Table 21. *Crosstabulation of Size of High School and Perceived Effectiveness of Mentoring Program for Students Involving Members of the Community*

Dependent variable	Size of the high school				X^2
	Very large (*n* = 3)	Large (*n* = 10)	Medium (*n* = 7)	Small (*n* = 9)	
Not effective	1	0	0	0	**20.648**
Slightly effective	0	1	3	1	
Somewhat effective	2	3	3	7	
Very effective	0	6	1	1	

p < .10

A chi-square test of association was performed to examine the relation between the size of the high school and perceived effectiveness of mentoring programs for students involving members of the community. The relationship between these variables was statistically significant, (*df* =9, *N* = 29) = 20.648, p=<.05 (*p* = .014). A higher percent of small and medium sized schools rated mentoring programs in schools as somewhat effective or very effective. The chi square data indicates that there is a relationship. Therefore, the data indicate that the likelihood the perceived effectiveness of mentoring programs is related to the school size, specifically small and medium.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine if SES, community type, and race were predictors of perceived effectiveness of transition practices. Regression results indicated the following overall model: SES, community type, and race do not significantly predict perceptions of effectiveness of transition practices.

Chapter Summary

The survey responses indicate data on the variety of transition practices in Virginia's high schools as well as the perceived effectiveness of these transition practices. School officials were asked to provide demographic information about their high schools, including high school size, community type, and race or ethnic composition. Respondents also were asked to report ninth-grade daily attendance and promotion percentages, courses and number of credits needed for promotion, and existing transition practices. School officials who reported having an interdisciplinary team or ninth-grade teams were asked to indicate their specific activities and rate the effectiveness as perceived by them.

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients and one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were performed. Both analyses were completed to define the reported transition practices and to depict the reported perceived effectiveness. The highest rated transition practices as reported were special curriculum (53%), homeroom or advisory group (52%), mentoring program (52%), and small learning community or school within a school (50%). The Pearson correlations between race or ethnic group percentages and transition practices revealed only two significant correlations. Schools reporting *other* race or ethnic populations showed a significant correlation with small learning community or school within a school ($p < .02$). Interdisciplinary teams and schools with Asian populations generated a significant correlation ($p < .037$). When race or ethnicity was recoded to White or non-White, the data revealed no significant correlations with transition practices.

The ANOVAs were performed to compare the perceived effectiveness of transition practices to community type and school size. Respondents were asked to choose the community type represented by their respective high schools: *rural*, *suburban*, or *urban*. The data revealed a significant relationship between interdisciplinary teams and perceived effectiveness; additionally, the data revealed one significant relationship between mentoring programs and perceived effectiveness ratings by school size, specifically between small and large high schools.

Survey results indicated several differences in promotion requirements and transition practices among the 101 high schools. Demographically, 52% of the respondents were from rural schools, 47% indicated their high schools were large (1501-2000), and 55% of respondents reported that 25%-60% of the student population qualified for free or reduced-price meals. More than 64% of the students were reported to be White students and 26% African American students.

Varied transition practices were reported through the survey. More than 92% of the respondents reported that their high schools offered extra help in core classes, 81% offered career choices or planning, and 78% offered cooperative learning instruction as transition practices. Nevertheless, less than 24% of reporting schools offered extended class periods and less than 22% offered a smaller learning community or school within a school as a transition practice.

Chapter 5 Conclusions, Findings, and Implications for Future Research

This research study was a replication of a study by Henry Johnson (2009). Johnson's study titled *High School Transition Practices for Ninth Graders: A Descriptive Study of Maryland Public High Schools* involved the surveying of Maryland high school principals. This study replicated Johnson's study and methodology but surveyed comprehensive public high schools in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The survey asked school officials to select the transition practices offered in their respective schools. The respondents were allowed to choose as many as applicable. The transition practices offered as response options on the survey included the following:

- Small learning community or school within a school
- Interdisciplinary teams
- Extra help in core classes
- Mentoring program
- Homeroom or advisory group
- Career choices or planning
- Cooperative learning instruction
- Special curriculum
- Extended class periods
- Big brother–Big sister program

The 101 Virginia high school principals who responded to the survey generated findings similar to results from Johnson's study involving Maryland high school principals. Overall, the findings show that high schools in Virginia are using a variety of practices to help ninth-grade students with the transition to high school. Principals should take note

of the various practices used within their schools and consider the perceived effectiveness of each practice when creating policies.

Findings

Finding one. According to survey responses, the most frequently used transition practices in Virginia's public high schools are the following: extra help for students in the core classes, career choices or planning, and cooperative learning**.** Research has indicated that students given extra help before, during, and after school hours show academic gains (Johnston, 2000). More than 92% of reporting schools in this study offered extra help for students in the core courses. Johnson's (2009) study indicated that 84% of Maryland high schools reported offering extra help in core classes as a means to assist ninth-grade students.

This research found that 81% of responding Virginia high school officials reported that their respective schools offered students help in career choices and career planning. According to Gibbons (2006), ninth-grade students are at an idealistic stage of career development and need an early introduction to careers to help them understand the realities of their choices throughout high school. The ninth-grade year is an important time for students to begin talking about career choices. Kerr's (2002) research indicated that 71.5% of Maryland high schools used career choices or planning as a transition practice. Johnson's (2009) study, however, found that only 52% used career choices or planning in their high school transition practices.

Nearly 80% of respondents in this research stated that their schools offered cooperative learning in the classroom. Cooperative learning in the classroom was found to be a frequently used practice in Maryland but only by slightly more than half of

Maryland high schools, according to Johnson's 2009 study. Researcher Kerr (2002) found in her study that more than 80% of Maryland high schools were using cooperative learning strategies at least once a week, thereby making it a common practice. In a study completed in January 2012, the researcher found that when ninth-grade students were grouped purposely in cooperative learning groups, they developed and improved their scientific thinking skills (Abdulkarim, 2012).

Finding two. The least frequently used practices by school officials in Virginia included the smaller learning community or school within a school, mentoring programs, big brother–sister programs, and the use of extended class periods. This finding is similar to Johnson's (2009) findings indicating that the smaller learning community or school within a school, mentoring programs, and big brother–big sister programs were the least used transition practices in Maryland's high schools as reported by school officials. The current finding, however, is dissimilar to Johnson's with regard to the use of extended class periods; the use of extended class periods occurred more frequently in Maryland's high schools (54%) than in Virginia's high schools (23.8%) as reported by school officials.

Finding three. According to those surveyed, small learning community or school within a school, interdisciplinary teams, providing extra help in the core courses, and cooperative learning are the most effective transition practices in Virginia's high schools. Two of the strategies in this finding are similar to those in Johnson's (2009) study. In Virginia, 96% of principals rated the small learning community or school within a school *somewhat* or *very effective*, whereas 86% of the Maryland principals in Johnson's study rated the small learning community or school within a school transition practice as

somewhat or *very effective*. Interdisciplinary teams were rated *somewhat* or *very effective* by 97% of Maryland principals and by 86% of Virginia principals. Two of the findings, however, are dissimilar to Johnson's study findings with regard to the perceived effectiveness of transition practices. In Johnson's study, roughly 71% of the respondents rated the practices of providing extra help in core classes and cooperative learning as *somewhat* or *very effective*; 86% of Virginia's school official rated these two practices as *somewhat* or *very effective*.

Finding four. According to those surveyed, career choices or planning, extended classes, and big brother–big sister programs were perceived as the least effective practices. In Virginia, 37% and 38% of school officials, respectively, rated career choices or planning and big brother–big sister programs as *not effective* or *slightly effective*; 29.1% of school officials rated the offering of extended classes as *not effective* or *slightly effective*. This finding is in line with the findings in Johnson's (2009) study: Almost 40% of the Maryland principals reported that career choices or planning and big brother–big sister transition practices were either *not effective* or *slightly effective*.

Finding five. The three highest transition practices common among the three SES categories were providing extra help in core classes, career choices or planning, and cooperative learning. When data were disaggregated by SES, the most frequently mentioned transition practices were the same among the three SES categories. Respondents were asked to choose from three descriptions to identify the SES of their respective high schools. Then, the data were disaggregated to determine the distribution of transition practices by each SES category. Almost 90% of schools with less than 25% or more than 60% of their student population eligible for free or reduced-price meals

reported providing ninth-grade students extra help in core classes as well as homerooms or advisory groups; 95% of schools with 25%-60% of students' qualifying for free or reduced-price meals reported the provision of extra help in core classes. The transition practice of helping ninth-grade students with their career choices and planning was reported at close to 85% in schools with student populations who qualify for free and reduced meals greater than 60% and in schools with free and reduced meals populations between 25% and 60%; 71.4% of schools with less than 25% of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals reported this as a transition practice. Close to 80% of the schools in all three of the SES categories reported cooperative learning as a transition practice.

The finding regarding the transition practice of extra help in core classes is similar to Johnson's study in that all three SES categories listed it as the most frequently used practice. Nearly all (94%) of the schools with greater than 60% of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals, 92% of schools with 25%-60% eligible students, and 78% of schools with less than 25% of students eligible reported extra help in core classes as a transition practice.

Finding six. The least frequently used transition practice for ninth-grade students disaggregated by SES was the smaller learning community or school within a school. For all three SES categories, this practice was rated as one of the least frequently used practices. Less than 18% of schools with less than 25% eligible for free or reduced-price meals, 21.4% of schools with 25%-60% of students eligible, and 29.4% of schools with greater than 60% of the student population eligible offered a smaller learning community or school within a school. Comparison of Virginia and Maryland schools with impoverished student populations revealed that this finding is similar to Johnson's (2009)

study finding. Close to 30% of Maryland high schools with greater than 60% of students qualifying for free or reduced-price meals incorporated a small learning community or school within a school; this practice was the least frequently reported. Findings from the current study differ from Johnson's study with regard to the higher two SES categories. Almost 65% of Maryland high schools with 25%-60% of students qualifying for free or reduced-price meals and 40% of schools with less than 25% of their students qualifying offered a small learning community or school within a school.

Finding seven. The perceived effectiveness rating of small learning community or school within a school was different (higher or lower) among schools with student populations of 25% or less qualifying for free or reduced-price meals compared to schools with student populations in which more than 25% qualified for free or reduced-price meals. There was a significant effect at the $p < .10$ level for the perceived effectiveness of small learning community or school within a school for schools with less than 25% of their students eligible for free or reduced-price meals. This finding differs from Johnson's (2009) research. Johnson found significant findings with regard to the perceived effectiveness rating of two practices at the $p < .05$ level: mentoring program ($p < .02$) and extended class periods ($p < .02$).

Finding eight. Virginia high schools who reported African American and *other* race or ethnic groups showed a significant correlation with the transition practice of small learning community or school within a school. Students from *other* ethnic backgrounds reflected a correlation at the $p < .05$ level with the small learning community or school within a school transition practice ($p < .02$). African American students ($p < .09$) correlated with the small learning community or school within a school transition practice

at the $p < .10$ significance level. *Other* racial or ethnic groups also correlated with schools that utilize extra help in core classes as a transition practice.

Finding nine. A correlation was found between schools that identified interdisciplinary teaming as a transition practice and Asian students. In this research, Virginia high schools that reported using interdisciplinary teams as a transition practice for ninth-grade students correlated with Asian ethnic groups ($p < .04$) at the $p < .05$ level. This same correlation presented in Johnson's (2009) study at the $p < .03$ significance level.

Finding ten. A correlation was found between schools offering extra help in core classes as a transition practice and *other* ethnic groups. In this study, the data showed a correlation at the $p < .10$ significance level between extra help in core classes and *other* ethnic groups ($p < .06$). This finding was different from Johnson's (2009) study; his study found no correlation between the two variables.

Finding eleven. A correlation was found between interdisciplinary teams and the community type, with rural schools rating those strategies significantly lower than suburban schools. In Virginia's high schools, rural schools rated interdisciplinary teams much lower than did suburban schools. The one-way ANOVA revealed significance between interdisciplinary teams and community type ($p < .01$) at the $p < .05$ significance level. A post hoc Bonferroni test revealed that rural schools rated interdisciplinary teaming significantly lower than did suburban schools. This finding is different than Johnson's (2009) study of Maryland high schools: There was no significant finding between interdisciplinary teams and community type in Johnson's study.

Finding twelve. The perceived effectiveness ratings of mentoring programs within Virginia high schools varied depending on school size. Research has indicated that mentoring programs or teacher-student relationships can foster an improved academic and social atmosphere (Pianta, 2002). One study found that student competencies and perceptions in high school improved as a result of a mentoring relationship within the school (Pianta, 2002). In the current study, a significant effect was found between perceived effectiveness of mentoring programs ($p < .06$) and very large high schools at the $p < .10$ significance level. Large high schools rated the mentoring programs significantly higher than did very large high schools in Virginia. This finding is different from Johnson's (2009) finding. His research showed no significant differences in comparing the means of perceived effectiveness ratings of mentoring programs by school size.

Finding thirteen. Socioeconomic status, community type, and race or ethnicity did not significantly predict the perceptions of the effectiveness of transition practices**.** A logistic regression analysis was conducted to assess SES, community type, and race or ethnicity as predictors of perceived effectiveness of transition practices. A test of the full model against a constant-only model was not statistically significant, indicating that the predictors as a set did not reliably distinguish between acceptors and decliners of the offer (chi square = .000, $p < .000$ with $df = 5$). Johnson's (2009) study did not include logistic regression analysis.

Finding fourteen. Most Virginia high school administrators reported offering transition activities for students before entering the high school. Survey respondents were asked to determine the practices at the middle school level for eighth-grade students

before entering high school. Respondents were given six response options from which they could choose as many practices as they deemed relevant. Roughly 90% of the respondents stated that their students were offered an orientation program or assembly and that school staff presented information to ninth-grade students before they entered the high school. In more than 60% of the respondents' schools, counselors met with students and students visited the high school before leaving middle school. Nevertheless, there were few offerings during the summer between the eighth-grade year and the ninth-grade year to help enrich or remediate incoming ninth-grade students. In Virginia, less than 26% of respondents reported offering summer enrichment or remedial programs to incoming ninth-grade students.

Implications

The following implications for principals and other school officials are based on the findings of this study. Those leaders who are interested in the transition practices that other principals perceive to be most effective should consider these implications for practice.

Implication one. Principals and school officials should consider the vast range of transition practices being used across Virginia's high schools as well as the perceived effectiveness of these practices. The least frequently reported practices received the two highest ratings: *somewhat* and *very effective*. Use of a smaller learning community or a school within a school, extended classes, and mentor programs are transition practices reportedly used in less than 30% of the schools, according to survey respondents; however, all three practices were rated by 70% to 96% of respondents as *somewhat* or *very effective*. On the other hand, principals and school officials should consider the use

of practices that are perceived as less effective yet widely used. For example, more than 80% of respondents used career choices or planning as a transition practice, but almost 40% of those respondents rated it as *not effective* or *slightly effective*.

Implication two. School officials should consider the needs of their specific student bodies based on socioeconomic status. This survey asked school officials to determine their respective schools' socioeconomic status by choosing the best description of their student body: > 60% eligibility for free or reduced-price meals, 25%-59% eligibility for free or reduced-price meals, or < 25% eligibility for free or reduced-price meals. More than a fourth (27%) of respondents reported that greater than 25% of their student body was eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Of this 27% of responding schools, 89% utilized a homeroom or advisory group and offered students extra help in core courses; 82% utilized cooperative learning in their schools. The least used practices used were small learning community (18%), interdisciplinary teams (18%), and big brother and big sister programs (18%). More than half of the respondents (55.4%) reported having 25%-60% of their student body qualifying for free or reduced-price meals. This group reported the highest distribution of transition practices. More than 55% of these respondents incorporated interdisciplinary teams, and roughly 77% provided cooperative learning, 86% incorporated career choices or planning, and 95% provided extra help in core classes as transitional practices to facilitate ninth-grade success. The least used practices for this category of students was the extension of class periods (19.6%), small learning community (21.4%), and mentoring program (25%). Close to 17% of schools described their schools as having greater than 60% of the students eligible for free or reduced-price meals. This category reflected the fewest

reported transition practices. More than 88% of the students in schools with greater than 60% free or reduced-price meal eligibility offered extra help in core courses, 82.4% of schools offered career choices or planning, and 76.5% offered cooperative learning. Only 29.4% incorporated a smaller learning community or school within a school and mentoring programs and less than 18% offered a big brother or big sister program. Students in poverty reflect a higher dropout rate. According to Dalton, Glennie, and Ingels (2009), as school poverty levels increase, so do dropout percentages.

Implication three. Principals and administrators should consider the transition practice of smaller learning community or the school within a school model. A small number of high schools reported the use of a smaller learning community or a school within a school as a transition practice. Nevertheless, the respondents reporting their perceptions of effectiveness rated smaller learning communities as an effective transition practice, especially when the data were disaggregated by SES**.** For example, 22% of responding schools utilized a smaller learning community or school within a school as a transition practice. More than 95% of those schools with a small learning community or school within a school rated the transition practice as *somewhat effective* or *very effective*. This research revealed a significant finding for schools with fewer students qualifying for free or reduced-price meals. A one-Way ANOVA was used to determine the perceived effectiveness ratings by SES categories. Based upon school officials' survey responses, the study found significant relationships between small learning community or school within a school ($p < .09$) and the use of a specialized curriculum ($p < .05$) for schools with fewer than 25% of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Thus,

principals and administrators should consider the transition practice of smaller learning community or the school within a school model with regard to poverty levels.

Implication four. As administrators disaggregate their schools' data, principals need to consider best practices for the diverse student populations in their buildings and to create successful programs and utilize the most current best practices. This research found two significant findings at the $p < .05$ level and two significant findings at the $p < .10$ level with regard to race or ethnic groups and transition practices. There was a significant correlation between small learning community or school within a school and schools with *other* populations ($p < .02$) and schools with African American populations ($p < .09$). The use of interdisciplinary teams was significant in schools with Asian populations ($p < .037$). Extra help in core classes for ninth graders was significant in schools with *other* populations ($p < .05$). When race or ethnicity data were coded as White or non-White, no significant correlations were found. Yet, this survey revealed that the least used transition practice was the small learning community or school within a school.

Implication five. High schools should consider the use of mentorship programs as a means to help ninth-grade students in their transition into high school, particularly in schools with student populations exceeding 1500 students. Survey respondents were asked to choose the best descriptor of their respective high schools: small (< 1001), medium (1001-1500), large (1501-2000), or very large (< 2000). The perceived effectiveness of a mentoring program was significant for large high schools ($p < .10$) and very large high schools ($p < .06$). Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni test indicated that the mean score for the perceived effectiveness of mentoring programs was

significantly different between the large high schools (1501-2000) and the very large high schools (< 2000). These results suggest a significant correlation between the perceived effectiveness of the mentorship programs and very large high schools.

Implication six. High school principals should consider utilizing interdisciplinary teams as a transition practice based on their community type. The one-way ANOVA revealed significance between interdisciplinary teams and community type ($p<.01$) at the $p<.05$ significance level. Rural school officials rated interdisciplinary teams significantly lower than suburban, according to the post hoc Bonferroni test.

Implication seven. High schools should consider offering a variety of practices to incoming ninth-grade students. Virginia high school officials reported several relevant practices offered. Almost 90% of the school officials offered an orientation program to incoming ninth-grade students; however, fewer than one-fourth of the respondents offered a summer enrichment or remedial program to incoming ninth-grade students.

Limitations and Delimitations

The survey method was used for data collection. This method relies on individuals' reports based upon their knowledge of the school; consequently, responses can be subjective.

1. The survey size limited respondents to Virginia schools and to a limited number of principals. This type of survey reporting may not reveal appropriate conclusions that can be imposed on schools in other states.
2. The survey response rate was not as high as anticipated. Several school districts required a complicated approval process, and some chose not to participate.

3. Respondents were asked to rate their perceptions of transition practices. This type of data depends on individual opinions, which may not reflect an accurate analysis.
4. Several statistical F-tests were used to compare the data. Researchers find more significance with more F-tests, so the effects may be inflated.

Delimitations

Survey data were collected from high school principals in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The responses may not reflect those of high school principals in other states or localities, limiting their generalizability.

Future Research Recommendations

The area of transition practices should be investigated further in future research.

1. A replication of this study in high schools with the addition of academic achievement and graduation rate as variables is recommended. End-of-course (EOC) and Standards of Learning (SOL) data and grades could be used to represent academic achievement.
2. A case study on high schools utilizing a smaller learning community or school within a school is recommended to determine the effectiveness of this transition practice as it relates to academic achievement, graduation rates, and perceived effectiveness.
3. A study of student and teacher perceptions of transition practices during the ninth-grade year is recommended.

Reflections

The ninth-grade year is an incredibly influential and important year for students entering the foreign world of high school. I have always held that the ninth-grade student can be influenced and molded at this critical point in high school. Large high schools are at an advantage in that they can offer a wide variety of courses and extracurricular activities, but often incoming ninth-grade students are overwhelmed with the choices, academic rigor, and the transition into a new setting. Smaller high schools might offer tighter communities in which fewer ninth grade students fall, unnoticed, through the cracks but may not have the resources to offer a wide variety of courses or extracurricular activities to help ninth-grade students define who they are.

There were some surprising results from this research. First, 70% - 90% of the principals surveyed perceived smaller learning community / school-within-a-school transition practice as *somewhat effective* and *effective* yet fewer than 30% of reporting schools incorporate these practices within their schools. It is interesting to note, on the other hand, the practice of helping students with career choices and planning as a transition practice was utilized in over 80% of responding schools; however, these 40% of the respondents rated this practice as *not effective* or *slightly effective*. It intrigues me that these data revealed more schools were continuing to use transition practices that they did not consider effective tools with ninth-grade student transition practices. Impoverished students have a higher chance of dropping out of school. The research from this study showed interesting results with the SES and transition practices. This group of students had the fewest transition practices reported.

It is my belief that Virginia's secondary principals have many challenges in this era of high stakes testing and accountability. Ninth-grade transition practices could be simply the shuffling of personnel and responsibilities at no extra cost or it could be a major paradigm shift for some schools with an additional cost associated with implementation. No matter, these important steps in dealing with freshmen should be an integral step for school districts in handling graduation rates and decreasing dropout rates.

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Appendix A: University Approval to Conduct Study

VirginiaTech

Office of Research Compliance
Institutational Review Board
2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2000 (0497)
Blacksburg, VA 24060
540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959
email irb@vt.edu
website http://www.irb.vt.edu

MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 7, 2012

TO: Carol S Cash, Toni Leigh Childress

FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires May 31, 2014)

PROTOCOL TITLE: A Study of Ninth Grade Transition Practices across the Commonwealth of Virginia

IRB NUMBER: **12-500**

Effective June 7, 2012, the Virginia Tech Institution Review Board (IRB) Administrator, Carmen T Green, 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:	**June 7, 2012**
Protocol Expiration Date:	**N/A**
Continuing Review Due Date*:	**N/A**

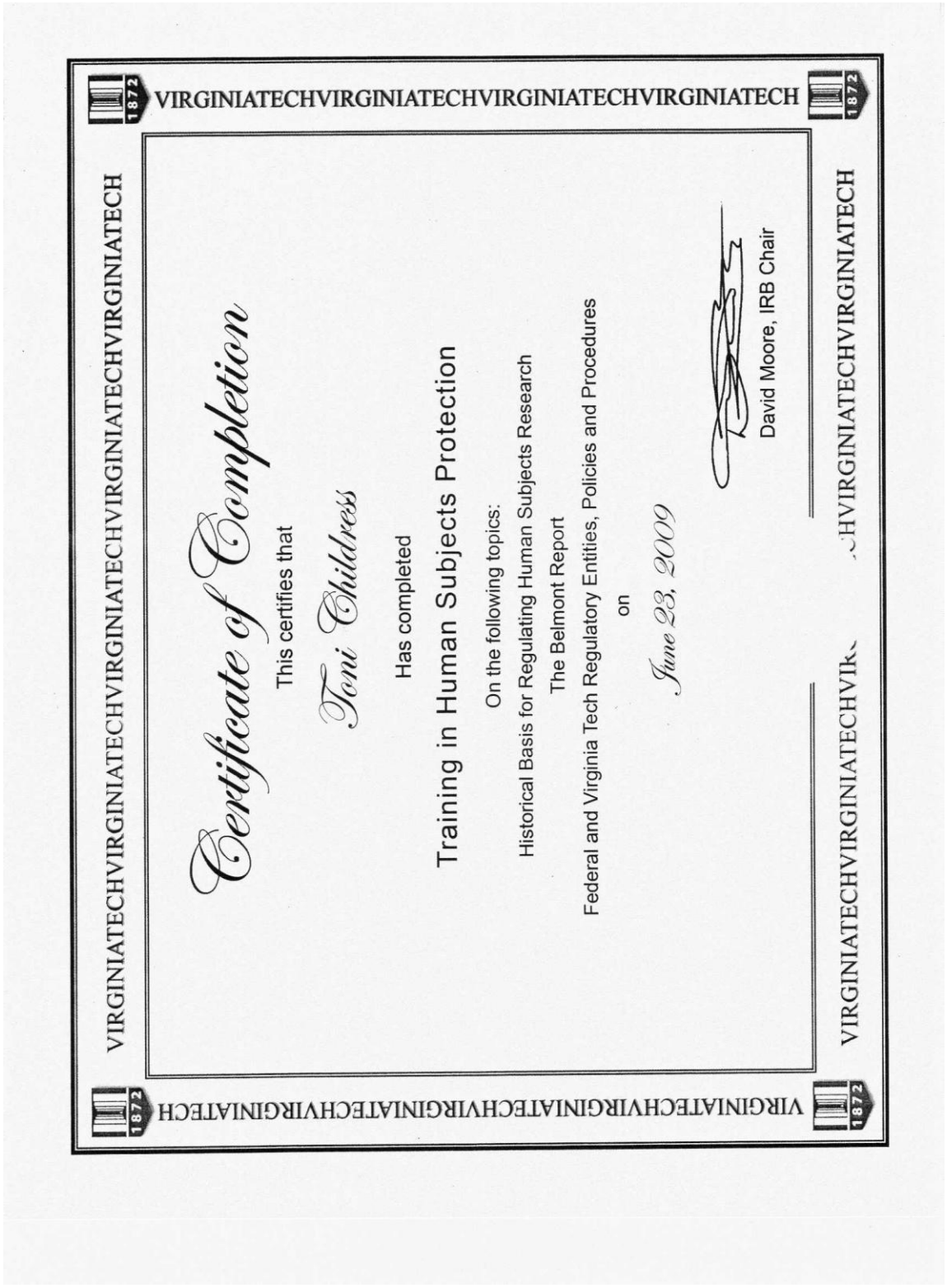
*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

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.

Appendix B: IRB Approval



Appendix C: Survey

Transition Practices

1. General School Information

*1. On average, what percent of ninth graders attend school each day?

numeric percent only

*2. What percent of ninth graders are promoted to the tenth grade at the end of their ninth grade year (on time)?

numeric percent only

3. Check all courses students need at the end of the end of ninth grade for promotion to tenth grade:

- English
- Social Studies
- Science
- Mathematics
- Foreign Language
- Physical Education
- Technology

*4. How many credits do ninth graders need for promotion to tenth grade?

numeric credits only

5. What type of schedule does your school currently use? (choose only one)

- Single-period (Traditional)
- Semester (4 x 4) Block (year long course work is completed in one semester)
- Alternate Block (A / B)
- Trimester
- Hybrid (modified block or combination of traditional and block)
- Other (please specify)

6. For which subjects are ninth graders at your school grouped on the basis of SIMILAR abilities or achievement levels? (Mark all that apply)

- English / Reading
- History
- Mathematics
- Science
- None--ninth graders are NOT grouped by ability / achievement level

Page 1

Transition Practices

7. How does your school help students make the transition to high school? (Mark ALL of your current practices)

- ☐ High school students, counselors, teachers present information at the feeder middle schools
- ☐ Middle school students visit the high school for an assembly or to visit classes
- ☐ Students participate in a summer program before entering high school for enrichment purposes
- ☐ Students participate in a summer program before entering high school for remediation purposes
- ☐ Middle school and high school counselors/teachers meet to coordinate course content and requirements for high school
- ☐ Orientation programs or assemblies are held for new students upon arrival at high school
- ☐ Other (please specify)

Transition Practices

2. Current Practices

*1. Please mark ALL of your current practices. For each practice you currently use, please indicate its effectiveness. (Mark only one column per practice)

	not offered	not effective	slightly effective	somewhat effective	very effective
A school-within-a-school, academy or other small learning community for ninth grade					
Interdisciplinary teams of ninth grade teachers who share the same students					
Extra help in core academic classes, for example, after school sessions, Saturday school, or extra class periods					
A mentoring program for students involving members of the community					
Ninth graders assigned to a homeroom or advisory group which meets regularly throughout the school year					
A focus on career choices and planning for ninth graders					
Student-centered instructional practices, such as cooperative learning or student-directed projects or activities, used an average of once a week or more					
Special curriculum or classes for ninth graders to help them learn the study skills and / or social skills needed to be successful in high school					
Extended class period					
Buddy or Big Brother / Sister program that pairs new students with older ones upon arrival at high school					

Other (please specify)

Page 3

Transition Practices

2. Do you have a school-within-a-school, academy, or other small learning community for ninth graders?

- Yes
- No
- If NO, skip to Section 3

3. (Mark all that apply) Is the small learning community for ninth graders in your school:

- Self-contained (ex: located in its own part of the building)
- Run by its own administrative staff
- Made up of teachers who work primarily with ninth graders
- None of these are characteristics of the ninth grade small learning community in my school

4. At your school, do ninth grade students:

- Stay with the same classmates throughout the day
- Stay with the same classmates for most classes, but get re-grouped for one or two classes only
- Change classmates for most classes, but stay with the same classmates for one or two classes only
- Change classmates every class / period

5. If your ninth grade small learning community does not use the practices listed above in Question 3, describe briefly how your Small Learning Community is organized:

Transition Practices

3. Interdisciplinary Teams / Teaming of Ninth Graders

*1. Does your school have interdisciplinary teams of ninth grade teachers who share the same students?

- yes
- no (If NO, go to Section 4)

2. Do teachers on the same interdisciplinary team share a common planning period?

- Yes
- No

3. How often do team members usually meet as a team? (mark only one)

- More than once a week
- Once a week
- Once or twice a month
- Once or twice a semester
- Once or twice a year

Transition Practices

4. Indicate how often a typical ninth grade interdisciplinary team in your school performs each of the following activities (mark only one per activity):

	not offered	not effective	slightly effective	somewhat effective	very effective
a.) Coordinate content: Teachers decide common themes and related topics for instruction.					
b.) Revise schedules: Teachers arrange or alter schedules for classes that need more time:					
c.) Regroup students: Teachers arrange small or large groups of students to match lessons to abilities:					
d.) Diagnose individual students: Teachers discuss problems of specific students and arrange help:					
e.) Conduct Parent / Teacher conferences: Teachers meet as a team with individual parents to discuss their child's progress, solve problems, and provide assistance:					
f.) Extra out-of-class work or homework given by classroom teacher:					
g.) Pull-out programs in English:					
h.) Pull-out programs in Mathematics:					
i.) Extra subject period in a core academic class (for example, double dose of math / English so students take two full courses in one year):					
j.) Saturday classes:					
k.)Summer school:					

Transition Practices

4. Staff Development / Special Training

*1. Do ninth grade teachers in your school participate in any special training or staff development exercises that focus on the needs and characteristics of adolescents and / or specific teaching strategies for adolescents?

- Yes
- No

2. Describe any other programs or practices being used at your school to support ninth grade students.

Page 7

Transition Practices

5. Demographic Information

*1. What is the size of your high school?

- Small (1000 students or less)
- Medium (1001-1500)
- Large (1501-2000)
- Very Large (2001 students or more)

*2. Is your high school considered:

- Rural
- Urban
- Suburban

*3. What is the percent of students on Free / Reduced Meals in your school?

- Greater than 60%
- 25% - 60%
- Less than 25%

4. Approximately, what percent of your student body is:

Asian	
Black / African-American	
Hispanic / Latino	
White	
Other	

*5. Indicate your position at your school:

- Principal
- Assistant Principal
- Grade level team leader
- Teacher

Other (please specify)

Page 8

Appendix D: Permission to Use Survey

VirginiaTech
Invent the Future

Toni Childress< tochildr@vt.edu>

dissertation replication

Johnson, Henry R. < Henry_R_Johnson@mcpsmd.org> Tue, Nov 20, 2012 at 8:52 AM
To: Toni Childress <tochildr@vt.edu>

Ms. Childress,
That is excellent. I truly know the feeling. I am happy to grant you permission to replicate my study in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Good Luck to you!!
[Quoted text hidden]

VirginiaTech
Invent the Future

Toni Childress< tochildr@vt.edu>

Fwd: Your new connection: Kerri Kerr

1 message

Toni Childress< TChildre@gc.k12.va.us> Wed, Dec 26, 2012 at 10:34 AM
To: "tochildr@vt. edu" <tochildr@vt.edu>

Toni Childress
Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: Kerri Kerr via LinkedIn <member@linkedin.com>
Date: November 26, 2012, 10:41:46 AM EST
To: Toni School <tchildre@gc.k12.va.us>
Subject: Your new connection: Kerri Kerr
Reply-To: Kerri Kerr <kerri.a.kerr@gmail.com>

LinkedIn

Kerri Kerr has sent you a message.

Date: 11/26/2012

Subject: Your new connection: Kerri Kerr

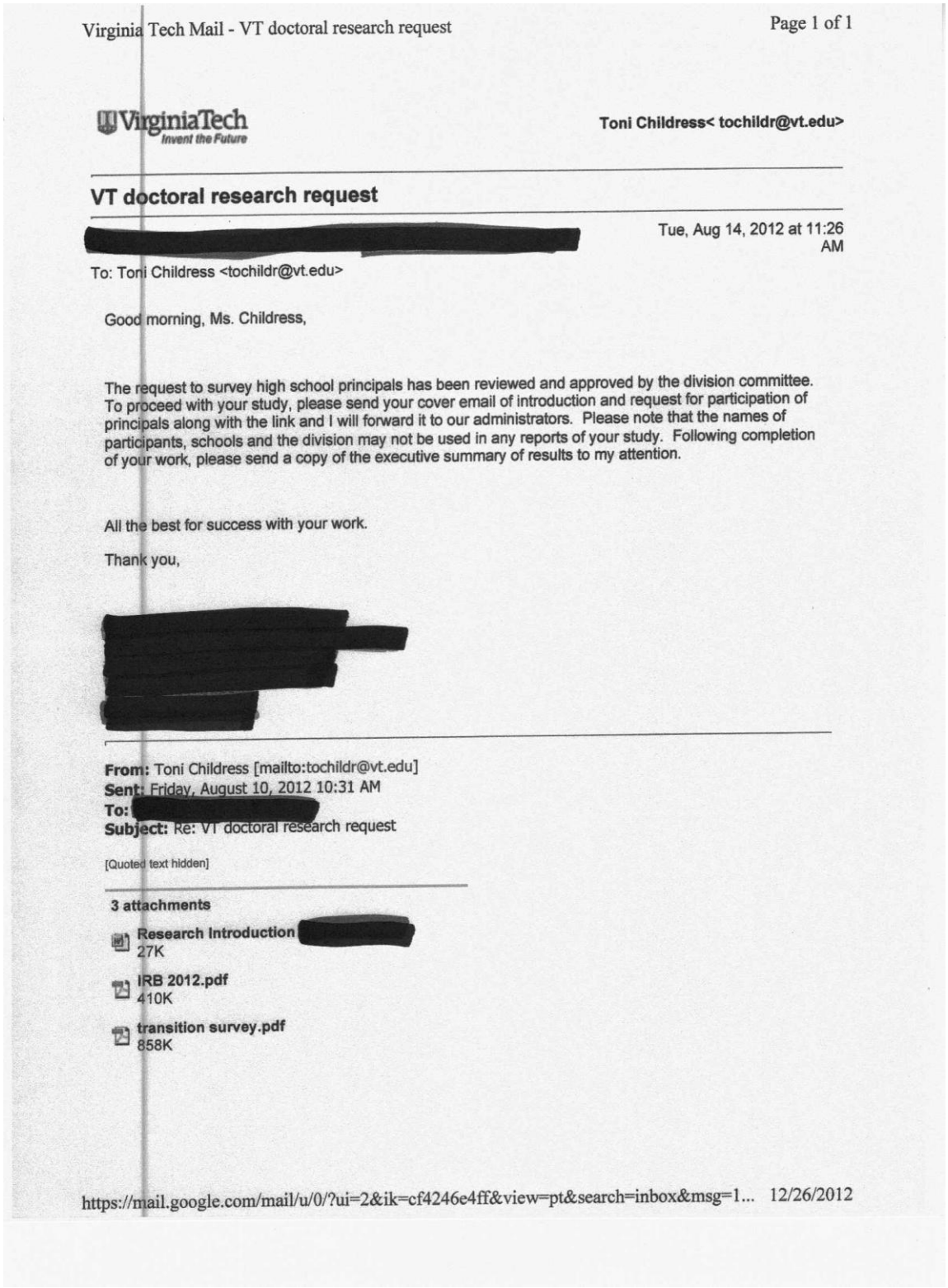
Hello,

Feel free to use my survey, though it probably needs updating by now!

View/reply to this message

Don't want to receive e-mail notifications? Adjust your message settings.

Appendix E: Permission from School Districts to Conduct Research



Virginia Tech Mail - VT doctoral research request

Page 1 of 1

VirginiaTech
Invent the Future

Toni Childress< tochildr@vt.edu>

VT doctoral research request

[redacted] Tue, Aug 14, 2012 at 11:26 AM

To: Toni Childress <tochildr@vt.edu>

Good morning, Ms. Childress,

The request to survey high school principals has been reviewed and approved by the division committee. To proceed with your study, please send your cover email of introduction and request for participation of principals along with the link and I will forward it to our administrators. Please note that the names of participants, schools and the division may not be used in any reports of your study. Following completion of your work, please send a copy of the executive summary of results to my attention.

All the best for success with your work.

Thank you,

[redacted]

From: Toni Childress [mailto:tochildr@vt.edu]
Sent: Friday, August 10, 2012 10:31 AM
To: [redacted]
Subject: Re: VT doctoral research request

[Quoted text hidden]

3 attachments

Research Introduction [redacted]
27K

IRB 2012.pdf
410K

transition survey.pdf
858K

https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&ik=cf4246e4ff&view=pt&search=inbox&msg=1... 12/26/2012

[redacted]

August 1, 2012

Toni Childress, Doctoral Candidate
Virginia Tech School of Education
War Memorial Hall
Blacksburg, VA 24061

Dear Ms. Childress,

We have reviewed your research request and this letter serves as notification that [redacted] has approved at the district level your proposal to conduct the study, "*A Study of Ninth Grade Transition Practices Across the Commonwealth of Virginia*" with [redacted] high school principals. According to your proposal, you hope to have [redacted] high school principals complete an online survey that will take approximately 20 minutes.

This letter gives you permission to contact [redacted] gh school principals via email to request their participation in the study. The decision as to whether to complete the survey will rest with each principal. It is our understanding that you will obtain appropriate consent from each principal who participates in the study and that you will not identify schools or individuals in any works that result from your research.

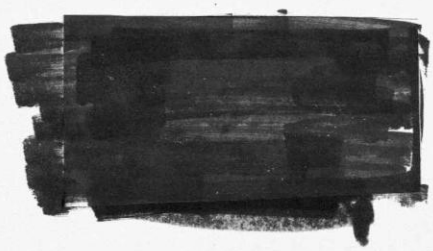
If you have questions, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

[redacted] Grant Writer/Research Proposals

Cc: [redacted] Director of Secondary Education

[redacted]



August 1, 2012

Toni Childress, Doctoral Candidate
Virginia Tech School of Education
War Memorial Hall
Blacksburg, VA 24061

Dear Ms. Childress,

We have reviewed your research request and this letter serves as notification that [redacted] has approved at the district level your proposal to conduct the study, "*A Study of Ninth Grade Transition Practices Across the Commonwealth of Virginia*" with [redacted] high school principals. According to your proposal, you hope to have [redacted] high school principals complete an online survey that will take approximately 20 minutes.

This letter gives you permission to contact [redacted] high school principals via email to request their participation in the study. The decision as to whether to complete the survey will rest with each principal. It is our understanding that you will obtain appropriate consent from each principal who participates in the study and that you will not identify schools or individuals in any works that result from your research.

If you have questions, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

[redacted] Grant Writer/Research Proposals

Cc: [redacted] Director of Secondary Education

[redacted]

August 15, 2012

Ms. Toni L. Childress
9970 Woods Cross Road
Gloucester, VA 23061

Dear Ms. Childress:

This letter serves as the Department of Educational Leadership and Assessment's approval for your research study entitled "A Study of Ninth-Grade Transition Practices Across the Commonwealth of Virginia." Your request to administer an online survey to high school principals was approved with the understanding that individual participation is completely voluntary, and you will not identify the names of the participants, schools, or the school division in any reports. As always, the final decision to participate rests with the school principal, and you are expected to discuss your study with the principal prior to starting your research activities.

Our approval for your study will expire one year from the date of this letter. If there are any changes to the methods or materials that you plan to use as part of your study, you must submit the changes to our office for review prior to proceeding. It is our expectation that you will submit an electronic copy of the final report upon its completion to the Department of Educational Leadership and Assessment. Please send the report to [redacted] If you have any questions, please contact me at [redacted]

Sincerely,

[redacted]

ec: [redacted]

All High School Principals

[redacted]