

TRANSITION STRATEGIES FROM SIXTH GRADE INTO SEVENTH GRADE

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Immaculata University

by

Carrie A. Pequignot

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

Immaculata, Pennsylvania

Defense Date: June 6, 2022

Signature Page



TITLE OF DISSERTATION DEFENSE

TRANSITION STRATEGIES FROM SIXTH GRADE INTO SEVENTH GRADE

AUTHOR: Carrie Pequignot

Sister Carol Anne Cochran, IHM, Ed.D.
Chair

[Signature]
Committee Member

David Renaut, Ed.D.
Committee Member

ON BEHALF OF IMMACULATA UNIVERSITY

Marcia Parris, Ed.D.
Marcia Parris, Ed. D.
Dean, College of Graduate Studies

Melissa Reed, Ed.D.
Melissa Reed, Ed. D.
Chair, Education Division

DATE: *June 6, 2022*

©

Carrie Anne Pequignot

2022

All Rights Reserved

Abstract

Transition between buildings is a crucial time for students enrolled at one rural school district. This qualitative study examined teachers' and administrators' perspectives of the current transition program implemented at this district. For the purpose of this study, this researcher focused on the move from sixth grade (intermediate school) into seventh grade (middle school). As identified through administered surveys, both the sixth and seventh grade teachers (N=24) employed within this district identified this transition period as a time of struggle for most students. Interviews of both volunteer teachers and administrators (N=7) identified the current transition practices implemented for students leaving sixth grade and entering seventh grade.

These strategies were compared with research-based studies and identified as either effective or ineffective. Overall, the practices being utilized by the school district of study were determined to be effective. Suggestions were made by the researcher to the school district on ways to provide additional effective transition activities in order to support a better learning experience for students switching buildings (from sixth grade to seventh grade) within this school district. Three recommendations were provided by the researcher. The first recommendation involved the school district providing transition information to both the sixth and seventh-grade teachers. The second recommendation suggested bringing seventh grade students, teachers, administrators, and guidance counselors to the intermediate school for an assembly regarding seventh-grade expectations and to provide a question-and-answer session for sixth-grade students. The third recommendation was to set aside one day for the students in sixth grade to attend

middle school as a seventh-grade student in order to learn the routines, expectations, and to meet new teachers and peers.

Acknowledgments

To my chair, Sister Carol Anne Couchara, thank you for accepting the role of my dissertation chair. I value your feedback and appreciate the immediate correspondence conducted throughout this journey. Your patience and leadership will always be remembered.

To my committee members, Dr. Renee Mosser and Dr. David Renaut, thank you for taking the necessary time to provide recommendations and guidance throughout the dissertation process. I truly appreciate your support and counsel.

To all the excellent teachers and staff at Immaculata University, I would like to show my appreciation by thanking you for your time and knowledge you shared with me while navigating this challenging process. I looked forward to attending classes, even after difficult days at work.

To my friends, family, and colleagues, thank you for all of your support and encouraging words throughout this process. There were times I wanted to give up, but your positivity kept me going.

To my parents, Mike and Carla Rutland, thank you for furnishing me opportunities for success by encouraging the continuation of learning and supporting all of my educational decisions. From the perspective of a parent, I can truly appreciate the amount of guidance, support, and patience necessary for shaping a child into a life-long learner.

The most difficult job in this world is being a parent. I could have never accomplished this goal without the love and support from two of my greatest blessings, Autumn (13) my favorite teenager and Story (9), my best birthday present ever. Autumn

and Story, thank you for being the best daughters a mother could ever ask for and supporting me throughout this journey. I hope you now understand the time, perseverance, and dedication it takes to meet challenges. I can't wait to see what each of your futures hold!

Lastly, to my wonderful husband Andy, I love you so much and greatly appreciate your support and understanding of my passion for learning. You kept me focused and determined and made it possible for me to achieve this life-long goal. I know it was not always easy, but you stuck with me and provided encouragement when I needed it the most. We have gone through so much together and I look forward to the next adventure with you and our girls. Thank you for being you!

Table of Contents

Signature Page	ii
Copyright	iii
Abstract	iv
Acknowledgments	vi
Table of Contents	viii
List of Tables	xi
Table of Figures	xii
Chapter One Introduction	
Overview.....	1
Need for the Study.....	2
Statement of the Problem.....	4
Definition of Terms.....	6
Limitations of the Study.....	6
Research Questions.....	7
Summary.....	7
Chapter Two Literature Review	
Introduction.....	9
Buildings and Physical Space.....	9
Teachers and Instructional Support.....	11
Expectations and Student Responsibilities.....	14
Effective Transition Strategies.....	20
Summary.....	28

Chapter Three Methodology

Introduction.....30

Participants.....30

Setting.....31

Instruments.....31

 Survey.....31

 Interviews.....32

 Validity.....33

 Reliability.....34

Design of the Study.....34

Procedure.....34

Data Analysis.....36

Summary.....37

Chapter Four Results

Introduction.....38

Demographics.....39

Research Question One.....39

Research Question Two.....42

Research Question Three.....48

Summary.....51

Chapter Five Discussion

Summary of the Study.....53

Summary of the Results.....54

Research Question One.....	54
Research Question Two.....	54
Research Question Three.....	56
Limitation of the Study.....	57
Recommendation for the School District.....	59
Recommendations for Further Research.....	60
Summary.....	61
References.....	63
Appendices	
A: Survey Questions.....	73
B: Interview Questions.....	75
C: RERB Approval Form.....	77

List of Tables

	Page
Table 3.1	Research Question Alignment for Analysis.....36
Table 4.1	Teachers' Perceptions Regarding the School District's Transition Process.....40
Table 4.2	Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Effective Strategies that Enable an Effective Transition.....43

Table of Figures

	Page
Figure 2.1 Concerns of Students Entering Middle School.....	27

Chapter One: Introduction

Overview of the Study

As students matriculate through the public school system, the idea of transitioning from one building to another brings about feelings of excitement as well as anxiety (McKeon, 2014). Most school districts have a process in place to reduce these feelings of stress, but are these practices effective or ineffective? How does a school district know if the activities in which they implement each school year are actually improving the academic success of their students? This research examined what research-based activities exist for students moving from sixth grade (intermediate school) into seventh grade (middle school) to identify their presence in research-based studies that recognize effective transition programs.

This rural school district encompasses three elementary buildings that combine into one intermediate school, housing both fifth and sixth grade classes. Next, the students enter a middle school that includes seventh and eighth grade classes and finishes with one high school that incorporates ninth through twelfth grade. Although several transitions occur as students matriculate through this district, the transition from sixth grade into seventh grade poses the greatest challenge for several reasons. As stated by Stowers (2014), students in this age range are simultaneously experiencing a shift in academic expectations, procedures, community, physical, and psychological changes.

The enrollment at this rural school district increased over a ten-year span. In 2007, the district registered 3,829 students (wikipedia.com). Ten years later, in 2017, the school district enrolled 3,924 students across six schools (usnews.com). According to PublicSchoolReview.com, approximately six hundred students attend the intermediate

building (fifth and sixth grades) and about six hundred students are enrolled at the middle school building (seventh and eighth grades). As stated above, this district implements three transition periods for this large number of matriculating students. As concluded by Schwartz et al. (2017), academic performance decreases as the number of transition experiences increases. Therefore, this school district needs to incorporate effective transition strategies to reduce or avoid any negative effects on academic performance. One effective transition strategy mentioned by Cohlhepp (2018) included forming a transition team that incorporates both sixth and seventh-grade teachers, guidance counselors, administrators, and mentoring students enrolled in eighth grade. Additional effective transition programs included one-on-one mentors for new seventh-grade students, orientation opportunities that involve parents, and continued support provided to seventh grade students throughout the school year, not just at the beginning (Andrews & Bishop, 2012; Lockwood, 2016; Spies, 2018).

The purpose of this study was to identify effective and ineffective transition practices currently being utilized within one rural school district through surveys and interviews with sixth and seventh grade teachers and administrators. Then, based on research findings, recommended successful transition activities to implement for students moving from sixth grade (intermediate school) into seventh grade (middle school) to provide a more positive learning experience for students who are enrolled within this school district.

Need for the Study

As an intermediate schoolteacher, it is the responsibility of the teacher to ensure the sixth-grade students within the classroom participate in a positive transition

experience as they leave the intermediate school building and enter the middle school building. According to Andrews and Bishop (2021), one way the intermediate schoolteacher can do this is by providing opportunities for these sixth-grade students to navigate the middle school building, practice new procedures, and meet the seventh-grade teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators. Additionally, the sixth-grade teacher could administer a survey to the sixth-grade students regarding their concerns and aspirations as they enter seventh grade (Cohlhepp, 2018). Finally, by keeping open communication with parents, students, teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators, the intermediate schoolteacher could ensure a less stressful transition experience for the sixth-grade students (Andrews & Bishop, 2012).

A study needs to be conducted to determine if current transition strategies being utilized are effective or ineffective within the study's setting. This qualitative study examined teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the effectiveness of current transition strategies utilized for students entering middle school and identified whether the current implementation strategies are successful. Then, these activities were compared to research-based transition strategies that are identified as being effective with students who are entering middle school buildings to identify whether the currently implemented activities within this school district are effective or ineffective. Finally, recommendations for continuing or implementing effective transition activities within this study setting were provided, if needed, to improve this crucial transition process for students enrolled within this rural school district.

Statement of the Problem

Research suggested that transitioning from building to building is a critical component to a child's adaptation for an effective learning environment (Linnenbrink, 2010). Hanewald (2013) also identified transition as important, due to the diverse issues faced by these young and impressionable people, such as "cognitive, psychosocial, and emotional transformations" (p. 64). Onetti et. al. (2019) identified areas of concern with transitioning students: increased stress, social problems, and physical changes.

Additionally, Patton and Kim (2016) recognized that appropriate transition assessments and planning are necessary for the successful transitioning of students identified with special needs. Therefore, effective transition strategies must be developed and implemented by school districts for students, both with and without special needs, to experience a positive academic learning environment when moving from building to building.

Wolpert-Gawron (2017) also recognized that students struggle moving from elementary to middle school as the school and class size increase, along with escalated student expectations, variety of lesson instruction, reduction of interactions with families, unfamiliar teaching styles with multiple teachers, discomfort of changing clothes for physical education classes, and limited teacher accessibility throughout the student's day. While Gilewski and Nunn (2016) focused on the changing of buildings during the stressful time of hormonal, mental, and physical changes for students entering middle school, the Great Schools Staff (2010) outline three worries students have regarding the switch to middle school: logistical, social, and academic.

Anfara (2007) outlined seven areas of focus for school districts to consider when administering effective transition activities: the school's ecosystem, connectedness, academic motivation, academic performance, self-perception, behavior problems, and the students', teachers', and parents' perceptions of transitioning. Research by Lemanczyk Ross (2002) outlined four effective transition activities that can be implemented by school districts to support effective transition experiences: large-group orientation visits, interdisciplinary teaming, mentor programming between schools, and exploratory scheduling. Stowers (2014) supported the idea of a mentorship program for each student moving from one building to the next. There are many research-based strategies for school districts to consider and successfully implement to provide a more positive transition experience for students who are enrolled within the school district. Additionally, arguments were presented from Malone et al. (2019), West and Schwerdt (2012), Sparks (2011), and Yecke (2006) that support elimination of the middle school transition altogether by accommodating kindergarten through eighth-grade students in the same elementary school building. This perspective will be discussed more in Chapter Two.

Specifically, this study explored current perceptions of the enacted transition practices in place at one rural school district, evaluated their effectiveness by comparing them with research-based recommended activities, and suggested any additional strategies that may support a more positive transition experience from sixth grade (intermediate school) into seventh grade (middle school).

Definition of Terms

English Language Arts (ELA): Subject in school that incorporates reading fluency, reading comprehension, writing, and public speaking skills (Google.com, n.d.).

Executive Functioning Skills: The mental process that enables people to plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and juggle multiple tasks successfully (Harvard University, 2021).

Intermediate School: A school with students attending grades four through six (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). For the purpose of this study, intermediate school will refer to students enrolled in fifth and sixth grade.

Middle School: A school with students enrolled in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade (Dictionary.com, n.d.). For the purpose of this study, middle school will refer to students enrolled in seventh and eighth grade.

Reappraisal Interventions: Meetings to address and reinforce realistic concerns regarding transition (Borman et al., 2019).

Transition: The movement from one position to another (Collinsdictionary.com, n.d.). For the purpose of this study, the term transition will focus on students moving from one school building to another.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to one school district's teachers' and administrators' perceptions. The questionnaires and interviews were opened to interpretation of both the individual answering the questions and the interviewer's biases. Therefore, the questions were written in a way to minimize personal bias and the responses were taken verbatim to limit the interviewer's personal prejudices.

Another limitation is that this study focused only on students enrolled in a rural school district that are moving from sixth grade (intermediate school) into seventh grade (middle school). Therefore, this study cannot be generalized across grade levels (elementary or high schools) or within urban or suburban school district settings.

The final limitation encompassed the fact that this research, including the surveys and interviews, was completed in the same school district in which the researcher is employed. Therefore, anonymity of the survey responses and confidentiality of the interviews was necessary for validity purposes. Additional security precautions were obtained for both teachers and administrators participating in this study.

Research Questions:

- 1) What are teachers' perceptions regarding the school district transition process for students moving from sixth grade to seventh grade?
- 2) What are teachers' perceptions regarding effective strategies that enable an effective transition for students from sixth grade to seventh grade?
- 3) What are school district administrators' perceptions regarding the current district process and effective strategies for student transitions from sixth grade to seventh grade?

Summary

Transition is a vital time for all students. However, students moving from elementary to middle school are experiencing additional challenges that include physical, mental, emotional, and social changes. How do schools support these children and provide enough assistance for a successful transition experience? Chapter Two provides research about the reasons students who are leaving elementary and entering middle

school are experiencing a more challenging process. Chapter Two also outlines specific strategies schools can implement to best support students during this transition period because, as researchers have found, an effective transition program will positively impact student experiences who are leaving elementary school and entering middle school.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Historically, students moving from an elementary school building into middle school have experienced negative effects due to mental, social, and physical adaptations necessary for a successful transition to take place (Cohlhepp, 2018). Students benefit from effective transition programs implemented during these vital periods of change (Spies, 2018). Therefore, this chapter will identify discrepancies between elementary and middle school settings, recognize developmental needs of students who will be moving from elementary into middle school, outline academic and discipline concerns, and explore research-based practices found to be effective within elementary and middle school buildings to best support students and take a proactive approach to this critical experience in education.

Buildings and Physical Space

Elementary settings differ from middle school buildings in many ways: not only is the structure physically larger than an elementary school, but the routines, expectations and social aspects all change dramatically (Pasch, n.d.). Rockoff and Lockwood (2010) found that moving elementary students into a middle school in either sixth or seventh grade negatively impacts the academic achievement of these students due to larger class sizes, diverse elementary experiences, and psychological well-being. This research focused on students attending grades three through eight in New York City and determined that implementing a middle school within a school district is not cost effective. Next, the research showed the inverse correlation between transition and

academics as well as offer solutions on ways to improve this period of transition for adolescents.

First and foremost, elementary schools are remarkably different from middle school environments. Pasch (n.d.) identified six areas in which the habitat and expectations diverge as students leave elementary and enter middle school:

- More teachers are employed due to more variety and the switching of classes.
- The physical size of the building increases.
- The number of tasks and difficulty of these assigned tasks enlarges.
- The amount of homework assigned grows notably.
- Additional resources become available.
- Higher teacher expectations exist with an emphasis on independence.

Wolpert-Gawron (2017) supported the previous findings and added that the number of students in each class was also increasing, which limits teacher accessibility and family communication. As this researcher hypothesized, this new and uncharted territory negatively impacts students' mental and social well-being as well as academic achievement. Finally, Hanover (2014) focused on elementary students attending kindergarten through fifth grade, then middle school students attending sixth through eighth grade, and stated that students are confronting a more impersonal, educationally challenging, and socially perplexing situation by facing more demanding coursework with harsher evaluating standards. This literature research report found that students entering middle school can detach from academic goals due to less parental supervision, a disruption in peer connections due to attending different classes, exposure to older

children and their inappropriate behaviors, as well as a possible decline in positive correspondence with their assigned teachers.

Teachers and Instructional Support

In addition to this physical change in buildings, teachers, and expectations, Gilewski and Nunn (2016) stated that these adolescents are also experiencing changes both physically and hormonally within their own bodies and this only complicates the transition process even more. The Great Schools Staff (2010) identified three categories of worries from students that were switching out of elementary school and had enrolled into middle school: logistical, social, and academic. This organization also outlined specific strategies parents could utilize within each category to make the transition more positive for their students.

Onetti et al. (2019) conducted a study of fifth through eighth-grade students that analyzed ten different schools in a random Spanish city. Out of the 800 participants obtained in this research, 712 surveys were returned and analyzed which concluded a lower self-concept during the years in which students transitioned from elementary to middle school. This study supported the notion that adolescents experience mental challenges or difficulties coping with the change from elementary to middle school. Finally, Heissel and Norris (2019) stated that adolescents attending middle school should engage in more sleep to allow for their bodies to accommodate the physical and hormonal changes. However, most middle school buildings have earlier start times when compared to elementary school buildings, contradicting most research study recommendations. School districts may have reasons for earlier start times, such as students who participate in extracurricular activities (i.e., athletics).

Yecke (2006) completed a longitudinal analysis of 924 Milwaukee students in either kindergarten through eighth or kindergarten through sixth grade, 2,464 Baltimore students in kindergarten through fifth grade and 407 students in kindergarten through eighth grade, and 80 Philadelphia students with 40 attending kindergarten through eighth grade and 40 attending middle school to show that discipline in middle school is negligent and sporadic and not conducive to a premier educational setting. During this research, Yecke (2006) found that in all the urban schools listed above, the higher academic grades (kindergarten through eighth grade) yielded the better state scores. In addition, the following strategies were mentioned at the conclusion of this study to better support school districts with transitioning students:

- include parents
- add higher grades (eighth versus fifth)
- ensure grade-level balance demographically (not too many younger or older students)
- establish clear and consistent transfer policies
- modify facilities to support larger grade spans
- decide on an academic approach
- provide greater access to advanced courses and electives
- provide greater access to extracurricular opportunities.

The Public School Review (2008) concluded that the kindergarten through eighth-grade model is better than a middle school framework. The study noted that middle schools were subjected to more behavior problems, lower test scores than elementary, more exposure to negative influences of teenagers, the middle school building is too large

to navigate, and the middle school buildings are usually located farther away from home than elementary school buildings (The Public School Review, 2008). Additionally, Gordon et al. (2011) examined twenty-three peer-reviewed articles, one dissertation, one peer-reviewed book, and one peer-reviewed journal that an elementary to high school transition from kindergarten through eighth grade was a more favorable model for academics and achievement. This study identified factors including negative impacts on psychological and social well-being as well as negative effects on student behaviors as contributing factors for a decrease in middle school academic achievement. However, Gordon et al. (2011) stated that other factors, such as the leadership and school culture, student-teacher relationships, and teaching practices, in addition to school demographics and size should all be considered and further investigated for impacting middle school adolescents during this transition period.

Due to the onset of puberty while changing schools, many researchers support keeping sixth and seventh grade students in an elementary setting (Chen, 2020; Goldstein et al., 2015; Malone et al., 2019; Public School Review, 2008; Schwerdt, 2012; Sparks, 2011; Swartz et al., 2017; Tamer, 2021; West & Yecke, 2006). Chen (2020) compared the pros and cons of keeping sixth grade in the elementary school location and found that, although it depends on the individual sixth-grade student, that overall, factors for keeping sixth grade in elementary outweigh the reasons for moving sixth grade into the middle school. Another study, completed by Goldstein et al. (2015), administered surveys to 774 participants in a public middle school located in both urban and suburban settings within the northeastern United States to identify links between the stress associated with middle school transition and academic performance. These researchers found that students in

middle school experience more stress which produces more anxiety and causes reduced motivation to be successful in school, leading to poor academic performance. On the other hand, this study also identified that stable friendships decrease stress and increase academic achievement. Therefore, schools should focus on improving peer relationships and incorporate friendship bonding activities into effective transition programs.

Pate et al (2019) stated that physical activity is important for students to maintain a healthy lifestyle and promote successful transition through peer relationships and compared middle school students' physical activity both with and without interventions starting in fifth grade and they followed the same cohort of students through seventh grade. The interventions outlined by Pate et al. (2019) included sports participation, parent encouragement and support, report of activity level at home, time spent outdoors, social spaces for outdoor activities within the community, and the number of outdoor facilities proximal to the student's home. The findings of this study stated that the children who received interventions as mentioned above participated in more physical activity than those who did not participate in the interventions. This study shows that children continue to benefit from parent involvement even after elementary school and sports is one way to improve peer relationships (Pate et al., 2019).

Expectations and Student Responsibilities

Adolescent students are changing physically, mentally, and socially (Cohlhepp, 2018). Armstrong (2006) compared developmentally inappropriate practices in which school districts should replace with developmentally appropriate practices to positively support an effective transition into middle school and avoid reverting school districts

back to the kindergarten through eighth grade school building. The developmentally appropriate practices include:

Ensure a safe school climate, small learning communities, personal adult relationships, engaged learning, positive role models, metacognitive strategies integrated into all courses, expressive arts activities for all students, health and wellness focus, emotionally meaningful curriculum, student roles in decision making, honoring, and respecting student voices, and facilitating social and emotional growth. (Armstrong, 2006, p.3)

These developmentally appropriate strategies can easily be adapted and implemented into any school district's middle school building to better support the transition of their students (Armstrong, 2006). Additionally, Fraser-Thill (2021) stated that when students leave elementary school and enter middle school, their attitudes towards academics decrease which leads to lower grades and a diminished self-concept of being less capable of learning. This article identified two developmental reasons for this shift: interest changes from academics to a more social focus and physical body adaptations, as well as increasing demands academically and behaviorally from both teachers and parents.

Both research studies completed by Sparks (2011) and West and Schwerdt (2012) found that academic grades as well as state test scores were higher for students who attended sixth and seventh grade within an elementary setting as compared to a middle school building. Additionally, Schwartz et al. (2017) analyzed administrative data from the public records of New York City. They identified three cohorts of fifth- through eighth-grade students (around 88,000 records), examined the state-standardized test scores in both mathematics and English Language Arts (ELA), and found that students

who moved buildings during this time scored worse in both math and reading than students who stayed in the same building. This study also found that the students who remained in the same school showed increased state-standardized test scores in the ELA sections, which reinforces the discussion for eliminating middle school buildings.

Finally, Malone et al. (2019) conducted a study that included students attending sixth, seventh, and eighth grades throughout 573 public schools located in urban, rural, and suburban settings throughout Florida. These researchers compared the standards of learning exam scores in both reading and math between kindergarten through eighth grade schools and middle schools over a three-year period. This study found that scores were significantly lower for students who were enrolled in sixth and seventh grade within a middle school as compared to sixth and seventh grade students attending an elementary setting. Supported by earlier research, Tamer (2012) agreed and stated that “the longer students stay in a middle school, the lower their achievement” (p. 7). This research also supports keeping sixth and seventh grades in an elementary building.

In a meta-analysis study by Linnenbrink (2010), Iowa state scores in reading and mathematics were analyzed to determine if the kindergarten through eighth grade students scored differently than students who attended middle school. The result from this study found that state scores in both mathematics and reading were lower for students who attended middle school and that transitioning more than once is even more damaging for student academic performance.

Additionally, Conley (2016) performed a comparative study and data analysis of 725 students in southwestern North Carolina to identify discrepancies between end of grade assessments in both math and reading as well as graduation rates for those

attending elementary (kindergarten through eighth grade schools) versus students who attended middle schools within the districts. The findings suggested no significant differences in reading scores; however, math scores were higher for those attending elementary schools as well as higher graduation rates for students who attended the elementary kindergarten through eighth grade schools as compared to those who attended middle schools. Both studies support the kindergarten through eighth grade paradigm (Conley, 2016; Linnenbrink, 2010).

In a study conducted by Hong et al. (n.d.), the effects of attending a kindergarten through eighth grade schools versus middle schools were examined by accessing the data warehouse in one anonymous school district that matriculated 5,329 fifth and sixth grade students with thirty-six percent attending elementary and middle schools while all others were enrolled at kindergarten through eighth grade school buildings. The findings showed that the students who attended the middle school models scored on par or higher on the math standardized assessments and exceeded reading assessment scores when compared to those students attending the kindergarten through eighth grade schools. This report contradicts previous research findings and should be taken into consideration when school districts discuss switching school configurations (Hong et al., n.d.).

The next study included research regarding how students feel about attending middle school. Hymann (2015) administered a mixed-method study (qualitative and quantitative) on two adjacent school districts that included two kindergarten through eighth grade elementary schools and one sixth through eighth grade middle school to determine which framework students preferred: the elementary (kindergarten through eighth grade) or middle school model. The findings of this research include 136

participants completed online surveys and 22 volunteered for three focus group sessions and both school types reported that they would prefer to attend a separate middle school (sixth through eighth grade) rather than stay in an elementary building. Hymann (2015) also stated that the students involved in this study supported transition strategies both before (during the last two weeks of fifth grade) and continuing throughout the sixth-grade transition school year to be successful within a middle school setting.

In looking at discipline, Theriot and Dupper (2010) conducted a study on fifth and sixth grade discipline records from the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years in a medium-sized school district located in the southeastern United States. This school district included forty-nine elementary schools, fourteen middle schools, and fourteen high schools, yielding approximately 53,000 students in both the urban and suburban settings; however, the research only focused on 4,196 fifth grade and 4,145 sixth grade students. When compared, Theriot and Dupper (2010) found an eighteen percent increase in discipline referrals for sixth graders than fifth graders. This study reflects the increased expectations held by middle school teachers and administrators.

A mixed-methods study completed by Lockwood (2016) incorporated an online survey, focus group interviews, teacher interviews, and student records review to identify factors contributing to failing grades and absenteeism in seventh grade middle school students attending Bark River-Harris School District located in Michigan. This research concluded that students were failing math and science classes due to the amount of homework assigned and the content was deemed most challenging. Lockwood (2016) was unable to determine if the high absenteeism was due to the failing classes or if students were failing classes due to frequent absences; however, there is a positive

correlation with chronic absenteeism and failing grades. Recommended strategies from the conclusion of the research included a truancy officer, implementing peer and adult mentoring programs, offering tutoring opportunities, teaching organizational strategies, implementation of or opportunities for after school programs, and to alternate math and science courses in the master schedule. Effective transition programs should include academic achievement strategies as this could have a positive impact on absenteeism and educational performance (Lockwood, 2016).

Im et al. (2013) completed a mixed-methods study that identified 784 elementary students ranging from first grade through fifth grade who scored below the average state assessment score in literacy and compared these scores before and after their transition to middle school. Out of the 299 students who were either promoted or retained, the findings noted there was no difference in projected scores between the promoted and the retained students. This study showed that transition affects all students, in a similar way, whether retained (not participating in a transition experience) or promoted (Im et al., 2013). A literature review conducted by Evans et al. (2018) evaluated existing literature on the psychological and academic impacts of transition to secondary education and reported the following conclusions:

- Negative impact on academic achievement with lower motivation and engagement, academic self-confidence/competence, and intrinsic interest.
- Positive impact for social support from parents, teachers, and peers.
- Inconsistent evidence supporting either a negative or positive impact on emotional well-being.

This study supports that effective transition programs incorporate activities to improve academic achievement through lesson engagement, intrinsic motivation, and self-assurance development strategies should be implemented.

Effective Transition Strategies

Van Rens et al. (2017) reviewed thirty empirical studies published between 1987 and 2011 to determine a commonality among effective transition practices and found that to make the transition from elementary to middle school less challenging, all stakeholders involved (students and their parents as well as representatives from both the elementary and middle school buildings) must communicate and work cooperatively. These researchers only focused on peer-reviewed articles that included children whose ages ranged from eleven to thirteen and excluded any study that involved less than ten children and stated that students and their parents were not well represented during the decision-making processes and interventions implemented throughout the transition experience. Therefore, when students move from the elementary school into the middle school building, school districts need to ensure that all participants are actively involved throughout the transition process (Van Rens et al., 2017).

Research by Chamblin (2017) involving a suburban school district in New York focused on a three-week summer transition workshop for students moving from sixth grade (elementary school) into seventh grade (middle school). This research began with a pre-survey sent to 350 students to identify areas of concern. Of the 350 invitations sent, 200 students registered, and 120 children attended five or more of the six sessions; 109 random surveys were completed after the program with 61 from students who attended the summer workshop and 48 from students who did not attend. The transition workshop

included lessons on organizational skills, study skills, and communication skills, a tour of the building that involved a mock schedule for students to follow, and a question-and-answer session between incoming seventh grade students and current eighth grade students. The researcher found that although there was no difference in academic grades between those students who attended the transition workshop and those who did not, the students who did attend had fewer absences, reported to be more confident, stated they were more likely to participate in extracurricular activities, and were involved in fewer discipline issues. An effective transition program includes identifying areas of concern and creates opportunities to inform students as well as parents and community members about changes occurring from elementary to middle school (Chamblin, 2017).

Spies (2018) administered a phenomenological study that included 87 sixth-grade students enrolled in Cheney Middle School located within West Fargo Public Schools. This research incorporated thirty-minute sessions with small focus groups that analyzed written responses as well as audio recorded sessions to identify components of the middle school transition program from the perspective of the students. These participants recognized the following effective transition strategies: implement in-school activities, time and experience to practice new expectations, know class locations, practice combination lock, and see, feel, and explore the middle school building (Spies, 2018). Two of these strategies can be completed with a tour of the middle school building within the last two weeks of elementary school: class locations and exploration of the new building; another two can be completed within the elementary school building during the last two weeks: practice combination locks and new expectations. Students who are absent or unable to attend for other reasons could schedule a time over the summer to

complete these activities. This study supports that effective transition activities begin at the end of elementary school but continue through to middle school (Spies, 2018).

Research completed by Borman et al. (2019) analyzed the effects of re-evaluation interventions to improve academics, attendance, and behavior issues at middle school by performing a double-blind experimental study on 1,304 fifth and sixth-grade students attending middle school in one midwestern school district. The conclusion of this research stated that the students who attended the reappraisal interventions (meetings to address and reinforce realistic concerns regarding transition) reduced sixth grade disciplinary issues by 34%, increased attendance rates by 12%, and decreased failing grades by 18%. Overall, these reinforced interventions that included adversity training, attitudinal changes, and behavioral expectations had positive effects on students during this difficult transition experience (Borman et al., 2019).

A literature review of thirty-seven studies between 2005 and 2011 was conducted by Hanewald (2013) who reported that well-designed and implemented transition approaches can assist in supporting students, families, and staff. This study also outlined several reasons successful transition programs work:

- Improve student well-being by instilling a sense of belonging.
- Support given to the students from both parents and teachers.
- The role of peers is clearly identified.
- Academic outcomes improve.
- Emphasizing the importance of family connections.

- Enhancing teacher-student connections, which was found to be the most effective transition strategy throughout all of the studies researched (Hanewald, 2013).

Louisiana State University Shreveport (2017) agreed that teacher-student rapport is the most important factor to build confidence and a sense of security in adolescents during an unpredictable time and can be achieved through open communication between teachers and students. This group also supports transition activities to acclimate the students to the new building as well as an open discussion for parents and students to discuss concerns and dispel any myths about middle school. Finally, this study supported students experiencing normal physical and social changes by maintaining flexibility and assisting with perseverance for a successful transition enterprise (Louisiana State University Shreveport, 2017). Additionally, Gallagher (2021) identified that positive student-teacher relationships promote a safe and secure learning environment and support for vital academic and social skills. This researcher noted that positive student-teacher rapport improves relationships with other students, increases self-esteem and self-concept, and supports socially acceptable behaviors as well as educational expectations on how to successfully accomplish both.

A qualitative study by McGee (2017) took place in an urban school district located in the central region of Arkansas that included 682 sixth grade students to determine if there is a difference in connectedness among economically disadvantaged students when compared with higher-performing and lower-performing schools. After analyzing surveys from 331 students, this research found no significant difference in the level of connectedness with economically disadvantaged students when compared

between low-performing and high-performing schools within this region. This study supports student-teacher relationships among all students and settings through daily open communication and positive interactions (McGee, 2017).

In a research study by Pearsall (2019), critical transition periods were identified by ways adults can support students which are: assist with executive-functioning skills by providing social-emotional instruction, manage emotions, generate optimistic thinking, and construct a nurturing academic habitat. Executive functioning skills include “adaptable thinking, planning, self-monitoring, self-control, working memory, time management, and organization” (Hill Learning Center, 2019, p. 2). The American Addiction Centers (n.d.) recommended that schools implement constructive and extensive transition programs that utilize a plethora of transition activities that incorporate staff, students, parents, and administrators, together with business partners and community members, who can be invited to an open house and other school-related events, to best revise current transition practices.

Additionally, Stowers (2014) conducted a case study of questionnaires and surveys to two middle schools (sixth through eighth grade) in central California that included 1,788 responding participants. These participants identified concerns for organization strategies, assistance with textbooks, and the need for an older student to mentor each student moving from elementary school into middle school. This study concluded that it would be beneficial for school districts to provide several activities that involve students, parents, teachers, and staff from both buildings (elementary and middle schools) to best support students during this difficult transition period. The research did

not address parental involvement for families in which the parents are working full-time (Stowers, 2014).

Peterson (2017) outlined ten primary transition concerns for students entering middle school and offered suggestions on how to help students during this critical time of change:

- Manage peer pressure by building positive relationships and making peer connections.
- Take initiative by encouraging leadership roles of managing and organizing tasks and plans.
- Instill motivation and a growth mindset by emphasizing effort over success.
- Regulate emotion by recognizing brain changes while supporting emotional as well as academic demands.
- Administer time management skills by prioritizing actions and supporting balance and choices.
- Improve self-image and agency by capitalizing on passions and autonomy.
- Support self-awareness and social skills by providing opportunities to assert needs and responsibility for actions.
- Guide perseverance by implementing grit-building strategies.
- Reinforce self-advocacy by practicing low-stakes freedom of choice moments.
- Students may not know how to achieve their aspirations, so help them set manageable goals by making them specific, attainable, and measurable.

Rappa (2011) completed a qualitative study from the perspective of the students at one northeastern middle school that involved three focus group interviews (one for each

sixth-grade team) and a review of anonymous student writing samples. The participants of this study believed that the transition program in which they participated in effectively prepared them for middle school; however, additional academic and social-emotional support throughout the school year would further benefit student performance.

Hill and Mobley (n.d.) conducted a convenience sample of two comparable middle schools in Georgia with 315 sixth-grade students in one school that utilized a minimal transition program and 294 sixth-grade students in the other school that implemented a basic transition program to compare criterion-referenced competency tests in math and reading, attendance, and discipline referrals. These researchers found improvement in both academic performance and behavior for the school that participated in the basic transition program; however, no significant differences were found in attendance. This study supports that effective transition programs can positively impact student academic performance and behavior (Hill & Mobley, n.d.).

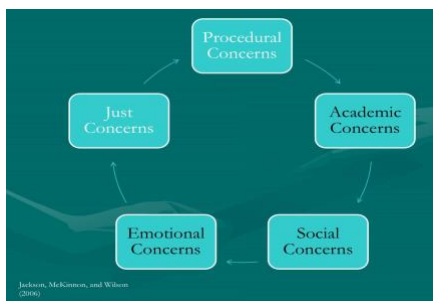
Cohlhepp (2018) used surveys and analyzed responses among sixth-grade students and teachers within three elementary schools as well as seventh and eighth-grade students, parents, and teachers at one middle school within the Franklin Area School District located in Pennsylvania to explore the attitudes and experiences of students leaving elementary school and entering middle school. The following conclusions were made about creating an effective transition program based on the information provided in this study:

1. Form a transition team that includes both sixth- and seventh-grade teachers, guidance counselors, administrators, and students.

2. Distribute an annual survey for sixth-grade students to identify areas of concern and aspirations.
3. Organize a time for seventh and eighth-grade students to visit the sixth-grade classrooms for an open discussion forum regarding any questions or concerns.

One transition activity was completed by the Taylor Road Middle School (2016) located in Georgia. This school created a boot camp over the summer for students who were leaving elementary school and entering middle school. The sixth-grade assistant principal, sixth-grade counselor, and a grade-level chairperson are all in charge of this summer transition program that is organized into student and parent information sessions starting with a tour of the middle school building. The student sessions are broken into twenty-minute increments and cover the following topics: lockers, Office 365, bullying, accountability and respect, digital citizenship, school guidelines, kid talk with the counselor, and clubs and extracurricular activities. The following graphic organizer utilized within this summer transition program depicts the concerns of students entering middle school as seen in Figure 2.1:

Figure 2.1
Concerns of Students Entering Middle School



Note: “TRMS boot camp schedule,” by Fulton Schools, 2016, *Taylor Road Middle School*, slide 14 <https://school.fultonschools.org/ms/taylorroad/Documents/Boot%20Camp%20Parent%20Presentation%202018.pdf>

Adding to effective transition strategies schools could implement, Andrews and Bishop, (2012) interviewed various schools about their transition practices and identified the following effective transition strategies:

- Provide orientations for both parents and students to attend
- Encourage open communication with families and teachers to share data, stimulate collaboration, and identify vulnerable populations before and throughout the school year
- Ensure students negotiate new practices, policies, and area locations such as classes, restrooms, cafeteria, auditorium, etc.

This study reinforces effective transition activities for school districts to incorporate into their transition programs for students who are navigating new buildings and experiences.

Summary

When school districts consider transition programs, there are many ways to make them more effective for students who are leaving elementary school and entering a middle school building (Borman et al, 2019; Evans et al., 2018; Hymann, 2015; Im et al., 2013; Lockwood, 2016; Taylor Road Middle School, 2016). Districts should take into consideration the physical, mental, and social changes between not only the buildings, but also the students who are making the transition (Gilewski & Nunn, 2016; Goldstein et al., 2015; Great Schools Staff, 2010; Hill & Mobley, n.d.; Pate et al., 2019). An effective transition program incorporates students as well as their parents, staff of both buildings, and community members not only before the school year begins, but also maintaining these connections and implementing activities throughout the school year for these students who are new to the building (Andrews & Bishop, 2012; Armstrong, 2006;

Chamblin, 2019; Fraser-Thill, 2021; Hanewald, 2013; Spies, 2018; Stowers, 2014; Van Rens et al., 2017). This study focused on one rural school district located in south-central Pennsylvania to identify the transition strategies used, evaluate their effectiveness, and recommend any additional transition activities or alterations to the current program through the perspective of sixth and seventh-grade teachers. The research utilized completed surveys that were completed by sixth and seventh-grade teachers and conducted interviews with sixth and seventh-grade teachers as well as administrators at the sixth and seventh-grade buildings.

Chapter Three: Method and Participants

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of the sixth and seventh-grade teachers as well as the administration of the intermediate (fifth and sixth grade) and middle school (seventh and eighth grade) buildings to identify current transition practices, determine their effectiveness, and recommend any changes for a more successful transition program. Students who transfer buildings during this critical time of development tend to struggle more academically, mentally, and socially (Cohlhepp, 2018; Hanover, 2014; Wolpert-Gawron, 2017). Therefore, implementing an effective transition program into the school district would allow for improvement for these students not only intellectually, but also psychologically (Borman et al., 2019; Lockwood, 2016).

Participants

The participants in this research study included twenty-four sixth and seventh-grade teachers who completed surveys as well as three voluntary teachers and four administrators from both the intermediate building (fifth and sixth grade) and the middle school building (seventh and eighth grade) who also participated in interviews with the researcher. The researcher received a signed school district consent form from the school district's superintendent. The survey included fourteen Likert-scale ratings and one open-ended response. The interviews only utilized open-ended questions in which the researcher scripted the responses and provided the opportunity for the interviewee to receive a copy of the interviewer's scripted notes.

Setting

This study was completed in one rural school district located in an anonymous county found in south-central Pennsylvania. The population of the intermediate (fifth and sixth grade) and middle (seventh and eighth grade) schools are as follows: the intermediate school has 317 students in sixth grade with thirteen core subject teachers and the middle school is made up of 308 students in seventh grade with sixteen main subject teachers.

Instruments

This research study utilized both survey and interview data to assist the researcher in obtaining accurate information. Consent from each of the participants who agreed to take part in this study was obtained via survey completion. The researcher obtained either written or verbal consent for each of the interviews. The researcher developed an online survey (Appendix A) and interview questions (Appendix B) to gather information from both sixth and seventh-grade teachers as well as administrators to identify current transition practices and their effectiveness.

Survey. The survey was designed to collect qualitative data from current sixth and seventh-grade teachers to identify transition strategies and their effectiveness for students leaving sixth grade and entering seventh grade. The survey consisted of fourteen Likert-scale multiple choice questions and one short answer question. According to Bishop and Herron (2015), the Likert item response utilizes options ranging among “Strongly Agree”, “Agree”, “Disagree” and “Strongly Disagree” and must apply equal distances between each option visually. Surveys are often used for research purposes to reach more participants, use multiple techniques of measures (quantitative, qualitative, or

both), analyze and investigate human behaviors, as well as minimize bias via anonymous data collection (Ponto, 2015).

Google Forms was the tool used to develop the online survey that consists of a four-point Likert scale varying from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” with one open-ended question. Since Google Forms is a secure website, all data collected was kept confidential and participants remained anonymous (Google Forms, n.d.). The survey consisted of fourteen multiple-choice questions and one short-answer question. The survey was developed so that it could be completed in approximately ten minutes. Consent for completing the survey was obtained through the participants’ completion of the Google Form.

Interviews. At the conclusion of the survey, there was an option to meet with the researcher to participate in one-on-one interviews. Both sixth and seventh-grade teachers who volunteered to participate scheduled a time with the researcher to answer interview questions. Volunteers completed either a written consent form or gave their verbal consent prior to participating in the interview. These interviews were scripted by the researcher with the option given to the interviewee to receive a copy of the scripted notes. No participant requested a copy of the scripted notes.

Afterwards, this research study conducted two interviews with the administrators at each of the buildings: two interviews were completed with two administrators from the intermediate (fifth and sixth grade) building and the other two interviews were completed with two administrators from the middle (seventh and eighth grade) school. Either verbal consent or a written consent form was completed for each interviewee prior to beginning the interview.

As stated by Dejonckheere and Vaughn (2019), one-on-one interviews create dialogue between the researcher and participant that allows for flexibility by including follow-up questions, probing by the researcher, and comments by both the participant and the researcher that could not otherwise be done with a survey alone. These researchers also state that in-person interviews collect open-ended data, explore the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of the participant, and can address any sensitive issues that may arise during the interview. A list of scripted interview questions was created, and the interviews were conducted either in person, over the phone, or via Zoom. The same list of questions was used for all interviews (teacher and administrator) to ensure validity and reliability. The questions were designed to allow for the participants to elaborate on their responses to each question. The interviews were scripted by the researcher to allow for confidential participation and comfort of each participant.

Validity. The validity of the questions was established by the relevance and accuracy of both the questions and the responses documented by the researcher. Sullivan (2011) defines validity in research as “how well the assessment tool actually measures the underlying outcome of interest” (p. 119). The researcher utilized a pilot group consisting of two teachers and one administrator in the high school building within the same school district. The researcher established validity by having the pilot study group assess each survey and interview question to ensure that the question relates directly to the researcher's questions. None of the pilot study participants were used in the actual study. The pilot group was selected due to proximity to the researcher and similarity with the research study group. The members of the pilot study were given the opportunity to provide feedback and make comments and suggestions to the researcher. The researcher

then made appropriate adjustments to the survey and interview questions according to the pilot study group participants' feedback.

Reliability. The researcher gathered data via survey and interviews and organized the information into categories. The process for gathering and organizing the information was structured to allow for consistency and reliability of the data. The interviews were documented and summarized by the researcher to ensure reliability of the data collected.

Design of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to gather data from sixth and seventh-grade teachers and administrators regarding their perceptions of the current transition program, evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies utilized, and make recommendations for changes to the current transition services. This study represented qualitative data by administering a survey to the sixth and seventh-grade teachers that included fourteen Likert-scale multiple choice questions and one short answer response as well as conducted interviews with teacher volunteers and the administrators that incorporated open-ended questions. A panel of experienced researchers reviewed the survey and interview questions to be sure they answer all the research questions and contain reliability and validity of the study.

Procedure

The first step in this process was to secure a site in which to conduct the research. An email was sent to the superintendent of a rural school district located in an anonymous county located in south-central Pennsylvania. The email included a permission form for the approval of both teachers and administrators employed by the school district to participate. After permission was obtained, a pilot group that consisted

of two teachers and one administrator was identified to complete the survey and interviews for validity and reliability purposes. After feedback from the pilot group was received, the researcher revised the survey and interview questions to maintain reliability throughout the research. The permission returned by the superintendent was copied and sent to Immaculata University Ethics Review Board (RERB). Next, a Request for Protocol Review was submitted to the RERB for permission to conduct the study (Appendix C).

Once RERB approval was obtained, the researcher contacted the administrators of both the intermediate (fifth and sixth grade) and middle (seventh and eighth grade) school buildings to identify all sixth and seventh-grade core-subject teachers in which to administer the survey. Then, the researcher sent an email explaining the study along with a link to the survey to each of the administrators at the sixth and seventh grade buildings. The administrators then shared the survey with each of the sixth and seventh-grade teachers. The participants had the opportunity to read and give their implied consent once clicking on the Google Forms link. The survey window was open for three weeks and twenty-four surveys were completed in that time.

Next, an email introducing the study along with an attachment of the interview questions was sent to each administrator: two at the intermediate (fifth and sixth grade) and two at the middle (seventh and eighth grade) school. Three teachers volunteered to be interviewed by the researcher and all four administrators participated in interviews. Before conducting the interviews, either verbal consent was given for the phone and Zoom interviews, or a written consent form was signed by both the teachers and the administrators participating in the in-person interviews. Two interviews were conducted

over the phone. Two interviews were conducted via Zoom and three interviews were completed in person with the researcher scripting notes. The researcher was able to ask any additional questions to clarify responses. A summary of each interview was then typed by the researcher and offered to each interviewer to assure accuracy of the information obtained. No participant requested a copy of the interviewer's scripted notes.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed by the researcher using the Likert-scale model for the survey and charts, tables, and narrative paragraphs were developed based on the responses to the surveys and interviews. The percentage of survey responses was calculated by the researcher to determine the most selected answers. Patterns and themes to both the survey and interview replies were closely examined by the researcher. The survey and interview questions were aligned with each of the three research questions; this alignment is represented in Table 3.1:

Table 3.1

Research question alignment for analysis

Research Questions	Survey Questions	Interview Questions
What are teachers' perceptions regarding the school district transition process for students moving from sixth grade to seventh grade?	1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 15	1, 2, 7, 9
What are teachers' perceptions regarding effective strategies that enable an effective transition for students from sixth grade to seventh grade?	5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15	3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9
What are school district administrators' perceptions regarding the current district process and effective strategies for student transitions from sixth grade to seventh grade?		1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9

Summary

This qualitative research study was conducted to identify the current transition strategies utilized by one rural school district, evaluate the effectiveness of these activities, and recommend any changes to the current transition program to improve student experiences when moving from sixth grade into seventh grade. Data was collected by an online tool, Google Forms, as well as documentation from teacher and administrator interviews. All data was analyzed to identify themes and patterns of common answers. A variety of research tools was implemented to increase both reliability and validity of the questions and responses. These tools included an online survey with both multiple choice and one short answer question, interview questions with a written documentation of responses, and approved summary data.

In Chapter Four, the researcher outlined the data collection and reported on the results of the study. The information included results from twenty-four surveys and seven interview summaries. The findings were represented in tables, charts, and narrative summaries.

Chapter Four: Results

Introduction

The purposes of this qualitative study were to gauge sixth and seventh-grade teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the current transition program being implemented in one rural school district, compare these strategies with effective transition techniques recommended by literature research, and recommend any absent effective strategies into the current program. By supplementing research-based effective transition strategies into the current program, the school district would provide these students with additional opportunities for a more positive transition experience as well as improve social, mental, and academic success from sixth grade into seventh grade.

Twenty-nine teachers from both sixth and seventh grades were asked to participate in an online survey consisting of fourteen Likert-scale questions with one open-ended question and the opportunity to participate in a follow-up interview. Of the twenty-nine requests, twenty-four teachers completed the online survey. The interviews were conducted with four administrators from the sixth and seventh-grade buildings as well as three teachers who volunteered to participate in an interview after completing the online survey. The interview consisted of nine open-ended questions.

The method used in the data collection was researcher-designed survey questions to identify the current transition practices being implemented into the school district of interest. The data collection formats included Likert-scale items, open-ended responses, and interview responses that were designed to improve the reliability and validity of the study. The results of the collected data are presented in the following sections.

Demographics

This study was conducted during the 2021-2022 school year in one rural school district located in south-central Pennsylvania. All twenty-eight participants work as either a teacher or administrator within the Intermediate School (fifth and sixth grade) or Middle School (seventh and eighth grade) buildings. All three teacher interview participants worked in the district for over five years. One administrator participant was hired by the school district last year. The other three administrators worked for the school district for five years or more. Therefore, six of the seven interviews were conducted with participants who were familiar with the school district's current transition procedures.

Research Question One

1. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the school district transition process for students moving from sixth grade to seventh grade?

The purpose of this question was to identify sixth and seventh-grade teachers' perceptions about any programs and/or strategies that the school district was currently implementing in either sixth or seventh grade, or both. Teachers who completed the online survey and answered questions one, two, and eight addressed this research question. Although participants could skip any question while completing the online survey, all respondents completed all Likert-scale survey questions. This data is represented in Table 4.1:

Table 4.1*Teachers' Perceptions Regarding the School District Transition Process*

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1) Students transition easily from intermediate to middle school.	0 (0.00%)	8 (33.33%)	14 (58.33%)	2 (8.33%)
2) Students have legitimate concerns that will facilitate transition to middle school.	2 (8.33%)	21 (87.50%)	1 (4.17%)	0 (0.00%)
8) Students need help in navigating the path to middle school.	14 (58.33%)	9 (37.50%)	1 (4.17%)	0 (0.00%)

N = 24

Of the twenty-four responses, most teachers disagree (fourteen) or strongly disagree (two) that students transition easily from intermediate to middle school. Almost all teachers (twenty-one) agree that students have legitimate concerns about transitioning to middle school. Finally, most teachers either agree (nine) or strongly agree (fourteen) that students need help with navigating a path to middle school.

Teachers who volunteered for the interview addressed this research question by answering questions one, two, and seven during the interviews. Although interviewees were permitted to skip any interview questions, all participants answered all interview questions for the interviewer. The teacher interviews included one sixth-grade teacher and two seventh-grade teachers. The sixth-grade teacher was not aware of any transition program being implemented within the district at the time of the interview. However, in the survey it was mentioned that a few transition strategies were being utilized by the district:

1. In the spring, sixth-grade students participate in an information session at the intermediate school that includes one middle school administrator and one

seventh-grade guidance counselor to introduce the middle school expectations and procedures.

2. Following this information session, sixth-grade students participate in a tour of the middle school building in May. Since students were not able to participate in-person last school year due to Covid-19 restrictions, a video of middle school students answering frequently asked questions was shared with the sixth-grade class.

The seventh-grade respondents were aware of a transition program being utilized by the school district called WEB (Where Everybody Belongs) and mentioned the following transition practices currently taking place within the school district:

1. A tour of the middle school building takes place at the end of sixth grade
2. Administrators create a list of students who should and shouldn't be together for academic teams.
3. Seventh-grade students attend school one day prior to the eighth-grade students in order to learn the proper procedures and participate in team-building activities without eighth-grade students in the building.
4. Sixth-grade students have the opportunity to participate in an individual tour of the middle school over the summer.
5. Seventh-grade teachers speak with sixth-grade teachers regarding the transition needs of students identified with special disabilities.

Although the seventh-grade teachers agreed that the WEB transition program is showing success, more strategies could be implemented such as seventh-grade teachers being included in the introductory session conducted at the intermediate school in the

spring. Another recommendation is that sixth-grade students should attend one day as a seventh-grade student at the end of their sixth-grade school year. This would allow for an additional opportunity for social interaction, teacher identification, and practice with seventh-grade procedures and expectations with the additional support of current seventh-grade students.

The last interview question regarding teachers' perceptions of current transition practices pertained to the professional development that the school district currently provides for the sixth and seventh-grade teachers. All teachers responded that the school district does not currently provide sixth or seventh-grade teachers with professional development for transition practices and that professional development opportunities are needed, especially for seventh-grade teachers.

Research Question Two

2. What are teachers' perceptions regarding effective strategies that enable an effective transition for students from sixth grade to seventh grade?

The purpose of this question was to determine if the sixth and seventh-grade teachers were familiar with effective transition programs and to be able to identify any strategies that the school district was currently using within their transition program. Teachers who completed the online survey and answered questions three, four, five, six, seven, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, and fourteen addressed this research question. Again, participants were able to skip any question while completing the online survey; however, all respondents completed all Likert-scale questions. Additionally, ten online survey participants completed the open-ended question that pertained to either research

question one or research question two. All ten responses, however, address research question two. This data is represented in Table 4.2:

Table 4.2

Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Effective Strategies that Enable an Effective Transition

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3) Student orientation is a key element to transition.	14 (58.33%)	10 (41.17%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)
4) Student emotional needs must be addressed during a transition program.	17 (70.83%)	7 (29.17%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)
5) Students would benefit from weekly mentoring to assist in their transition to middle school.	14 (58.33%)	9 (37.50%)	1 (4.17%)	0 (0.00%)
6) Professional development for grade 7 teachers is important to aid in transition.	7 (29.17%)	13 (54.17%)	4 (16.67%)	0 (0.00%)
7) Having a faculty advisor in addition to a guidance counselor is important for grade 7 students.	8 (33.33%)	11 (45.83%)	4 (16.67%)	1 (4.17%)
9) Addressing students' concerns is a priority for transition.	14 (58.33%)	10 (41.67%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)
10) Providing a separate setting and easing 7 th graders into the regular population is needed.	5 (20.83%)	8 (33.33%)	11 (45.83%)	0 (0.00%)
11) Middle school administrators and counselors should visit the intermediate school during the spring.	17 (70.83%)	6 (25.00%)	1 (4.17%)	0 (0.00%)
12) A student survey would help to create a handbook of typical first-year concerns and coping skills.	13 (54.17%)	11 (45.83%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)
13) Student social needs should be addressed during transition.	16 (66.67%)	6 (25.00%)	2 (8.33%)	0 (0.00%)
14) A sound transition program can directly influence formation of identity for an adolescent.	13 (54.17%)	10 (41.67%)	1 (4.17%)	0 (0.00%)

N = 24

All respondents agreed (ten) or strongly agreed (fourteen) that student orientation is a key element to transition. All participants also agreed (seven) or strongly agreed (seventeen) that student emotional needs must be addressed during a transition program. All respondents except one either agreed (nine) or strongly agreed (fourteen) that students will benefit from weekly mentoring to assist with transitioning to middle school. Thirteen teachers agreed and seven teachers strongly agreed that professional development for seventh-grade teachers is important to aid in transition. Most teachers agreed (eleven) or strongly agreed (eight) that having a faculty advisor in addition to a guidance counselor is important for seventh-grade students.

All participants agreed (ten) or strongly agreed (fourteen) that addressing students' concerns is a priority for transition. Only eight teachers agreed with five teachers who strongly agreed, and eleven teachers disagreed with the need to provide a separate setting to ease seventh-grade students into the regular population. All teachers, except one, agreed or strongly agreed that middle school administrators and counselors should visit the intermediate school during the spring. All respondents agreed (eleven) or strongly agreed (thirteen) that a student survey would help to create a handbook of typical first-year concerns and coping skills. Six participants agreed and sixteen strongly agreed that student social needs should be addressed during transition. All teachers, except one, agreed or strongly agreed that a sound transition program can directly influence formation of identity for an adolescent.

The following responses were provided by teachers who participated in the online survey open-ended question:

1. I think that seventh grade teachers and current students should also visit the Intermediate school to help with the transition.
2. I think this is particularly apparent after the Covid shutdown and partial virtual year. Many students have essentially transitioned from being a fifth grader to an eighth grader with little support or mentoring from a social and emotional perspective. While doing fine academically, many students are struggling socially.
3. Transition during the 2021-2022 school year has been more difficult because a number of students are not maturing socially, academically, and emotionally because of the impact of Covid. I have witnessed a more apathetic approach to completing assignments from the students. Also, there has been an increase in anxiety among the student population.
4. Based on what previous students told me, I think the tours of the Middle School in the spring, as well as the question and answer they provide is always helpful. Students also benefited from hearing former sixth graders share their knowledge when the Middle School staff created videos of concerns to share with us!
5. I think WEB is doing a great job easing the transition to middle school. I think the real needs involve time management and navigating the workload from multiple teachers. I also think the study skills and being able to study for a test or a quiz is a skill these students are lacking. I think if at the end of sixth grade these students could be trained in time management, organizing things for multiple courses, behavior during unstructured time, goal setting, and understanding letter grades, they would be much more successful entering middle school.

6. Why does the burden of transition fall entirely on the Middle School? Shouldn't the transition process begin at the Intermediate school during the spring semester?
 7. Perhaps we need to also consider what can be done at the Intermediate school and get sixth-grade teachers to help students at the end of their sixth-grade year to better prepare for the middle school experience.
 8. In my previous setting, the district orchestrated a date that the entire district would transition to the next grade (prior to the end of the current school year - typically the second to last day of the year). It was called, "Move the Pride." Example: 6th graders would spend an entire day living and going to school as a 7th grader - in a new building, with their actual schedule. They were able to experience life in the middle school (a new school for them), eat lunch in a new cafeteria, meet their teachers, ride the bus, etc. Feedback from students and parents was overwhelmingly positive.
 9. I think that there should be communication between the 6th grade teachers and the 7th grade teachers in an effort to ease the transition process from intermediate to middle school.
 10. If there is information about a student, it should be shared with the administration and team teachers in the middle school to avoid any continued issues or situation.
- All feedback from the open-ended question related to research question two: teachers' perceptions regarding effective transition strategies. Statements two and three mentioned reasons students are struggling with transition. Statement six questioned current transition responsibilities. Statements five, seven, eight, and ten offered new ways in which to

improve the current transition program, while statements one, four, and nine mentioned techniques that are currently being implemented.

Teachers who volunteered to participate in the interview with the researcher addressed this research question by answering interview questions number three, four, five, six, and eight. Although interviewees were allowed to skip any interview questions, all three teacher respondents provided answers for interview questions one through eight. Interview question nine addressed either research question one or two, depending on the participant's response. Two of the three teachers interviewed completed question nine and both responses contributed to research question two.

The three teachers interviewed identified the most effective strategies that the school district currently utilizes as face-to-face interactions, promoting student leaders, summer tours, seventh-grade students attending the first school day without eighth-grade students, and sixth-grade special education teachers communicating with seventh-grade special education teachers regarding concerns. No teachers identified ineffective strategies in which the district practices; however, a few suggestions on improvement were mentioned: summer orientation should involve teachers and the middle school building tour should develop a way to incorporate parents, such as providing evening tours.

All teacher interviewees identified the following ways in which seventh-grade students would benefit from an effective transition program: alleviate anxiety and stress, reduce the chance of getting lost, practice proper cafeteria procedures, students would be more excited and less scared, improve social-emotional wellbeing by learning schedules, meeting teachers, and mentors to check in emotionally, socially, and academically. The

teacher respondents identified the following people as important participants with an effective transition program: sixth and seventh-grade teachers, sixth and seventh-grade guidance counselors, administrators from both buildings, nurses from both buildings, sixth and seventh-grade special education teachers with appropriate paraprofessionals and personal care assistants (PCAs), parents, students, and cafeteria staff and custodians from both buildings.

All three teachers who participated in the interview agreed that seventh-grade students should have both student and teacher mentors. The student mentors would assist with checking in periodically to verify social, emotional, and academic wellbeing. The adult mentor would assist with career planning, provide a safe contact person at school, communicate with parents, and provide appropriate social, emotional, and academic skills support. The following comments were made by two of the three teachers interviewed regarding interview question nine:

1. 6th grade teachers should know if 7th grade students are struggling and how to help current 6th grade students.
2. 6th grade students and parents should be given a survey in April asking concerns about 7th grade. This survey should be sent to both the students and the parents to identify if an extra tour is wanted or needed and if the student should be provided homework help or study sessions, etc.

Research Question Three

3. What are school district administrators' perceptions regarding the current district process and effective strategies for student transitions from sixth grade to seventh grade?

The purpose of this question was to identify the current administrators' perspectives, at both the sixth and seventh-grade buildings, to see if they were aware of the current transition practices and be able to evaluate their effectiveness for the sixth-grade students moving into seventh grade. All interview questions with administrators address this research question. Administrators were given permission to skip any interview question. All four administrators who participated in the interview responded to questions one through eight. Three of the four administrator interviewees completed question nine regarding additional feedback.

Three of the four administrators interviewed were aware of the WEB transition program currently being implemented by the school district. This program includes the middle school administrator overseeing a team of seventh-grade teachers and working with a sixth-grade administrator to prepare programs for the upcoming seventh-grade students. Then, the seventh-grade administrator works with the WEB coordinators and eighth-grade student leaders over the summer for training lessons and to prepare for the first day of school. Next, the new seventh-grade students attend a WEB orientation that includes an assembly, small-group activities, building tours, question and answer sessions, and character-building activities. These student-led leader sessions continue twice a month throughout the school year with the first meeting of the month focusing on a lesson and the second meeting of the month centering around team building activities. The WEB program concludes at the end of the school year with a "fun day". All administrators agree that the WEB program provides enough transition activities to introduce the building and new expectations. However, one administrator would like to

improve the climate and culture aspects for students transitioning into the middle school building.

The most effective transition strategies identified by the administrators include providing a tour of the middle school building in the spring, supplying an open house opportunity in the summer, starting the first day without eighth-grade students, and continuing the student-leader session twice per month throughout the school year. There were two ineffective transition practices identified by two different administrators. One involved the student-led sessions, and it was stated that the lessons should be evaluated at the end of each school year for relevancy and implementation the following school year. The other ineffective transition practice identified involved a transition strategy that has not occurred since the start of the WEB program two years ago: teachers attending the introduction meeting were not perceived as “welcoming”.

Seventh-grade students benefit in many ways from an effective transition program, according to the administrators interviewed. Anxiety and nervousness are alleviated, familiar faces in a new school, mentors to assist with social, emotional, and/or academic issues, procedures are understood, students get lost less often, students can focus on learning from day one of instruction, students are prepared for a new culture, awareness of academic shift in expectations, bullying and drama are reduced, and students are more prepared for a successful school year.

The administrative respondents identified the following people as those who should be included in an effective transition program: administrators, teachers, and guidance counselors of both sixth and seventh-grade students, team leaders of struggling students, sixth-grade students’ parents, and sixth and seventh-grade students. Although

all administrators stated that no professional development is provided by the school district, the WEB program sponsors that include three middle school teachers, do attend a national training program to learn how to implement the lessons and support the student leaders. One administrator stated that professional development opportunities would not hurt but are not necessary since national training was provided and the lessons are taught by the student leaders.

The question regarding mentors differed among administrator responses. Two administrators believed that seventh-grade students should have both an adult mentor (to be a positive role model) and a student mentor (to provide a different perspective and build peer relationships). The other two administrators interviewed stated that one-to-one mentorship was not necessary. However, team leaders (both adult and student) should be assigned to each homeroom team of seventh-grade students to assist with social, emotional, and academic areas of concern. There were no additional comments other than two administrators who are looking forward to implementing this transition program more effectively without restrictions due to Covid-19.

Summary

Chapter Four outlined the results of this study that included Likert-scale items, open-ended questions, and interview responses for each research question. The first research question identified perceptions of teachers regarding the current transition program being implemented within the school district of interest. The second research question determined teachers' perceptions of effective transition strategies and the third research question identified perceptions of administrators regarding current transition practices and their effectiveness within the school district of interest.

A total of twenty-four sixth and seventh-grade teachers completed the online survey that consisted of fourteen Likert-scale questions and one open-ended question. Of the twenty-four teachers who completed the survey, three volunteered to participate in an interview with the researcher that included nine questions. Additionally, four administrators, two from the intermediate school (fifth and sixth grade) and two from the middle school (seventh and eighth grade) participated in an interview with the researcher that also included the same nine questions as the teacher interview participants. These perceptions were analyzed and compared, and the responses were categorized into the three research questions that guided this study.

The results of this study indicated that most transition practices occur at the middle school (seventh and eighth grade) and that very little knowledge of transition strategies exist at the intermediate school level (fifth and sixth grade). Most administrators do not think that professional development is necessary for teachers; however, teachers believe that professional development opportunities for teachers regarding transition practices would benefit students leaving sixth grade and entering seventh grade. Both teachers and administrators agree that an effective transition program would provide a more positive learning experience by assisting students socially, emotionally, and academically throughout the seventh-grade school year. Results will be further discussed in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Summary of the Study

The purposes of this qualitative study were to identify the awareness of sixth and seventh-grade teachers and administrators regarding current transition practices for students leaving sixth grade and entering seventh grade, comparing these practices with effective research-based transition strategies, and recommending any adjustments to the current transition program, as determined beneficial. Perceptions of twenty-four sixth and seventh-grade teachers employed at one rural school district located in south-central Pennsylvania were analyzed using a survey consisting of fourteen Likert-style statements and one open-ended question. Additionally, one sixth-grade teacher, two seventh-grade teachers, and four administrators (two from each grade-level building) participated in one-on-one interviews with the researcher.

The data acquired through the survey and interviews were examined by the researcher to detect patterns and themes within each of the three research questions guiding this study. Findings were reported in narrative structure that incorporated tables to establish accurate data. The compiled data presented valuable understandings concerning teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the current implemented transition program for students moving from the intermediate school building (fifth and sixth grades) into the middle school building (seventh and eighth grades). This chapter provides a summary of the results, an explanation as to whether the current transition program utilizes effective research-based strategies, considerations for adjusting the current program to benefit students' needs and best interests, and recommendations for further study.

Summary of the Results

Research question one. The goal of this research question was to determine sixth and seventh-grade teachers' perceptions of the current transition practices taking place within the school district of study. The data accumulated from three Likert-style statements showed that teachers had varying perspectives on the current transition program implemented within the same school district. Additionally, varying open-ended responses were documented during the interviews of three teachers regarding the district's current transition practices.

Of the twenty-four survey responses completed by sixth and seventh-grade teachers, 66.67% either disagreed or strongly disagreed that moving from sixth grade into seventh grade is an easy transition. The majority of teachers, 95.83%, agreed or strongly agreed that students pose legitimate concerns regarding this transition process. Finally, most teachers, 95.83%, agreed or strongly agreed that students need help with navigating a path to middle school.

During the interviews of sixth and seventh-grade teachers, it was noted that the one sixth-grade teacher was not aware of many transition strategies in which the school district utilized. However, the two seventh-grade teachers who volunteered to be interviewed were knowledgeable of the newly integrated WEB transition program and were able to provide specific activities in which the students participated in throughout the school year.

Research question two. The goal of research question two was to determine teachers' perceptions of effective transition practices taking place within the school

district of study. The data collected from eleven Likert-style statements showed that most teachers agreed about the effectiveness of transition activities. Additionally, there were many open-ended responses that provided suggestions in which the district could improve the current transition program.

All of the sixth and seventh grade teachers either agreed or strongly agreed that the sixth-grade students would benefit from participation in the following transition activities: orientation program, addressing emotional needs and student concerns, and completion of a student survey regarding questions about seventh grade. Most (95.83 %) teachers either agreed or strongly agreed that students benefit from a weekly mentoring program, that middle school administrators and counselors should visit the intermediate building in the spring, and that a sound transition program would influence the formation of identity for adolescents.

The majority, 91.67%, of sixth and seventh-grade teachers either agreed or strongly agreed that students' social needs should be addressed and 83.33% agreed or strongly agreed that professional development for seventh-grade teachers should be provided by the school district. Only 79.17% of the teachers who completed the survey agreed or strongly agreed that a faculty advisor in addition to a guidance counselor should be assigned to incoming seventh-grade students. Only 54.17% of teachers surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that a separate setting should be provided for the seventh-grade students to ease their transition into the rest of the middle school population.

The open-ended responses provided by the sixth and seventh-grade teachers who completed the survey showed the following themes regarding effective transition

practices. The first theme recommended seventh-grade teachers and students visiting the intermediate building in the spring. The second suggestion was to make sure students' social/emotional well-being needs should be met. The third theme proposed that the district provide tours of the middle school building. The fourth recommendation supported sixth-grade teachers with transition information. The fifth idea provided a time for sixth-grade teachers to communicate with seventh-grade teachers regarding expectations and students of concern. The last suggestions stated that sixth-grade students should spend a day as a seventh-grade student in the spring.

Research question three. The goal of research question three was to establish administrators' perceptions of the current transition process and to identify the effective strategies utilized by the school district of study. None of the survey questions address research question three since the survey was only completed by teachers, not administrators. Therefore, four administrators were interviewed by the researcher and the responses to these interview questions were analyzed for themes. Three out of the four administrators interviewed were knowledgeable about the current transition program being implemented by the district: WEB.

The WEB program consists of sixth-grade students first completing a survey in the winter that addresses questions and concerns they may have about their transition into seventh grade. The current seventh-grade students address these questions and concerns via video presentation and the school district provides a tour of the middle school building for the current sixth-grade students during school hours in the spring. Then, seventh-grade orientation is provided to incoming seventh-grade students and their families over the summer. Seventh-grade students start school one day prior to eighth-

grade students returning and participate in team-building activities. Finally, eighth-grade WEB leaders and seventh-grade teacher coordinators meet with seventh-grade homerooms twice per month throughout the school year to provide WEB lessons one week and team-building activities the second week of each month.

The most effective transition strategies currently implemented by the school district as identified by the four administrators interviewed include: a tour of the middle school in the spring, open-house opportunities in the summer, starting seventh-grade students one day earlier than the eighth-grade students, and providing student-leader sessions twice per month. The administrators interviewed identified the following persons that should be included in an effective transition program: administrators from both the intermediate and the middle school buildings, both sixth and seventh-grade teachers and guidance counselors, eighth-grade team leaders, sixth-grade parents, and both sixth and seventh-grade students. It was noted by the researcher that one administrator who was interviewed mentioned an effective transition practice in which the school district did not already participate: having sixth-grade students attend the middle school as a seventh-grade student for one day in the spring to experience life as a seventh-grade student.

Limitations of the Study

The main limitation of this qualitative study was the sample size. Since the focus of this research centered around one rural school district located in south-central Pennsylvania, the results are limited to similar districts within the same state and exclude any school located within a suburban or urban school district. The researcher focused on this particular school district for location purposes and personal reasons. Another

limitation to this study involved the teachers. Only sixth and seventh-grade teachers' perceptions were included in this research. Additionally, only administrators' perceptions at the intermediate and middle schools were incorporated in the data. Therefore, teachers or other administrators from other grade levels within the same school district were not given the opportunity to participate. Finally, the last limitation of this study concerned the fact that the research was conducted in the same school district in which the researcher was employed. Therefore, anonymity of the survey was crucial as well as the confidentiality of the interview responses to ensure validity and reliability of the data utilized for this study.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the current transition program implemented during the move from sixth grade into seventh grade, evaluate their effectiveness, and recommend any adjustments to current transition practices. If given the opportunity to conduct this study in the future, two things would be changed to avoid limitations when examining the data collected:

1. Administrators would complete the survey along with the sixth and seventh-grade teachers.
2. Teachers who completed the survey would identify whether he or she was teaching sixth or seventh grade.

It would benefit the research study for administrators to also complete the survey to provide the study with additional information from administrators' perspectives. It would also benefit the study to have the teacher state which grade he or she taught to better analyze, disaggregate, and improve the understanding of the data collected.

Recommendations for the School District

Through surveys and interview responses, it was evident that this school district participates in an effective program when transitioning students from sixth grade into seventh grade. This WEB program utilizes various activities beginning in the sixth grade and extending throughout the students' seventh-grade school year. However, during the interview process, three recommendations were made regarding the improvement of the current transition program for the school district of interest. The first suggestion included the incorporation of all sixth and seventh-grade teachers by providing information regarding current transition practices. Professional development was not deemed necessary, but knowledge and understanding of the WEB program as well as any additional current transition practices should be provided to all sixth and seventh-grade teachers for the program to be the most effective.

The second recommendation involved bringing seventh-grade students, teachers, administrators, and guidance counselors to the intermediate building for an assembly presentation for the sixth-grade students at the end of the school year. This would be comprised of a question-and-answer interactive session rather than entering concerns into a survey with a video response addressing those concerns. The interaction between the students would help reduce anxiety and nervousness for transitioning sixth-grade students.

The final suggestion concerned the sixth-grade students attending seventh-grade classes for one school day. This way students could see first-hand how their day would operate, participate in the different transitions between periods, practice new daily procedures, interact with students and teachers they would be sharing their school with

the following school year, and navigate their way around a brand-new school building with support from both teachers and students. This transition strategy would also help reduce stress and anxiety for upcoming seventh-grade students.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study showed that most seventh-grade teachers and administrators are aware of the current transition practices being implemented within their school district. The study also concluded that the transition program being utilized within this school district included research-based strategies that improve students' experience with transitioning from the intermediate school building into the middle school building. Therefore, a future study might explore students' and parents' perceptions of the current transition program being utilized within a particular school district in order to identify areas that are working well and areas that are in need of improvement.

Further research regarding the perceptions of the sixth and seventh-grade students and the impact of the current transition program would benefit the school district in knowing if the current transition program is positively or negatively impacting students based on their perceptions. For example, students could complete surveys and participate in interviews that obtain information regarding student perspectives on what strategies are and are not working for each student personally. Additionally, further research regarding a transition program's impact on students could incorporate the academic effects of the current transition program by comparing students' grades and state assessment scores of students who participated in the program for its entirety and those who did not, such as move-in students, those who were absent, or students who chose not to participate in all transition activities.

Another area of focus for future research regarding effective transition practices would involve parents of sixth and seventh-grade students. For example, parents could complete surveys and volunteer to participate in interviews to collect data regarding parents' perceptions of the current transition program and its impact on their student(s). Finally, research studies regarding transition programs could be more generalized by conducting the research in various types of school district settings, including rural, suburban, and urban.

Summary

This qualitative study examined sixth and seventh-grade teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the current transition program, determined the effectiveness of strategies utilized by considering research-based techniques, and recommended modifications to the current transition practices in one rural school district located in south-central Pennsylvania. The knowledge of current transition practices ranged from unknown to full awareness of the current WEB program utilized within the district. The program included research-based effective transition practices, however, additional suggestions were made by teachers who completed the survey and administrators who participated in the interviews with the researcher.

Additionally, further research would be necessary for school districts to determine whether current transition practices are positively impacting students within their district. It is recommended that future research should include sixth and seventh-grade students' and parents' perceptions of the current transition program. Furthermore, future research studies should expand to include various types of school districts such as suburban and urban, and not just focus on rural school districts. This would make the research study

generalizable and comparable with a plethora of other schools located throughout the state of Pennsylvania.

References

- American Addiction Centers. (n.d.). *The transition to middle school*. MentalHelp.net.
<https://www.mentalhelp.net/adolescent-development/the-transition-to-middle-school/>
- Andrews, C., & Bishop, P. (2012). Middle grades transition programs around the globe. *Middle School Journal*, 8-14. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ990866.pdf>
- Anfara, V.A. (2007). School transitions: Jeopardy or wheel of fortune? *Middle School Journal*, 60-67.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080100940771.2007.11461616>
- Armstrong, T. (2006). *The best schools*. ASCD.
<http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/106044/chapters/Middle-Schools@-Social,-Emotional,-and-Metacognitive-Growth.aspx>
- Bishop, P. A., & Herron, R.L. (2015). Use and misuse of the Likert item response and other ordinal measures. *International Journal of Exercise Science*, 8(3), 297-302.
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4833473/>
- Borman, G.D., Rozek, C.S., Pyne, J., & Hanselman, P. (2019). Reappraising academic and social adversity improves middle school students' academic achievement, behavior, and well-being. *PNAS*, 116(33), 16286-16291.
<https://www.pnas.org/content/pnas/116/33/16286.full.pdf>
- Chamblin, M. (2017). Junior high school here we come! Evaluating the effects of a summer transition workshop. *Open Access Library Journal*, 4(3413), 1-12.
<https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1103413>

- Chen, G. (2020, September, 17). Should sixth grade be in elementary school or middle school? *Public School Review*.
<https://www.publicschoolreview.com/blog/should-sixth-grade-be-in-elementary-school-or-middle-school>
- Cohlhepp, C. F. (2018). *Student perceptions regarding the transition from elementary to middle school: Engaging student voice in the development of an improved, data-informed transition program* [Doctoral Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh]. CORE. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/163106788.pdf>
- Collinsdictionary.com. (n.d.). *Collinsdictionary.com*. Retrieved September 15, 2021, from <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/middle-school>
- Conley, J. (2016). *The effect of elementary and middle school grade span and transition on student achievement and graduation* [Doctoral Dissertation, Liberty University]. Scholars Crossing.
<https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2364&context=doctoral>
- DeJonckheere, M., & Vaughn, L. M. (2019). Semi structured interviewing in primary care research: A balance of relationship and rigor. *Family Medicine and Community Health*, 7(2), 1-8.
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6910737/>
- Dictionary.com. (n.d.). *Dictionary.com*. Retrieved September 15, 2021, from <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/middle-school>

- Evans, D., Borriello, G. A., & Field, A. P. (2018). A review of the academic and psychological impact of the transition to secondary education. *Frontiers of Psychology*, 9(1482), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01482>
- Fraser-Thill, R. (2021). *How tweens change in middle school*. Verywellfamily. <https://www.verywellfamily.com/how-do-tweens-change-over-the-middle-school-transition-3288058>
- Gallagher, E. (2021). *The effects of teacher-student relationships: Social and academic outcomes of low-income middle and high school students*. Applied Psychology Opus. https://wp.nyu.edu/steinhardt-appsych_opus/the-effects-of-teacher-student-relationships-social-and-academic-outcomes-of-low-income-middle-and-high-school-students/
- Gilewski, C. D., & Nunn, M. L. (2016). *Research summary: Transitioning young adolescents from elementary to middle school*. AMLE. <https://www.amle.org/transitioning-young-adolescents-from-elementary-to-middle-school>
- Goldstein, S. E., Boxer, P., & Rudolph, E. (2015). Middle school transition stress: Links with academic performance, motivation, and school experiences. *Contemporary School Psychology*, 19, 21-29. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-014-0044-4>
- Google.com. (n.d). *Google.com dictionary*. Retrieved September 15, 2021, from <https://google.com>
- Google Forms. (n.d.). *Forms*. <https://docs.google.com/forms/u/0/?tgif=d>
- Gordon, M. F., Peterson, K., Gdula, J., & Klingbeil, D. (2011). *Review of literature on grade configuration and school transitions*. Center for Applied Research and

Educational Improvement.

<https://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/138604/Impact%20of%20School%20Transitions%20and%20Different%20Grade%20Configurations.pdf?sequence=1>

Great Schools Staff. (2010). *Smoothing your child's transition to middle school.*

Great!SCHOOLS.org. <https://www.greatschools.org/go/articles/smoothing-your-childs-transition-to-middle-school/>

Hanewald, R. (2013). Transition between primary and secondary school: Why it is important and how it can be supported. *Australia Journal of Teacher Education*, 38(1), 62-74. <https://doi.org/10.14221/ante.2013v38n1.7>

Hanover Research. (2014). *School feeder patterns: Overview and impacts.* Hanover Research.

<https://www.napls.us/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=4047&dатаid=8331&FileName=School%20Feeder%20Patterns-%20Overview%20and%20Impacts.pdf>

Harvard University. (2021). *Executive Function & Self Regulation.* Center on the

Developing Child. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/executive-function/>

Heissel, J., & Norris, S. (2019). Rise and shine. *Education Next*, 19(3).

<https://www.educationnext.org/rise-shine-how-school-start-times-affect-academic-performance/>

- Hill Learning Center. (2019). 7 executive functioning skills your child should have. *Hill Learning Center*. <https://www.hillcenter.org/7-executive-functioning-skills-your-child-should-have/>
- Hill, L. M., & Mobley, J. A. (n.d.). *Making the change from elementary to middle school*. American Counseling Association. https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/vistas/article_2208c024f16116603abcacff0000bee5e7.pdf?sfvrsn=96d6442c_4
- Hong, K., Zimmer, R., & Engberg, J. (n.d.). *How does grade configuration impact student achievement? Evaluating the effectiveness of k-8 schools*. Institute of Education Sciences. <https://peabody.vanderbilt.edu/docs/pdf/faculty/zimmer-Grade Configuration Paper AEJ Policy Submission version.pdf>
- Hymann, L. (2015). *Middle school plunge: A mixed-methods study exploring 6th grade students' perceptions of their transition to middle school experiences and its influences on school achievement and performance for urban youth* [Doctoral Dissertation, Rowan University]. Rowan Digital Works. <https://rdw.Rowan.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1322&context=etd>
- Im, M. H., Hughes, J. H., Kwok, O., Puckett, S., & Cerdia, C. A. (2013). Effect of retention in elementary grades on transition to middle school. *Journal of School Psychology, 51*(3), 349-365. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2013.01.004>
- Lemanczyk Ross, A. J. (2002). *Principals' perceptions of elementary to middle transition practices in Iowa middle level schools* [Doctoral Dissertation, Iowa State University]. Retrospective Theses and Dissertations. <https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2025&context=rtd>

- Linnenbrink, M. (2010). Transition to the Middle School Building and Academic Achievement in Iowa. *Intersect*. Retrieved May 27, 2021 from <https://educateiowa.gov/sites/files/ed/documents/Transition%20to%20the%20Middle%20School%20Building.pdf>
- Lockwood, J. B. (2016). *Transitioning from elementary to junior high: Action research at Bark River-Harris School District* [Master's Thesis, Northern Michigan University]. NMU Commons. <https://commons.nmu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1113&context=theses>
- Louisiana State University Shreveport. (2017). *Helping elementary students transition to middle school*. LSUS Shreveport. <https://online.lsus.edu/articles/education/helping-elementary-students-transition.aspx>
- Luke, M., & Goodrich, K. M. (2019). Focus group research: An intentional strategy for applied group research? *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, 44(2). <https://doi.org/10.1080/01933922.2019.1603741>
- Malone, M., Cornell, D. G., & Shukla, K. (2019). Grade configuration is associated with school-level standardized test pass rates for sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 31(2), 289-305. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2019.1654526>
- McGee, K.M., Sr. (2017). *School transition from elementary to middle school: Perceptions from economically disadvantaged students* [Doctoral Dissertation, Arkansas Tech University]. Online Research Commons @ ATU. https://orc.library.atu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=etds_2017

- McKeon, B. (2014). *Middle school transition: Faculty and parent perceptions of the academic, procedural, and social changes that occur between elementary and middle school* [Doctoral Dissertation, Seton Hall University]. Seton Hall University Dissertations and Theses.
<https://scholarship.shu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2941&context=dissertations>
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved September 15, 2021 from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intermediate%20school>
- Onetti, W., Fernandez-Garcia, J. C., & Castillo-Rodriguez, A. (2019). Transition to middle school: Self-concept changes. *PLoS Online, 14*(2), 1-15.
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0212640>
- Pasch, M. (n.d.). The differences between elementary and middle school. *Team Pasch Academic Coaching*. <https://www.teampasch.com/blog/transitiontomiddleschool>
- Pate, R. R., Dowda, M., Dishman, R. K., Colabianchi, N., Saunders, R. P., & McIver, K. L. (2019). Change in children's physical activity: Predictors in the transition from elementary to middle school. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 56*(3), 65-73. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ampere.2018.10.012>
- Patton, J. R., & Kim, M. K. (2016). The importance of transition planning for special needs students. *Revista Portuguesa de Educação, 29*(1), 9-26.
<https://redalyc.org/pdf/374/374446772002.pdf>
- Pearsall, M. (2019). 3 ways social-emotional learning supports students' transition to new schools. *Committee for Children*. <https://www.cfchildren.org/blog/2019/08/3-ways-social-emotional-learning-supports-students-transition-to-new-schools/>

- Peterson, W. (2017). 10 key transition issues for 6th graders in middle school...and how you can help. *MAWI Learning*.
<https://www.mawilearning.com/blog/administrators/10-key-transition-issues-for-6th-graders-in-middle-school-and-how-you-can-help/>
- Ponto, J. (2015). Understanding and evaluating survey research. *Journal of the Advanced Practitioner in Oncology*, 6(2), 168-171.
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4601897/>
- Public School Review. (2008). *Academic research overwhelmingly finds that 6th grade students are better off staying in elementary school*. White Plains Public Schools.
<https://www.whiteplainspublicschools.org/cams/lib5/NY01000029/Centricity/Do-main/4/6th.pdf>
- Rappa, K.A. (2011). *A case study exploring the transition to middle school from the perspective of the students* [Doctoral Dissertation, Walden University].
 ScholarWorks.
<https://scholarworks.walden.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1997&context=disse-rtations&httpsredir=1&referer=>
- Rockoff, J. E., & Lockwood, B. B. (2010). Stuck in the middle: Impacts of grade configuration in public schools. *Journal of Public Economics*, 94(11), 1051-1061.
http://repository.UPenn.edu/bepp_papers/73
- Schwartz, A. E., Stiefel, L., & Cordes, S. A. (2017). Moving matters: The causal effect of moving schools on student performance. *Education of Finance and Policy*, 419-446. https://doi.org/10.1162/EDFP_a_00198

- Sparks, S. D. (2011). *Study links academic setbacks to middle school transition*. Education Week. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/study-links-academic-setbacks-to-middle-school-transition/2011/11>
- Spies, E. (2018). *Exploring student perspectives on elementary to middle school transition practices* [Doctoral Dissertation, University of North Dakota]. UND scholarly Commons. <https://commons.und.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3431&context=theses>
- Stowers, J. (2014). *Assessing transitions from elementary to middle school for students with mild to moderate disabilities* (410). [Master's Thesis, California State University, Monterey Bay]. Digital Commons @ CSUMB.
- Sullivan, G. M. (2011). A primer on the validity of assessment instruments. *Journal of Graduate Medical Education*, 3(2), 119-120. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3184912/>
- Tamer, M. (2012). Do middle schools make sense? *Harvard Ed. Magazine*. <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/ed/12/09/do-middle-schools-make-sense>
- Taylor Road Middle School. (2016). *TRMS boot camp schedule*. Fulton Schools. <https://school.fultonschools.org/ms/taylorroad/Documents/Boot%20Camp%20Parent%20Presentation%202018.pdf>
- Theriot, M. T., & Dupper, D. R. (2010). Student discipline problems and the transition from elementary to middle school. *Education and Urban Society*, 42(2), 205-222. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124509349583>
- van Rens, M., Haelermans, C., Groot, W., & van den Brink, H. M. (2017). Facilitating a successful transition to secondary school: (How) Does it work? A systemic

literature review. *Adolescent Research Review*, 3, 43-56.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40894-017-0063-2>

West, M. R., & Schwerdt, G. (2012). *The middle school plunge*. Education Next.

<https://www.educationnext.org/the-middle-school-plunge/>

Wolpert-Gawron, H. (2017). *Easing the shift from elementary to middle school*.

eduTopia. <https://www.edutopia.org/article/easing-shift-elementary-middle-school>

Yecke, C.P. (2006). Mayhem in the middle: Why we should shift to K-8. *Educational*

Leadership, 63(7), 20-25. <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational->

[leadership/apr06/vol63/num07/Mayhem-in-the-Middle@-Why-We-Should-Shift-to-K-8.aspx](http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/apr06/vol63/num07/Mayhem-in-the-Middle@-Why-We-Should-Shift-to-K-8.aspx)

Appendix A

Survey Questions

Please rate the following statements from 4 (Strongly Agree), 3 (Agree), 2 (Disagree), to 1 (Strongly Disagree):

- 1) Students transition easily from the intermediate to middle school.
- 2) Students have legitimate concerns that will facilitate transition to middle school.
- 3) Student orientation is a key element to transition.
- 4) Student emotional needs must be addressed during a transition program.
- 5) Students will benefit from weekly mentoring to assist in their transition to middle school.
- 6) Professional development for grade seven teachers is important to aid in transition.
- 7) Having a faculty advisor in addition to a guidance counselor is important for grade seven students.
- 8) Students need help in navigating the path to middle school.
- 9) Addressing students' concerns is a priority for transition.
- 10) Providing a separate setting and easing seventh grade students into the regular population is needed.
- 11) Middle school administrators and counselors should visit the intermediate school during the spring.
- 12) A student survey would help to create a handbook of typical first-year concerns and coping skills.
- 13) Student social needs should be addressed during transition.

- 14) A sound transition program can directly influence formation of identity for an adolescent.
- 15) Please add any information you would like to share regarding transition that was not included in this survey.
- 16) If you are willing to participate in a follow-up interview with the researcher, please provide your email address below. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Appendix B

Interview Questions

- 1) Are you aware of the current transition program or process used for sixth grade students entering seventh grade?
 - If so, please tell me what you know.
 - If not, do you think there should be one?
- 2) Do you think the district does enough for sixth grade students who are entering seventh grade?
 - If so, what are the best strategies?
 - If not, what else could be done?
- 3) List the most effective strategies the district currently practices for transition.
 - If unknown, what strategies do you think would be effective to implement?
- 4) Is there anything the district does that you think is ineffective regarding transition practices?
 - If so, what are they?
- 5) In what ways would the seventh-grade students benefit from an effective transition program?
- 6) Who do you think should be included in the transition process for sixth grade students entering seventh grade?
- 7) Is any professional development provided to teachers regarding transition?
 - If so, what?
 - If not, do you think it is needed?

- 8) Should seventh grade students have mentors? Why or why not?
- 9) Is there anything you would like to add regarding the transition process used in this district that I did not already address?

Appendix C

IMMACULATA UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW BOARD REQUEST FOR PROTOCOL REVIEW--REVIEWER'S COMMENTS FORM (R1297)

Name of Researcher: Carrie Pequignot

Project Title: Perceptions of Transition Strategies from Sixth Grade into Seventh Grade

Reviewer's Comments:

Your proposal is **Approved**. You may begin your research or collect your data.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS APPROVAL IS VALID FOR ONE YEAR (365 days) FROM DATE OF SIGNING.

Reviewer's Recommendations:

<input type="checkbox"/> Exempt <input type="checkbox"/> Expedited <input type="checkbox"/> Full Review	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Approve <input type="checkbox"/> Conditionally Approved <input type="checkbox"/> Do Not Approve
---	--

Marcia Parris

December 20, 2021

Marcia Parris, Ed.D.,
Chair, Research Ethics Review Board

Date