High School Transition Practices for Ninth Graders:

A Descriptive Study of Maryland Public High Schools

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ABSTRACT

Research shows that there exists a tremendous need for programs and practices that help rising ninth grade students successfully transition from middle to high school. Various studies depict these transition programs which are related to demographics such as race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status, programs that center on rural, urban and suburban education as well as programs that are related to school size. This dissertation is a descriptive analysis of the transition practices for ninth grade students found in Maryland's public high schools. Using quantitative methodology with an emphasis on survey design, the study describes the relationship between the practices and the aforementioned factors that influence those practices. Secondary to the description is a determination by school staff regarding the effectiveness of these practices.

Results from this study support the theory that transition practices are needed to address the many issues facing ninth grade students. The success of ninth grade students is dependent upon the use of these practices by high schools. This goal assists students to make a successful transition to high school leading to a successful educational experience

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

When school districts instituted middle schools (grades 6-8) in place of junior high schools (grades 7-9), secondary educators faced one of their greatest challenges: meeting the unique needs of a new, younger group of students. However, the change often created a ninth grade in high schools that was “forgotten and unwanted” (Kerr, 2002, p. 1). The transition from eighth to ninth grade presents problems for many students who struggle with issues related to academic performance. Special programs for ninth graders demonstrated the potential to ease the transition to high school. The educationally sound transition programs become even more critical with the increased accountability requirements of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* and the institution of high stakes assessment requirements for the award of high school diplomas.

High school reform efforts point to the importance of the transition that occurs between eighth and ninth grade. A successful transition to high school creates a lasting impression for ninth graders and promotes an attachment to successful learning and meaningful experiences (Kerr, 2002). Ninth grade students come to high school from middle school where there is a more nurturing environment that supports their social and emotional needs as developing adolescents. Large, traditional high school programs do not always meet these needs. Instead, ninth grade students enter a high school environment characterized by a great degree of anonymity (Blyth, Simmons & Carlton-Ford 1983). Unfortunately, many traditional high schools place little emphasis on the ninth grade student, often integrating these students into the larger school population by “allowing them to fend for themselves” (Roderick & Camburn, 1996, p. 50). The lack of personalization and other negative outcomes (including a decline in student achievement, student attendance and a higher drop-out rate) create a platform for a number of reform efforts directed to this population (Roderick & Camburn, 1996). According to Kerr (2002), the “impersonal nature of most high schools leaves students apathetic, isolated, and alienated from the learning process, while the curriculum leaves them searching for meaning and connection to the outside world and their future goals” (p. 3).

Many high schools do not address the needs of ninth graders entering high school. A study of ninth graders conducted by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (1985) found that the traditional organization of high schools did not meet the unique needs of adolescent ninth graders. The large, comprehensive high schools tend to provide ninth graders too many options and responsibilities so quickly after coming from an environment where many decisions were made for them (Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985).

The purpose of this study is to describe the various transition practices found in high schools in the State of Maryland. The overall guiding research question is: What transition practices exist for ninth grade students in the State of Maryland? What are the perceptions of school officials regarding the effectiveness of these practices?

The specific research questions are:

(1) How do the transition practices vary according to socioeconomic status (SES) and race/ethnicity throughout the State of Maryland?

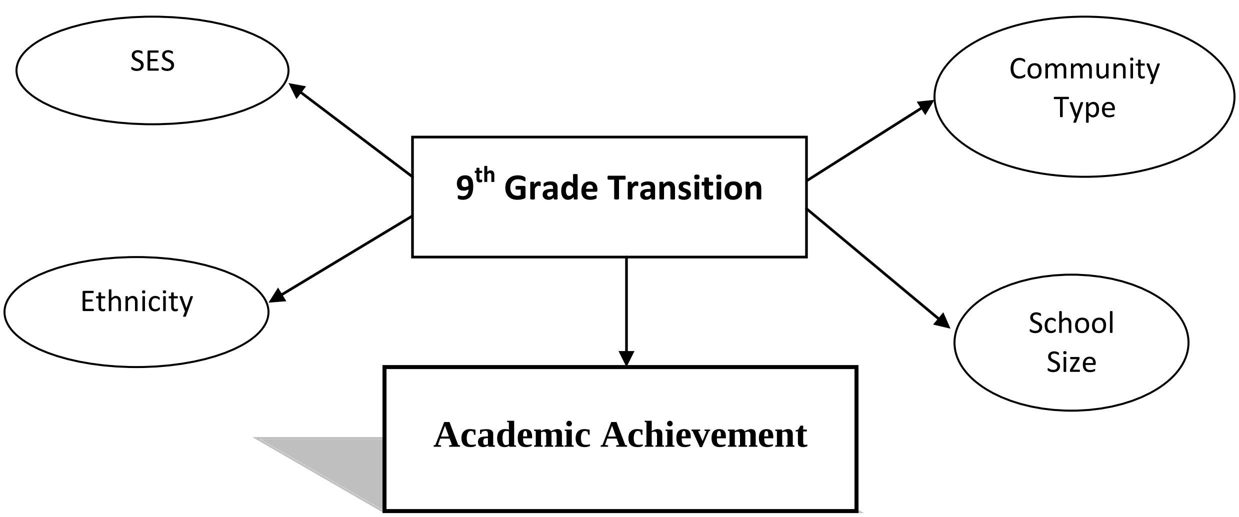
(2) What differences exist among transition practices in urban, rural and suburban communities throughout the State of Maryland?

(3) What are the differences between transition practices in small (1,000 students or less), medium (1001-1500 students), large (1,501- 2000 students) and very large high schools (2001 students or more) in the State of Maryland?

Factors Influencing Transition Practices

The conceptual framework used in this study is depicted in Figure 1. The final outcome of interest, academic achievement in ninth graders, varies according to the socioeconomic status (SES) and race/ethnicity of the students as well as the type of community (urban, rural, and suburban) and the size of school. Examples of transition practices found in different high schools serve as models of practices found in the guiding research.

Figure 1 *Factors Influencing Transition Practices*



The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (P.L.107-110), a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, places importance on academic success for all students, including ninth graders. The legislation drives instructional programs in all states with its focus on: (1) stronger accountability for results; (2) greater freedom for states and communities; (3) proven educational methods; and (4) greater choice for parents (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). Characteristics of practices and their effectiveness that assist students with transition from eighth to ninth grade may be closely related to socioeconomic status (SES) and ethnicity as well as the community where the school is located. School size also plays an important role in the transition process.

Socioeconomic Status (SES) and Race/Ethnicity

Throughout the history of education, opportunities varied according to student's socioeconomic status (SES) and race/ethnicity, a factor closely related to SES. According to Wang (2006), SES is one of the greatest influences on student achievement. As students prepare for high school, these differences greatly affect the preparation they receive. To combat this problem, the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) was signed into law. The Act places an emphasis on educational equity regardless of socioeconomic status (SES), race/ethnicity, and educational challenges and requires that educational programs pay close attention to these differences by showing a commitment to all students. (NCLB §101, 2001).

Closely aligned with SES are the differences in transition practices that vary based on race/ethnicity. Studies show that African-American, Hispanic and Native American students are more likely to either fall behind their white and Asian counterparts or drop-out of school during/at the end of ninth grade (Heck & Mahoe, 2006). Akos and Galassi (2004) indicate that the transition from middle to high school can be particularly difficult for students of color and that effective school transition practices are less likely to succeed if special attention is not placed on race/ethnicity.

The creation of a successful transition program is especially important to minority students entering high school. Creating a culture of success for minority students increases motivation and provides opportunities for students to perform at higher levels. Because some minority students lack adequate support at home or in the community, schools that promote a culture of success have a positive effect on these students' performance (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). Because of the heavy peer influence on minority students, it is important that schools provide opportunities for peer learning in and out of class, cooperative work and study experiences and socialization programs that promote the motivation for high achievement (Kahlenberg, 2001).

Community Type

Like SES and race/ethnicity, the type of community is also related, to some degree, to differences in transition practices. Urban school districts with large minority populations of low SES suggest a need for different practices than do rural and suburban districts. Morrison and Legters (2001) show that urban ninth graders need highly organized practices that provide educational experiences that are lacking for students with poor parental support. Parental support contributes to decreasing the high drop-out rate typical of ninth grade students in urban high schools (Neild, Stoner-Eng & Furstenberg, 2002).

In rural schools, resources often determine the educational practices that exist within the community. Through the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, the federal government provides rural school districts with financial assistance based upon poverty and school enrollment (Arnold, Biscoe, Farmer, Robertson & Shapley, 2007).

In contrast to urban and rural schools, most suburban schools have adequate resources. However, suburban schools have their own issues associated with transitioning ninth graders. These issues differ from those of urban and rural communities because of the disparity between educational attainments in suburban communities (Case, 2006).

School Size

Research shows that some transition practices are more successful than others, depending on the size of the school. Wang (2006) suggests that small schools, as well as those devoted entirely to ninth grade, show greater academic success for students. As a part of the school reform movement, many school districts opened smaller high schools because of a belief that these smaller schools create a greater chance for student success, especially during the ninth grade year (Lee & Smith, 1994).

Overview of Methodology

The methodology used in this study is descriptive. The purpose of this study is to describe ninth grade transition practices and their effectiveness in the State of Maryland in relation to factors that appear to impact the choice of practices: SES, race/ethnicity, community type- (urban, rural and suburban) and high school size (small, medium, large, very large). Primary data on the dependent variable (transition strategies used in ninth grade and their effectiveness) was gathered through a survey (paper and/or electronic) administered to high school principals in high schools in the State of Maryland. The researcher chose high school principals because of his own employment as a high school principal in Montgomery County, Maryland.

This study serves as one of the recommendations suggested in a study conducted by Kerr (2002) in the State of Maryland on ninth grade transition and school organization and reform. Kerr (2002) states, “very little if any research in this field focuses on the potentially positive effects of the countless initiatives taken on by high schools to address student needs; this study provides reason for further exploration of this topic” (p. 225).

Quantitative analysis was used for this study. A survey instrument that gathers information about various transition practices used by high school principals was used. The survey is designed to gather data on the frequency of transition practices and their effectiveness in Maryland high schools based on SES, race/ethnicity, community type (urban, rural and suburban) and high school size (small, medium, large and very large). The survey instrument was piloted with one high school principal from each of the three community settings (urban, rural and suburban) outside the State of Maryland. Upon validation of the data collection procedures by the pilot group, the survey was administered to Maryland high school principals or their designees using the paper or electronic version. Follow-up phone contact was used to increase the participation rate of principals. Once the survey was administered and results received, the researcher used the JMP Statistical Discovery Software to analyze and report results.

Definitions

The following definitions are used in this study.

Transition - According to Smith-Mumford (2004), transition is defined as “a change or passing from one condition, place, thing, activity or topic to another” (p.17).

Socioeconomic Status (SES) - According to the National Center for Education Statistics, socioeconomic status (SES) is a measure of an individual or family’s relative economic and social ranking. SES is constructed based on father’s education level, mother’s education level, father’s occupation, mother’s occupation, and family income. Also, students are classified into high, middle, and low SES based on a standardized composite index score of their parents' education level, mother's and father's occupation, family's income, and certain household items. The terms "high SES," "middle SES," and "low SES," respectively, refer to the upper, middle two, and lower quartiles of the composite index score distribution. By definition, one-quarter of each cohort of students will be in the bottom SES quartile, even if education levels, average family incomes, and the number of persons in more prestigious occupations change.

Urban - a cluster of one or more block groups or census blocks each with a population density of at least 1,000 people per square mile (U. S. Census Bureau, 2007)

Rural - Rios (1988) suggests that the definitions for rural are both quantitative and qualitative. The former defines the number of inhabitants in an area according to square mile while the latter addresses the values, family structure and political structure of the area.

Suburban - territory outside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with a population of 250,000 or more (U. S. Census Bureau, 2007)

Single period schedule- daily schedule of 45-55 minute periods that meet daily (Visher, Emanuel, Teitelbaum, 1999)

4 x 4 block schedule- a four class, 90 minute format that consolidates year long courses into semester long courses (Visher, Emanuel, Teitelbaum, 1999)

Alternating day block schedule- six to eight courses are spread over 2 days, sometimes designated as "A" and/or "B" days (Visher, Emanuel, Teitelbaum, 1999)

Hybrid schedule- a combination of one or more schedules during the school year (Visher, Emanuel, Teitelbaum, 1999)

Significance

As early as 1985, Lounsbury and Johnston conducted a study of ninth graders for the National Association of Secondary School Principals (Black, 2004). Finding that there were few practices to help with the gap between middle school and high school, these researchers favored looking at practices that would help engage ninth grade students in the high school experience. Another study in 1993 by Wheelock (Morton, 2005) found that high schools were not an inviting place for ninth graders and provided very few practices to assist in their success. According to Morton (2005), Hertzog and Morgan (1999) found the same results as the earlier studies conducted by Lounsbury and Johnston (1985) and Wheelock (1993). Pulling all these studies together in 2002, Kerr concluded that “the needs of ninth graders are not met by current school programs” (p. 3).

Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1, Introduction, provides a description of the study purpose, an introduction to the research questions (which serve as a focus for the study), an introduction and explanation of the conceptual framework and its relationship to the research questions, and other related topics including factors influencing ninth grade transition, definitions to be used throughout the study and the significance of the study. Chapter 2, Review of Related Literature, contains a summary of empirical and theoretical research related to the various elements included in the conceptual framework (see Figure 1 in Chapter 1). Research related to the history of grade level organization, adolescent development, and the significance of ninth grade transition is also addressed in this chapter. Chapter 3, Methodology, includes a description of the quantitative methodology to be used in the study. Specifically, the survey instrument used to determine the various transition practices and their effectiveness (dependent variable) implemented at Maryland public high schools is described. Independent variables such as SES, race/ethnicity, community type and school size enhance the descriptive nature of the study. Chapter 4, Data Analysis, describes the results of the data analysis and reports findings from the survey data regarding the various transition practices (dependent variable) and the frequency of distribution related to the independent variables (SES, race/ethnicity, and community type and school size). Chapter 5, Conclusions, Findings, Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research, serves as a summary of the study, describes conclusions and limitations of the study and offers recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Scope

This study centers on transition strategies that increase the success of ninth graders moving from middle to high school. An emphasis is placed on one primary question: What transition practices exist for ninth grade students in the State of Maryland? What are the perceptions of school officials regarding the effectiveness of these practices? The study also addresses the following three secondary questions:

1. How do the transition practices vary according to socioeconomic status (SES) and race/ethnicity throughout the State of Maryland? What are the perceptions of school officials regarding the effectiveness of these practices?
2. What differences exist between transition practices in urban, rural and suburban communities throughout the State of Maryland?
3. What are the differences between transition practices in small (1000 students or less), medium (1000-1500 students) large (1501-2000 students) and very large (more than 2001 students) high schools in the State of Maryland?

The study addresses these research questions through empirical and theoretical research in order to provide successful educational outcomes for ninth grade students in the State of Maryland.

The History of Grade-Level Organization

In the history of education in this country, the organizational structure of school systems changed frequently as a result of cultural, sociological and political movements. During the twentieth century, industrialization in America resulted in a growing student population that organized schools into grade levels (Kerr, 2002).

During the first half of the twentieth century, middle grades consisted of grades 7-9 and were called junior high schools. For a number of years, schools were structured around the 6-3-3 model. Elementary schools consisted of grades 1-6, junior high schools were grades 7-9 while high schools were organized with grades 10-12 (Alexander & George, 1981). The middle school movement of the 1960’s and 1970’s created reorganization with the purpose of providing a “better transition of students from elementary to high school” (Kerr, 2002, p.10). At the same time, the hope was that these schools would also focus on the social, emotional and physical development of students in the middle grades (Alexander & George, 1981). There was no acceptable or standard organization of the middle years throughout the United States, thus many school communities moved toward the middle school concept which consisted of grades 6-8 (Alexander & George, 1981).

Two studies conducted by the National Association of Secondary School Principals provide a perspective on the ninth grade student in relationship to their adjustment to high school. A study conducted in 1984, *How Fares the Ninth Grade: A Day in the Life of a 9th Grader* (Lounsbury & Johnston, 1985), demonstrated that, in the 141 schools studied, very few practices existed to address transition and the adjustment needed for students between middle and high school. Researchers found that high schools were not effective in providing long-lasting practices to help with the transition from eighth to ninth grade (Roskosky, 2006). A second study (Wheelock, 1993) conducted by the National Association of Secondary School Principals in 48 states and the District of Columbia, concluded that very little was done to address the needs of ninth graders leading to, according to another educator, a “fragile attachment to their new school” (Roskosky, 2006, p. 35).

Moving ninth graders to high school was seen as a more practical approach (Kerr, 2002). This move eliminated overcrowding that resulted from the increase in population in the elementary and middle years and placed students in high schools with those closer to their hormonal and physical development. According the Epstein and MacIver (1990), “grade span is often the result of mechanical and demographic factors” (p. 8). Placing ninth graders in high school increased the level of independence for a group of students more physically and emotionally aligned with older students (Kerr, 2002).

Throughout the years, educators questioned whether the design of grades 9-12 at the high school level was the best organizational framework for schools (Kerr, 2002). Because of the complexity of adolescent development, ninth graders share characteristics with their older peers, but they also share many characteristics with their younger peers (Kerr, 2002).

Adolescent Development

For many, adolescence is a difficult period. There are many challenges and pressures associated with this stage in a child’s life (DaGiau, 1998). Throughout this period, children are confronted with significant changes in personality, physical appearance and hormonal levels which result in varying levels of maturation for young adolescent males and females. According to Schaffer (1996):

> Girls hope to be perceived as attractive and become concerned about their appearance and how people will respond to them. They also tend to be more concerned and troubled by their interpersonal relationships. Conversely, boys tend to have a more positive body image and tend to focus more on physical strength and ability. They tend to show more reaction to challenging restriction and attaining independence, rather than focusing on themselves. (p. 4)

These differences, taken together, profile an adolescent period that makes it difficult to imagine how students with these diverse profiles can be gathered into one grade level with the ability to face the myriad difficulties of the high school environment.

According to Piaget, “adolescence is the beginning of planning a possible path for one’s life” (DaGiau, 1998, p. 5). This is the period when identities are formed with a focus on understanding and accepting other’s views and behaviors. Adolescents become more mature and independent in thought and action. However, this period is also filled with feelings and emotions focused on social influence (Hansen, Rossberg & Cramer, 1994). Erik Erikson’s theory of development indicates that adolescence is a period when “maturing children struggle with who they are and how they fit into their social world” (DaGiau, 1998, p. 5). Peer social relationships and acceptance become increasingly important, thus supporting the complexities of entering a period in their lives filled with attitudes and decisions focused on the future.

This profile of adolescence presents many challenges for those attempting to provide educational practices to meet the needs of different psychological, social and emotional behaviors. According to Cairns & Cairns (1994), “the cooperation and trust of the schools, teachers, parents and the often contrary adolescents themselves” is the partnership needed to address the many issues facing them (p. 7).

In 1990 and 1991, the U. S. Department of Education published the following:

> Approximately 50% of children between the ages of 10 and 17 in the U. S. are at moderate to high risk for failing at school, becoming delinquent or involved with the juvenile justice system, becoming involved in substance abuse or becoming an adolescent parent (DaGiau, 1998, p. 7)

Because of the challenges facing adolescents and the adults who work with them, it is critical for schools to provide programs to assist in bridging the gap between youth and adulthood (DaGiau, 1998). A move from traditional programs at the high school level is necessary so that educators can address the problems which make academic achievement a barrier to success for many students. To do this, schools must provide programs that meet the individual needs of students during the school day and beyond in order to create successful outcomes (Behar-Horenstein, Amatea, 1996).

The Sierer study (1989) addressed the relationship between four private Christian schools in Pennsylvania with adjoining middle and high schools. A student survey was given to eighth graders who had plans to attend the affiliated high school. The student population for the high school was twice the size of the middle school. The study did not specifically address transition but did evaluate common independent variables like grade point average, gender, and family relationships (siblings who attended the high school). The following conclusions were drawn from the survey: (1) students with higher grade point averages had positive attitudes about school in both the middle and high school (2) female students were more concerned than male students about making the social adjustment from eighth to ninth grade (3) male students were more concerned about academic performance in high school and (4) there were fewer problems for students (male and female) who had older siblings at the high school (Roskosky, 2006). As a recommendation, Sierer (1989) stated, “teachers dealing with young people at this vulnerable age need to be better trained, or in-serviced, as to the specific concerns and needs of those students anticipating the transition from middle to a high school environment “(p. 158).

The Significance of Ninth Grade Transition

According to Gibson (2006), ninth grade transition occurs when students enter high school for the first time. While this is a natural educational progression, it is a difficult and complex one for many students. Queen (2002) argues that of the major transitions that exist in formal education,

> the transition from middle school to high school can be traumatic for adolescents, yet it is considered to be another rite of passage that young people must experience in order to move to the next level of education. (p. 2)

Many researchers believe that the ninth grade year is one of the most critical points in formal education and that intervention is needed to prevent failing and to decrease the drop-out rate of ninth graders (Reents, 2002).

Because of the relationship between adolescent development and the entrance into high school, Midgley and Maehr (2000) studied 800 students from fifth to ninth grade and examined the transition process and its impact on student success. They concluded that “student grade point averages declined significantly as they moved through middle school into high school” (p. 2). Further conclusions showed that high school teachers were very concerned about the academic performance of ninth grade students. However, the Wheelock study (1993) found that the unrealistic expectations of teachers contributed to the problems facing ninth graders in high school. According to Morton (2005), Hertzog and Morgan studied 450 high schools in 1998 along with their feeder middle schools and found that 25 percent of ninth graders failed core academic course work. Finding similar results earlier in 1990, Donohoe & Zigmond provide a specific rationale for the problems which ninth graders face entering high school for the first time:

> In ninth grade, for the first time, students must earn passing grades in core courses that carry credits required for graduation. At the same time, ninth grade students are faced with increased demands both in terms of independent study skills, and in the amount of content covered in each class. Some students who are at risk for failure may have advanced through earlier grades due to individual teacher attention and vigilant monitoring that may not be possible or desirable within the larger secondary school culture. (p. 9)

Because student needs vary, schools need different practices to meet the physical, social and emotional needs of students. Diverse practices that support success for ninth grade students should begin as early as the eighth grade year in order to meet the social and emotional needs of ninth graders entering high school (Mizelle, 1999). Kerr (2002) suggests a number of programs for a positive first experience in high school for ninth graders including:

1. *student-centered instructional practices*- small learning communities or academies that are organized by theme or career;
2. *extended class periods*- an alternate schedule that creates less movement and academic disruption during the school day for students;
3. *advisory/mentoring groups*- small groups of students who work with one teacher/advisor/mentor who serve as an advocate for students to help them navigate the high school program in a more personal way with their peers;

4. *interdisciplinary teaming*- a common practice in middle school where students are grouped into teams and teachers share common planning time to meet regularly to discuss individual student performance;
5. *summer enrichment practices* for entering ninth graders- practices designed to introduce students to high school; freshman orientation; and
6. *elimination of tracking in core academic subjects*- placing students in classes (more commonly core classes) according to ability.

Many of these same practices are reported in studies conducted by organizations like the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At-Risk (CRESPAR), the Southern Education Regional Board (SREB), and the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE).

The CRESPAR study (Balfanz, Jordan & Letgers, 2004) used survey data from high poverty high schools in large urban school districts (Baltimore and Philadelphia).The researchers used multiple regression analyses of standardized test scores and determined that various strategies in these districts significantly improved the academic performance of ninth grade students. Among the strategies included was the use of cooperative learning and group projects, an effective strategy that correlates with Kerr's (2002) findings. The SREB study conducted by Bottoms (2002) highlighted 15 middle and high schools in urban and suburban areas and found similarities in practices that mirror the Kerr study (2002). As reported by Gibson (2006), Bottoms specifically cites "building a flexible schedule into the school structure and integrating curriculum through use of interdisciplinary approaches for instruction" (p. 21) as critical to the success of the network of 15 schools studied. As is common in most studies related to ninth grade transition, Orfield, Sanni, and Schwartz (2001) in their research on minority drop-out rates for the HGSE stressed the importance of a number of intervention programs to keep students in school, especially beginning in the ninth grade. These include interdisciplinary teaming and common planning time for teachers, flexible scheduling and summer enrichment programs (Gibson, 2006). Practices that provide students with a successful transition to high school increase the likelihood of a positive experience, thus creating a lasting attachment to high school for students and increased academic performance (Wang, 2006). This is especially true for at-risk students who must form those strong bonds very early in their high school careers.

Factors Related to Ninth Grade Transition

Four factors will be examined related to ninth grade transition: SES, race/ethnicity, community (urban, rural, suburban) and school size (small, medium, large and very large).

SES and Ninth Grade Transition

The passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* introduced an educational program in America that emphasized equity in academic opportunity and success regardless of condition of wealth (SES), race, language limitations and disability (NCLB, 2001). Students with low SES were guaranteed equal education for the first time in America (Domecq, 2004). However, almost instantly school districts were forced to examine the differences in students when assessing student achievement. For decades, there were clear and distinct differences in educational opportunities for students with low SES. Despite the efforts of many low income, minority and first generation students still face challenges often unseen in wealthy, white communities (George, 2002). High schools fail to reach these students and this is especially the case with ninth graders entering high school. The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* instituted high stakes testing attempts to address this issue and, in most states, the accountability begins in ninth grade (Domecq, 2004).

Research that centers on socioeconomic status (SES) in ninth grade primarily addresses issues related to the drop-out rate for first time ninth graders. Ethnographers through qualitative methods concentrate on insights and reasoning behind the lack of success while quantitative researchers look at patterns across institutions in various settings (Heck & Mahoe, 2006). As a result there exists a close relationship between SES/social class and race/ethnicity in the Heck and Mahoe (2006) study that addresses the success of high school students beginning in ninth grade and concluding with graduation four years later.

The longitudinal study of Heck and Mahoe (2006) was a comprehensive study that followed 25,000 high school eighth graders through high school at two-year intervals. These students represented 984 high schools throughout the United States during the first two years (grades 9, 10) and 1,016 high schools during the last two years (grades 11, 12). The study addressed two questions: (1) how do intersections between social divisions (i.e., ethnicity, social class) and academic-social integration within schools contribute to students' likelihood to persist? (2) How do school contextual and process variables (a) affect students' likelihood to persist and (b) moderate the strength of within-school relationships regarding student persistence? This quantitative study used several within-school variables to test persistence models. These included student background variables (e.g., social categories, middle school academic variables, mobility before high school and academic orientation) along with social integration variables (e.g., attendance patterns, misbehavior, mobility, and relationship with teachers). Between-school variables included school type, location, and student composition and size. Other between-school variables included academic and social variables (e.g., faculty stability, curricular structure, classroom academic organization, support practices and school improvement efforts).

Heck and Mahoe (2006) described two studies. Their Model 1 study centered on the student transition to high school in grades 9 and 10 while Model 2 focused on the completion of high school in grades 11 and 12. The investigators reported the following findings:

<u>Model 1 (Grades 9 and 10)</u>

- African-Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans were more likely than white and Asian students to fall behind their peers and drop out of high school within the first two years (grades 9 and 10).
- African-Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans were more likely than white and Asian students to fall behind their peers and drop out of high school within the first two years (grades 9 and 10).
- Students with higher grade point averages during the first year of high school were more likely to make normal progress toward graduation.
- Public school students were more likely than private school students to drop out of high school early.
- Students in small schools were more likely to drop out of high school early compared to students in large schools.

The Model 2 (grades 11and 12) study placed an emphasis on students' likelihood of graduating from high school on time, that is, their persistence. The following findings were noted:

<u>Model 2 (Grades 11 and 12)</u>

- Race/ethnicity and social class (SES) were significantly different for students in later years of high school. There were no direct effects between race/ethnicity and persistence (likelihood of graduating from high school).

- Higher SES increased the likelihood of graduating on time. This was especially true of African-American and Hispanic students when there was a combination of low SES and race/ethnicity.
- Curricular findings show that African-Americans, Hispanic and Native American students were underrepresented in college-level academic practices and made less academic growth throughout high school.
- Relationships between African-American and Hispanic students and their teachers were more negative, but did not affect persistence. Students in public schools with higher concentration of low SES and with higher concentration of African-American, Hispanic and Native American students decreased their odds of graduating on time.

The Kerr and Legters' study (2001) focused on the kinds of practices used with ninth graders to ease the transition to high school. Like the Heck and Mahoe (2006) study, an emphasis was placed on attendance, promotion and drop-out rates of ninth graders, especially those associated with high poverty/high minority schools. The study included a survey of all 175 Maryland high schools in spring, 2000 with an 80% response rate. Kerr and Legters (2001) described high poverty/high minority schools as schools with 50% or more minority and 25% or more of the students eligible for free/reduced meals. In this study, 25 high schools fell into the high poverty/high minority category and were found in or close to cities in the State of Maryland. The researchers concluded that:

- schools with high poverty and high minority populations were more likely to implement practices to support the transition of ninth graders to high school;
- instructional practices such as double periods of math and English were more prevalent in high poverty/high minority school than in advantaged schools; and
- the relationship between high test scores and SES indicated that students attending disadvantaged high schools did not perform as well as students in advantaged high schools.

Upon closer examination of the Kerr and Legters (2001) study, however, Gibson (2006) noted contradiction in some areas, especially in areas with high poverty and high minority schools such as the City of Baltimore. In such cases, ninth grade transition practices did yield higher promotion rates, although students did not achieve higher test scores.

Both the Kerr and Legters (2001) and the Heck and Mahoe (2006) studies show the need for high schools to address ninth grade transition as a way to deal with educational issues linked to SES and race/ethnicity. Without this attention, failure is imminent (Heck & Mahoe, 2006; Kerr & Legters, 2001).

Race/ Ethnicity and Ninth Grade Transition

Most research links SES and race/ethnicity as factors which prevent successful transition to high school by ninth graders. However, when separating the two, there still exist problems associated with race that may not be connected to poverty. According to Simmons, et.al (1991), minority students, especially African-American and Latino students have significant problems when making that transition from middle school to high school. A study by Gillock and Reyes (1996) of 71 minority eighth grade (Latino and African-American) students was conducted to determine the influence of school staff on the perceptions of African-American and Latino students on academic performance. As part of the study, student perceptions were also analyzed. Conclusions were found to support the idea that student perceptions of their teachers as well as teacher perceptions of their students was directly linked to the successful transition from middle to high school. Further analysis of the students indicated problems with organization, the difficulty of the work, the organization of classes and the length of class periods as additional burdens making the transition to high school more challenging (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

Urban, Rural and Suburban Communities and Ninth Grade Transition

Thus far the research indicates a need for transition practices based upon SES and race/ethnicity. However, it is not as clear about the need for these practices based on the type of community in which the schools are located (urban, rural or suburban). In detailing ninth grade transition in urban high schools, an emphasis is placed on practices that assist with decreasing the drop-out rate at the end of the ninth grade year. Researchers show that in urban cities like New York, Detroit, Baltimore, Chicago and Philadelphia, the highest drop-out rate occurs at the end of ninth grade with an even greater increase in the drop-out rate for students who repeat ninth grade (Balfanz & Legters, 2001).

Urban high schools create a unique set of problems that make it almost impossible to provide transition practices. These high schools are typically large, anonymous and complex structures. Thus, it is almost difficult to provide transition practices for ninth graders that are meaningful and effective (Neild, Stoner-Eby & Furstenberg, 2001). It is for this reason that staff at urban high schools tend to spend more time on practices that assist with ninth grade promotion than they do on practices that influence transition from eighth to ninth grade. Neild, Stoner-Eby and Furstenberg (2001) concluded from their Philadelphia study that “enabling students to make a successful transition into high school should be one of the highest priorities of urban high schools” (p. 5). This longitudinal study conducted in Philadelphia followed eighth graders during the 1995-1996 school year. The study included 2,933 students and their parents who were surveyed and 1,470 who were interviewed by phone. The survey and interview data collected at the end of eighth grade were merged with data on student performance and attendance at the end of the first year of high school. The school district has a majority enrollment of students of African-American and Hispanic descent and is one of the poorest in the country with 75 per cent of the students coming from low-income homes. The study found that:

- 46% of the initial group surveyed and interviewed at the end of eighth grade graduated from high school.
- 15% of that same population was still enrolled in high school at the end of four years.
- 19% of the initial population dropped out of high school.
- 65% of those students who dropped out during the study had not been promoted at the end of the first year of ninth grade.

These statistics clearly show the need for practices that assist students with transition during high school rather than in eighth grade. These high school-based practices are needed to assist ninth graders in maintaining a level of academic performance that concentrates on grade level promotion rather than to emphasize an increase in the drop-out rate at the end of ninth grade. Programs like the *Talented Development High School Model*, one of the federally funded high school reform initiatives, show success in helping urban high schools in cities like Philadelphia organize schools and students for ninth grade success (Legters, et al, 2002). This program addresses the transition in urban high schools through organizational structures that include ninth grade academies and a “double dose” of English and Math. These strategies mirror the student-centered instructional practices and extended class periods recommended by Kerr (2001) as the basis for ninth grade reform. In addition to these programs that appear to be at the center of most ninth grade transition programs, other efforts are also important for ninth grade transition in urban high schools, including drop-out prevention classes, mentors, rewards for attendance and a consistent discipline policy. However, an important conclusion drawn from the

Philadelphia study (Neild, et al, 2001) stresses the limitations of these programs and strategies and suggests that urban high schools should move from concentrating on traditional ninth grade transition programs and to building smaller high schools with non-traditional structures in order to make the high school experience more personal for students.

Rural education poses other problems for ninth graders. In education, the term rural was first used by the U. S. Bureau of the Census in 1874. At the time, the term rural meant all areas that fell outside urbanized areas and locations with populations of 2,500 or more (Whitaker, 1982). More specifically, the National Rural and Small Schools Consortium defines a rural district as one where “inhabitants number fewer than 150 per square mile or if the district is located in a county where 60% or more of the population lives in communities of 5000 of fewer” (Rios, 1988, p. 1). More recently, Arnold, Biscoe, Farmer, Robertson, and Shapley, (2007) defined rural schools as those that reference population density, geographic features as well as a particular level of economic and industrial development. Qualitative researchers suggest that rural school districts are defined as having a lack of distinction between school and community, close and supportive family ties, a sense of cooperative spirit, as well as independence and self-reliance (Dunne, 1982).

In rural areas, where only one middle school and one high school usually exist, transition from high school is not as significant a problem as in densely populated urban areas. Alspaugh (1998), used the Missouri Mastery and Achievement Test results from rural and small town school districts in Missouri and found little or no statistical difference when reporting scores for students in: (a) K-8 and 9-12 with one school at each level; (b) K-5, 6-8 and 9-12 with one school at each grade level; and (c) K-5, 6-8 and 9-12 with several elementary schools and one middle school and high school. Alspaugh (1998) also noted that schools with more than one transition program also saw a loss in achievement though not statistically significant. Case (2006) further suggests that “when high schools closely mimic the middle school setting there are less declines in student performance” (p. 25). Furthermore, Case (2006) implies that there is less of a need for transition practices in rural schools with clearly defined pyramid structures (elementary, middle, high school) in place to help students move from one grade level to the next.

Similar to these findings related to transition in rural high schools, is the finding that suburban high schools appear to have little need for formal transition practices when there is a link between the middle school and the high school. In a study of 25 suburban high schools in the Chicago area conducted by Gillock and Reyes (1996), middle schools that closely resembled high schools in grading practices and departmentalization by subject teachers made the transition for ninth graders easier. Thus, a decline in absenteeism and fewer declines in the GPA were found.

As reported by Case (2006), case studies tend to drill data to individual levels and provide an in-depth look at how particular practices affect individual students. In a case study in Chicago, Illinois that included 23 ninth grade students in a suburban high school of 3,300 at the end of eighth grade and six weeks into ninth grade, two students were highlighted. One male student came from a family with high SES and had a 94.2% average in the school's most challenging courses at the end of a six-week period. The other student, a female had a brother who dropped out of high school and a family with little or no connection to the school. This student had a 68% average at the end of the six-week period. These profiles highlight results suggesting that although many suburban high schools do not show a need for transition practices, especially if there is a strong link between the community middle school and the high school, these schools should develop practices that concentrate on the individual students, especially when there are populations of students who do not fit the community profile (p. 33).

While there are similarities between viewpoints related to transition practices in urban, rural, and suburban communities, there are also stark differences between what researchers view is appropriate for ninth grade students who transition to high school. The similarities are that all three communities show little need for formal transition practices from eighth grade to ninth grade but the differences lie in what is best for students once they reach ninth grade. In urban high schools, a greater concentration is needed to decrease the drop-out rate for all students at the end of the ninth grade. In rural and suburban communities that are closely linked to middle schools, more time and attention should be placed on providing practices that increase the performance of individual students.

School Size and Ninth Grade Transition

One of the mitigating factors that appear to be associated with ninth grade transition is school size. However, most of the research related to school size is not specific to ninth grade transition. While there is no decisive argument regarding the ideal size of a high school, Kerr (2002) defines school size accordingly: (a) small high schools that have an enrollment less than

1,000 students; (b) medium high schools have an enrollment between 1,000-1,500 students; and (c) large high schools that have an enrollment equal to or greater than 1,500 students. Lee and Smith (1996) assert that high schools should have an enrollment ranging from 600-900 students to create the most positive impact on student performance. Earlier conclusions by Lee and Smith (1995) found that school size can be closely linked to other factors that impact performance such as SES and ethnicity. In most of the research, school size is only defined by two categories, small high schools and large high schools. This is a result of the body of work reported by Conant in *The Comprehensive High School* (1967) study that led many educators to believe that larger high schools (enrollments from 700 to 2,000 students) were better because these schools offered students more curricular choices.

Gregory (1992) believes that students experience a greater sense of connection in smaller high schools. The students tend to involve themselves in more activities, show a greater sense of pride in the school and generally feel better about school because of this connection. Subsequent studies reported after Conant's work in 1967 found that students were more successful when exposed to a more centralized curriculum (Gottfredson, 1985). Large high schools, with the ability to offer more courses, have a tendency to alienate students and create a sense of isolation, especially for disadvantaged students (Lee & Smith, 1996). Smith-Mumford (2004) states that large high schools are impersonal, inefficient and create a sense of personal loneliness for most students. Over the past few decades, efforts to create more manageable high schools have been at the forefront of school reform (Queen, 2002).

School size and its relationship to transition to high school is the basis for the study conducted by Hertzog and Morgan (1996). Using qualitative methodology, Hertzog and Morgan (1996) measured student perceptions of high school as a means to determine the factors that contribute to a smooth transition. Factors like smaller classes and better relationships with teachers and administrators served as key factors in determining a smooth transition to high school.

Unlike Hertzog and Morgan, Kerr (2002) conducted a quantitative study using survey research to determine specific practices used by 175 Maryland high schools related to ninth grade transition as well as school organization and reform. Kerr noted that there are specific practices that larger high schools use to alleviate the effects of school size. Those include school-within-a school organization (small learning communities for ninth graders or freshman academies), interdisciplinary teaming and advisory groups. Other practices include student-centered instructional practices that encourage cooperative and project-based learning, extended class periods that allow for fewer class changes by students and create less disruption to the academic program, and classes/practices specifically linked to ninth grade students which assist with study skills and tips for a successful high school experience. The survey results indicated the following when comparing schools according to size:

- student-centered instructional practices (64.5%) and extended class periods (61.3%) were found in small schools (1000 students or less)
- student- centered instructional practices (81.7%) and extended class periods (51.7%) were found in medium schools (1000-1,500 students)
- student-centered instructional practices (87.2%) and a special emphasis on specific classes/practices for ninth graders were found in large high schools (1,500 or more students).

Traditional schools cannot always provide the successful practices as reported by Kerr (2002). Wang (2006) reported the growing popularity of ninth grade schools/centers across the country. Understanding the need to create schools that meet the social, emotional and academic needs of ninth grade students, the Aldine Independent School District in Houston, Texas opened four centers in 1998. This organizational reform model at the ninth grade level provides an opportunity for ninth grade students to adjust to the complexity of high school life without the "social pressures" which often overwhelm them and conflict with academic success (p. 27). The goal of the centers was also to prepare the students for tenth grade making the transition smoother (Reents, 2002).

In Alexandria, Virginia, Minnie Howard opened as a ninth grade center in 1999. The original purpose of the school was to decrease enrollment because of overcrowding at T. C. Williams High School. Over the years, the school became a model for effective ninth grade transition with small classes (no more than 24 students in core classes), academic advisories (13-15 students mentored by one teacher) and interdisciplinary teaming (middle school model) (Wang, 2006). With large poverty and minority populations (more than 50%) as well as a large population of limited English proficient (LEP) students (more than 40%), the school faced a number of challenges. The model proved successful because of its size and the individual attention given to students (Wang, 2006). By 2000, over 128 ninth grade centers were located in school districts throughout the country. From Texas to Virginia to Utah, ninth grade transition showed success because of the personal attention and education given to these students (Reents, 2002).

Chapter Summary

The literature reviewed in the previous section highlights the middle school reform movement's emphasis on changing the schools organizational structure in order to make the transition from elementary to high school easier for students. However, school structure changes alone do not provide adequate support since the psychological research shows that there are problems inherent to the period of adolescence experienced by students in grades 6-8. These adolescent-specific problems make the transition to high school difficult and require transition practices that specifically address these issues.

Research also shows that socioeconomic status is clearly aligned with a student's race/ethnicity and that in communities with low SES and a large minority population, there is a concentration on drop-out prevention practices instead of transition practices. This is especially the case in urban high schools which use transition practices in different ways than do their rural and suburban counterparts. Finally, the research around school size concentrates on the differences between small and large high schools with current research suggesting that smaller high schools facilitate the transition to high school for all students.

In recent years, research on the topic of transition practices has grown, but there remains a paucity of information regarding the nature of the practices and their relationship to variables such as SES, ethnicity, community setting, and school size has been identified. This dissertation attempts to provide a clearer description of the transition practices used in high schools in the State of Maryland. By describing these practices, the researcher hopes to show some connection between the various practices and their relationship between (SES), race/ethnicity, community type (urban, rural and suburban) and school size.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the study was to describe transition practices for ninth graders moving from middle school to high school. The study described various practices and their effectiveness found in public high schools across the State of Maryland and indicated the frequency of practices linked to the following independent variables: SES, race/ethnicity, community type (urban, rural and suburban) and school size (small, medium, large and very high schools). The intent was to describe the practices and determine by school officials the effectiveness of these practices. The Kerr (2002) study, also conducted in the State of Maryland, suggested the need for further research in the field. This was not surprising since the Kerr (2002) study was conducted prior to the full implementation of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* which increased the demands placed on high school students.

Research Design

The current study used quantitative methodology to address the following research questions:

- What transition practices exist for ninth graders in the state of Maryland? What are the perceptions of school officials regarding the effectiveness of these practices?
- How do the transition practices vary according to socioeconomic status (SES) and race and ethnicity throughout the State of Maryland?
- What differences exist between transition practices in urban, rural and suburban communities in the State of Maryland?
- What are the differences between transition practices in small (1,000 students or less), medium (1001-1500 students), large (1501-2000 students) and very large high schools (2001 students or more) in the State of Maryland?

The dependent variable in this study was the ninth grade transition practices available in public high schools in Maryland. Perception of effectiveness was also measured. The independent variables consisted of SES, race/ethnicity, type of community setting (urban, rural, suburban) and size of school (small, medium, large, very large).

The main research method was survey design. According to Hopkins (2000), quantitative research determines relationships between an independent variable and another, the dependent variable, in a population. Quantitative research designs tend to be descriptive (subjects measured once), experimental (subjects measured before and after treatment) or correlational (Hopkins, 2000). In quantitative research, investigators seek causes for behavior and want to know as much as possible so that differences can be identified (Roberts, 2004). Survey research collects data from a population to determine the current status of that population in relationship to one or more variables (Gay & Airasian, 2000). This study described the relationship between the dependent variable (type of ninth grade transition practices) and the independent variables (SES, race/ethnicity, school communities (urban, rural, and suburban) and high school size (small, medium, large and very large).

Study Participants

There are 198 high schools in the State of Maryland as reported on the Maryland Department of Education website. Of the 198 high schools, 172 are considered comprehensive high schools that place an emphasis on practices related to ninth grade transition. The other 26 high schools are vocational and/or alternative schools which serve students placed from other high schools in the various jurisdictions. Of the 172 comprehensive high schools, 102 of the 172 high school principals or their designees (59%) responded to the survey. The survey was an adaptation of the one used by Kerr (2002) in 2001. Kerr gave approval for the use and adaptation of the original instrument (see Appendix B for electronic permission from Kerr). The Kerr study (2002) was a mixed-methodology study that described various practices and also analyzed data related to organizational, structure and reform practices of schools/school districts in the State of Maryland in 2001. The current study does not address organizational, structure and reform practices since it is a descriptive study of current practices used by high schools in the State of Maryland.

Instrumentation

The researcher gathered data through the use of a survey administered to all high school principals (or their designees) in the State of Maryland. The current survey was adapted from the Kerr study (2002) which had 16 items organized into five different categories that identified various practices in use by high schools in the State of Maryland. The Kerr (2002) survey also contained information on:

- the number of years the practices were in place,
- the percentage of ninth grade students involved in the practices,
- the frequency of use of the practices,
- the perceived effectiveness of the practices, and
- organizational practices, structures and reform practices of Maryland schools and districts (Kerr, 2002).

Like the Kerr survey, the current survey instrument is divided into five sections. Section I focuses on general school information including the average daily attendance for ninth graders, promotion/retention rates, number of credits needed for promotion to tenth grade, type of schedule used, grouping practices in core subjects (English, mathematics, science, social studies), and practices used by middle schools in conjunction with high schools to assist with the transition from middle to high school. Section II of the survey instrument concentrates on the various practices used by high schools and unlike the Kerr (2002) survey, respondents were asked the perceived effectiveness of these practices using specific indicators (not effective, slightly effective, somewhat effective and very effective). Along with the delineation of various practices, this section also concentrates on the practice of the "small learning community/school-within-a school program" format and a description of this type of program found in various high schools throughout the State of Maryland. However, this section of the survey did not specifically address the research questions in this study and therefore information from this section is not included in the analyses of data. Section III of the instrument asks respondents to identify if their high school uses inter-disciplinary teams and the methods used to organize these teams. Participants were asked to determine the effectiveness of this practice using the same response indicators as reported earlier (not effective, slightly effective, somewhat effective and very effective). Section IV of the instrument asks respondents to describe staff development practices used at their high schools and to identify the successful strategies used with ninth grade students. Like section II on small learning communities/schools-within-a-schools, data from sections III and IV did not address the research questions and therefore were not included in the analyses of data reported by the respondents. Finally, Section V requests respondents to indicate specific demographic information such as size of their school (small, medium, large, very large), position of survey respondent (principal, assistant principal, grade level team leader and teacher) and community type (urban, rural, and suburban). The Kerr survey is included as Appendix A and the present survey is included as Appendix C.

Since the purpose of this study was to describe various transition practices currently in use by Maryland public high schools, the researcher concentrated primarily on describing the practices and the frequency of use based upon variables related to SES, race/ethnicity, school community and school size along with the perceived effectiveness of these practices.

Prior to the collection of data, a small pilot study of the instrument was conducted using one high school principal in each of the three community types: urban, suburban, and rural. Schools were selected from several different jurisdictions in the Washington metropolitan region, not including Maryland high schools. Pilot participants were administered the survey in order to evaluate survey procedures and content. None of the pilot participants suggested any changes to the proposed survey.

Data Collection

Results of the survey administered to the 102 high school principals (or their designees) were analyzed to provide a description of the transition practices used in public schools in the State of Maryland. Of the 102 respondents, 67 were high school principals, 29 were assistant principals, 2 were grade level team leaders and 4 were teachers. The data from the survey instrument was collected through the use of a paper and electronic version of the instrument.

The following procedures were used during data collection. Upon approval from the IRB from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (see Appendix G), a letter was sent via email to each high school principal in public schools throughout the State of Maryland. A copy of the survey accompanied the letter (see Appendix E). The letter explained the purpose of the study and requested the principal (or designee) to complete the survey. A link to access the survey electronically was included in the letter. A follow-up paper version of the survey was mailed to participants who chose not to complete the survey electronically.

The initial electronic survey was emailed to high school principals across the State of Maryland in June 2008. The first responses to the survey were reported that same month (June 19:26 responses; June 24: 3 responses; June 27: 1 response). A follow-up electronic survey was sent in July 2008. As a result, more responses were received (July 1: 23 responses; July 22:5 responses; July 30:5 responses). Following the electronic mailing of the survey instrument, the researcher called high school principals to solicit their participation since only 63 of the potential 172 participants responded to the survey. In August 2008, the researcher mailed paper copies of the survey to participants who had not responded. As a result of that mailing, 39 additional participants responded to the survey for a total of 102 out 172 (a 59% return rate).

The initial data were posted and collected using SurveyMonkey. The data were then imported into the JMP Software for Univariate and Multivariate Statistics (2005). Prior to running the statistical analyses, the data were checked for accuracy and errors were identified and corrected. Data were printed in hard copy and electronic versions. Data from 102 surveys were compiled and analyzed using the descriptive statistics method of the JMP software.

Data Analysis

Once the data were collected, the JMP Multivariate Statistical Analysis software program was used to convert the raw data and perform the statistical analyses described in this section. The dependent variable, the elements and practices of transitional practices, was identified from the results of the survey. Data related to the independent variables (SES, race/ethnicity, community type, school size) were gathered as a separate question in the survey administered to participants. These data were used to characterize each school. Correlational statistics was used in the analysis of data for this study. Correlational research is used frequently in descriptive statistics which is the basis for this study (Gay & Airasian, 2000).

The Kerr (2002) study conducted in the State of Maryland used a mixed methodology that included both quantitative and qualitative methods to determine frequency of practices along with organizational structure and reform practices. This study, however, described transition practices related to various independent variables (SES, race/ethnicity, community type, and school size) by collecting and analyzing data through quantitative methodology only.

The statistical methods used for the independent variables are included in Table 1.

Table 1 *Method of Analysis*

Independent Variable	**Method of Analysis/Dependent Variable**
SES (FARMS) Ranges: >60 %, 25%-59%, <25%	One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of Perceived Effectiveness
Race/Ethnicity Percentage: Asian, African-American, Hispanic, White, Other	Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient
Type of Community: Urban, Rural, Suburban	One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of Perceived Effectiveness
Size of School: Small, Medium, Large, Very Large	One-Way Analysis of Variance(ANOVA) of Perceived Effectiveness

In providing an analysis of question 1, *What transition practices exist in the State of Maryland? and What are the perceptions of school officials regarding the effectiveness of these practices?* the researcher determined frequencies of practices, analyzed perceptions as reported by respondents. Descriptive statistics were reported using means and standard deviations. Questions 2, 3, and 4 addressed the independent variables. In each of the questions the researcher used two methods of analyses, one which addressed the distribution of practices in relationship to the independent variables (SES, community type and school size) as well as a one-way Analysis of Variance to determine the perceived effectiveness of the transition practices. However, in question two, regarding race/ethnicity, a Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the relationship between race, ethnicity and the effectiveness of transition practices reported by the high schools. If significant variations were found, a post-hoc test was conducted to determine the relationship.

Chapter Summary

This chapter addressed the methods used in this descriptive study of transition practices in the State of Maryland. The study used data collected through a survey instrument to address the four research questions. Study participants included high school principals throughout the State of Maryland using a small sample of principals, outside of the State of Maryland, to pilot the survey procedures. Procedures for the collection of the data included both a paper and electronic format. Phone calls and reminder notices were used to increase the participation rate. Data were analyzed using the JMP Multivariate Statistical Analysis software. The frequency of distribution of transition practices was determined by independent variables to show the differences between groups along with a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and the Pearson product-moment coefficients to determine correlation between the dependent variable (transition practices) and the independent variables (SES, race/ethnicity, and community type and school size) to determine perceived effectiveness of transition practices by groups.

CHAPTER 4 DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to describe the various practices for ninth grade transition used by high schools across the State of Maryland. The study described practices (the dependent variable) and their effectiveness in relationship to factors like SES, as measured by the FARMS or "free and reduced meals" rate, race/ethnicity, community type and size of school (independent variables). Survey design was the methodology used. The following research questions were addressed:

1. What transition practices exist for ninth grade students in the State of Maryland? 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/ethnicity throughout the State of Maryland?
3. What differences exist among transition practices in urban, rural and suburban communities throughout the State of Maryland?
4. What are the differences between transition practices in small schools (1000 students or less), medium schools (1001-1500 students), large (1501-2000 students) and very large high schools (2001 students or more)?

This study was an adaptation of the Kerr study (2002) with an emphasis placed on describing various practices since the full implementation of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*.

The survey instrument was divided into five sections as outlined in Chapter 3. Section I included general school information. Section II concentrated on the various practices used by high schools with ratings to determine effectiveness. This section also included information related to the "small learning community/school-within-a school/academy" format following the Kerr (2002) model. Section III of the instrument reported on the use of inter-disciplinary teams. Section IV of the instrument described staff development practices used by high schools. Finally, Section V identified demographic information of the reporting high schools. As reported earlier in Chapter 3, data collected on the "small learning community/school-within-a-school academy model", along with interdisciplinary team data and staff development data were not addressed in the research questions. To address the four research questions, the researcher concentrated only on the items related to transition practices and their effectiveness along with data related to SES (FARMS), race/ethnicity, community type and school size.

Results of Survey

Demographic Information

The four research questions centered on the description of ninth grade transition practices used by high schools in the State of Maryland. Survey respondents were asked to identify school information related to the various transition practices for ninth graders. This information also served as the catalyst for the four research questions addressed by the survey.

Table 2 *Frequency of Responses by Size of School*

	Number	Percent of Total
Small (<1000)	23	23%
Medium (1,001-1,500)	36	36%
Large (1,501-2,000)	25	25%
Very Large (>2,000)	16	16%
Total	100	

In the information provided by the 100 respondents who reported general school survey information, 23% of the schools were reported as small high schools (less than 1000 students), 36% of the high schools were reported as medium size high schools (1001-1500 students), 25% of the high schools were reported as large high schools (1501-2000 students), while 16% were reported as very large high schools (greater than 2001 students). Table 2 above displays the information on school size.

Table 3 *Descriptive Statistics of Reported Ethnic/Racial Composition of Responding Schools*

	Mean %	Standard Deviation
Asian	5.77	7.39
African American	38.91	33.49
Hispanic	10.66	12.16
White	48.19	32.36
Other	1.82	1.76

*Respondents provided the ethnic/racial composition of their schools by total membership.

The mean ethnic/racial composition of the high schools was reported as follows: Asian student population— 5.77% (SD=7.39), African-American students—38.91% (SD=33.49), Hispanic students—10.66% (SD=12.16), White students —48.19 (SD=32.36) and other racial/ethnic student groups —1.82% (SD=1.76). Table 3 displays the ethnic/racial composition of the sample.

Table 4 *Frequency of Responses by Community Type*

	Number	Percent of Total
Rural	14	14.1%
Urban	30	30.3%
Suburban	56	55.6%
Total	100	100%

One-hundred of the 102 respondents reported the type of community of their school as follows: 14% of the high schools were identified as rural, 30% of the high schools were identified as urban, and 56% of the high schools were identified as suburban. Table 4 displays the responses on type of community.

Socioeconomic Status (SES)

Table 5 *Frequency of Responses by Percent Category of Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS)*

Category	Number	Percent of Total
>60%	17	17.1%
25%-59%	37	37.3%
<25%	46	45.5%
Total	100	100%

Socioeconomic status (SES) was determined using the percent of the student population that qualified for “free and reduced meals” (FARMS). Respondents were asked to characterize their high schools according to the following criteria: high schools with greater than 60% FARMS, high schools with 25%-59% FARMS and high schools with less than 25% FARMS. The data, displayed in Table 5, were reported by 100 respondents as follows: 17 of the high schools had FARMS populations greater than 60%, 37 high schools had a FARMS rate between 25%-59% and 45 of the high schools had a FARMS rate less than 25%.

Other Information on Schools

To determine the types of transition practices that were found in high schools in the State of Maryland, it was also important to know more information about the schools. Therefore, information was gathered on the percentage of ninth graders who attend school each day, the percentage of ninth graders promoted from ninth grade to tenth grade each year, the number of credits needed by ninth graders for promotion along with the courses ninth grade students need for promotion to tenth grade and the type of instructional schedule used by the high schools.

Attendance/Promotion Rate of Ninth Graders

The average attendance for high schools throughout the State of Maryland during the 2007-2008 school year, as reported by the respondents, was 91.70% (SD=6.33). The promotion rate of ninth graders from ninth grade to tenth grade throughout the State of Maryland was 90.22% (SD=9.13).

Number of Credits Needed for Promotion

Table 6 *Frequency of Schools Requiring Specific Courses for Promotion to Tenth Grade*

Course	Number (N= 101)	Percent of Total
English	86	86%
Social Studies	62	62%
Math	73	73%
Foreign Language	7	7%
Physical Education	14	14%
Tech	10	10%

Regarding promotion from ninth to tenth grade, respondents were asked to provide information related to the core course requirements for ninth grade students. The average number of courses required for promotion was 3.12 (SD=1.88). The following course requirements for promotion were reported as follows: 86% of the high schools reported English, 62% of the schools reported social studies, 73% reported math, 7% reported foreign language, 14% reported physical education and 10% reported technology. Table 6 displays these data.

Type of Schedule Reported by Respondents

Table 7 *Frequency of Respondents Reporting by Type of Schedule*

	Number N=100	Percent of Total
Single Period	40	40%
Semester (4X4) Block	19	19%
Alternate Day Block (A-B)	24	24%
Hybrid	14	14%
Other	3	3%
Total	100	100%

The information on the type of schedule reported by responding high schools in the State of Maryland indicated that 40% of the high schools use a single period schedule, 19% use a semester (4 x 4) block schedule, 24% use an alternate day block (A-B), 14% use a hybrid schedule (a combination of the various schedules) and 3% reported the use of another type of schedule that was not listed on the survey. These data are displayed in Table 7.

Research Question 1

What transition practices exist for ninth grade students in the State of Maryland? What are the perceptions of school officials regarding the effectiveness of these practices?

As indicated previously in the review of related literature in Chapter 2, Reents (2002) indicated the need for high schools to implement practices that support successful transition for ninth graders to ensure academic success. Similarly, Kerr (2002) reported that practices introduced by schools should be varied. Examples of practices that support successful transitions include the following:

- student-centered instructional practices, commonly referred to as small learning communities and/or school-within-a-school academies, which place an emphasis on academic themes, etc.;
- interdisciplinary teams, a more common practice in middle schools in which teachers share common planning periods to discuss strategies and individual student performance;

- extra help in core academic classes such as after school sessions, Saturday school and extra class periods;
- an advisory/mentoring program that uses teachers and community adults to serve as advisors;
- mentors to assist ninth graders to navigate the high school experience;
- assignment of ninth grade students to homerooms and/or advisory groups that meet regularly to address issues/concerns associated with high school transition;
- a focus on career choices and planning for ninth graders at the beginning of their high school career;
- student-centered instructional practices like cooperative learning (group instruction) used frequently to allow diversity in instruction that supports the learning styles of early adolescents;
- special curriculum for ninth graders that emphasizes study skills for academic success;
- extended class periods (80-90 minutes) with an emphasis on alternative scheduling to create less academic disruption for ninth graders; and
- a buddy program (Big brother/Big sister) that pairs ninth grade students with older students to assist the younger students with successful transition (p. 63).

Table 8 *Frequency of Respondents Reporting Various Transition Practices*

Transition Practices	n	Percent of Schools
Small Learning Community/ School within a School	48	47%
Interdisciplinary Teams	33	32%
Extra Help in Core Classes	86	84%
Mentoring Program	48	47%
Homeroom/ Advisory Group	53	52%
Career Choices/Planning	53	52%
Cooperative learning instruction	57	56%
Special Curriculum	53	52%
Extended Class Periods	55	54%
Big Brother/ Sister Program	20	20%

Using the same practices introduced by Kerr (2002), the data collected in this study indicated that a variation of transition practices was being used in high schools in the State of Maryland. The distribution of practices, as reported by respondents, is reported in Table 8.

Of the 102 respondents, 47% indicated the use of a small learning community/school within a school model, 32% reported the use of interdisciplinary teams, 84% reported the use of extra help in core classes, 47% reported the use of a mentoring program, 52% reported the use of the homeroom/advisory practice, 52% reported the use of a career choice and planning practice, 56% reported cooperative learning instruction, 52% reported the use of a special ninth grade curriculum, 54% reported the use of extended class periods and 20% reported the use of a Big brother/big sister program. To further analyze these practices, respondents were asked to rate their perception of the effectiveness of these programs using indicators such as: "not effective," "slightly effective," "somewhat effective" and "very effective". The responses to these items are summarized in Table 9.

Table 9 *Descriptive Statistics of Respondents' Perceived Effectiveness of Transition Practices*

Transition Practices	n	Not Effective (1)	Slightly Effective (2)	Somewhat Effective (3)	Very Effective (4)	Mean Rating
Small Learning Community/ School within a School	48	2.1%	12.5%	33.3%	52.1%	3.54
Interdisciplinary Teams	32	0.0%	03.1%	37.5%	59.4%	3.56
Extra Help in Core Classes	86	0.0%	29.1%	47.7%	23.3%	2.94
Mentoring Program	48	4.2%	31.3%	43.8%	20.8%	2.81
Homeroom/ Advisory Group	53	0.0%	45.3%	28.3%	26.4%	2.81
Career Choices/Planning	53	0.0%	39.6%	37.7%	22.6%	2.83
Cooperative Learning	57	3.5%	26.3%	31.6%	38.6%	3.05
Special Curriculum	53	7.5%	28.3%	45.3%	18.9%	2.75
Extended Class Periods	55	1.8%	9.1%	47.3%	41.8%	3.29
Big Brother/ Sister Practices	20	5.0%	30.0%	40.0%	25.0%	2.85

*Percentage based on number of respondents identifying transition practices

An analysis of the practices and their effectiveness as measured by the indicators indicated that:

- 59.4% of school staff perceived that the interdisciplinary team approach was "very effective."

- 52.1% of school staff perceived that the small learning community/school within a school model was "very effective."
- 47.7% of school staff perceived that the extra help in core classes was "somewhat effective."
- 43.8% of school staff perceived that the mentoring program was "somewhat effective."
- 45.3% of school staff perceived that the homeroom/advisory program was "slightly effective."
- 39.6% of school staff perceived that the career choices/planning practices were "slightly effective."
- 38.6% of school staff perceived that the cooperative learning instructional practice was "very effective."
- 45.3% of school staff perceived that the special curriculum for ninth grade was "somewhat effective."
- 47.3% of school staff perceived that the practice of extended class periods was "somewhat effective."
- 40% of school staff perceived the Big brother/big sister program was "somewhat effective."

Various practices at the high school level were not the only means used to assist with the transition of ninth graders to high school in the State of Maryland. A variety of transition practices were reported to have taken place during the eighth grade year prior to ninth grade students reporting to high school. These data are reported in Table 10.

Table 10 *Frequency of Distribution of Middle School Practices Prior to Ninth Grade*

Middle School Practices	n	Percent
School Staff Present Information	48	48%
Students Visit High School	32	32%
Summer Enrichment Program	86	86%
Summer Remedial Program	48	48%
Counselors Meet	53	53%
Orientation Program/Assemblies	53	53%

The transition practices included the following: (a) information presented to ninth grade students by high school staff was used by 48 high schools (48%); (b) middle school visits to high school by incoming ninth graders reported by 32 high schools (32%); (c) summer enrichment practices for incoming ninth graders as reported by 86 high schools (86%); (d) summer remedial practices for incoming ninth graders as reported by 48 high schools (48%); (e) meetings between counselors and incoming ninth graders as reported by 53 high schools (53%); and (f) orientation practices and assemblies for incoming ninth graders as reported by 53 high schools (53%).

Research Question 2

How do the transition practices vary according to socioeconomic status (SES) and race/ethnicity throughout the State of Maryland?

In order to address research question 2, the responses to the survey item, "*Please mark all of your current practices*," were analyzed. To determine whether transition practices vary according to school population of different SES, as measured by FARMS (free and reduced meals), two analyses were conducted. The first analysis determined the percentage of schools using various transition practices according to socioeconomic status (SES) as reported by the "free and reduced meals" (FARMS) data of each school. This distribution of practices is included in Table 11 and displayed in Figure 2.

Table 11 *Distribution of Transition Practices by Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS)*

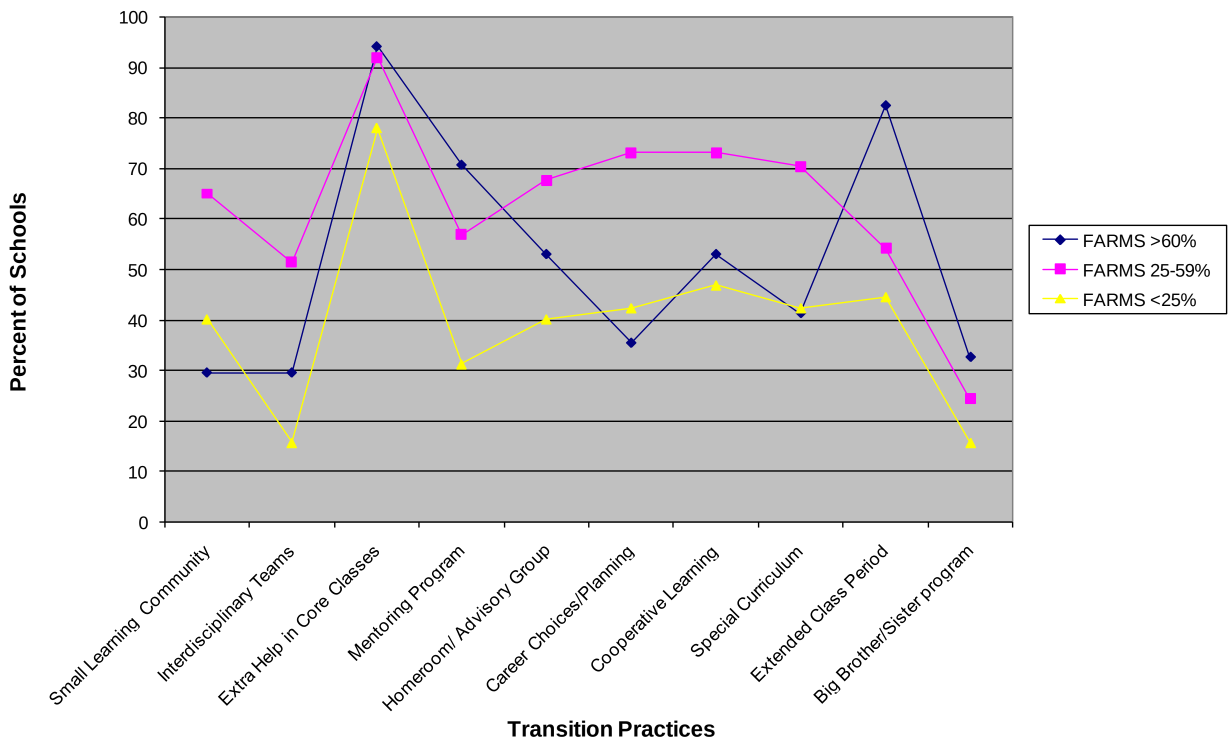
Transition Program	FARMS >60% n = 17	FARMS 25-59% n = 37	FARMS <25% n = 45
Small Learning Community/ School within a School	29.4%	64.9%	40.0%
Interdisciplinary Teams	29.4%	51.4%	15.6%
Extra Help in Core Classes	94.1%	91.9%	77.8%
Mentoring Program	70.6%	56.8%	31.1%
Homeroom/ Advisory Group	52.9%	67.6%	40.0%
Career Choices/Planning	35.3%	73.0%	42.2%
Cooperative Learning	52.9%	73.0%	46.7%
Special Curriculum	41.2%	70.3%	42.2%
Extended Class Periods	82.4%	54.1%	44.4%

Transition Program	FARMS >60% n = 17	FARMS 25-59% n = 37	FARMS <25% n = 45
Big Brother/Sister program	32.5%	24.3%	15.6%

*p<.05; SES based on percent of students qualifying for FARMS (Free and Reduced Meals)

The distribution of transition practices related to the FARMS rate, as reported by the respondents from high schools in the State of Maryland, revealed that schools with a FARMS rate greater than 60% used the following practices: (a) extra help in core classes (94.1%); (b) extended class periods (82.4%); and (c); a mentoring program (70.6%). In schools with a FARMS rate of 25%-59% the predominate practices were: (1) extra help in core classes (91.9%), (2) career choices/planning, and (3) cooperative learning (73%). Schools with a FARMS rate less than 25% used only one practice predominantly, extra help in core classes (77.8%).

Figure 2 Percent of Schools using Various Transition Practices by FARMS



In the second analysis, a one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed using three levels of SES (>60%, 25%-59%, and <25%) to determine the perceived effectiveness of the transition practices in schools with varying rates of free and reduced meals (FARMS) school populations. Effectiveness was rated on a four point scale (1 = not effective; 2 = slightly effective; 3 = somewhat effective; 4 = very effective). The mean rating for each transition practice, as reported by schools at the three levels of FARMS, is shown in Table 12.

Table 12 *One-Way ANOVA of Perceived Effectiveness Ratings By Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS) Categories*

Transition Practice	FARMS >60% n = 17	FARMS 25-59% n = 37	FARMS <25% n = 45	F	p(F)
	Mean Rating	Mean Rating	Mean Rating		
Small Learning Community/School within a School	3.61	3.20	3.00	1.94	0.16
Interdisciplinary Teams	3.71	3.52	3.40	0.47	0.63
Extra Help in Core Classes	3.03	3.03	2.56	2.77	0.07
Mentoring Program	2.71	3.14	2.33	4.37	**0.02***
Homeroom/ Advisory Group	2.83	2.96	2.33	1.92	0.16
Career Choices/Planning	2.68	2.96	2.67	0.84	0.44
Cooperative Learning	3.14	3.00	3.03	0.16	0.85
Special Curriculum	2.79	2.73	2.71	0.03	0.97
Extended Class Periods	3.35	3.35	2.86	4.44	**0.02***
Big Brother/Sister program	3.14	2.50	3.00	0.96	0.40

*p<.05; SES based on percent of students qualifying for FARMS (Free and Reduced Meals)

The one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed significant (at p< .05) findings for ratings of the following two practices: mentoring program (p<.02) and extended class periods (p< .02). A Tukey-Kramer post hoc test indicated a significant difference between ratings for the two practices among FARMS populations. In rating the mentoring program transition practice, schools with a FARMS population less than 25% rated the practice significantly (p<. 05) lower than schools with a FARMS population of 25-59%. With the practice of extended class periods, schools with a FARMS population less than 25% rated the practice significantly (p<. 05) lower than schools with a FARMS population greater than 60%.

In order to address the second part of research question 2 (race/ethnicity), the responses to the survey item, "*Please mark all of your current practices*," were analyzed. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the relationship between transition practices and the racial/ ethnic compositions of the school population. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 13.

Table 13 *Pearson Correlations between Race/Ethnic Groups' Percentages and Transition Practices*

	Ethnic Group Percentage									
Transition Practices	Asian		African American		Hispanic		White		Other	
	r	(p)r	r	(p)r	r	(p)r	r	(p)r	r	(p)r
Small Learning Community/ School within a School	.07	.27	.15	.93	.33	***02**	.08	.27	.17	.50
Interdisciplinary Teams	.37	***.03**	.09	.61	.21	.88	.18	.74	.36	.34
Extra Help in Core Classes	.15	.10	.34	.16	.10	.20	.07	.46	.16	.60
Mentoring Program	.11	.47	.20	.10	.34	***.01**	.09	.43	.19	.45
Homeroom/ Advisory Group	.28	***.04**	.17	.11	.11	.47	.18	.20	.26	.79
Career Choices/Planning	.16	.96	.14	.10	.11	.47	.05	.30	.17	.23
Cooperative Learning	.08	.42	.12	.18	.13	.78	.05	.30	.22	.09
Special Curriculum	.14	.71	.13	.18	.14	.73	.22	.13	.43	***.03**
Extended Class Period	.26	***.04**	.45	***.00**	.09	.43	.37	***.00**	.28	.98
Big Brother/Sister program	.27	.88	.33	.15	.19	.51	.19	.45	.28	.51

*p<.05

Several ratings were found to be significant. First, the small learning community/school within-a-school program was found to be significantly correlated with large Hispanic school populations (p<.02). Mentoring programs was also found to be significantly correlated with large Hispanic populations (p<.01). Second, the use of interdisciplinary teams in high schools was found to be significantly correlated with schools with large Asian population (p<.03) along with homeroom/advisory programs (p<.04). Third, the use of a special curriculum as a transition practice for ninth graders was found to be significantly correlated with “other” race/ethnic groups (p<.03). Finally, three significant correlations were identified with the use of extended class periods. These include: (a) schools with large Asian populations (p<.04), (b) schools with large African-American populations (p<.00), and (c) schools with large White student populations.

Research Question 3

What differences exist between transition practices in urban, rural and suburban communities throughout the State of Maryland?

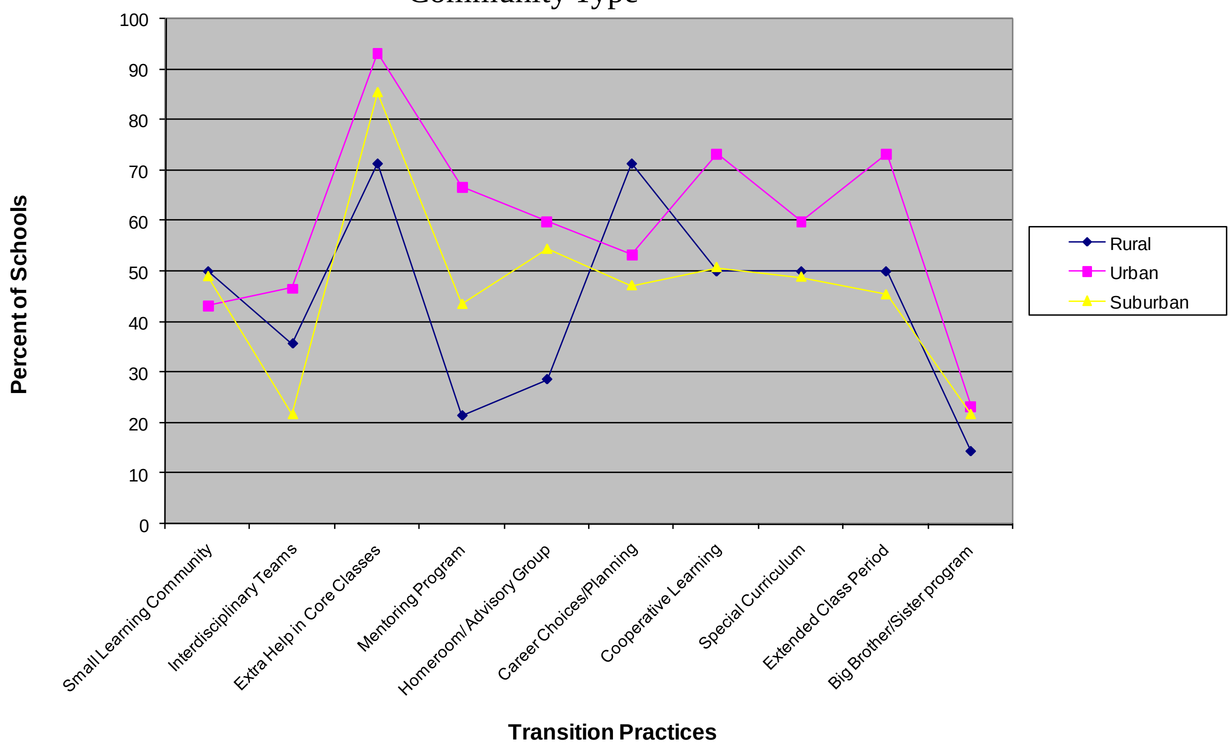
For this question, two analyses were conducted: one to determine the distribution of practices by community type and a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine the perceived effectiveness ratings by community type for the various transition practices. The distribution of transition practices by community type is included in Table14 and displayed in Figure 3.

Table 14 *Distribution of Transition Practices by Community Type*

Transition Practices	Rural n=14	Urban n=30	Suburban n=55
Small Learning Community/ School within a School	50.0%	43.3%	49.1%
Interdisciplinary Teams	35.7%	46.7%	21.8%
Extra Help in Core Classes	71.4%	93.3%	85.5%
Mentoring Program	21.4%	66.7%	43.6%
Homeroom/ Advisory Group	28.6%	60.0%	54.5%
Career Choices	71.4%	53.3%	47.3%
Cooperative Learning	50.0%	73.3%	50.9%
Special Curriculum	50.0%	60.0%	49.0%
Extended Class Period	50.0%	73.3%	45.5%
Brother/ Sister Practices	14.3%	23.3%	21.8%

Table 14 shows the distribution of transition practices by community type. In rural schools, extra help in core classes and career choices/planning were the practices used primarily in 71.4% of the schools. Four practices, school within a school/small learning community, cooperative learning, the use of a special curriculum and extended class periods, were strategies used in 50% of the schools. In the urban high schools in the State of Maryland, extra help in core classes was used by 96.3% of the schools while cooperative learning and extended class periods were practices used by 73.3% of the schools. Like the rural and urban schools, extra help in core classes was the practice used by a significant number of schools (85.5%); however, few other strategies were identified by more than 50% of the schools.

Figure 3 Percent of Schools using Various Transition Practices by Community Type



In the second analysis, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed using three levels of community type (urban, rural, suburban). Again, effectiveness was rated on a four point scale (1=not effective; 2=slightly effective; 3=somewhat effective; 4=very effective). The mean rating for each transition practice as reported by schools at the three levels of community type are shown in Table 15.

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

Transition Practices	Urban n=30 Mean Rating	Rural n=14 Mean Rating	Suburban n=55 Mean Rating	F	p(F)
Small Learning Community/School within a School	3.14	3.23	3.44	0.57	0.57
Interdisciplinary Teams	3.20	3.57	3.67	1.23	0.31
Extra Help in Core Classes	2.90	2.75	3.06	1.67	0.20
Mentoring Program	3.33	2.70	2.83	0.78	0.46
Homeroom/ Advisory Group	3.25	2.67	2.83	0.81	0.45
Career Choices/Planning	2.60	3.06	2.77	1.22	0.31
Cooperative Learning	3.14	2.95	3.11	0.21	0.81
Special Curriculum	2.43	2.56	2.96	1.83	0.17
Extended Class Periods	3.57	2.95	3.52	4.84	**0.01***
Big Brother/Sister program	2.00	2.71	3.00	0.71	0.51

*p<.05

The one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that the practice of extended class periods was significant at the p< .05 level. A Tukey-Kramer post hoc test was run and indicated a significant difference in ratings of the practice of extended class periods by community types. In the rating of extended class periods, rural schools rated the practice significantly lower than urban and suburban schools.

Research Question 4

What are the differences between transition practices in small (1000 students or less), medium (1001-1500 students), large (1501-2000 students) and very large (2001 students or more) high schools in the State of Maryland?

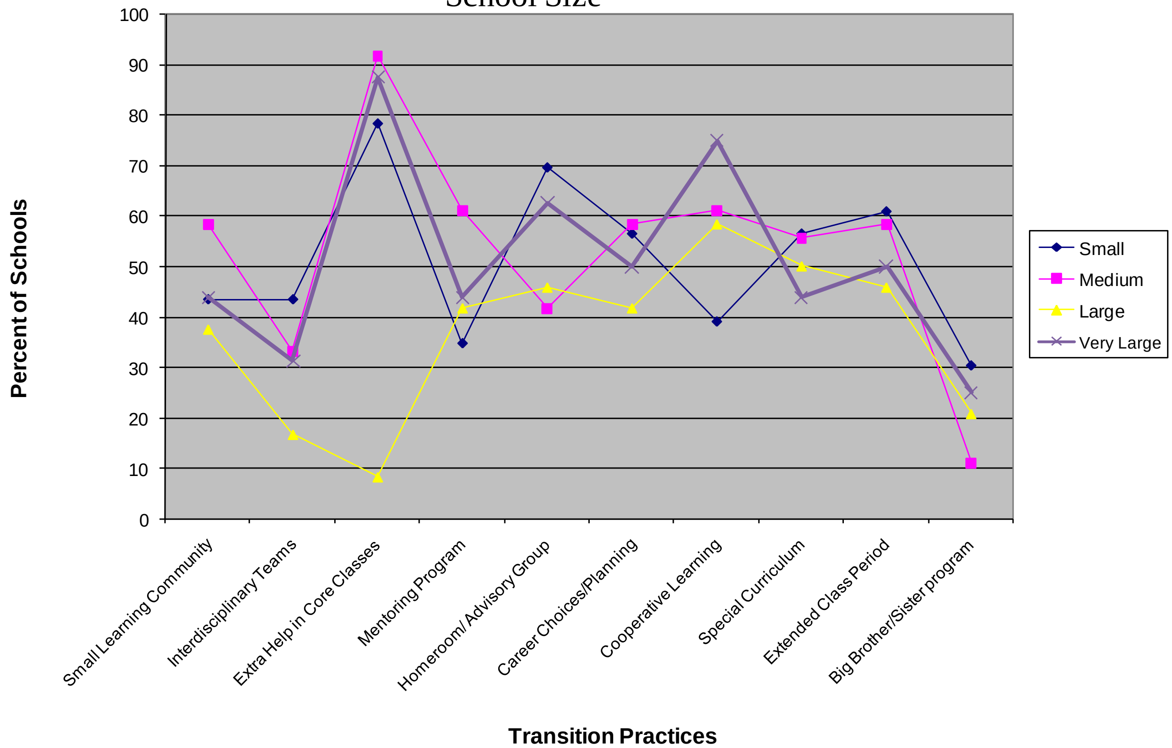
To understand the differences between transition practices in small (1000 students or less), medium (1001-1500 students), large (1501-2000 students) and very large (2001 students or more) two analyses were conducted: a distribution of transition practices as reported by schools according to school size and a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) of perceived effectiveness ratings by school size. The distribution of transition practices according to school size is included in Table 16 and Figure 4.

Table 16 *Distribution of Transition Practices by School Size*

Transition Program	Small (<1000) n = 23	Medium (1001-1500) n = 36	Large (1501-2000) n = 24	Very Large (>2000) n = 16
Small Learning Community/School within a School Program	43.5%	58.3%	37.5%	43.8%
Interdisciplinary Teams	43.5%	33.3%	16.7%	31.3%
Extra Help in Core Classes	78.3%	91.7%	8.33%	87.5%
Mentoring Program	34.8%	61.1%	41.7%	43.8%
Homeroom/ Advisory Group	69.6%	41.7%	45.8%	62.5%
Career Choices/Planning	56.5%	58.3%	41.7%	50.0%
Cooperative Learning	39.1%	61.1%	58.3%	75.0%
Special Curriculum	56.5%	55.6%	50.0%	43.8%
Extended Class Periods	60.9%	58.3%	45.8%	50.0%
Big Brother/Sister Program	30.4%	11.11%	20.8%	25.0%

The distribution of transition practices by school size revealed differences among schools of various size. In small schools, the practice of extra help in core classes was the predominate practice as reported by 78.3% of the schools. The medium size schools (1001-1500 students) also used extra help in core classes as a significant practice (91.7%). In large schools (1501-2000 students), only one practice, cooperative learning, was used in more than 50% of the schools (58.3%). However, in the very large high schools (2000 students or more), both extra help in core classes (87.5%) and cooperative learning (75%) were the primary practices used in these schools.

Figure 4 Percent of Schools using Various Transition Practices by School Size



Like community type and FARMS, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine the differences between the ratings for the various transition practices according to school size. Effectiveness was rated using a four point scale (1=not effective, 2= slightly effective, 3=somewhat effective, 4=very effective). The mean rating for each transition practice as reported by the schools is found in Table 17. There were no significant differences among the ratings of the transition practices as reported by schools of various size.

Table 17 *One-Way ANOVA of Perceived Effectiveness Ratings By School Size*

Transition Program	Small (<1000) n = 23 Mean Rating	Medium (1001-1500) n = 36 Mean Rating	Large (1501-2000) n = 24 Mean Rating	Very Large (>2000) n = 16 Mean Rating	F	(p)F
School within a School	3.30	3.29	3.33	3.57	0.23	0.87
Interdisciplinary	3.50	3.58	3.50	3.60	0.06	0.98

Transition Program	Small (<1000) n = 23 Mean Rating	Medium (1001-1500) n = 36 Mean Rating	Large (1501-2000) n = 24 Mean Rating	Very Large (>2000) n = 16 Mean Rating	F	(p)F
Teams						
Extra Help in Core Classes	2.83	2.91	3.00	3.07	0.34	0.80
Mentoring Program	2.75	2.73	2.70	3.28	0.92	0.44
Homeroom/ Advisory Group	2.69	2.87	2.84	2.90	0.70	0.92
Career Choices	2.69	2.80	2.80	3.00	0.26	0.85
Cooperative Learning	3.33	3.18	2.79	2.92	0.45	0.72
Special Curriculum	2.77	2.85	2.50	2.86	0.45	0.72
Extended Class Period	3.29	3.24	3.27	3.50	0.26	0.86
Brother/ Sister Practices	2.71	2.75	2.85	3.25	0.32	0.81

Summary of the Research Questions

Respondents described various practices used to assist with ninth grade transition to high school. The description of the current practices reported here centered on the distribution of the practices, the perception of their effectiveness as reported by respondents and the correlation between the practices according to independent variables, socioeconomic status (FARMS), race/ethnicity, community type (urban, rural, suburban) and school size (small, medium, large, very large). Analyses using the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient were performed to describe the various transition practices and their effectiveness ratings as reported by respondents. The reported effectiveness ratings of the variety of current transition practices in high schools in the State of Maryland ranged from “not effective" to “somewhat effective.” Respondents also reported that many of the current practices began in middle school and followed ninth graders to high school.

In reporting the various transition practices used by high schools in the State of Maryland, respondents stated the following:

- 84% of the schools use the practice of extra help in core classes.
- 56% of the schools use the cooperative learning instructional practice.
- 54% of the schools use extended class periods as a practice.
- 52% of the schools use the homeroom/advisory program, the career choices/planning, and the special curriculum for ninth grade as a practice.
- 48% of the schools use a small learning community/school within a school program
- 47% of the schools use some type of mentoring program
- 32% of the schools use interdisciplinary teams as a practice.
- 20% of the schools use a Big brother/big sister program.

In stating their perception of effectiveness, the respondents rated:

- the interdisciplinary teams approach (58%), the small learning community/school-within-a-school model (52%) and the cooperative learning instructional practice (39%) as "very effective."
- extra help in core classes (48%), the special curriculum for ninth grade (47%), the extended class period (47%), mentoring (44%) and the Big brother/big sister program (40%) as "somewhat effective".
- the homeroom/advisory (45%) and the career choices/planning practice (40%) as "slightly effective".

The distribution of transition practices related to the independent variables (SES, race/ethnicity, community type and school size) are reported according to the percentage of various practices found in the schools as reported by the respondents. In rating the mentoring program transition practice, schools with a FARMS population less than 25% rated the practice lower than schools with a FARMS population of 25-59%. With the practice of extended class periods, schools with a FARMS population less than 25% rated the practice significantly lower than schools with a FARMS population greater than 60%. With regard to race/ethnicity, several ratings were found to be significant. First, the small learning community/ school within-a-school program was found to be significantly correlated with large Hispanic school populations ($p<.02$). Mentoring programs was also found to be significantly correlated with large Hispanic populations as well ($p<.01$). Second, the use of interdisciplinary teams in high schools was found to be significantly correlated with schools with large Asian population ($p<.03$) along with homeroom/advisory programs ($p<.04$). Third, the use of a special curriculum as a transition practice for ninth graders was found to be significantly correlated with “other” race/ethnic groups ($p<.03$). Finally, three significant correlations were identified with the use of extended class periods. These include: schools with large Asian populations ($p<.04$), schools with large African-American populations ($p<.00$), and schools with large White student populations.

In analyzing the data related to community type, respondents reported that rural schools rated the practice of extended class periods significantly lower than urban and suburban schools. Finally, the analysis of data related to school size found no correlation between school size and the ratings of transition practices as reported by respondents.

In Chapter 4 Data Analysis, demographic information was reported on the sample pool, community type, school size, attendance statistics and promotion information. This chapter also included an analysis of research questions. In Chapter 5 conclusions, findings and recommendations for further studies will be addressed.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS, FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This chapter provides a summary of the study along with an interpretation and explanation of the findings. The chapter is divided into three sections: (1) summary of the purpose and methodology (2) review of the major findings (3) findings related to the literature and conclusions which center on implications and topics for future research.

Summary of the Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of the study was to provide a description of various transition practices and the perception of their effectiveness for ninth graders used in high schools in the State of Maryland. This study is a replication of the Kerr (2002) study and describes various practices used by high schools in the State of Maryland since the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. Previously Kerr (2002) stated that "very little if any research in this field focuses on the potentially positive effects of the countless initiatives taken on by high schools to address student needs" (p. 225). This study further explores the Kerr study in its description of present day transition practices for ninth grade used by high schools in the State of Maryland as suggested in the Kerr (2002) study. This study focuses on the following research questions:

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

A survey instrument conducted online and by mail was used to collect data from 102 out of 172 high school principals and/or their designees (a 59% return rate) in the State of Maryland. Descriptive statistics using Survey Monkey and the JMP Multivariate Statistical Analysis (2005) software program were calculated to describe the various practices used by high schools in the

State of Maryland related to demographic information such as socioeconomic status (SES) as measured by free and reduced meals (FARMS), race/ethnicity, community type and school size.

Summary of Findings

Transition Practices and the Perception of Effectiveness in Maryland High Schools

Using the practices documented in the Kerr (2002) study, respondents were asked to choose from a list of practices used at individual high schools and determine their effectiveness in transitioning ninth graders to high school. The practices include: (1) small learning communities and/or school-within-a-school model, (2) interdisciplinary teams, (3) extra help in core academic classes, (4) mentoring to assist with ninth grade transition, (5) homeroom/ advisory, (6) career choice/ planning and exploration for ninth grade, (7) cooperative learning strategies, (8) special curriculum for ninth grade, (9) extended class periods, and (10) Big Brother/Big Sister programs (p. 63). The practices were rated by the respondents accordingly: (1) not effective (2) slightly effective (3) somewhat effective (4) very effective, and not offered.

In reporting the frequency of practices used at individual high schools, the respondents, collectively, reported the following:

- The practice of extra help in core classes (84%) was reported by the majority of the high schools in the State of Maryland.
- The practice of using cooperative learning as an instructional practice (56%), extended class periods (54%), along with the homeroom/advisory period, career choices/planning and a special curriculum for ninth grade (52%) were found in a little more than half of the high schools as reported.
- Practices like the small learning community/school-within-a-school model (47%), mentoring (47%), interdisciplinary teams (32%) and the Big brother, Big Sister program (20%) were all reported by less than half of the high schools as a practice used.

After reporting the frequency of the practices in high schools, there were significant differences reported regarding the effectiveness of the practices in individual high schools in relationship to the frequency of distribution. A comparative analysis between frequency of distribution and perception of effectiveness is found below:

- While 84% of the high schools reported the use of extra help in core classes as a practice, 47% found the practice to be "somewhat effective."
- The practice of cooperative learning as an instructional strategy was found in 56% of the high schools, but only 38% of those who reported the practice found it to be "very effective."
- The use of extended class periods was reported as a practice by 54% of high schools and 47% of those schools found it be "somewhat effective."
- The use of a special curriculum for ninth grade was reported as a practice in 52% of the high schools and rated as "somewhat effective" by 45%; 52% of the high schools reported the use of the homeroom/advisory as a practice and 45% found it to be "slightly effective," while 52% of the high schools reported the use of the career choice/planning practice for ninth grade and only 39% found it be "slightly effective."
- The lowest reported practices in high schools like the small learning community/ school-within-a-school model (48%), interdisciplinary team approach (47%) mentoring program (47%) and the Big brother/Big sister program (20%) were perceived as some of the most successful. For example, 52% of the respondents rated the small learning community/school-within-a-school model as "very effective," 59% of the respondents rated the interdisciplinary team approach as "very effective," 43% rated the mentoring program as "somewhat effective," and 40% rated the Big brother/Big sister program as "somewhat effective."

In addition to reporting the effectiveness of the various practices by high schools in the State of Maryland, respondents were also asked to report on the use of other transition practices prior to ninth grade entrance to high school. These include practices such as: (a) presentations to middle schools students by high school staff used by 48 schools; (b) student visits to high school reported by 32 schools; (c) summer enrichment practices used by 86 schools; (d) summer remedial practices used by 48 schools; (e) high school counselor meetings with eighth graders reported by 53 schools; and (f) orientation practices/assemblies reported by 53 schools.

SES and Transition Practices

Using the same list of practices, respondents were asked to determine the relationship between socioeconomic status (SES) and the various practices. This information was reported using the distribution of practices according to the various levels of SES as determined by the percentage of students qualifying for "free and reduced meals" (FARMS) in each high school. School populations were reported according to three levels of FARMS: greater than 60%, 25%-60%, and less than 25%. Schools with a FARMS population less than 25% rated the practice of the use of mentoring programs lower than schools with a FARMS population of 25-59%. With the practice of extended class periods, schools with a FARMS population less than 25% rated the practice significantly lower than schools with a FARMS population greater than 60%.

Race/Ethnicity in Maryland High Schools and Transition Practices

Regarding transition practices and race/ethnicity, high schools reported significance between the following practices and racial groups. Among the reporting high schools, the study found that the school's rating of the small learning community/school-within-a-school model ($p< .02$) as well as the use of mentoring programs ($p< .01$) was significant in schools with larger populations of Hispanic students. The use of interdisciplinary teams ($p< .03$) and homeroom/ advisory ($p< .04$) ratings were significant in high schools with a large population of Asian students. The use of a special curriculum for ninth grade ($p< .03$) rating was significant in high schools among "other" student populations. The extended class period rating was significant in high schools with large populations of Asian ($p< .04$), African-American ($p< .00$), and White ($p< .00$) students.

Transition Practices and Community Type in Maryland High Schools

This study asked respondents to self-report community type. Schools were reported as urban, rural and suburban high schools. The analysis between transition practices and community type revealed only one significant relationship, extended class periods ($p<.01$). In the rating of extended class periods, rural schools rated the practice significantly lower than urban and suburban schools.

School Size and Transition Practices

The Kerr (2002) study concentrated primarily on the differences between small and large high schools. The list of practices prevalent throughout this body of research was the result of work by Kerr (2002) in determining the type of practices that were particularly effective in small and large high schools in the State of Maryland in 2002. To determine a current relationship between these practices and school size, this researcher used a more specific grouping of schools in analyzing the differences between school size and transition practices. Respondents were asked to label their schools according to the following criteria: small high schools (less than 1000 students), medium high schools (1001-1500 students), large high schools (1501-2000 students) and very large high schools (more than 2000 students). In this study, there was no significant correlation between the rating of transition practices and size of school.

Discussion

This study provides a description of the various transition practices and their effectiveness used by high schools in the State of Maryland since *No Child Left Behind*, as well as a comparison between these practices and socioeconomic status (SES), race/ethnicity, community type and school size.

Description and Analysis of Current Practices

In 2002, Kerr reported a number of transition practices when conducting research on ninth grade transition in high schools throughout the State of Maryland. These practices were the basis for the current study's description and analysis of practices used by high schools in the State of Maryland in 2008. These practices include (1) student-centered instructional practices like "small learning academies and/or school within a school models;" (2) interdisciplinary teams; (3) extra help in core academic classes; (4) mentoring to assist with ninth grade transition; (5) homeroom/advisory grouping; (6) career choice/exploration for ninth grade; (7) cooperative learning strategies; (8) special curriculum for ninth grade; (9) extended class periods; and (10) Big Brother/Big Sister practices for ninth graders.

Kerr (2002) found these practices to be an important part of the organizational reform for ninth grade in high schools in the State of Maryland. In analyzing the current data, the researcher found that these practices are still considered useful in helping high schools organize an efficient and effective program of transition for ninth grade. Since Kerr (2002), other researchers such as Bottoms (2002) (reported by Gibson in 2006), emphasized practices such as interdisciplinary teams (the most frequently reported practice currently in high schools in the State of Maryland- 59.4%) and the use of the integration of curriculum among discipline subjects (a component of interdisciplinary teaming) as a successful practice to assist with transition for ninth grade students.

Socioeconomic Status (SES) and Race/Ethnicity

Nation-wide socioeconomic status (SES) and race/ethnicity continue as important variables when projecting the success of ninth grade students entering high school for the first time. The goal, according to research conducted by Heck and Mahoe (2006), is to determine which practices related to ninth grade transition assist with the long term success of students living in poverty as well as for students of color. The long term success is measured by graduation from high school in four years with a decrease in the drop-out rate. To help address this issue, high schools in the State of Maryland reported that mentoring practices (47% effective) assist with the long term goal of graduation from high schools, while extended class periods (47% effective) provide the academic support needed to assist with the adjustment to high school, a problem for students of color and students living in poverty.

Community Type

Schools in large cities like New York, Detroit, Baltimore, Chicago and Philadelphia, the urban centers of the country, report a need for specific practices to assist with ninth grade transition to high school (Balfanz & Legters, 2001). As reported in the review of related literature, determining transition practices for ninth grade students by community type (urban, rural, and suburban) is a challenge. According to Neild, et al. (2001), many transition practices for ninth graders are not meaningful and effective. In urban high schools, ninth grade promotion is more significant than ninth grade transition. In rural areas, the close link between high schools and the community make the transition from middle to high school less definitive (Arnold, et. al, 2007). On the other hand, according to Case (2006), suburban high school transition practices for ninth graders tend to place an emphasis on the "individual" student because of the differences among the various diverse populations of students and the fact that needs vary greatly from school to school and from student to student (p. 33). This premise is supported in this study in the State of Maryland because 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.

School Size

Smith-Mumford (2004), Kerr (2002) as well as Lee & Smith (1996) address school size as a barrier to success for all students and, in particular, ninth graders. Current research continues to concentrate on the need to create smaller high schools which, in turn, create successful transition practices for ninth graders (Smith-Mumford, 2004). Growing in popularity in the study of ninth grade transition is the development of ninth grade centers that place an emphasis on the social, emotional and academic needs of ninth grade students separate from other grade levels (Wang, 2006). In the State of Maryland, however, school size was not significant in the ratings of transition practices as reported.

Implications

The purpose of this study was to describe the various transition practices used by high schools in the State of Maryland and their effectiveness as rated by school officials at individual high schools. The data were analyzed to reveal the correlation of transition practices with socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, community type (urban, rural, and suburban) and school size (small, medium, large, very large). The results of this study support the body of knowledge that indicates that different practices are needed for different types of schools and different categories of students for academic success in ninth grade (Kerr, 2002).

According to current research, practices related to ninth grade transition remain significant. An analysis of responses reveals that administrators in high schools in the State of Maryland recognize the need for effective transition practices, but 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. For example, 59.4% of high schools in the State of Maryland found the practice of interdisciplinary teams to be effective; a popular practice found in middle schools but is now used more frequently in high schools. Other traditional practices like extended class periods (46.4%) and extra help in core classes (47.7%) were also among the more popular practices used by high schools in the State of Maryland. However, the creation of practices more closely aligned with organizational reform initiatives like homeroom/advisory was reported as not effective in high schools in Maryland (45.3%).

Limitations

Several limitations exist in this study. These include:

1. The use of a survey instrument as the center of methodology was limiting because of the self-reporting nature of the data.
2. The reliance on distribution frequencies in determining success was a limitation.

3. The effectiveness of various programs as reported by respondents did not provide a true empirical analysis of practice effectiveness because of the individual perceptive nature of the reporting.
4. The sole purpose of the study, to describe transition practices in high schools in the State of Maryland, was a limitation because the researcher did not solicit or gather information to determine the empirical effects of the practices on the individual high schools.

De-Limitations

The following de-limitations exist in this study:

1. The collection of data only in high schools in the State of Maryland limiting the generalization of findings to other states.
2. Because the study was limited to high school principals and/or their designees in the State of Maryland, it did not provide a comprehensive study of ninth grade transition practices nationwide.

Implications for Action

According to the research conducted in high schools in the State of Maryland, the following implications for actions may be addressed by high schools with a desire to create effective transition practices for ninth grade. These include:

1. The use of school organizational reform practices like small learning communities (rated very effective by 52% of high schools in Maryland reporting it as a practice) and interdisciplinary teams (rated very effective by 59% of high schools reporting it as a practice).
2. Summer enrichment programs between eighth and ninth grade (used by 84% of high schools in Maryland) to assist with the transition to high school.
3. The creation of a flexible schedule with extended periods as a practice to assist various diverse groups of Asian, African-American and White students as well as students from divergent socioeconomic groups.

Recommendations for Further Research

The following recommendations are made for further research:

1. Replication of this study concentrating on specific practices in relationship to ninth grade transition is recommended. A qualitative study using school personnel associated with the various practices could provide information on the effectiveness of individual practices.
2. A study comparing current practices and data related to ninth grade success in formal assessment subjects such as Algebra and English (benchmark subjects required by the State of Maryland to determine annual yearly progress or AYP for each high school) is also recommended.
3. A study concentrating on specific independent variables (e.g., gender of students, same sex schools) in relationship to ninth grade transition could provide greater understanding of the usefulness of practices for specific school populations and characteristics.
4. A study that centers on the separate ninth grade school as an effective transition practice.

In conclusion, future research that concentrates on specific practices in use by high schools to effectively address ninth grade transition may prove beneficial to high school principals. Research centered on practices for individual groups of students has the potential to provide a greater opportunity for successful transition to ninth grade. The analysis of data gathered from surveys, case studies and assessment scores can be used to chart the success of the various transition practices which, when supported by passing rates on state assessments, could be supported as “best practices” for creating a successful environment for ninth graders. Principals in the State of Maryland need the flexibility to provide transition practices for ninth grade that benefit the school as a whole as well as the individual student.

Reflections

This researcher, like others who have studied this topic, feels that transition to ninth grade is the key to academic success for all students. As a high school principal in the State of Maryland, this researcher was surprised at the effort it took to get 102 out of 172 high school principals and/or their designees to respond to the electronic survey, a survey that was relatively easy to complete. The researcher concludes that high school principals perceive that there are more important problems/issues facing them than formalizing a program of transition for ninth grade students. In many instances, transition to high school for ninth graders takes place with little effort and with the same practices that have been in place for years, despite the research that supports the notion that different schools, different groups and different students need different approaches to address their individual needs.

At one time, the researcher thought that transition practices would become a priority for schools since formal assessments (specifically Algebra in ninth grade) are associated with each school's goal to meet AYP (annual yearly progress). The review of the literature clearly shows the need for transition practices for ninth graders to decrease the increasing number of drop-outs at the end of the ninth grade. There exists significant research on this topic, but until there is a closer look at its effect on the total high school experience, schools will continue to provide practices that support the efforts of the entire school and not the practices needed to support the needs of this very vulnerable group of students.

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APPENDIX A

KERR SURVEY

Programs and Practices for 9th Graders

Please return survey by fax or mail by FRIDAY, JUNE 16, 2000 to:

by fax: Kerri Kerr
FAX NUMBER: (410) 516-8890

by mail: Kerri Kerr
CSOS
3003 N. Charles St., Suite 200
Baltimore, MD 21218

Name of Person Completing Survey ______________________ Position/Title ______________

1. What are the LOWEST and HIGHEST grade levels in your school? *(Circle TWO choices below.)*

   Pre-K K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

2. a) On average, what percent of your total student body attends school each day? ________

   b) On average, what percent of 9th graders attends school each day? ________

3. What percent of 9th graders are promoted to the 10th grade at the end of their 9th grade year, i.e. "on time" ? ________

4. What are your school system's course and credit requirements for promotion out of the 9th grade?

   ____

5. What type of schedule does your school currently use?

   O Single period (Traditional)

   O Semester (4x4) Block (Year-long course work is completed in one semester.)

   O Alternate Day Block (A-B)

   O Trimester

   Other (describe) ____

6. For which subjects are 9th graders at your school grouped on the basis of SIMILAR abilities or achievement levels? *(Please mark all that apply.)*

   O English/reading

   O History

   O Math

   O Science

   O None - 9th grade classes are not grouped by ability.

7. **How does your school and/or district help students make the transition to high school?**

Please mark ALL of your current practices.

- O High school students, counselors, or teachers present information at the middle grades school.
- O Middle grades students visit the high school for an assembly or to visit classes.
- O Students participate in a summer program before entering high school *for enrichment purposes.*
- O Students participate in a summer program before entering high school *for remediation purposes.*
- O Middle grades and high school teachers meet to coordinate course content and requirements.
- O Orientation programs or assemblies are held for new students upon arrival at high school.

Others (describe) ____

8. **Which of the following programs and practices does your school currently use with 9th graders?**

Please mark ALL of your current practices. For each practice you currently use, please indicate how many years your school has been using this practice and the percentage of 9th graders who participate in this practice.

	YES	NO	Number of years in use	% 9th graders participating
a) A school-within-a-school, academy, or other small learning community for 9th graders.	O	O	____	____
b) Interdisciplinary teams of 9th grade teachers who share the same students.	O	O	____	____
c) Extra help in core academic classes, for example after-school sessions, Saturday school, or extra class periods.	O	O	____	____
d) A mentoring program for students involving members of the community.	O	O	____	____
e) 9th graders assigned to a homeroom or advisory group which meets regularly throughout the school year.	O	O	____	____
f) A focus on career choices and planning for 9th graders.	O	O	____	____
g) Student-centered instructional practices, such as cooperative learning or student-directed projects or activities, used an average of once a week or more.	O	O	____	____
h) Special curriculum or classes for 9th graders to help them learn the study skills and/or social skills needed to be successful in high school.	O	O	____	____
i) Extended class periods, e.g. 80-90 minutes.	O	O	____	____
j) Buddy or Big Brother/Sister program that pairs new students with older ones upon arrival at high school.	O	O	____	____
k) Others ____________________			____	____

If your school has a school-within-a-school, academy, or other small learning community for 9th graders, please answer the following questions. If not, go to question #12.

9. Is the small learning community for 9th graders in your school ..... *(Mark all that apply.)*

- O self-contained, i.e. located in its own part of the school building?
- O run by its own administrative staff?
- O made up of teachers who work primarily with 9th graders?
- O None of these are characteristics of the 9th grade small learning community in my school.

10. At your school, do 9th grade students ..... *(Choose one.)*

- O Stay with the same classmates throughout the day?
- O Stay with the same classmates for most classes, but get regrouped for 1 or 2 classes only?
- O Change classmates for most classes, but stay with the same classmates for 1 or 2 classes only?
- O Change classmates every class?

11. If your 9th grade small learning community does not use the practices listed above in Question 9, please describe how your small learning community is organized. ______________________

____

____

If your school has interdisciplinary teams of 9th grade teachers who share the same students, please answer the following questions. If not, go to question #15.

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

- O YES
- O NO

13. How often do team members usually meet as a team?

- O More than once a week
- O Once a week
- O Once or twice a month
- O Once or twice a semester
- O Once or twice a year
- O Never

14. Indicate how often a typical 9th grade interdisciplinary team in your school performs each of the following activities.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Frequently
a) *Coordinate content.* Teachers decide common themes and related topics for instruction.	O	O	O	O	O
b) *Revise schedules.* Teachers arrange or alter schedules for classes that need more time.	O	O	O	O	O
c) *Regroup students.* Teachers arrange small or large groups of students to match lessons to abilities.	O	O	O	O	O
d) *Diagnose individual students.* Teachers discuss problems of specific students and arrange help.	O	O	O	O	O
e) *Conduct conferences with parents.* Teachers meet as a team with individual parents to discuss their child's progress, solve problems, and provide assistance.	O	O	O	O	O

15. **Which of the following activities or programs does your school offer to 9th graders who need extra help with 9th grade subject matter?**

Please mark ALL activities or programs your school offers. For each activity offered by your school, indicate the number of years your school has been offering this activity and the percentage of 9th graders who participate in this activity.

	YES	NO	Number of years in use	% 9th graders participating
a) Extra out-of-class work or homework given by classroom teacher	O	O	____	____
b) Pull-out programs in English	O	O	____	____
c) Pull-out programs in math	O	O	____	____
c) Extra subject period in a core academic class, for example Double Dosing of math so students take 2 full courses of math during the school year	O	O	____	____
d) After-school or before-school classes or coaching sessions	O	O	____	____
e) Saturday classes	O	O	____	____
f) Summer school	O	O	____	____
g) Other ____			____	____

16. **Do 9th 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?**

O YES

O NO

If YES, please describe the content of the training or staff development exercises. ____

17. **Please describe any other programs or practices currently being used at your school to support 9th graders.** ____

Thank you for completing this survey.

Would you be willing to participate in a phone interview to give more detailed information about your school's practices for 9th graders? O YES O NO

APPENDIX B

PERMISSION TO USE THE KERR SURVEY

LinkedIn: InMails: Sent Page 1 of 1

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NO PHOTO Henry Johnson

Principal at Montgomery County Public Schools

What are you working on?

Your profile is 25% complete [Edit]

Inbox

InMails

Permission to use survey

From: Henry Johnson
InMail Feedback: New
Date: January 29, 2009
To: Kerri Kerr
Category: Get back in touch
Status: In Progress

Dr. Kerr,
Last year, I contacted you while you were with NLNS regarding permission to adapt your survey from your dissertation work at Hopkins for a study that I was conducting for my doctoral work at Virginia Tech. You sent me an email granting me permission however I was not aware that I needed that documentation as part of my final dissertation. I conducted the study and will be defending my work on Feb. 26th and need written documentation that supports the permission you gave me this spring (early April, 2008). An email from you will suffice and it will be included as part of my appendix. I appreciate your cooperation and I enjoyed updating your work with principals in the state of Maryland. Interestingly enough, not much has changed since your study in 2001. Again, thanks. My email address is listed above but is "json56@ aol.com " or henry_r_johnson@ mcpsmd.org . You may or may not recall but I am the principal of Northwood High School in Silver Spring, Maryland. Again, thank you.

Henry R. Johnson, Jr.

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http://www.linkedin.com/mbox?displayMBoxItem=&itemID=S75269628_3&goback=%2E... 2/3/2009

APPENDIX C

STUDY SURVEY

1. GENERAL SCHOOL INFORMATION

*** 1. On average, what percent of 9th graders attend school each day? (Numeric percent only)**

*** 2. What percent of 9th graders are promoted to the 10th grade at the end of their 9th grade year, i.e. "on time"? (Numeric percent only)**

3. Please check all courses the students need at the end of 9th grade for promotion to 10th grade

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

4. How many credits do 9th graders need for promotion to 10th grade? (Numeric credits only)

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

- ☐ Single-period (Traditional)
- ☐ Semester (4X4) Block (year long course work is completed in one semester
- ☐ Alternate Block (A-B)
- ☐ Trimester
- ☐ Hybrid (Combination of Traditional, Block)
- ☐ Other (please specify)

6. For which subjects are 9th graders at your school grouped on the basis of SIMILAR abilities or achievement levels? (Please mark all that apply)

- ☐ English/Reading
- ☐ History
- ☐ Mathematics
- ☐ Science
- ☐ None-9th graders are NOT grouped by ability/achievement level

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

- [ ] High School students, counselors, teachers present information at the 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)

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) A school-within-a-school, academy or other small learning community for 9th graders	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b) Interdisciplinary teams of 9th grade teachers who share the same students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c) Extra help in core academic classes, for example, after school sessions, Saturday school, or extra class periods	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d) A mentoring program for students involving members of the community	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
e) 9th graders assigned to a homeroom or advisory group which meets regularly throughout the school year	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
f)A focus on career choices and planning for 9th graders	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
g)Student-centered instructional practices, such as cooperative learning or student-directed projects or activities, used an average of once a week or more	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
h)Special curriculum or classes for 9th graders to help them learn the study skills and/or social skills needed to be successful in high school	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
i) Extended class period, e.g. 80-90 minutes	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
j) Buddy or Big Brother/Sister program that pairs new students with older ones upon arrival at high school	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Other (please specify)

____

2. Do you have a school-within-a school, academy, or other small learning community for 9th graders?

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

3. Is the small learning community for 9th graders in your school.... (Mark all that apply)

- ☐ Self-contained, i.e., located in its own part of the building
- ☐ Run by its own administrative staff
- ☐ Made up of teachers who work primarily with 9th graders
- ☐ None of these are characteristics of the 9th grade small learning community in my school

4. At your school, do 9th grade students....(Mark only one)

- ☐ Stay with the same classmates throughout the day
- ☐ Stay with the same classmates for most classes, but get re-grouped for 1 or 2 classes only
- ☐ Change classmates for most classes, but stay with the same classmates for 1 or 2 classes only
- ☐ Change classmates every class/period

5. If your 9th grade small learning community does not use the practices listed above in Question 3, please describe how your small learning community is organized?

3. Interdisciplinary Teams/Teaming of 9th graders

1. Does your school have interdisciplinary teams of 9th 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

4. Indicate how often a typical 9th grade interdisciplinary team in your school performs each of the following activities.(Mark only one column 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 conferences with parents- 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 DOSING of math so students take two full courses of math during the school year	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
j) Saturday classes	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
K) Summer School	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

4. STAFF DEVELOPMENT/SPECIAL TRAINING

1. Do 9th 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. Please describe any other programs or practices being used at your school to support 9th graders

5. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

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

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

* **2. Is your high school considered:**

- ( ) Rural
- ( ) Urban
- ( ) Suburban

* **3. What is the percent of FARMS(Free and Reduced Meals) students in your school?**

- ( ) greater than 60%
- ( ) 25%-60%
- ( ) less than 25%

* **4. Approximately, what percent of your student body is: (Numeric percent only)**

Asian ______
Black/African-American ______
Hispanic/Latino ______
White ______
Other ______

5. Please indicate your position at the school

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

Other (please specify) ______

APPENDIX D

MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

IRB APPROVAL

Office of Shared Accountability

MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Rockville, Maryland

May 12, 2008

MEMORANDUM

To: Dr. Frieda K. Lacey, Deputy Superintendent of Schools

From: Stacy L. Scott, Associate Superintendent, Office of Shared Accountability

Subject: Approval of Request to Conduct Research

Mr. Henry R. Johnson, Jr., doctoral candidate, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, requests permission to conduct a survey of high school principals in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). The attached request to conduct the survey is approved.

The survey will collect information about the types of programs that are available in Maryland high schools to help students transition from middle to high school. The data collection activity and report of the findings are part of the requirements for completing a doctoral degree in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

Mr. Johnson will send an e-mail letter to MCPS high school principals inviting them to participate in the survey. The letter explains the study, the confidentiality of collected information, and asks principals to respond to a Web-based survey through *SurveyMonkey*. The researcher estimates it will take principals approximately 20 minutes to complete the survey.

Participation in the survey is voluntary. The Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University Institutional Review Board approved the research in accordance with the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects on April 15, 2008. The MCPS Chief Technology Officer and the Montgomery County Association of Administrative and Supervisory Personnel (MCAASP) support the data collection activities.

All data will be reported in summary format. Names of participants, schools, and the school district will not be used in the summary of results. Mr. Johnson agrees to provide the Office of Shared Accountability (OSA), the Office of the Chief Technology Officer, and MCAASP with a report of the findings.

If you have questions regarding this request, please contact Mrs. Cynthia Loeb, logistics support specialist, OSA, at 301-279-3848.

SLS:cll

Attachment

Copy to:
Mr. Bedford
Mr. Collette
Mr. Johnson
Mrs. Loeb
Mrs. Pevey
Dr. Von Secker
Dr. Newman

Approved: ____
Frieda K. Lacey, Deputy Superintendent of Schools

APPENDIX E

INVITATION LETTER TO PRINCIPALS

Dear Principal Colleague,

I am writing to invite you to participate in a study of practices of high schools in the state of Maryland to assist with the transition of ninth grade students. This study is being conducted as part of my doctoral program at Virginia Tech in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies.

I am asking you to respond to the survey questionnaire which can be found as a link at the bottom of the page. The other link at the bottom of the page gives you the option to choose not to participate in the survey. My hope is that each of you will assist me in trying to collect data on practices that create successful experiences in high school for all of our ninth grade students. The survey is divided into five sections (general information, current practices, interdisciplinary teams/teaming of ninth graders, and staff development/special training and demographics) and should take no more than 20 minutes to complete. The survey may be completed by any member of your school team with knowledge regarding practices in your school related to ninth grade transition.

All responses are confidential. All identifying information will be removed and survey data will be maintained in secure files and will be accessible only to me. Reports and other communications related to the study will not identify respondents by name, nor will they identify any schools. I will be happy to provide you with reports regarding the survey results if you like.

If you have questions or concerns about this study, you may contact me by email at json56@aol.com. I can also be reached at (301) 649-8088 (work) You may also contact Dr. John Eller at jeller@vt.edu. I appreciate your time. Thank you for your participation.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx

https://www.surveymonkey.com/optout.aspx

Henry R. Johnson, Jr., Principal

Northwood High School

Silver Spring, Maryland

APPENDIX F

FOLLOW UP LETTER TO PRINCIPALS

Dear Principal Colleagues,

Recently, you were sent an email asking for your participation in a survey questionnaire on ninth grade transition that I am conducting as part of my doctoral program at Virginia Tech. To date, you have not responded and your input is very important in my attempt to collect data that represents all highs schools in the state of Maryland. Please take a few minutes (approximately 15-20) to answer the survey questionnaire. A link is inserted in this email that will take you directly to the survey. My dissertation is titled: "High School Transition Programs for Ninth Graders: A descriptive study of Maryland Public High Schools". You or a designee may respond to the questionnaire. I appreciate your support.

Henry R. Johnson, Jr.

Northwood High School

Silver Spring, Maryland

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx

https://www.surveymonkey.com/optout.aspx

Please note: If you do not wish to receive further emails from us, please click the link below, and you will be automatically removed from our mailing list.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/optout.aspx

APPENDIX G

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

VirginiaTech

Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board
2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2000 (0497)
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
540/231-4991 Fax 540/231-0959
e-mail moored@vt.edu
www.irb.vt.edu
FWA00000572(expires 1/20/2010)
IRB # is IRB00000667

DATE: April 22, 2008

MEMORANDUM

TO: John Eller
Henry Johnson

FROM: Carmen Green

SUBJECT: **IRB Amendment 1 Approval:** "Programs and Practices for 9th Graders" , IRB # 08-249

This memo is regarding the above referenced protocol which was previously granted approval by the IRB on April 15, 2008. You subsequently requested permission to amend your IRB application. Approval has been granted for the requested protocol amendment, effective as of April 22, 2008.

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

1. Report promptly proposed changes in the research proposal. The proposed changes must not be initiated without IRB review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.
2. Report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

cc: File