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## Ninth Grade Transitional Program in a Georgia Metro School District: Case Study

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NINTH GRADE TRANSITIONAL PROGRAM IN A GEORGIA METRO SCHOOL

DISTRICT: CASE STUDY

by

SAMUEL DAVID WILDER

(Under the Direction of Linda Arthur)

ABSTRACT

This study investigated and further documented current perceptions of teachers and the leadership team regarding the implementation of a ninth grade transitional program model from a traditional program model during the 2007-2008 school year. With the constraints under the No Child Left Behind Act, teachers, schools, and school systems are faced with the challenge of supporting students in meeting high academic standards. Further, teachers and administrators are expected to meet this challenge with declining resources. Over the past several years, the metro Georgia high school that is the subject of this study has changed from a small, isolated, suburban high school to a large, highly visible, urban high school. During this time, the high school has experienced substantive administrative, demographic, and physical changes. Prior to 1996, the school administrative team and faculty remained relatively stable. However, since 1996, frequent changes in leadership have occurred, resulting in ongoing, overall transformation and adjustments in school policies, environment, and activities. A qualitative case study was conducted at this high school. It is hoped that the results of this case study will contribute to a greater understanding of the transitional process from a traditional program model to a ninth grade transitional program model. Emphasis in this study was placed on learning about the substantial amount of personal and professional

change on the part of the teachers. The researcher conducted a qualitative case study at a local metro Atlanta high school through the distribution of interviews and examinations of artifacts. Findings in the study revealed that teachers had lack of input in decision making, lack of proper training, scheduling conflicts, lack of planning time with teams, and lack of communication with administration team.

INDEX WORDS: Perceptions of teachers, Transitional program model, Traditional program model, Professional change of teachers

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DISTRICT: CASE STUDY

by

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DISTRICT: CASE STUDY

by

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Electronic Version Approved:  
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## DEDICATION

To the One who is known by many different names- I choose to call you JESUS. Thank you for imparting within me wisdom, knowledge, passion, strength, patience, and endurance on this journey we call "LIFE"!

To my wonderful family, thanks for being an awesome support system. To Lachesha Wilder, my wife, "Boo", you were truly my glue and best friend. Words can't adequately or eloquently express my gratitude for your firm and loving care. To my mother, Lillie Wilder, you have really provided me with the motivation to be all I can be and never get to a point that I did not believe in myself, thank you. To my sister, Doris, thanks for always encouraging me to keep going and never give up. To my sister Pat, thanks for doing the little things at my home that I did not have time for while on this journey. To my brother Kenny, thanks for always checking up on me when it seemed like I fell off the face of the earth engrossed in this process.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Entering ninth grade can be one of the most emotionally difficult and academically challenging times in a student's life (Rourke, 2001). Ninth graders are a unique group of individuals who are searching for their own identities. Rourke (2001) identifies ninth grade as the most critical point for intervention to prevent students from losing motivation, failing, and dropping out of school.

Students entering high school must learn how to function academically, socially, and psychologically in an entirely new school setting. Transition programs can raise academic, social, and psychological concerns for students as they leave their smaller more personal environments of middle school (Cotton, 1997). Students may not be academically prepared for the rigor of high school coursework. Ninth graders have to adjust to a new group of peers and being on the bottom of the barrel at school in terms of age and experience (Cotton, 1997). Entering high school has the tendency to make ninth grade students feel more isolated and anonymous in the larger high school setting (Cotton, 1997).

According to a recent study (Testing Blamed, 2004), in many states there is an excess of students in the ninth grade, and fewer students are attaining tenth grade status. Fewer ninth grade students attaining tenth grade status indicates that there is a high retention rate of students in the transition year of ninth grade. According to Mizelle (2001), suggests that a decline in achievement is associated with the transition into high school. Likewise, Isakson and Jarvis (1999) assert that achievement of ninth grade students is affected by their transition into high school.



Although not all of the pressures and changes that students face can be eliminated in the transition into high school, educators are exploring techniques to ease the transition and help ninth grade students achieve. Moving from the traditional high school program is of great interest among educators as many transitional high school program models are currently being implemented across the nation (Hertzog & Morgan, 2001). Transitional programs may be more beneficial than the traditional high school program for incoming ninth grade students and are worthy of further exploration and research.

### Background of Study

Educators often question why school systems are still following the same procedures that they have followed for many years when many of those procedures did not work. The philosophy of teaching by rigid academic programs does not always accomplish the goals of the education system. In an effort to address some of the challenges in academic performance of today's students, President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act on January 8, 2002 (U.S. Department of Education, 2002.). NCLB outlined the importance of school reform and the value of smaller learning communities within large public high schools. The passing of NCLB reinforced that high school programs must be flexible in order to meet the needs of today's students, thus moving away from traditional high school procedures. Therefore, smaller learning community environments, such as ninth-grade transitional programs, are supported by the NCLB Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

The transition from middle to high school embodies the elements of many adolescents' worst fears of not knowing anyone, being ignored by peers, getting lost, and confronting demanding classes and teachers (Rouke, 2001). Anxiety over academics and social issues increases as students enter high school. High school students must contend with more rigorous academics and greater amounts of homework, and balance these demands with extracurricular activities (Aikins, Bierman, & Parker, 2005). Some schools are experimenting with setting ninth graders apart in their own physical location with separate teachers and schedule the academy approach, to give students the literal and psychological space they need to mature (Rouke, 2001). The academy approach creates a more supportive environment for students to develop closer bonds with teachers, who will in turn, have more chances to personalize learning to meet students' individual needs.

Transitional programs often allow for ninth grade students to keep near to each other because they find comfort and support in those like them (Reents, 2002). Chapman and Sawyer (2001) assert that transitional programs help students feel more secure about the changes taking place in their lives. Therefore, effective transitional programs could be an avenue to help alleviate difficult self-esteem issues that ninth grade students often face upon beginning high school.

Transitional programs infer that true freshman students may need appropriate transitional activities to help them bridge the gap between middle school and high school (Hertzog & Morgan, 2001). The societal changes that ninth grade students must face are perhaps the first milestone to conquer as they enter high school. The new school climate is one of the most obvious adjustments that incoming ninth graders must cope with. One

noted strategy to address these changes is the implementation of freshman transitional activities that help to ease the dilemmas and troubles that students encounter as they make the move from middle school into high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Hertzog and Morgan (2002) declare that it is crucial for transitional programs to include activities that will present arriving ninth grade students with the social support that they need in order to get to know others and build positive relationships with their new peers.

Models of transitional programs may vary. There are two common types of transitional models: the School-within-a-School model, and the Ninth Grade School model. Both transitional program models require restructuring of the traditional high school. Both physical environmental changes, as well as changes in instruction will occur upon implementation of either of the transitional programs discussed in this study.

The School-within-a-School model, in this study, may also be referred to as a Ninth Grade House (Hertzog & Morgan, 2004). The model requires that students spend time in a separate location within the school building that house upperclassmen as well. Students in a school-within-a-school model remain in a separate area for core classes, and interact with upperclassmen during elective class time and common areas such as the cafeteria, library, and gymnasium. Hertzog and Morgan (2004) report that this model could be a vital factor in the success of ninth grade students.

### *Change Process*

Change in education is almost always a painful process, for it requires the restructuring of one's personal and professional belief system as well as the school

culture (Clark & Clark, 1999). Leaders who understand the change process are patient, create nurturing and inquiring environments, establish mechanisms for networking and collaboration, and provide the time and resources necessary for the change process to be successful (Clark & Clark, 1999). According to Clark & Clark, they believe that “innovation makes great demands on diligence, persistence, and commitment, and if these are lacking, no amount of talent, ingenuity, or knowledge will avail” (p. 181).

According to Henson (2001) changing organizations is difficult because organizations have a built-in resistance to change. Because of their fundamental nature, schools are especially resistant to change (Henson, 2001). Teachers themselves are responsible for much of the reluctance of schools to change. According to Henson (2001), often teachers in high schools maintain the status quo because of their reluctance to get involved with the changes prescribed in the high school reform. These teachers refuse to invest in a reform that might not last, and Henson (2001) further elaborates that this viewpoint not only reflects that of teachers but community members as well.

Teachers need to be considered primary stakeholders in the change process (Ames & Miller, 1998). One way this can be accomplished is through teacher empowerment, that allows teachers to become involved in the decision making process. As teacher leadership becomes fostered through participation and school transition committees, teachers can grow and develop as individual practitioners. Teachers can extend their activities beyond the classroom by serving as change agents in their own schools and providing guidance and support to other colleagues across the state and the nation that are beginning the transition from the middle school to a high school (Ames & Miller, 1998).

Learning a new way to function is difficult for teachers. There are times when things will go so badly that they may wish for the good old days (Kommer, 1999). When old, comfortable methods are abandoned for new ones, however, everyone needs to remember that for a while those teachers are working in an area unfamiliar to them. Working in such a situation may easily bring a staff to exhaustion within a year if care is not taken (Kommer, 1999). Ames and Miller (1998) state that elements of a successful and rapid move to a transitional program include having energetic, student-oriented teachers involved in the transition to a high school. These teachers need to have a significant role in moving a more traditional staff in that direction. Some traditional teachers do not want to change from the lecture; note-taking type of activity associated with the high school and is oftentimes apprehensive about working on the interdisciplinary teams which are a hallmark of transitional model program.

#### Conceptual Framework

For Glesne (1999) theory building is preceded by thick description, defined as “description that goes beyond the mere or bare reporting of an act (thin description), but describes and probes the intentions, motives, meanings, contexts, situations, and circumstances of action” (Glesne, 1999, p.22). The goal of theorizing, then, becomes that of providing understanding of “direct lived experience instead of abstract generalizations” (Glesne, 1999, p. 22). Qualitative researchers consider that every human situation is novel, emergent, and filled with multiple, often conflicting meanings and interpretations; they attempt to apprehend the core of these meanings and contradictions according to Glesne (1999).

The conceptual framework for this study is based on the high school philosophy and its direct correlation to the constructive philosophy. The focal point of the study is based on ninth grade teachers' perceptions of their roles in the current transitional setting. The researcher will explore the following conceptual framework derived from the Review of Related Literature presented in Chapter 2:

1. The role of "constructivist teachers" (Henson, 2001, p. 30) changes from information provider, sequencer of information, and test creator (aligned with the traditional high school setting) to scaffold and problem or task presenter (transitional high school setting).
2. One perception of education is the process through which individuals (in this study, the individuals are the teachers) learn "to alter their environments and their own behavior to better cope with life situations" (Henson, 2001, p. 30) such as the transition from a middle school to high school. These goals require both academic and social growth. This process involves acquiring new information and changing it into meaningful knowledge perceived by constructivists as the purpose of curriculum content (Henson, 2001). The acquisition of academic and social growth includes learning perceived as a lifelong quest of problem-solving, of exploration, and what Freire (1998) refers to create a greater awareness of one's self and one's reality.
3. School reform has stressed accountability as measured by student performance on standardized exams (Norton, 2000). Education reform is also stimulating the restructuring of the curriculum. Maximum success with this process requires teacher involvement with evaluating the total curriculum (Henson, 2001).

4. School reform has changed the role of educational leaders, making it broader and increasing their management responsibilities (Schlechty, 1998). School reform has pressed for participation in management as a means of empowering teachers because there is evidence that successful involvement of teachers managing the schools is essential to maximum educational improvement (Henson, 2001). School leadership is based on community and on “the leader as a steward of a self-motivating, self managing community” (Evans, 1999, p. 229-30). Teachers are perceived also as leaders and participate in the day to day problem solving and shaping of the school environment (Evans, 1999).

This research study discerned if teacher’s perceptions of their roles in the transitional program process were being implemented within the constructivist and transitional program model philosophies. The conceptual framework for this research study was guided by the methodology for data collection and the research questions. In chapter 5, the research provides a visual representation of the school personnel and teachers immersed or contained within the conceptual framework.

#### Research Problem

After reviewing in-depth sources of information on transitional programs, a design for additional study began to surface. Reform is essential if schools are to continually meet America’s changing needs for a well-educated, thoughtful populace. The transition from a traditional school model to a transitional school model requires personal and professional change on the part of teachers (Lundt & Vanderpan, 1998). The traditional high school and its surrounding system took time to develop. Its redesign to a

transitional model requires substantial commitment and time from administrators, teachers, students, parents, and the community. It is important to understand the transition process for teachers and to examine the impressions of the administrators, ninth grade academy coordinator, and counselor. The study will examine teachers' perceptions of the transition process through the use of qualitative investigative methods.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this proposed qualitative study will be to explore and analyze teachers' perceptions of the transitional program model from the traditional program model. This study will be conducted in a local metro Atlanta school district in Georgia. The sample will include school personnel comprised of the administrator, teachers, counselor, and ninth grade academy coordinator.

The methodology for the propose study will include interviews with open-ended and semi-structured questions.

### Research Questions

The following research question will be addressed in this study:

1. How do teachers describe their role in the transition process from a traditional model program to a ninth grade transitional model program?
2. What are teachers' perceptions of the change?
3. What has been the impact of the leadership of the school administrators on implementing the ninth grade transitional model program?

### Limitations and Delimitations

#### *Limitations*

The following limitations were identified for this study:



1. Participants in the interviews may have been reluctant to disseminate information about the transition process, particularly if initially the transition was problematic.
2. The principal investigator needed to be aware that participants such as administrator, teachers, coordinator, and counselor may be reluctant to discuss a transition process that was problematic.

### *Delimitations*

The following delimitations are identified in this study:

1. This case study will be limited to one metro Georgia high school making the transition from a traditional model program to a transitional model program.
2. Participants in the study would be limited to those teachers, administrator, counselor, and coordinator who are directly involved in this transition.
3. Only one specific local metro school district expressed interest in the topic.

### Definitions

*Credit:* The standard measurement awarded to a student for successful completion of course work and applied toward diploma type for graduation.

*Coding:* Involves critically analyzing the data and identifying themes and topics which represent categories into which numerous pieces of data can be classified.

*Ninth Grade Academy:* A school-within-a-school model transitional plan that allows for ninth grade students to be in the same building with upperclassmen; however, the ninth grade students are isolated from the rest of the student population at various times throughout the school day.

*Ninth Grade School:* A separate school in which only ninth grade students are on campus.

*Restructuring:* The rearrangement of the traditional high school program in order to meet the needs of transitioning ninth grade students.

*School Climate:* The social environment of a location or “learning environment” in which students have different experiences.

*School-within-a-School Model:* A design for a transitional program that implements a smaller school within the traditional high school.

*Sense of Worth:* Student self-worth and self-perception.

*Teacher Empowerment:* allows teachers who are affected by decisions to be involved in the decision making processes.

*Traditional High School:* A high school in which traditional components are in place serving grades nine through twelve. Teaching and practices have been handed down as standard and authoritative.

*Triangulation:* The term for the use of multiple methods, data collection strategies, and/or data sources.

*Transformational Leadership:* An encompassing approach that can be used to describe a wide range of leadership, from very specific attempts to influence whole organizations and even entire cultures.

*Transition:* The process of an eighth grade middle school student moving from the middle school to the ninth grade.

*Transitional Program:* Programs designed to help students have a smoother transition from middle school into high school.

## Significance of the Study

This will be a study of the perception of the move from a traditional model program to transitional model program at a local metro high school. Primary focus will analyze the transformative processes of teachers at a metro Atlanta school district in Georgia. A deeper understanding of the various roles of participants in school change, in particular the resistance to change will be important to consider for several reasons:

First, there exists an urgent need for educators to look at the whole education change process in totally new ways and to be able to understand the subconscious part of behavior, such as teachers' reactions to change.

Second, teachers' reluctance to change perhaps can be attributed, at least in part, to the failure of schools to involve teachers in change (Henson, 2001). Many experienced teachers have come to view programmatic changes as part of the process of administrative mandates (Lundt & Vanderpan, 1998). Principals as effective leaders act as change agents in the process of organizational restructuring, such as the movement from a traditional program model to a transitional program model. Principals need to engage teachers in shared decision making in continued long-term maintenance and improvement of the transitional programs in high school (Gerrick, 1999). Teachers' leadership potential is becoming more visible and much of this is attributed to the emergence of transitional program models (Gerrick, 1999). Sergiovanni (1996) states that teachers need to be the instructional leaders in schools and need to have the responsibility of becoming self managing.

Third, time also serves as a finite resource and often a barrier to the school reform agenda. The all-too-common pattern in educational reform has been, and continues to be

a leap from a planning phase involving policymakers and perhaps a limited number of practitioners to an expectation of full-blown implementation and documentation of positive results within two or three years. If educators do not allow for different rates of change, they are likely to get no change at all (Adelman & Walking-Eagle, 1999).

### Summary

The purpose of this study will be to explore and analyze teachers' perceptions of the transition from a traditional program model to a transitional program model for ninth grade students. The findings will be placed within the context of current literature and research on school reform at this level. Specifically, the researcher will conduct a qualitative case study at a local metro Atlanta school. It is hoped that the results of this case study will contribute to a greater understanding of the transitional process from a traditional model to a transitional model program, emphasizing particularly the vast amount of personal and professional change on the part of the teachers. In analyzing the process of change, the researcher will specifically look at the role of the teachers in implementing change, the teachers' reactions from moving from traditional program model to transitional program model.

The next chapter will present a more exhaustive review of the literature addressing many issues such as transition to high school for students, school reform, school culture, leadership, interdisciplinary team organization, and conceptual framework.

## CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Introduction

Transition is change; according to Smith (1997) the essential thought behind transition is that “one travels between definable and different points” (p.144). Ambrose(1996) defines transition as a time when the well known is let go and the new is to be anticipated. Bridges (1991) regards transition as the course of development people must work through as they move toward accepting change. The term transition in this review relates to the change that eighth grade students experience when leaving the middle school setting and entering the high school setting upon beginning the ninth grade. Students moving from middle school to high school have a number of changes that await them; this is a transitional year that brings feelings of unease and apprehension (Hertzog & Morgan, 2001). Transition should be considered a “process, not an event” (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999c, p.3).The journey from middle school to high school is filled with many changes and expectations, it could possibly be one of the most distressing times that students must face in their school career. As students make the transition into high school they experience a more intense environment than they have been accustomed to in years past; grades, friendships, and life-style changes are imminent (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). Students must go from the familiar environment of middle school to the mysterious high school environment; the adjustment is often difficult. Ninth grade could perhaps be the most crucial year in determining the success of a student (Alspaugh, 1998)

## Transition to High School

The choices, changes, and transition that ninth grade students' face could relate to student achievement, and has given rise to the question of what educators are doing to address the transitional process for students entering high school. Research indicates that smoothing out the process of young peoples' transition from middle school into high school necessitates transitional programs that specifically and purposefully address the transitional period (Herzog & Morgan, 1999a; MacIver, 1990; Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). As a result, many high schools have implemented transitional programs and practices in order to meet the needs of rising ninth grade students, as well as to improve overall ninth grade student achievement.

Research (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000) that has examined students' beliefs and feelings about moving into high school discloses that eighth grade students have mixed feelings about making the move to high school. They are eager, but at the same time troubled. According to middle school experts Lounsbury and Johnston (1985), most high schools offer little or no guidance for ninth grade students, leaving them on their own to adjust both socially and academically. Experts have found that, with all of the changes in the transitions from middle school into high school, many students feel that school is meaningless and never-ending (Lounsbury & Johnston, 1985). The time period when a student moves from middle school to high school represents a specific life transition that is recognized as a demanding and potentially intense life event (Hirsch & DuBois, 1992).

Student surveys have revealed that in the eyes of a middle school student, high school represents an unusual environment, full of many new academic and social challenges (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999).

The manner in which the transitional process is managed could have either a negative or positive lasting impact on students. Kelly (1993) reveals that a key factor in the impact of transition on students is the extent to which the new situation differs from the pre-transition situation. With that idea in mind, there could be a need for educators to develop transitional programs that address identified student needs and concerns, thus easing the move from middle school to high school.

## School Reform

### *Defining School Reform*

School change or education reform refers to systematic approaches at the national, state, or local level to make significant improvements in education. The transition to a high school would align with Henson's (2001) view of good education reform which uses practices or activities that help all students meet the goals of constructivists and multiculturalists (Henson, 2001). School reform inevitably involves changing the curriculum, for by doing so; reformers can shape the nature of schools and of entire communities. Henson (2001) explains the impact that curriculum change can have on society at large: "To change the curriculum is to fiddle with important values in American culture" (p.355).

Cuban (1999) states that there are two types of reforms: incremental and fundamental reforms. Incremental reforms are those that strive to improve the existing

structures of schooling. Fundamental reforms are those that aim to transform and alter permanently those very same institutional structures (Cuban, 1999).

Change viewed as reform is generally the implementation of a particular program or series of events which are interrelated as part of a broader plan (Hochman, 1998). This plan, representative of more abstract concepts, is characterized by a set of attributes common to each of the elements of the reform and by a determining tendency or rationale which justifies the plan (Hochman, 1998). School reform is also seen as planned organization change to improve schooling for student. This change, essentially, must be accomplished by individual people, mostly teachers who are operating within a wider system (Evans, 1999).

Education reform requires effecting substantial changes in the schools; however, evaluation is needed to determine when schools need change and when schools have been transformed. School transformation is partly ethereal, referring to its temporary nature and also to its emotional or attitudinal quality (Henson, 2001). Some questions that can be used to determine whether schools have been transformed include (Henson, 2001):

1. What are the desired values that our faculty agrees should be promoted at our school?
2. What is the future of our school culture, and how can our curriculum be adjusted to prepare students for the future?
3. What types of desirable and undesirable attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors does our evaluation system reward?

The saga of American public school organization since 1900 has been a “kaleidoscope of changing forms and patterns” (Toepfer, Jr. 1998, p. 134). It’s



evolving “milieu has been replete with rapid changes in vogue, fads, and bandwagons, unfortunately not always well thought-out as planned improvement upon existent situations” (Toepfer, Jr., 1998, p. 134).

Since beliefs and assumptions are so ingrained, they become one of the parameters within which schools can in general, “interpret and react to events” (Evans, 1999 p.8). Schools stay basically stuck in place when problems which invite innovative thinking get suppressed within their ingrained paradigm. An analogy that can be made to this statement would be a flea, confined in a glass jar, futilely striking its body off the lid of the jar in an effort to get free. After becoming conditioned by this experience, even after removing the lid, the flea can jump no further than where the bottom of the lid once was.

Yet there are perceived advantages to staying with these culturally determined limits. One benefit is the desire for security. If the system is not conducive to growth, the need for security will override the more pressing need for growth and change. As Evans (1999) states, “even disadvantaged members of a group routinely acquiesce in the system that treat them badly” (p.47).

Middle school teachers, for example, not only must fight culturally determined limits such as “attitudes, actions, and artifacts that have developed over substantial periods of time” to create change; they must also fight the innate tendency toward off school reform in favor of security with their teaching positions (Evans, 1999, p. 49). When they can’t or won’t do so, this creates a multi-layered dilemma that makes profound change virtually impossible.

Gerrick (2000) sees schools as “human organizations,” and the needs of persons within the school must be viewed in the context of the goals of the school. As “human organizations,” schools generally do not conform well to a smoothly functioning bureaucratic organizational structure. Consequences of bureaucratic dysfunction have been described as communication blocks, confusion, frustration, goal displacement, boredom, lack of morale, and conflict between achievement and seniority. These aspects are a reflection of the poor organizational fit of schools in a predominately corporate model. Schools are said to be loosely structured in an organizational sense. Teachers tend to view themselves as professionals, having all the rights and privileges that accompany this designation. Bureaucrats, on the other hand, view teachers as workers who should conform to establish rules and directives (Gerrick, 2000).

Overlooking and underestimating the human and organizational components of change has routinely sabotaged programs to improve our schools (Evans, 1999). No innovation can succeed unless it attends to the realities of people. In schools, the need to acknowledge people’s realities has always been acute, because innovation depends on the attitudes of teachers (Evans, 1999).

School reform initiatives are leaving many teachers emotionally drained, with feelings of confusion, anxiety, and professional inadequacy (Fullan, 1998). What is a teacher to do? Teachers generally feel it is right to be alienated and that it seems “hopeless to engage in the moral martyrdom of undertaking exhausting reforms against the grain” (p.219). Fullan (1998) further believes that the presence of a continuous stream of superficial, unconnected innovations justifies the conclusion that the school system does not know what it is doing either.

The more teachers become emotionally detached from school reform efforts, the poorer the decisions they make (Fullan, 1998). Understanding the two-way link between emotion and hope is a powerful insight. Hope, according to Fullan (1998), is not a naïve, sunny view of life. It is the capacity not to panic in tight situations, to find ways and resources to address difficult problems. Fullan's (1998) emphasis is that change is profoundly problematic and that we are down to our last virtue, which is hope. We stand less a chance "by pursuing the techniques of innovation than we do by working on a deeper understanding of the complex interrelationships of emotion, hope, empathy, and moral purpose" (p. 220). Fullan (1998) summarizes this viewpoint well as he states that "both are from the perspective of the individual, one as initiator of change, the other as recipient" (p.221).

### Societal Changes for Ninth Grade Students

#### *School Climate*

The high school atmosphere is very different than that which is found in middle schools. Students experience significant changes during the move to high school. Some of these changes may seem trivial to adults but could be regarded as significant to the average fourteen-year-old student. The concerns often begin as early as the eighth grade school year (Hertzog & Morgan, 1998). As students make the transition into high school many students experience a bigger, unfriendly, more spirited school climate than they experienced in middle school (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). In May 1998, all eighth, ninth, and tenth grade students in Philomath, Oregon were surveyed about their perceptions of high school (Kneisler, 2001). The survey revealed that students viewed school climate as being "not about the teachers; it is about how students treat one another" (Kneisler, 2001,

p.2), thus reflecting the need for positive relationships among students in high school in order to create a positive school climate.

The student population in high school is considerably larger than most middle schools, in addition there is much more freedom allowed in movement from place to place than students are accustomed to in the middle school setting. Therefore, the mere size of the school building could be intimidating to some incoming ninth grade students. Hertzog and Morgan (2001) surveyed all eighth and ninth grade students in four northwest Georgia school systems. They found that many eighth grade students were concerned about getting lost in the high school facility due to the traditional high school building being much larger in size than the traditional middle school facility (Hertzog & Morgan, 2001). Additionally, students were concerned with the location of lockers, restrooms, and classes (Hertzog & Morgan, 2001). Concerns about new classes, more classes, leaving middle school, and newfound freedom are great concerns of eighth grade students (Hertzog & Morgan, 2001).

Another societal change is that of the increased level of activities and offerings within the high school. There are several different clubs, activities, and sports opportunities offered in high schools that are not offered in the traditional middle school. There are many new faces and personalities in the new high school environment since students often feed into the high school from many different middle schools. Students experience an enhanced variety of teachers and peers, and they have more selections to make in both curricular and extracurricular activities (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). Mizelle and Irvin (2000) indicate that ninth grade students thought that high school seemed a lot more complicated and difficult than middle school. According to a survey conducted with ninth

grade students across the nation, tedious lessons are a factor that diminishes students' delicate attachment to school (Wheelock, 1993). For most students the workload becomes more intense in high school as research shows that school climate differences included differences in teacher lectures, note taking, and completion of assignments (Lounsbury & Johnston, 1985). Moreover, Mizelle (1999) advised that ninth grade students had great concerns about how to manage their time and how to study.

### *Sense of Worth*

The transition into the high school environment has a considerable effect on student self-worth and self-perception in relation to the social pressures that are brought on by the move to high school (Alspaugh, 1998). According to Reents (2002), beginning the ninth grade may be the most difficult year in a student's life as each student typically experiences changes both emotionally and academically upon entering high school. These negative social and emotional feelings, along with low academic achievement, and feeling altogether lost in high school settings, contribute to the low performance of students in the ninth grade (Reents, 2002).

Students in high school often seek to identify with a group of students as they establish social ties and relationships within the high school itself. Ninth grade students keep near to each other as they find solace and support in those like them (Reents, 2002). Belonging to a group is important for ninth grade students. Isakson and Jarvis (1999) indicate that the sense of belonging in their school affects a student's motivation to achieve. A sense of belonging may become difficult with so many new individuals in the school setting. Wheelock's 1993 nationwide study of high school reform concluded that overcrowded classrooms

contribute to feelings of being unconnected to school. Hertzog and Morgan (1998) conducted a survey with approximately 800 students in the southern part of Georgia and found that ninth grade students develop a more negative outlook of them and feel a greater need for peer friendships. Peers frequently offer support for teenagers as they encounter new challenges, and serve as examples in how to accomplish new tasks (Felner, Ginter, & Primavera, 1982). Felner et al. (1982) established that the amount of social support from friends and instructors could be linked to school adjustment after the transition to high school. At a time when friendships and social relations are exceptionally significant for young adolescents, the transition into high school frequently disrupts friendship networks and in so doing, interferes with students' adjustment to high school (Barone, Aguirre-Deandreis, & Trickett, 1991). Therefore, the enhanced importance on social relations in high school could possibly create a situation where fitting in and belonging becomes an added cause of stress and pressure for ninth grade students (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999).

#### Transitional High School Program Models

The traditional high school model allows students to interact with each other with no obvious separation between grades, other than course offerings that are limited to certain grade levels. Restructuring of the traditional high school environment is necessary when implementing a transitional program. There are two basic transitional high schools program models that will be discussed in this review: 1) the school-within-a-school model and 2) a separate school model for ninth grade students.

### *School-within-a-School*

One design for a transitional program is to implement a smaller school within the traditional high school (McAndrews & Anderson, 2002). This model may also be referred to as the “Ninth Grade House” (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999b, p.28). According to a study of transitional programs, involving more than 850 students from 17 middle schools and 14 high schools in south Georgia, researchers Hertzog and Morgan (1999c) assert that ninth grade transitional programs are intended to support the incoming ninth grade students as they adjust to high school and become at ease in their new environment.

A Ninth Grade House plan allows for ninth grade students to be in the same building with upperclassmen; however, the ninth grade students are isolated from the rest of the student population at various times throughout the school day (Raywid, 1996). The students take core classes within the designated location; yet, the students are scheduled to venture out to their elective classes throughout the day, this causes them to interact with upperclassmen during their elective class time. In addition to elective class time, students share common grounds with upperclassmen such as the school library and cafeteria (Reents, 2002). Due to the design of this model, and the time that students spend in the separate location of the school building, teachers in the Ninth Grade House develop a better personal relationship with the students because they see them frequently during the day as they teach them and watch they change classes (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999c). Hertzog & Morgan (1999b) reported that schools that implement a model such as the Ninth Grade House recognized it as a significant and vital factor in the success of the transitional program. However, according to Dewees (1999), the school-within-a-school model has varied in degrees of success in different school settings.

### *Ninth Grade School*

The ninth grade school transitional model is a separate school in which only ninth grade students are on campus (Reents, 2002). In other words, the students are totally segregated into their own transitional school between middle school and high school. Ninth grade schools may also be referred to as ninth grade centers (Walsh, 2002). The ninth graders in this transitional model remain separated, isolated from other older high school students throughout the entire school day.

The separate school is set up to be smaller in size than a traditional high school (Reents, 2002). School size is a key factor in success, according to recent research conducted by Alspaugh (1998), and is directly associated with academic achievement. Lee and Loeb (2000) analyzed data from approximately 5,000 teachers and 23,000 students in Chicago's schools to identify relationships in school size, and student achievement. They found that size (fewer than 400 students) was beneficial to student teaching (Lee & Loeb, 2000). However, according to the U.S. Department of Education report (2001), the findings on academic achievement are equally divided among students who do well in small schools as compared to those in larger schools?

According to Reents (2002), these schools keep ninth grade students from becoming lost in the hallways and classrooms of the traditionally large high schools. The ninth grade school does not interact with the high school in any way. Cotton's 1996 fusion of 103 studies and reviews (as cited in McAndrews & Anderson, 2002) describes a number of conditions that apply to the success of a small school, such as a ninth grade school, and noted the following:



1. People in small schools come to know each other better than those in a large school environment.
2. The rate of parent involvement is higher.
3. Staff and students are found to have a better sense of personal worth.
4. Small schools students are more likely to be responsible for their own learning.
5. Learning activities are more likely to be individualized.
6. Classes are typically smaller.
7. Scheduling is flexible.
8. Attendance is higher and dropout rates are lower. (p. 2)

The ninth grade school model allows for the transition to high school to occur at grade 10. Alspaugh (1999) conducted an ex post facto study to explore the interactive relationship among grade level of transition to high school, 45 schools were included in this study. The findings imply that as the grade level of transition to high school is increased, high school dropout rate also increases. Alspaugh (1999) found that dropout rates are particularly large for high schools that serve grades 10 through 12, with the transition to high school occurring at grade 10. According to Alspaugh (1999) the mean percent dropout rate for transition grade level 10 was 6.68 as compared to the mean percent dropout rate for transition grade level nine as being 6.06. Therefore, according to Alspaugh, it seems that a ninth grade school would not only delay the transition to high school by one year, but also increase the drop out rate.

Hertzog and Morgan (1999) conducted a study involving students, faculty, and administrators from more than 150 middle and high schools in Florida and Georgia in

1997. Hertzog and Morgan (1999) found that fewer than 30% of these schools used any type of transition program for the students going from grade eight to grade nine, other than visits to the middle school by the ninth grade counselors to assist with registration for high school. Moreover, 87% of the reporting schools indicated that they had no direct contact with the parents of the soon-to-be ninth grade students (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999). Transitional programs have been implemented in the past several years in order to try to help ninth grade students be more successful. Research indicates that it is imperative for transitional programs to incorporate activities that will present incoming students with social support activities that give students the chance to get to know others and build positive relationships with other students (Hertzog & Morgan, 2004; Pantleo, 1999). One of the noted strategies of a transitional program is the existence of freshman transitional activities that help to ease the troubles and problems that students come across as they make the move from middle to high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

#### *Findings on Effective Transitional Programs*

Hertzog and Morgan (1999c) developed and distributed a survey to 97 middle schools and their receiving high schools. The purpose of the survey was to gather data about the following concerns: a) the transition practices that the schools utilized, b) the percentage of students that dropped out of high school, and c) the percentage of ninth grade students who were retained in grade nine due to course failures. The data were examined to determine the effectiveness of the transition programs, and to provide important components on program effectiveness. The results showed that the schools that implemented four or more transition practices (experimental group) had significantly ( $p=.000$ ) lowers retention rates and drop out rates than did the schools with three or fewer

transitional practices (control group). Ninth grade course failures reflected a retention rate of 11% for the experimental group, whereas the control group reflected a 14% retention rate. Moreover, the dropout rate for the experimental group went from five percent to three percent, whereas the control group drops out rate went from eight percent to five percent (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999, 2003). Therefore, Hertzog and Morgan (1999) determined that student success could be affected by the number of transitional activities to ease the transition to high school. An examination of transition practices found three common components among the schools that were surveyed: a) eighth grade field trip to the high school, b) ninth grade counselors working with eighth grade students to determine course selection and c) meetings with parents of eighth grade students and high school staff (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999c).

Hertzog and Morgan continued their study of transitional programs; according to a national study of 450 high schools and their sending middle school, these researchers again established that the number of transitional practices had an effect on the success of the transitional program (Hertzog & Morgan, 2003, 2004). Research from this study reflected that schools with one to eight total transition practices in place had a 20% dropout rate as compared to a 10% drop out rate among schools that implemented a total of nine to fourteen transition practices (Hertzog & Morgan, 2003, 2004). Therefore, Hertzog and Morgan (2003, 2004) concluded that schools that implemented nine to fourteen transitional practices were 10% more successful, measured at the .015 level of significance, than those schools with eight or less transitional practices.

Hertzog and Morgan (2004) developed transitional activities based on four areas of concern: a) high school curriculum, b) familiarity with high school facilities, c) safety

and discipline in high school and d) high school teachers. According to Hertzog and Morgan (2004) transitional activities should take place throughout the eighth and ninth grade school years, and should incorporate some of the following activities:

1. Invite a panel of high school staff members to the middle school to discuss high school expectations.
2. Small group discussion opportunities with eight grade students regarding registration for high school classes.
3. Assemble ninth grade sample tests, class assignments, homework, and bell schedule to share with eighth grade students.
4. Invite eighth grade students to shadow ninth grade high school students.
5. Arrange a building tour preceded by the study of the high school map.
6. Develop a summer informational session at the high school for rising ninth grade students.
7. Small and large group meetings with counselor throughout ninth grade year.
8. Monthly meetings with the assistant principal throughout ninth grade year.
9. Adviser/Advisee programs at the high school level.
10. Freshman status reports to parents throughout the ninth grade year.
11. Open house for parents of ninth grade students upon beginning of school year.
12. Parent/Student/Counselor conferences throughout the school year.
13. Ninth grade mentoring program for freshman. (p. 2-3)

Pantleo (1999) surveyed 220 eighth grade Pueblo (Colorado) students who were preparing for the transition to a high school of more than 1,200 students. He determined from the results of the survey that eighth grade students would like to have more opportunities to visit their feeder high school. Survey results indicated that 65% of the students' responses indicated that the eighth grade students felt that more visits to the high school would contribute to their success the following school year. Moreover, Pantleo (1999) found that ninth grade students who were strongly involved in a peer mentor program had a reduced number of failures from first semester to second semester the percentage of students in grade nine who earned failing grades decreased from 48% to 44.5%. Pantleo (1999) surmised "The more interventions in which the students participates, the greater the likelihood of their success" (p.1).

Smith (1997) collected data from approximately 8,000 middle grade students nationwide and later collected data after their completion of high school. In this study Smith (1997) investigated the long-term effects that middle school transition programs have on student's high school performance as measured by their grades throughout high school. The study was prepared as an analysis of covariance. Smith (1997) established that the students who had access to a transitional program in middle school showed an average GPA of 2.43 in high school; whereas those students who did not have a transitional program in place in their middle school showed an average GPA of 2.01.

#### *Findings on Ineffective Transitional Programs*

Transitional programs do not always accomplish all of the program goals and aspirations. Gillock and Reyes (1996) conducted a study of a high school transition pilot project that was implemented in two different middle schools. This program was set up in

order to prepare eighth grade students for their transition to high school the following year. The 145 predominantly low-income participants in the study were from an urban public school in the Chicago area. The feeder high school had a total enrollment of approximately 2,900 and an average class size of 22 students. For the 60 experimental group of students, who were still enrolled in the feeder high school at the end of the study, archival school records were used as measures of academic adjustment. Researchers assessed the relationships between students' academic performance at the pre-transition and post-transition levels. Students' GPAs declined significantly (.01) between pretransition ( $M=2.59$ ) and post-transition ( $M= 1.58$ ) to high school. Further findings from this study indicate that the elementary school setting could have played a role in the students' adjustment during the transition to high school (Gillock & Reyes, 1996). When the researchers analyzed the elementary school differences of the 60 experimental groups members, they found that the group of students from North Elementary had a slightly higher GPA ( $M=1.75$  vs.  $M=1.47$ ) than did their counterparts from West Elementary. The students at North Elementary, where a higher GPA was noted, were taught by several content specialized teachers that mimicked that of a high school environment. In addition to the environment, such specialization could have resulted in higher school expectations with consequential higher performance norms. Therefore, the students from North Elementary may have been better prepared for the transition into high school due to the more rigorous academic focus and more high school-like practices (Gillock & Reyes, 1996).

Reyes and Jason (1991) conducted a study of a transitional program implemented in a high school located in Iowa. There were 154 ninth grade students involved in the study, half of which comprised the experimental group, and the other half, the control group. All students were entering a large urban high school that served approximately 2,800 students. A consent letter was sent to the parents of both the experimental and control group of students at the beginning of the school year. Information was provided to the parents as to how the groups would differ in instruction, intervention, and feedback throughout the school year; parents were given the opportunity to object to the measures being administered to their children. Students were assessed after the second semester of their ninth grade school year according to data that was gathered from students' academic records and relevant departmental sources, such as the counseling office, from their eighth-grade and ninth-grade student records. The mean for the number of courses failed was 2.1 for the experimental group of students, and 1.8 for the control group of students? The mean GPA for the experimental group was 2.3 and 2.5 for the control group. There were no significant differences found between the two groups in the academic areas of? GPAs, or the number of courses failed tested at the .01 level of significance (Reyes & Jason, 1991). However, a significant (.05) difference was found between the groups' Test of Reading Achievement and Proficiency percentile scores in grade nine; the experimental group of students achieved higher percentile scores on this test with a mean score of 38.3 as compared to the control group mean score of 35.1 (Reyes & Jason, 1991).

## The Downside of Transitional Programs within High Schools

As is true to nearly all education improvements, there can be downsides of transitional programs within high schools. Recruitment of teachers may have an impact on the success of a transitional program. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2001), staff pressures may occur when the transitional program is being implemented within the large high school. Teachers are not the only ones affected by the change, as noted by Raywid (1999). At times tensions appear with school administrators due to the restructuring practices and arrangement at the school. Dewees (1999) discussed disadvantages:

Research suggests that these models can sometimes create divisiveness in schools because it tends to realign organizational structures and fracture preexisting relationships". Conflicts can arise concerning allegiances to the larger school versus the smaller school unit, thus creating rivalries (Muncey & McQuillan, 1991; Raywid, 1996b). Other critics maintain that sub school groupings can lead to inequitable tracking if only one population is targeted for a sub school (Raywid, 1996a; McMullan, Sipe, & Wolfe, 1994). Another critique argues that a school-within-a-school model may negatively affect school coherence and the role of the principal, two areas of concern in the literature on effective schools. (p.3)

A downside for students in the transitional program may be that students could have fewer class choices with less selection of teachers than traditionally offered within large high schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Transitional programs may limit the offerings that the large high school was once able to give their students.

According to a survey conducted by Hertzog and Morgan (1999), students in smaller learning environments were worried about isolation and not getting to meet the upperclassmen. Therefore the small, protective environment of transitional programs could have an adverse effect on student attitude. According to Monforton and Morton (1995), an experimental transitional program implemented in Canada produced no



attitudinal benefits among students; in fact, student attitude seemed to deteriorate over the course of the school year.

Lastly, a noted downside to transitional models is that these programs are not the solution all for every student. Some students enter high school with both academic and social barriers, therefore, despite huge efforts, there may sometimes be a void in a student's life that educators are unable to fill (Holland & Mazzoli, 2001). Moreover, teachers, no matter the amount of effort, cannot prevent those students who are deeply troubled from getting into problematic situations. Some students cannot be saved despite boundless efforts among educators. As Holland and Mazzoli noted in a 2001 review of a school-within-a-school model, "for all their triumphs, the faculty members were not universally successful" (p.8).

#### Government Support for Transitional High School Programs

In order to assist in personalizing the high school experience for students, the U.S. Congress allocated funding for smaller learning communities within large districts and high schools. The Congressional plan supports tactics that result in smaller, safer educational situations at the high school level (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). By being supportive of transitional practices within large schools, the plan sets the stage for students to attain higher educational standards, since it helps students remain in school and involve themselves more fully in the school community. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2001):

To help large high schools and school districts make schools smaller, Congress earmarked \$45 million in the FY 2000 Appropriations Act for the Department of Education to fund Section 10104 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This section of the act, entitled the smaller learning community (SLC) program, was designed to help local education agencies (LEAs) plan, develop, implement, or expand smaller, more personalized learning communities in large high schools. Of the \$45 million

appropriated for the SLC program, the Department awarded \$42.3 million in support of 149 grants to LEAs. The secretary awarded 84 one year planning grants and 65 three-year implementation grants. A total of 349 schools, serving more than 450,000 students, benefited during the first year of the program. (p. 3)

Although the amount of grant money seems generous, there are stipulations that must be followed for spending the government funds. The finances may be used only for activities related to the completion of a plan to set up a smaller learning community (SLC), and may not be used for new construction of schools or the purchase of a great quantity of equipment (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). The implementation of transitional programs for ninth grade students, such as a SLC program, should expand and develop in many large high schools with continued monetary support from the government.

## Leadership

### *Defining Leadership*

Northouse (2001) defines leadership as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. Process means it is a transactional event that occurs between the leader and his/her followers. Subsequently, process also means that a leader affects and is affected by followers. This definition emphasizes that leadership is not a linear, one-way event but rather interactive event. When leadership is defined in this manner, it becomes available to everyone (Northouse, 2001) and encourages a sense of collaboration among individuals.

Principals should have a clear vision of where they want the school to go and the ability to communicate that vision to others. It is not enough, however, that a leader has a vision, principals must make that vision meaningful to others in a school setting (Kanthak, 1998).

Principals also provide instructional leadership. They place priority on issues relating to curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and create a climate of high academic expectations (Kanthak, 1998). Principals frequently visit classrooms and continually monitor student progress. Principals are master teachers and see themselves as partners with teachers in a collaborative setting in the challenge to improve student achievement for all students (Kanthak, 1998).

Furthermore, the best principals in schools are risk takers and thrive in the challenge of leadership. These principals are willing to take risks and support teachers and others who are risk takers. Frequently, these school principals are unpopular with the central office because their work is guided by what's good for student achievement rather than what's good for the school district bureaucracy (Kanthak, 1998). Principals' in schools should also managers and leaders. The manager ensures the school runs smoothly so teachers can teach and students can learn. The leader makes sure the school is moving toward a shared vision that focuses on high achievement (Kanthak, 1998).

Due to the emergence of transition to middle to high, teachers' leadership potential is more visible (Gerrick, 2000). Sergiovanni (1998) states that for years, we have insisted that principals be the instructional leaders in schools and be the managers, cheerleaders, and motivators of teachers. We provided principals with the training to get them to do their jobs better. We could just as well assume that teachers themselves be the instructional leaders in schools, and the teachers have a responsibility to become self managing (Sergiovanni, 1998).

Principals themselves must be empowered in order to empower teachers (Schlechty, 1998) to tap teachers' leadership potential. This has appeal to both principals

and teachers. It gives principals the opportunity to be more involved in a participatory leadership because this pattern of leadership promises to yield better decisions and results. It gives teachers, who are affected by decisions a chance to be involved in decision making processes (Schlechty, 1998).

Teachers' reluctance to change perhaps can be attributed, at least in part, to the failure of schools to involve teachers in change (Henson, 2001). Principals who are true leaders understand the big picture. In a professional organization, leadership is a function and responsibility of all members of the profession. Effective school leadership is dynamic, collegial, and rooted firmly in service to children and the profession (Henson, 2001). Principals as effective leaders acts as change agents in the process of organizational restructuring (Henson, 2001), such as the transformation from a middle school to a high school. Principals need to engage teachers in shared decision making in the continued, long-term maintenance and improvement of the school (Gerrick, 2000).

#### Summary

This research study supported the trend toward becoming more aware of teachers' perceptions of the traditional program model to the transitional program model. It should help those educators planning transitions to develop more effective transitional programs. In this way, the study will contribute to considerations of teachers' viewpoints on school reform efforts and the significant contributors teachers can be through participation in the decision making processes involved in making the transition from traditional to transitional program model for ninth grade.

The next chapter will describe the procedures used for gathering data, data analysis, and measures taken to ensure the credibility of results.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

This descriptive study was designed to explore and analyze teacher's perceptions of the transition from a traditional program model to a transitional program model. Specifically, the researcher conducted a qualitative case study at a local metro Atlanta high school through the distribution of interviews and examinations of artifacts.

This chapter will provide background and rationale for the selection of a qualitative design for this study. Each phase of the data collection will be discussed. The procedure used for data analysis and measures taken to ensure credibility of results will be described in this chapter.

### Research Design

The proposed research design was chosen to examine teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of a transitional program for the 2007-2008 academic school year. During the 2007-2008 school year a transitional program was implemented at a local metro Atlanta high school in Georgia. This research compared the traditional high school program model to a transitional high school program model and the perception of those teachers who have experienced each model.

Qualitative researchers are interested in meaning-how people make sense of their lives and their structures of the world (Creswell, 2003). Qualitative research is largely an investigative process where the researcher gradually makes sense of social phenomenon by comparing, contrasting, replicating, cataloguing, and classifying the object of study (Creswell, 2003). According to Creswell, 2003, qualitative research entails immersion in the everyday life of the setting selected for the study; the researcher enters the

participants' world and through ongoing interaction seeks the participants' perspective and meanings.

An analogy for qualitative research is presented by Glesne (1999): "Learning to do qualitative research is like learning to paint. Study the masters, learn the techniques and methods, practice them faithfully and then adapt them to your own persuasions when you know enough to describe the work of those who have influenced you and the ways in which you are contributing new perspectives" (p.3).

The decision to use a qualitative approach for this study was based on the intentions of the researcher to express the study in a narrative fashion. Secondly, since the researcher chose to use interviews as a method for collecting data, this will allow the interviews to accurately reflect the feelings and opinions of those participants interviewed and consequently permit appropriate interpretation of narrative data. A third reason for choosing qualitative methods was that the emphasis on affective factors from the perspective of the study participants made this naturalistic approach more feasible. The researcher wanted to understand the viewpoints of school personnel as well as teachers to humanize the case study, getting a sense of what was occurring in the teachers' natural setting. The idea was to present a holistic picture (through analysis of interview transcripts and artifacts) of the transformative process that teachers experience during the transition from a traditional program model to a ninth grade transitional program model.

### *Selection of Subjects*

Five teachers participated as transitional team members in the Ninth Grade Academy that was implemented at the designated high school during the 2007-2008 school year. These five teachers were selected to be interviewed along with the ninth grade school counselor, ninth grade coordinator (one of the teachers), and an administrator. The five teachers were located in the “Ninth Grade Academy” section of the school building. Five of the nine teachers selected had taught in a traditional program model prior to changing to the ninth grade transitional program model during the 2007-2008 school year.

The site selected for this study was a local metro Atlanta high school located in the southern part of the state of Georgia. During the length of this study, the school community in which the study was conducted demonstrated the following characteristics:

1. The surrounding community of the high school being studied was at poverty level, as demonstrated by approximately 76% of the student population receiving free or reduced price of school meals.
2. The overall ethnicity breakdown of the community of the selected high school represented primarily African Americans with a 99.45% population representation, and .55% population representation from other ethnic backgrounds. The student body racial composition strongly parallels to that of the bounding area of the school.
3. The total student population within the high school involved in the study, during the time frame of the study, were approximately 1400 students in the 2007-2008 school year.
4. The gender breakdown is almost a 60% - 40% split with females comprising

over half of the student population. Males make up just over 40% of the population.

5. The designated high school served a variety of students with special needs. Students are served in a general education setting as well as the special education resource room. Areas of disability included: a) mental retardation, b) emotional disturbance, c) specific learning disabilities, d) speech/language impaired, and d) gifted. The largest area of disability was specific learning disabilities. Special education students comprise 7.3% of the total student population.

6. The community had a variety of service industries, manufacturing, and retail business. The health care industry was exemplified as the Bartow Department of Health facilities as well as three major hospitals located nearby.

7. The building was constructed in 1942 and was predominantly a white student population.

8. In 2007 the school was undergoing over a nine million dollar renovation project. This will also include a new Ninth Grade House for ninth graders.

## Procedures

### *Data Collection*

Interviews are used extensively in educational research to collect information that is not directly observable. These data collection methods typically inquire about the feelings, motivations, attitudes, and experiences of individuals. A wide range of educational problems can be investigated with interviews (Gall, 1998).



Participants for voluntary audio taped interviews for the study were selected from three groups. The first group included school personnel (assistant principal, ninth grade counselor, and ninth grade coordinator) who were directly involved in the transition from traditional program model to transitional program model. The second group consisted of the four ninth grade teachers who had taught in a traditional model setting and now is participating in the transitional model setting.

### *Data Procedures*

A letter (Appendix A) was sent to the Superintendent of the local school system of the high school to obtain approval to conduct the study. The letter was forwarded by the Superintendent to the Executive Director of Accountability and School Improvement for approval. A copy of the approval letter was then forwarded to the principal of the designated school where the research took place (Appendix F).

To begin the actual data collection phase, the researcher made arrangements to discuss the purpose of the dissertation study with the teachers during a regularly scheduled faculty meeting. The researcher used this opportunity to distribute cover letters which stated the purpose of the research and required signed consent from the teachers to assure their participation in the research. All conventions of confidentiality were followed in working with the principal and the teachers and were outlined in the IRB Protocol of both the university and the school district.

Artifacts retrieved from the principal's office with written permission from the superintendent consisting of any written communications during the transition process to teachers and administrators originating from the superintendent's office explaining, for example, when the transition began and examples of artifacts included faculty meetings,

in-service training, communication with outside resources, human and financial resources available to support the transition process, adult leaders that helped with the transition process, input/feedback from teachers, students parents, etc.

A case study will be conducted in this research. The case study is an intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit such as an individual, group, institution, or community (Merriam, 2002). By concentrating upon a single phenomenon or entity (the case), this approach seeks to describe the phenomenon in depth (Merriam, 2002).

The practice of relying on multiple methods of data collection is commonly called triangulation, a term taken from surveying and navigation (Glesne, 1999). Although multiple data collection respondents are the most common form of triangulation in qualitative research, triangulation in order to increase confidence in research findings may also involve the incorporation of multiple data sources (e.g., not just teachers, school personnel as well as artifacts) and multiple theoretical perspectives (Glesne, 1999).

“Interviewing is a human interaction with all of its attendant uncertainties” (Glesne, 1999, p.67). A typical qualitative interview is a one-on-one session in which the researcher asks a series of open-ended, probing questions. In addition to serving triangulation objectives, interviews have a unique purpose, namely, to acquire data not obtainable in any other way (Gay, 1998).

Interviews can figure in a research project in different ways. In the positivist tradition, they can be the basis for later data collection, as in the form of a questionnaire. The researcher can also interview in search of opinions, perceptions, and attitudes toward some topic (Glesne, 1999).

The purpose of this study was to explore and analyze teachers' perceptions of the transition from a traditional program model to ninth grade transitional program model with an emphasis on the new 9<sup>th</sup> grade academy approach. As a researcher, Glesne (1999) states that interview questions should stimulate "verbal flights" for the important respondents who know what the researcher do not. "From these flights comes the information that the researcher transmute into data, the stuff of dissertations, articles, and books" (Glesne, 1999, p.67). Interviews seemed the most appropriate choice to obtain data that will be instrumental for understanding teachers' perceptions of the transition from traditional to ninth grade transitional modeled programs.

Glesne has stated that the questions for interviews may be fully established before interviewing begins and remain unchanged throughout the interview. Questions may also emerge in the course of interviewing and may be added to or replace the pre-established one; this process of question formation is the more likely and the more ideal one in qualitative inquiry (Glesne, 1999).

After obtaining the signed consent forms from the voluntary interview participants, the researcher contacted them by phone to schedule personal interviews. Gall (1996) states that the interviewer is largely in control of the response situation, scheduling with the participant in a mutually agreeable time and place. All from the first group of participants, comprised of the school personnel, had chosen to be interviewed in their designated offices. The second group consisting of teachers selected their classrooms as the site where the interview would take place.

The researcher made the decision to audio tape the interviews and take notes on an interview guide for each participant. The researcher carefully explained the purpose of

the recording to gain the confidence of the participants and to minimize any undesirable effects of having the interview recorded. The researcher also re-stated that the participation was voluntary and responses were confidential. None of the participants disapproved the use of the electronic recording device and they also did not object to the researcher note taking during the interview.

Interviewing is a complex act according to Glesne (1999), and a number of things occur simultaneously during the interview. First and foremost, a good interviewer must be a good listener (Glesne, 1999). In addition, he or she should be straightforward, non-threatening, and non-judgmental (Gay, 1998). Because there are so many acts to orchestrate, effective interviewing should be viewed the way good teaching is: “you should look for improvement over time, for continuing growth, rather than for mastery or perfection” (Glesne, 1999, p. 81). The opportunity to learn about “what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see is the special strength of interviewing in qualitative inquiry. “To this opportunity, add the serendipitous learning that emerge from the unexpected turns in discourse that your questions evoke” (Glesne, 1999, p.69). Essentially in the process of listening to one’s respondents, one learns what questions to ask as an interviewer.

A good interviewer is anticipatory, in terms of whom one should see next, in light of what the researcher has been learning and not learning (Glesne, 1999). Rapport is tantamount to trust, and trust is the foundation for facilitating full and detailed answers to your questions (Glesne, 1999). Being naïve characterizes the qualitative researcher’s special learner role. It entails a frame of mind by which the researcher set aside ones’ assumptions of what the respondents mean when they tell you something, and instead

seek explanations about what they mean. Often the hazard is that your research is on a topic about which you may know a great deal through study and personal experience (Glesne, 1999). Being nondirective and therapeutic is also essential as an interviewer. As a researcher, one is an interested, emotional person who, most likely, has an opinion on a topic into which the researcher is inquiring. But as a researcher, one wants to learn the respondents' beliefs, experiences, and views rather than to persuade them of your perspective. This need to learn the other guides the researcher's behavior into a non directive and somewhat therapeutic role (Glesne, 1999).

For qualitative inquiry, the interview is rightly conceived as an occasion for in-depth probes, for getting to the bottom of things. Qualitative researchers operate from the assumption that they cannot exhaust what there is to know about their topic (Glesne, 1999). Of courses, a good interviewer never does anything to make respondents look or feel ignorant and need to be clam and reassuring (Glesne, 1999).

#### *Data Processing and Analysis of Qualitative Data*

Data analysis for qualitative researchers involves organizing what you have seen, heard, and read so that a researcher can make sense of what was learned. Qualitative researchers must describe the data, create explanations, and link the story to other stories (Glesne, 1999). In order to do this, a researcher must categorize, synthesize, search for patterns, and interpret the data collected (Glesne, 1999).

Qualitative analysis involves making some sense out of an enormous amount of narrative data (Gay, 1998). The qualitative researcher seeks to identify categories, patterns, and themes which will help facilitate a coherent synthesis of the data. This

synthesis, including quotations and relevant illustrative examples, eventually represents the researcher's overall understanding of what the data mean (Gay, 1999).

Glesne (1999) recommends that to organize the data, the researcher must consistently reflect on the data and try to discover what the data are saying. She further recommends that a qualitative researcher should organize data into analytic files. A qualitative researcher begins with files organized by generic categories such as interview questions, people, and places. These files provide a way to keep track of useful information and thoughts. As the data and experience grow, the researcher will create relevant specific files on the social processes under investigation (Glesne, 1999). Analytic files help the researcher store and organize ones' own thoughts and those of others, such as the research participants. The process of data analysis includes organizing and storing data in light of increasingly sophisticated judgments of the meaning finding interpretations that a researcher is learning to make about the shape of the study (Glesne, 1999).

For this project, all transcribed interviews will be reread and categorized into more meaningful units. These units usually consist of key words or phrases that indicated the topic or significance of the material.

Glesne (1999) recommends that qualitative researchers should learn to be content with their early, simple coding schemes, knowing that with use, they will become appropriately complex. In the early days of data collection, coding can help the researcher to develop a more specific focus or more relevant questions. Glesne (1999) even goes so far as to define this process of coding as developing a rudimentary coding system.

Glesne (1999) states that the coding of data is a critical aspect of most qualitative research. Coding involves critically analyzing the data and identifying themes and topics which represent categories into which numerous pieces of data can be classified.

### *Data Transformation*

Data transformation is the process of moving from organization to meaning. Data transformation is an inevitable aspect of all types of research (Glesne, 1999). It is the effort of researchers to manage and make sense of their data, to transform its acquired form into a form that communicates the promise of a study's findings (Glesne, 1999). These forms include description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation which researchers may "develop, augment, or contradict" (Glesne, 1999, p. 151). Furthermore, data transformation is the "prelude to sensitive comprehensive outcomes that describe, identify patterns, make connections, and contribute to greater understanding" (Glesne, 1999, p. 151).

Qualitative researchers use many techniques such as coding to help organize, classify, and find themes in their data (Glesne, 1999). Qualitative researchers still must find ways to make connections that are ultimately meaningful to themselves and the reader. Glesne (1999) discusses description, analysis, and interpretation as three means of data transformation.

Description involves staying close to data as originally recorded. Qualitative researchers, according to Glesne (1999), draw heavily on interview transcripts, allowing the data to somehow "speak for themselves" (p. 149). This approach answers the question, "What is going on here?" and the narratives of qualitative research often "move

in and out like zoom lenses, selecting and portraying details that resonate with the study's purposes" (p. 149).

Glesne (1999) describes analysis as a second category of data transformation. Analysis is the identification of key factors in the study and the relationships among them. This method typically extends description in a systematic manner. Detailed coding schemes, data displays, comparisons to a standard, and other means of identifying patterned regularities are all useful in analysis.

Interpretation is the third means of data transformation according to Glesne (1999). She notes that interpretation occurs when the researcher "transcends factual data and cautious analysis and begins to probe into what is to be made of them" (p.150). Strategies for data interpretation include extending the analysis, using theory to provide structure, connecting with personal experience, and subsequently exploring alternative means of presenting data (Glesne, 1999).

Interpretations in a qualitative study are made and reviewed on an ongoing basis and are initially more tentative. Generalizations are highly speculative or nonexistent (Gay, 1998). The "conclusions" in a qualitative study are the insights the researcher believes he or she has gleaned as a result of a lengthy, intensive effort of interpretation. The issue of generalizability is left up to consumers of the research and to other researchers. Individuals reading the report may believe that findings have a degree of applicability for their environment, and other researchers may conduct studies which support the credibility of the reported possibilities (Gay, 1998).



## Trustworthiness

According to Merriam (2002), Qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding what those interpretations are at a particular point in time and in a particular context (Merriam, 2002).

Trustworthiness is the extent to which other researchers would arrive at similar results if they studied the same case using exactly the same procedures as the first researcher (Gall, 1998). Statements about the researcher's positions (the selection of participants, the biases and values of the researcher, etc.) enhance the study's chances of being replicated in another setting and thus enhance reliability (Creswell, 2003).

Merriam (2002) discusses several key characteristics regarding various interpretive qualitative research designs. The first characteristics are that researchers strive to understand the meaning people have constructed about their world and their experiences. Patton (1985) stated that qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interaction there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting, what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meaning are, what the world looks like in that particular setting (Patton, 2002).

The second characteristic of all forms of qualitative research is that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis (Merriam, 2002). Since understanding is the goal of this research, the human instrument, which is able to be

immediately responsive and adaptive, would seem to be the ideal means of collecting and analyzing data (Merriam, 2002).

Another important characteristic of qualitative research is that the process is inductive; that is, researcher gather data to build concepts and hypotheses rather than deductively deriving postulates or hypotheses to be tested (as in positivist research) (Merriam, 2002).

Finally, the product of a qualitative inquiry is richly descriptive (Merriam, 2002). Words and pictures rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learned about a phenomenon (Merriam, 2002). Data in the form of quotes from documents, field notes, and participant interviews, excerpts from video-tapes, electronic communication, or a combination thereof are always included in support of the findings of the study (Merriam, 2002).

Trustworthiness was enhanced in the following manner. First, the researcher provided a detailed description of the focus of the study, the participant's position, and the context from which data was selected. Second, triangulation or multiple methods of data collection was used which strengthens trustworthiness as well as validity according to Creswell (2003). Finally, data collection and analysis procedures were reported in order to provide a clear and accurate picture of the methods used in this research study to enable replication (Creswell, 2003).

Kvale (1996) proposes thinking of validity as 1) craftsmanship in which the researcher adopts a critical outlook during data analysis, 2) communication where validity is determined in dialogue with others, and 3) pragmatic validity, which goes beyond an

argument's persuasiveness to assessing validity in terms of real-world changes brought about as a result of the research.

### Internal Validity

Internal validity is the accuracy of the information and whether it matches reality (Creswell, 2003). A researcher wants to have confidence that the outcomes observed in a study are a function of the conditions observed, not due to other factors that are not addressed in the research study. Such confidence reflects that internal validity (Bieger & Geriach, 1998).

For qualitative "measurement," validity is the degree to which data, such as interviews, accurately reflect the feelings and opinions of participants or stakeholders which would consequently permit appropriate interpretation of the narrative data (Gay, 1998). In a qualitative study, the "goodness" of the data depends on the "goodness" of the researcher's personal reactions to the same, e.g., the researcher's observations about what was reported. The validity and reliability of measurement in a qualitative study are highly correlated with the competence, experience, and dedication of the researcher conducting the study (Gay, 1998).

Good qualitative researchers are well aware of the potential sources of inaccurate data collection and utilize a number of strategies to deal with them. Use and reporting of these strategies diminishes the reader's dependence on the competence of the researcher. One common strategy is referred to as triangulation. The term, triangulation, refers to the use of multiple methods, data collection strategies, and/or data sources. This approach is characteristic of qualitative research. While participant observation, for example, may be the primary data collection strategy for a qualitative study, collection of artifacts and use

of interviews serve two purposes: 1) We get a complete picture of what is being studied, and 2) we have a way to “cross-check” (p. 217) our information (Gay, 1998). If several different people have similar stories, as researchers, we have more confidence in the insights we are gaining than if only one person is interviewed. Even if their perceptions of reality are not completely accurate, we have evidence that the perception is a shared one.

Qualitative researchers can also seek to identify consistency of interview data among persons interviewed, consistency of interview data for the same person and consistency of the researcher’s data and impressions (Gay, 1998). Another major strategy of qualitative researchers for promoting accuracy of data is the use of audio equipment. Given that qualitative researchers take voluminous notes, their primary tools are traditionally a pen or pencil and a note pad (Gay, 1998). The advantages of using a recording device (especially audio equipment) are obvious. First, researchers are sure of an accurate and complete record of what was said (or what transpired). Second, tapes can be replayed as many times as desired at a later time; researchers do not have to worry that something was missed (Gay, 1998).

#### External Validity

Creswell (2003) describes external validity as “the limited generalizability of findings from the study” (p. 158). “Usually researchers want to use the results of a research study to make a claim not just about the participants in a study but also about a larger population of which the participants are a sample. The ability to make such claims or generalizations depends on external validity of the study” (Bieger & Gerlach, 1998, p.77).

Researchers can use several strategies to help readers of a case study determine the generalizability of findings to their particular situation or other situations. First, as a researcher, I attempted to provide a “thick description” (Glesne, 1999) of the participants and contexts that comprise the case, so that readers who are interested in applying the findings can determine how similar they are to the situation of interest to them. Second, researchers should address the issue of whether the selected case is representative of the general phenomenon being investigated.

### Summary

The research study explored and analyzed teachers’ perceptions of the transition from a traditional model program to a ninth grade transitional model program for ninth grade students. A qualitative design was used for this study based on my intentions as a researcher to convey my study in a narrative fashion as well as the emphasis on affective factors from the perspective of the study participants which made this naturalistic approach more appropriate.

The data collection focused in interviews and artifacts. Interviews are the primary method of gathering data with artifacts. The steps for data analysis included organizing the data, classifying and categorizing, and data transformation (which includes description, analysis, and interpretation).

In the next chapter, a contextual background of the study was provided based upon data obtained from interviews and artifacts.

## CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

### Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to explore and analyze the perceptions of implementation of a ninth grade transitional program model from a traditional program model. The study was concerned, primarily with the transformative process of teachers during the implementation at a metro Georgia high school. The first section of this chapter describes the transition process of the school district and reform efforts as told in the words of those people interviewed. The quotes in this section correspond to the original words of the participants with the following exceptions: some minor editing of quotes was done to eliminate the use of repetitive phrases (e.g., you know, ok) and other meaningless verbalizations (e.g., um, ah) that were not considered to be a significant part of the sentence. Proper names of participants and programs were substituted with pseudonyms for confidentiality purposes. The fictitious names have no symbolic meaning to the original names of participants.

The second section of this chapter is comprised of the artifacts analysis. Through a coding system, the researcher identified patterns and trends in the data that presented a holistic picture of the transformative process of teachers during the change from a traditional program model to a ninth grade transitional program model.

Emphasis in this study was placed on learning about the substantial amount of personal and professional change on the part of the teachers. The researcher conducted a qualitative case study at a local metro Atlanta high school through the distribution of interviews and examinations of artifacts. The research questions that will be used in this study focused on (1) How do teachers describe their role in the transition process from a

traditional model program to a ninth grade transitional model program? (2) What are teachers' perceptions of the change? (3) What has been the impact of the leadership of the school administrators on the change of implementing the ninth grade transitional model program? Findings in the study revealed that teachers had lack of input in decision making, lack of proper training, scheduling conflicts, lack of planning time with teams, and lack of communication with administration team.

#### Interview Participants

Interview profiles were completed with a total of seven participants directly involved in the implementation of a ninth grade transitional program model from a traditional program model. The first group consisted of school personnel including an administrator, school counselor, and ninth grade coordinator. The second group consisted of four ninth grade teachers. The seven participants were comprised of all females.

The researcher had the background experience of being involved in the transition from a traditional program model to a ninth grade transitional program model five years ago and has 10 years of teaching experience. This background experience subsequently enhanced the "experiential foundation" from which the researcher generated questions for interviews (Glesne, 1999), and this background experience also enabled the researcher to establish immediate rapport as an interviewer with school personnel as well as the teachers during the interview process.

The length of time for the interview ranged from 25 minutes to 45 minutes. The interviews were conducted at a site and time that was convenient for the participants. Initially, the researcher began with three school personnel and four teachers as interview participants who consented voluntarily to the interview process by completing a signed consent form.

### Themes of Data

The researcher began with generic categories such as interview questions and participants. The interview data for this study was entered into a computer immediately after each interview was completed with the voluntary participants, transcribed verbatim, and then printed out into hard copy. The researcher used the left-hand margin of these printouts to facilitate unitizing and theme procedures. These analytic files helped the researcher to organize the researcher own thoughts as well as those of the participants.

The beginning of the researcher's reoccurring themes process consisted of numerous attempts to classify and categorize the interviews. Hall (1996) specified in the research text to break the interviews into meaningful units or segments. These units in the research study reflected key words or phrases to indicate the topic or significance of the material.

The researcher used the Hall (1996) stages of concern about an innovation to code data collected. Several attempts were made by the researcher to use all the stages of concern as delineated by Hall (1996). This was difficult to accomplish because the researcher realized, after re-reading the interview transcripts the first category, awareness, could not be used for any of the interviews. Awareness, according to Hall (1996) means little concern about or involvement with the innovation is indicated.



The researcher proceeded to organize interview transcripts in the form of a profile for each participant. This enabled the researcher to look at reoccurring themes the interview questions and responses together instead of looking at the responses as entirely separate entities in the process. After numerous attempts at coding, the researcher could begin to surmise just how accurately Hall's (1996) stages of concern for an innovation blended with the interview profiles. Aspects of Transitioning were added by the researcher to Hall's (1996) stages of concern about an innovation because of the study's emphasis and the number of questions reflecting the transition process for my interviews. Perceptions, in actuality, replaced the stage, Personal in Hall's (1996) stages of concern about the innovation because of its significance to the overall research study.

The next section provides an overview of these categories, as well as a brief description of the criteria for each category.

#### Description of the Categories

Data from the voluntary interviews and artifacts fell into the following 7 categories:

- Aspects of Transitioning
- Informational
- Perceptions
- Management
- Consequence
- Collaboration
- Refocusing

The aspect of transitioning category included the participant's view on how or why the school made the decision to implement a ninth grade transitional program model from

a traditional program model. Historical elements consisting of the initial conceptualization of the implementation process and renovation plans were included in this category. The researcher also incorporated any involvement by the participants regarding the decision making processes for the transition and why this transition is ongoing at this metro Georgia high school. Answers that were pertained to the participant's views on the success of the transition were part of this category.

The informational category was based on Hall (1996) stages of concern about the innovation. A general awareness of the innovation and interest in learning more detail is indicated. Within this category, the participant is interested in general characteristics, effects, and requirements for use. Participants' involvement in workshops and in-service programs were included in the informational category. The researcher also included mention of opportunities for participants to visit other established high school that had gone through the process in this category.

A separate category was included for perceptions. According to Glense (1999), perception is the way events are recorded in an individual's mind. Many factors can influence perceptions, such as interests, background, and cultural influences (Glense, 1999). This category included teachers' reactions to the transitions from a traditional program model to a transitional program model, expectations based on the participant's understanding of the transition process and attitudes toward the change process.

Based on Hall's (1996) stages of concern about the innovation, management is focused on the processes and the tasks of using the innovation and the best use of information and resources. Issues in this category are related to efficiency, organizing,

managing, scheduling, and time demands that are of utmost importance to participants according to Hall (1996).

In this category of consequences, attention focuses on the impact of the innovation on teachers in his/her immediate sphere of influence (Hall,1996). This category focused on the relevance of the innovation for teachers, evaluation of teachers' outcomes, including performance, competencies, and changes needed to make the transition from a traditional model program to a transitional model program.

The focus in this collaboration category is on coordination and cooperation with others regarding the use of the innovation according to Hall (1996). For the refocusing category, Hall (1996) focuses on the exploration of more universal benefits from the innovation, including the possibility of major changes or replacement with a more powerful alternative. Participants have definite ideas about alternatives to the proposed or existing form of the innovation. This category included potential future implications for high schools.

With these categorical descriptions and criteria in mind, the following section contains interview profiles of the volunteer participants. These profiles were organized by responses to questions that have been categorized within the parameters of these classifications and stages of concern about the innovation based on Hall (1996). From these categories, patterns and trends in the data emerged to present a holistic view of the transformative processes of teachers during the transition from the traditional program model to a ninth grade transitional program model.

## Interview Profile: Ms. Merideth

Ms. Merideth is an administrator who serves as an assistant principal at the metro Georgia high school. She has 21 years of experience in the field of education and has been serving as a high school assistant principal for six years at this particular high school.

### *Aspects of Transitioning*

The researcher began my interview with Ms. Merideth by asking, in her opinion, how this particular high school was given the opportunity to make a change from a traditional program model to a ninth grade transitional program model.

I think the board and administration recognized that there were some major problems with the retention rate of ninth grade students at this particular high school and they recognize that the students have special needs. The teachers had become frustrated with the former traditional setting and were beginning to show signs of disparity and hopelessness. Having said all of that, that's overarching kind of concerns that we are dealing with at school. There are wide variances where kids are developmentally with their maturity levels and reshaping the environment was a primary concern. Another concern was the need to do something to relieve the overcrowding at the high school and at the same time, something needed to be done to relieve overcrowding at the primary buildings. About at the same time, we were also going through remodeling projects, reconfiguration of space at school and so just a whole lot of things came together and it seemed that after a whole lot of study and something we talked about for a number of years, it was the right move to make.

Ms. Merideth mentioned that she was "involved extensively" with the decision making processes for the transition and explained why.

At the time, I was chairing the Curriculum and Technology Committee, which is a committee made up of department chairs from each subject area along with the principal (Mr. Johnson). Mr. Johnson had invited Mr. Wilson an assistant principal from a neighboring school to speak to us regarding a transitional program.

Mr. Wilson shared with the committee the pros and cons of having such a program and the things it would take in order to make the change. Mr. Wilson shared a lot of information with us that I felt provided a blueprint not only for the physical setting of the ninth grade students but also the curriculum we wanted to try to orchestrate with our staff to achieve our goal.

She expressed some discouragement over the success of the transition process. Not as successful as I hoped it would have been. (Pause) I don't know if I'd use the word disappointed, I just, maybe my expectations were higher than what reality was possible to have happen in the time frame given and maybe there was more covert resistance than what I thought there was and I think a lot of that resistance was based upon misinformation, lack of information, lack of visualization, and probably even I'd say lack of enthusiastic leadership.

### *Informational*

Ms. Merideth described how she personally had the opportunity to visit other established high schools that converted from a traditional model program to a ninth grade transitional model program.

Yes, I did personally and we also made that a priority for teachers that we thought would be teaching in the transitional model program. We also had administrators work with other administrators from those established schools as consultant that provided insights on the different areas and setting of implementing such a program.

The researcher asked Ms. Merideth if there were any workshops or in-service training, provided to teachers to acclimate them to the transitional model program concept. Ms. Merideth answered this question by providing her perspective on the change process.

Yes, there were a series of workshops and in-service training provided. Having gone through that myself as an educator, you can never provide enough and you have what I will call people that are at different levels of adopting the change. Some are early adopters, some adopt a little later, and some are recalcitrant, just really don't

want change at all and those you could say are resistant to change. So you need to constantly keep showing examples and helping people visualize how it is they can change, what the needs are, and kind of work out of a comfort mode. It's an ongoing process.

Ms. Merideth was questioned as to whether the workshops were provided within the school district or if people outside the school district conducted the workshops. She provided examples of the topics covered at the workshops.

It's a combination of things. We sent teachers to various schools, we sent them to various conferences. We had people, like I said this one gentleman, he held workshops at the school for us. We had people within the school bring back ideas that they learned in conferences. So a variety of different approaches were used...let's say needs of the ninth grade student would be one (topic), another one would be pacing within activities, and effective climate. Another one is social and emotional support needs of the ninth grade student, things of that nature.

### *Perceptions*

Ms. Merideth expressed her views on the teachers' reactions in general when the transition was initially taking place. "Resistance, I think I could apply it as the same kind of resistance you get any time when you want to change something."The researcher did some further probing by asking Ms. Merideth if she has noticed any improvement in teachers' reactions.

Yes, I've seen some improvement but once again, we still have those that are somewhere along the continuum of accepting and moving forward and getting excited about it. I guess that we need to give it another good shot in the arm. Hopefully with a new principal, by getting some things moving, we can do that because some people, you just have to constantly keep looking and reflecting and seeing what they can do to make the system better.

### *Management*

Ms. Merideth specified some examples of what she learned in the process as far as visiting other established high schools with a ninth grade transitional model program.

I think one of the things we learned about is organization of time, organization of curriculum, probably got our first insight at a little higher level of what factors of development of that age group need attention and what are some things you need to do to try to organize activities and time and support for kids that are it that age group.

### *Consequence*

Ms. Merideth commented on an improvement she would like to see in the ninth grade as it relates to ninth grade students.

The ninth grade student is complex, parents don't understand it, teachers don't understand it, and it's not all psychologists understand so I think those are some things I'd like to see us move forward to try to see what we can do to increase the understanding of the buy-in from all parties in terms of addressing the needs, I think the other thing is that we need to carefully get the students to have more buy-in so it's not so much what are parents, teachers, and administrators doing to them, but what is it that we're all trying to do for their development and their growth and I think that we've got some resistance there, and some students who maybe have coming from their parents, maybe it's coming from a lack of support of role models or whatever, that it's just more than I think we can do in terms of getting by and getting people to work with us on this.

### *Collaboration*

Improvements in the ninth grade transitional model program that Ms. Merideth would like to see focuses on collaboration.

I think a lot of them have to do with the inter-human dynamics. We need to foster more of a team spirit. I think among the professionals, I think that we need to work better at informing the parents at what it is that we are trying to accomplish, how they can

be more supportive and interact with part of what is going on in the high school.

### *Refocusing*

Ms. Merideth explained how this high school is making an ongoing change to the ninth grade transitional model program.

Oh yes, from my perspective, I don't think we've fully implemented all the possibilities that exist with a transitional model program configuration. Having said that, know that every high school is different, but I think there are some basic tenets that are implemented or considered to a greater or lesser degree at each of the schools and I think with any educational plan or any curriculum, you've got to continue to refocus and revisit, take a look at, reflect on what you can do to improve and whether things need to be fixed.

An array of perspectives was provided by Ms. Merideth as she contemplated the progress of this high school during the next five years.

Well, hopefully, the leadership is going to be able to and the things only happen when people buy into it and have the appropriate attitude to make it happen so without sounding negative and with understanding, what we've got to continue to do is to work with people's attitudes and the best way to do that is to try to understand their concerns and address them one by one and give them information and give them examples and give them models that might be helpful to helping them buy into ways they can improve student achievement, make students happier, feel more engaged, more empowered, more involved in what it is that you're doing. So that's what I'd hope we could do it in less than 5 years but I'm not naïve enough to know that this is going to be an ongoing process until change is permanent.



## Interview Profile: Ms. Hall

Ms. Hall is the ninth grade counselor. She has been a counselor for twelve years. She has been part of a traditional model program for eleven years.

### *Aspects of Transitioning*

Ms. Hall informed me that she was not involved to any extent as for as the decision making processes with the transition from a traditional model program to a ninth grade transitional model program. The researcher asked Ms. Hall her opinion about how this particular high school was chosen to make such a change and she indicated that the central office felt that something needed to be done to address the growing concerns with ninth grade students' retention rate.

Since the actual conceptualization date was referred back as far as 9 months ago, I sought her views on this particular high school being part of an ongoing transition. Ms. Hall stated:

We're in progress of making the transition. I think there are some components of a ninth grade academy that were brought in but I don't think all the supports are in place to make it go further than what it is right now and that's what we're working to do right now.

### *Informational*

Many of the teachers as well as the administrators were provided the opportunity to visit other established high schools with a ninth grade transitional model programs as part of the transition process, according to Ms. Hall.

Many of the teachers have shared with me that part of their process was to go to other schools that already had a transitional program model...administrators who were here at that time also attended several conferences, for example, High School That Works, which featured many sessions on how to implement a ninth grade academy as well as a transitional program.

Through contact with other established ninth grade academy teachers, our teachers began to familiarize themselves with the ninth grade academy concept. Ms. Hall reflected:

I think that the most of them (teachers) got a sense of what it was that they (teachers) needed to do to make the transition....They had opportunity to talk with teachers about how they planned for the instructional components of what was taking place so a lot of it was seeing the structure of what a day would look like, addressing issues with the teachers and how they communicated with one another. One of my goals was to really get a grasp on how to balance the students schedules to support the efforts that the teachers were trying to implement with this new model. It was a challenge for me and I ended up getting a lot of support as well from counselors who had gone through the process.

Ms. Hall further reflected on her thoughts about the ninth grade transitional model program experts coming into the school district during the transition. “They (the high school) went over to other schools but they ( the high school) never really had anybody come in and I think, that was just something I would have liked to have seen, that maybe some people could have come along the way afterwards and given some feedback.”

### *Perceptions*

Since this high school is making an ongoing transition to a transitional model program, The researcher asked Ms. Hall about the teachers’ reactions in general to the transition process. “Teachers are feeling frustration....this transition has been perceived by teachers as top down mandates and (as a counselor), I would like to see that perception change.”

### *Management*

Ms. Hall shared her views on what has changed with the change to a ninth grade transitional model program that she would consider an improvement. Her emphasis was expressed as more of a disappointment with the loss of a common planning period.

The ninth grade teachers still operate very much like a traditional model program in that all the teachers have a plan period but they only have one and it's not together, so they never have a common plan time and it makes it a whole lot more difficult for them to talk about kids and the kinds of things that they're doing instructionally within their classes.

### *Consequence*

Ms. Hall discussed the disadvantages attributed to the lack of a common planning period and the impact on the ninth grade students. Ms. Hall reported:

As I say it, to even talk about the kids that they all have in common, being it's urban school district, if you're a ninth grade teacher, you have a ninth grade student and you're all part of the same team but they don't have enough time within the day any more than a teacher in a traditional model to seek assistance or consult with each other.

### *Collaboration*

When questioned about the use of interdisciplinary teaming being an integral aspect of the ninth grade transitional model program. Ms. Hall stated:

I think we're going to be able to achieve that for next year. And then the idea of what you're saying, the idea of intertwining the courses and one working on the other, we're working on that too...we have a very good competent staff by they've never worked as a team, so we're working on that a little bit.

### *Refocusing*

As a way of closing the interview, the researcher asked Ms. Hall about what she sees as having significant influence on this ninth grade transitional program in the next five years.

Emphasis on more technology, more different instruction, time to develop programs, and teachers having more input. I'd like to see more interdisciplinary thinking and instruction. The staff, as a whole, needs to be more involved in the decision making processes.

#### Interview Profile: Ms. Fulton

Ms. Fulton is a ninth grade science teacher and has been teaching for 22 years. She has been part of a traditional model program for 21 years. Ms. Fulton also serves as the ninth grade coordinator for the ninth grade academy. Ms. Fulton exclaimed during the course of the interview that as far as the curriculum she teaches, in science, "someone is pretty well going to know who I am and with that, I am hesitant."

#### *Aspects of Transitioning*

Ms. Fulton suggested the reason for the change from a traditional model program to a ninth grade transitional model program was more from the administrative level. That was an administrative decision that I was never told. As a group of teachers, we were never told what the decision would be.

As a teacher, the researcher asked Ms. Fulton if she was involved to any extent regarding the decision making processes for the transition.

The decision was made. I had the opportunity along with some other teachers to visit some other high schools to see what their philosophies were and how they operated their transitional program but the decision had been made prior to that time.

For the most part, Ms. Fulton felt that the transition to a transitional model program has been positive.

Well, we already had what I felt was a decent high school. The traditional model was working for me, but obviously there was concerns with the ninth graders as whole and I guess something had to be done to address the problem of high retention. Besides, the school needed a shift in the academic structure because the

ninth grade kids were at a lost in terms of success. I felt that it would be a positive situation. In just moving the groups of students, I felt this was workable. I still believe that the ninth grade would probably benefit best by being in a building by themselves but as far as the establishment of the transitional model program, it has been, at least I've felt it's been a positive approach.

Since the transition has been described by administration as “ongoing,” the researcher was interested in Ms. Fulton’s opinion as to how successful the process has been at this particular high school.

I don't think it's been successful. From what I knew what a transitional model program was and from what I know where we are, I don't think we've made the transition totally. I don't think we've been given the guidance. Sometimes we're told to implement some transitional model strategies but I don't think we still have the knowledge of what the goals are and how to go about reaching them. We haven't been so much given opportunities to sit down and establish goals with the right type of guidance to determine that and we certainly do not have the time in our schedules to accomplish any goals we would be given. Our staff is extremely overworked, our schedules are not compatible to sit down and develop a program and stick with it. It's been very, very difficult. Most of us are running to keep up with our own schedules let alone to take on extra duties.

### *Informational*

It was mentioned by the administrator, as well as the counselor, that teachers were provided the opportunity to visit other established high schools that had a transitional model program within the ninth grade.

Ms. Fulton explained:

I visited one, most of us had the opportunity to only visit one. I was most impressed with the procedures there, how they went about their timing for their classes, and how responsibilities were shared. Students were shared during time periods when they needed them, for example, if one teacher needed the group of students for a longer time period, they could just send a request to the next person. The school was so accommodating with doing that. I was also impressed with the layout of the school system

because it lent itself very well to the different activities. The extracurricular classes and things of that sort were very useable. Hallways were very large, students could use, if you had students in the classroom doing something and someone needed to do something specially, of you put a special group out in the hallway and they wouldn't interfere with traffic patterns. Our situation here, of course, is much more crowded. We don't have the avenue of places to put students for extra work that we might need them to do.

The researcher did some further probing by asking Ms. Fulton if the school or school district provided any workshops or in-service training to acclimate the teachers to the transitional model program concept.

Very little, it might be 45 minutes, but no, very little. We weren't given a transitional model program philosophy until this year. We don't really as a group of teachers know what the goals are here at the high school as it relates to the ninth graders. We keep hearing about the transitional model program philosophy but until we received a printed copy before parents teacher conference, we were not aware of what the philosophy was or what the goals are at this school or district for the transitional model program for ninth grade.

### *Perceptions*

Ms. Fulton related teacher's reactions to the transition to the process of change.

Well, I think as in any type of change, there is a fear that comes about with it. What will be my position? Will I know what to do? Will I be given the expertise and the time to accomplish the goals that are appropriate for my job?

### *Management*

As Hall (1996) explain, management issues, consisting of organizing, efficiency, scheduling, and time demands are of utmost importance to the participant's concern about the innovation. Ms. Fulton elaborated on improvements she would like to see in the transitional model program.

I would like to see vocational and extra curricular activities expanded on in a way that would include all students as is required by state law. I would like opportunities to be provided with equipment, materials, teaching time, planning time, full time teachers in any of the positions. I think our students have missed out on a lot of opportunities recently because of teachers' schedules, lack of space, lack of time. Very definitely.

The element of "time" was a factor mentioned when the researcher asked Ms. Fulton about the major difficulties and challenges associated with the transition.

Lesson plans we have to write, finding time to do those types of things. After teaching a number of years, I feel that I'm an expert at that. I've worked with student teachers to accomplish these things and now I'm doing things or having to rewrite things that are a greater role than I would expect of a student teacher let alone a beginning year teacher. I have better use of my time to work in a classroom than to be putting something down on paper time after time. It's very time consuming. It's very difficult to find time for those things when you also have to give that time to your students and your classes and accomplish the things that are necessary for in class education. I think sometimes we lose our scope and we take our time and spend it on other tasks that perhaps don't generate an improvement in the classroom, generate a whole lot of things for someone else to look at, but don't generate help to the students, direct help to the students.

### *Consequence*

Ms. Fulton focused on the ninth grade students as a change that she would consider resulting in an improvement in the transition process.

I think the separation of our ninth grade students from the rest of the high school has been a vast improvement. Many of the influences that influenced them when they were with the upper class students have ceased. Although they still are bused together and there are problems that develop on the buses themselves. But I've seen a change from the very beginning of implementation of the transitional model program to now, our students are accustomed to this. I've seen a change in behavior. I think they're developmentally acceptable of where they should be and what they are instead of trying to be a senior or junior in behaviors,

especially social behavior. I think that separation has been very good for them. I think the curriculum is evolving in a sense to meet their needs but I think we have a long, long way to go before we have that completely accomplished.

### *Collaboration*

I asked Ms. Fulton about the frequency in which the interdisciplinary team meets as a team.

Something that our team has not gotten real heavily involved in. I have when we do, I've been very, very involved and more involved when I have the time in my schedule. A lot of the ability to be involved is what can you do in the time you have and when I've had the time, I've been very involved. As my schedule has changed and I've had less time, I've been less involved.

### *Refocusing*

As an interviewer/researcher and having the background with being part of a transformation from a traditional model program to a transitional model program, I was very interested in hearing the teachers' responses to my question as follows: If you had a choice, would you rather see the existing transitional model program stay or go back to traditional model program for the ninth grade students.

I think the transitional model program philosophy could be good if we knew what it was entirely. If we had more direction from other high schools that have effectively implemented this model. I'm still struggling with only one visitation to another high school and not having seen that huge involvement here or involvement, it's hard for me to say whether yes, that is the answer.

Where does Ms. Fulton see this high school in the next five years?

She stated:

Hopefully moving ahead, I don't know. I quite frankly and quite honestly don't have an idea because if I would have answered that five years ago, I would have thought I would have had an answer. That answer would not have been correct so I'm very hesitant to say what I think will happen in five years at this time.



## Interview Profile: Ms. Daniels

Ms. Daniels is a ninth grade math teacher and has been teaching for 18 years.

She has been part of a traditional model program for 17 years.

### *Aspects of Transitioning*

Ms. Daniels shared her thoughts on why this particular school made the change traditional model program to a ninth grade transitional model program.

Actually, I'm not sure if philosophy, retention rate, or student number had a lot to play with it. I can't really answer for sure the philosophy as to why they did it... Whether it has something to do with the ninth graders being mixed up with upper classmen and they wanted to change that, I really don't know their philosophy of why they choose to do that.

She seemed very positive about the change to the ninth grade transitional model program concept but does not agree with the ninth graders being in the same building with the upperclassmen although now they are somewhat separate from the rest of the school population.

I like the change. I don't know I agree with the ninth graders being here with the rest of the upper class students. I think the school district should provide their own building and isolate them. Having them in an area in the building where they can grow and learn together I think is a good idea. The decision to implement a transitional model program had already been decided and then we were introduced to the philosophy of how this model works.

Ms. Daniels explained why she would rather see the existing ninth grade transitional model program stay as opposed to reverting back to the traditional model program.

I like it the way it is. You have to remember when we changed this philosophy into the transitional model, we changed to a whole new dynamics in the building... The way the old traditional model was, that was more of a challenge to me, just the way the rules were, everything the concepts of a seven period day etc. But

why do I like the transitional model? I like the ninth graders isolated in their own wing of the building and it gives them an opportunity to work closely with just a core group of teachers.

*Informational*

Ms. Daniels described the opportunity she had to visit other established high school's transitional model program for ninth grade students.

Yes, we went to a school in Lawnes County and we observed their ninth grade academy transitional model program all day. I know other teachers went to different places. I got to go to that one particular school. I know the administrators went to many. There were also opportunities to go to conferences and I know different teachers got asked to go to that so not everyone got to go to everything, but I'm pretty sure that everyone got to go to at least one school.

Ms. Daniels explained what she learned in her visit to the established high school with a transitional model program.

For me, since I'm a math teacher, I went and visited a math classroom...I got to see how that class worked, how that teachers interacted with the kids. There's a lot of inclusion going on at the time so that was of interest to me but I remember going into that classroom. I don't know if that helped necessarily with our transition here, it's just that I got to observe that classroom. The school had a lot of really neat things, I can remember their video production room that they had, how they did the morning announcements in front of the students. I thought that was very good.

Ms. Daniels elaborated on the school as well as school district's efforts to provide workshops to familiarize the teachers with the transitional model program for ninth grade students.

Yes, they did. We had several workshops. We had speakers that would come in, packets that they handed out. They gave a philosophy, they told us the way, the purpose of the transitional model program. They gave us lots of data, lots of information, that was given to us at this time and then I think beyond that, of course,

our job is in the classroom but as far as any other decision making, I don't know if we get to do that.

### *Perceptions*

Ms. Daniels explained teachers' reactions relating to the change from a traditional model program to a transitional model program.

I think positive overall but when you look at adolescents and you understand from the information we are getting that sitting is an issue for them. You know that they need some time to get up and move around and I think teachers are feeling they are not allowed to do that. You're not allowed to go outside. Activities are very limited. You're pretty much in the classroom doing your thing. Beyond that, we're not getting a lot of support right now.

She expressed her views on major challenges associated with the transition process.

Oh, I just think that we had a philosophy in mind and I don't think it came to form in the first year. Hopefully the second year under this type of model will bring even more of a positive results. I think they're now just trying to get to that philosophy and adjusting to changes. They're looking at each aspect and trying to decide if that's what they want or not. Yes, I think that this entire process was a big thing. I think we all had expectations of what it was going to be like because we had gone to other schools and we had been in-serviced and we did get the paperwork and we knew and I don't think it came. Like I said, we kept everything separate and our understanding was that the kids should be interacting a little bit more but it's just taking a long time to get it into place.

### *Management*

For an improvement Ms. Daniels would like to see in the transitional program, she discussed how more emphasis needed to be placed on the students.

I just think maybe we could do some more things for the kids and I think they're trying to, I think they're going to start but again this entire transition to this type of model has been a major adjust for all teachers. I'm sure administration is evaluating the way it going and will continue to make the necessary changes.

Ms. Daniels shared her opinion on how successful the transition was to new concept at the high school.

I don't think it's hindered as far as the academics. I don't think that has changed in any way. I think the changes just needed, know it takes time but it just seems like every year, there's a new change and different directions and we're just not real sure what direction we're actually going but as far as the curriculum and so forth, they're continuing to make changes.

### *Consequence*

Ms. Daniels seemed to respond to questions about students as not only an educator but a concerned parent as well.

As an educator the primary goal of students is the academic aspect making sure that each child is receiving the best education. As a some may have a concern that their child does not have an opportunity to be around much older kids who may have a positive impact on a child's life.

The researcher asked Ms. Daniels if she was required to change positions as a result of transition process. She replied:

Oh yes, definitely it did. I was still teaching math but I was never working a team that had the same students in the same general area in the building. I really enjoy the mere fact that the same team at some point can share effective ideas to support each other in a close knit environment.

Ms. Daniels was questioned about the change in curriculum as a result of the transition process.

Again, I think it just goes hand with the regulations of IDEA and so forth as far as trying to teach to the regular education curriculum as much as we can as opposed to having our own curriculum. I think that does benefit because once you get your students, you really never know what level they're at and if you can start with that regular education curriculum. Having the students on teams allows the teachers to compare notes and incorporate different strategies to meet the needs of the students.

### *Collaboration*

Ms. Daniels found that working on an interdisciplinary team can be beneficial and pondered the importance of finding a common planning time.

Oh yes, definitely, I think what they're trying to do also is to find a common planning time for each teachers next year which we never had. You know we always heard that as soon as you get your team together and meet but again scheduling just never seems to benefit us that way. I think it's rough because you are locked into the high school schedule also so even though you may want to do some things and change some, accommodate the teachers more in that way, you run into that schedule because it's the high school. You have to feed off of them from what I understand but the administrative team is going to do that next year, try to find common planning time for the teams. That would be really good.

### *Refocusing*

Ms. Daniels provided some examples as to what she sees as having significant influence on the transitional model program in the next five years.

I think it really depends on the administration and if it continues to stay the same and we can develop and be consistent but if there's change, I don't know which direction we're going to go. This year is the revamping year, it really, really was but I see a lot of things just being wiped out and starting from ground zero and building up again and that may or may not have anything to do with the transitional model program philosophy, it's just the way things are going and I think every year, we're hoping that it gets to be consistent.

The researcher asked Ms. Daniels if she had any additional comments and she provided the following perspective.

No, other than I think we've started off with the right idea and I think we had a lot of knowledge of what should be done. I'm just not sure that we've got off to the right foot necessarily. I think we've continued to act like a traditional model school in some aspects.

## Interview Profile: Ms. Thedford

Ms. Thedford is a ninth grade social studies teacher. She has been teaching for 6 years and has been part of a traditional model program for 5 years.

### *Aspects of Transitioning*

Ms. Thedford specified the reason she felt the change was needed from a traditional model program to a ninth grade transitional model program.

One of the reasons was that too many kids in the traditional model was not doing well academically as well as socially to the new environment of high school. Retention rate was high and the dropout rate was on the rise.

Ms. Thedford also indicated that she was not involved to any extent regarding the decision making process for the transition as a teacher because this was her first year at this particular high school. The researcher asked Ms. Thedford if she was required to change positions as a result of the transition process. She responded by stating:

Not really, I was hired as a ninth grade teacher and I was accustomed to that grade level because I had taught it before in another state.

### *Informational*

Ms. Thedford informed the researcher that she did not have an opportunity to visit other established high schools during the transition process. She indicated that the school district did have a couple of people brought in to talk about how a transitional model program should be run. The researcher asked Ms. Thedford to describe the topics covered at the workshop and she stated:

I know with the school district it's almost like two separate schools, grade nine is in one isolated wing in the building and basically away from grades 10-12. I mean I can see that there

are pros and cons to that and I would like to see some interaction with the upper class students.

### *Perceptions*

Ms. Thedford expressed her reaction to the change from a traditional model program to a ninth grade transitional model program.

I like it. I went to a traditional model high school and after having the opportunity to visit a school that has implemented a transitional model program, I got excited about the opportunities it would for the students as well as myself as an educator.

She also expressed her views on the overall transition process.

If you're flexible with the changes, I mean there have been so many changes. Like the last couple of years from my understanding, our school district has gone through so many changes and that has to do with administration, new principals, and all of that. So a lot of it and what I've been through, I'm not sure if it's the transitional model or the transition of administration.

Ms. Thedford stated her preference for the ninth grade transitional model program as opposed to reverting back to the traditional model program.

I'm basing it on being part of the school when it was a traditional modeled setting. The kids, like when we were in 9<sup>th</sup> grade and you're dealing with 12<sup>th</sup> graders, the kids don't feel free to blossom. They feel so little, they feel so insignificant and keeping it as an academy dealing with just 9<sup>th</sup> graders in an area isolated from the upperclassmen, the 9<sup>th</sup> grade students feel like they're on top of the world. It's something new to them whereas for the most part, you don't have a lot of upper class students running them down because they're not together during the day.

### *Management*

Ms. Thedford explained how the major difficulties associated with the transition process correlated with the Georgia state scores.

Our scores haven't been very high, the Georgia state scores, and every year that I was there, they tried to improve it in some way

and then every year we'd get there and they'd say 'ok, again our scores are low. It is hard to improve student achievement when there is no consistency for students who are trying to get adapted to an entirely new environment.

There has been much emphasis placed on the need for a common planning period. Ms. Thedford commented the common planning period would really help. There are some teachers that have one planning period. She mentioned some advantages to having a common planning period.

Usually my planning periods are third or fourth, whereas some of other teachers are first or second, which I have a class so if there is something I need to talk with them, like I could go a whole day without being able to get together with them to talk about it whereas if you know you have that one time each day where they're in their room or meeting with somebody else, I'd feel much better to be able to just run down, get together with them and discuss things whereas sometimes you could just go a week without actually meeting up and by then the problem's over or is too big, you can't deal with it any more.

Curriculum, as a whole, has changed slowly as Ms. Thedford said:

I've seen small changes to it since I've been there....I got there a year or so after it had been changed...mostly, it's just like the year to year changes that you would make that I wouldn't be able to give you specific examples.

### *Consequence*

Ms. Thedford remarked that the ninth grade transitional model program provides benefits to the students.

It just seems like the kids could relate a lot better to their own age group and not feel pressure to try to fit in an much older group of students.

An improvement she acknowledged is:

They're given more options of things to do such as sewing, home economics or industrial arts which they had down in the high school but instead of run on a high school schedule, high school



curriculum, it's based on the transitional model where it's a little bit easier geared towards them. But there are tons of options they can kind of explore before they get into the tenth thru twelfth grade.

### *Collaboration*

Collaboration is a key to the success of the ninth grade transitional model program as Ms. Thedford commented:

I think the ninth grade work better the way we have it now. Part of it is that the teachers that are there that make it work so well. Everyone for the most part seems to cooperate and the way it's set up now, you have to be a little bit flexible.

Ms. Thedford related her experience working collaboratively on an interdisciplinary team.

Yes, I think it is really nice to work with my team. The drawback that I have is not being able to meet on a consistent bases. Due to the scheduling conflict, we are not able to meet as a team like we should. That is something that the administrative team will work this upcoming summer for next school year.

### *Refocusing*

Ms. Thedford shared her views on where she envisions this high school in the next five years.

It definitely has a potential. It's just whether the administration, our principal, whether everybody works together and whether the teachers are allowed to have input in some of the decision in the building regarding academic achievement. In the past, we were kind of allowed to use our judgment like for the best of our students and some of the ways the school is running now like we're not allowed to kind of use our judgment and we're being stifled. Not only is it taking creativity away from the teachers, but it's like, a lot of teachers I've talked to in the last couple of months who were always the happiest teachers like to go to and are fun, fun, fun, they're down and it's because of the administration and not that it's bad, it's just totally different. So it depends on whether they kind of not get their act together but just everyone starts cooperating and working together. I think if it stays the way it is, it's going to go through some more rocky years and it's going

eventually rub off on the kids, trying to get our scores up and all that, I think it's going to have an effect.

#### Interview Profile: Ms. Tyler-Wiltzs

Ms. Tyler-Wiltzs is the literature teacher. She has been teaching for nine years. She has been part of a traditional model program for eight years.

#### *Aspects of Transitioning*

The researcher asked Ms. Tyler-Wiltzs her opinion as to why this particular high school made the change from a traditional model program to a ninth grade transitional model program. She stated "my impression is that it is better for our ninth grade students." Ms. Tyler-Wiltzs informed the researcher that she was not involved to any extent regarding the decision making processes for the transition as a teacher. In her views, the transition process "was an administrative decision."

Ms. Tyler-Wiltzs was asked if she had a choice, would she rather see the existing ninth grade transitional model program or go back to the traditional model program and why. She remarked:

I will be honest with you, I really had become very comfortable with the traditional model program, but I understand that something had to be done to support our ninth graders who need a lot of support and nourishment in order to be successful in our building. Based on data we had to shake things up around here because retention and failure rate was out of order.

#### *Informational*

Ms. Tyler-Wiltzs described her visit to another established high school that had a transitional model program and what she learned in the process.

We got to see a high school in Rex county and it was a well run ninth grade academy that I thought was a very good example of what a transitional model program should be...One of the things I was impressed with was the show of student work around the

building as well as I think interdisciplinary work that you could see was being done as well as exploratory subjects with the students attending different language classes, also, a very strong arts program there, specifically music programs. Scheduling seemed to be beneficial to the arts program.

She also mentioned that the school and school district provided a few workshops and speakers during the transition process for teachers. Ms. Tyler-Wiltz described some of topics covered during the workshops.

It's been a while but I remember specifically one teacher talking about the ninth graders and their physical and emotional abilities, inabilities, and the limitations to them. It was specifically along the lines of dealing with students in the middle ages, of 14 and 15 year old children.

### *Perceptions*

Ms. Tyler-Wiltz was in favor of the change to a transitional model program as she stated "I believe that it was a good thing and that it was meant to be beneficial to the students." As far as the teachers' reactions in general to the transition process, Ms. Tyler-Wiltz explained:

Well, they were mixed. I think you have a lot of teachers who were ingrained in what had been and were unwilling to change. But I think overall the change was going to happen anyways so you either went with the flow or didn't and I think most of them did.

Ms. Tyler-Wiltz stated that she is not capable of judging the success of the transition for this reason.

I would say, because I don't know exactly what the vision of the high school is from the administration, that I can't really be a judge of that whether or not it's been successful or not. I don't see students or parents in an uproar about it, so I can't really judge its success other than that day-to-day things go on without a whole lot of gnashing of teeth.

## *Management*

Ms. Tyler-Wiltzs described some improvements that she would like to see in the transitional model program.

Yes, I'd like to see improvements made in scheduling, especially we've had a few run-ins with scheduling as far as all the classes are concerned and I'd like to see that addressed, see if we could smooth that out a little bit. It has been, it seems to me that every year, there's major changes and we haven't really settled into a groove yet and I'd like to see that occur, where we kind of settle in. It just feels like we're always in a state of flux. I'd like to see us establish a routine, establish some consistency in scheduling in the day-to-day goes on...I don't know if that is the problem or not. I think that's an administrative thing that I don't have a real good handle on.

She sees the relevance of incorporating a common planning period for regular education teachers, but not particularly for special subject teachers.

Yes, I see that is of importance to some teachers, it's not particularly important to some teachers to get together on certain teams, but I can see where a ninth grade team might want to do that, just to keep consistency across the grade level.

The major difficulties encountered with the transition process stems from scheduling and other factors as Ms. Tyler-Wiltzs explained:

The major difficulties I would say that we've been trying to overcome are again scheduling problems, teacher morale, students discipline consistencies, curricular consistencies across the board, meaning sequencing through the entire transitional model program. Of course, I think that's an ongoing thing is consistency in curriculum. Those are, I'd say are the difficulties we're constantly working on.

## *Consequence*

Ms. Tyler-Wiltzs believes that ninth graders should be a part from the high school all together. She remarked:

I think it can be done with the ninth graders having there own building separate from the upper class population. I know that

this is something that the school district would have to approve and it probably will be very expensive to build ninth grade buildings throughout the school district. Wishful thinking.

### *Collaboration*

Ms. Tyler-Wiltzs felt that interdisciplinary teaming is an effective way to teach students.

Yes, I think it's good and it would work. I don't think you can let that take center stage in the curriculum but I think it's good idea to try and tie in when you can.

I asked Ms. Tyler-Wiltzs about her participation on the interdisciplinary team.

We are on teams and we try to stay in touch with each other weekly. One of our biggest challenges with this is trying to figure out with the scheduling how to set up the common planning time for each team. It has not worked out the way we had planned. The teams still try although administration is trying to work on this matter for next year. Some teachers don't really give a concerted effort in trying to meet at all. I think having a team that is willing to do whatever it takes for the children is what we are really missing.

### *Refocusing*

Ms. Tyler-Wiltzs shared her thoughts on where she sees this high school in the next five years.

The concerns that I have shared, I'm sure will be some of the challenges on the table each year. I am hoping that sooner than later that this transitional model program that we have implemented will be one day the state of the art for others to witness and take back to their school. Maybe we can continue to work with the administration regarding the transitional model and have more dialogue between the teachers as the what they expect the transitional model program to be, and how we can make that happen.

Additional comments focused on the future of this transitional model program.

I'd like to really see maybe more programs done for teachers. If the district is going to go to a transitional model program for all high schools in the district, I really think the teachers need to be told what the overall vision is, what they want it to be, and how they think we can do that, the plan if you will, a vision for five years down the road, so I can tell people like you that ask me what's going to be happening in five years, I'd like to know too.

#### Interview Profile: Ms. Only

Ms. Only is a ninth grade health teacher. She has been teaching for 14 years and has been a part of a traditional model program school for 13 years.

#### *Aspects of Transitioning*

Ms. Only provided some insights as to why this particular school made the change from a traditional model program to a ninth grade transitional model program.

Primarily, I think it was because we have been having problems in promoting our ninth graders to the next grade level over the past few years. The retention rate was constantly getting worse each year and a number of students were beginning to drop out and the dropout rate was becoming a concern.

Ms. Only believed that teachers did have the opportunity to be involved in the decision making processes for the transition as a teacher.

We were allowed to voice our opinions. There was a lot of discussion. There were pros and cons and sometimes I like to play the devil's advocate and so I did take a look at some of the information, the literature that was out there on opposition to the transitional model program because I wasn't totally in favor. I felt that we needed to really investigate and look very closely into making a decision that was more geared towards our needs and

what we have here because I live in the district as well. I have children coming into the district so those issues were a concern to me.

*Informational*

Ms. Only described the opportunity she was given to visit other established high schools with transitional model programs.

Yes, in fact, I went to Cobb High School which is in the north of my school. I got to spend the day there with them, see some of the things they were doing and after that experience, I became a little more enlightened and but then again, they're a very, very wealthy district so you can't say well we want to be just like them because I mean their finances and what they're capable of doing is astronomical. We also did have some people who came in some different teams and we went through some transition and everybody shared their experiences, so it wasn't just one person going to one particular high school, but people going to a variety high schools.

The researcher asked Ms. Only what she learned from visiting Cobb High School.

Well, certainly, I think that the concepts and some of the philosophies, things they were doing with curriculum, etc. could be applied to ninth grade. The transitional model program itself is, I think, a lot more in terms of an ideal as a philosophy, not so much in teaching or in curriculum or presentation. I think it has to go a lot deeper and what I'm searching is for somebody to tell me how do we work better with adolescents, with these young people that are going through these transitions and that's the question that I have that I still haven't had answered yet.

The researcher inquired as to whether any workshops or in-service training was provided to acclimate teachers to the transitional model program concept.

We were given some things on what other high schools were doing. It was way back at the very beginning. There was a talk on the philosophy of the transitional model program and we did some things and sharing and everybody seems to have a good understanding or a good idea of what it is for an adolescent to go

from, that transition is all about their changing so much physically and emotionally, and we see these big changes as they enter into the ninth grade and from that point grow from being children to young adults and all the hormonal, chemical, physical changes and things that are taking place and of course, all of the pressures that are added with this, with these physical changes. We talked about a lot of other things, too, and how these students are a lot different. They are different type of students and they need a different environment, and they need a different approach. So in ideas, yes, we all saw those things and we recognize those things. It's just a matter of now how do we address that, how do we approach these young adolescents, how do we help them through the rough stretches? I tell my students that were the roughest period in my life, that transition from eighth to ninth grade and being thrown into a high school environment where it seemed like you were basically on your own.

### *Perceptions*

Ms. Only shared her reaction to the change to the ninth grade transitional model program from the traditional model program.

I didn't like that, I didn't like that. I was concerned, I wanted to see the district have us stay with the traditional model program to be honest with you. All of this change was to was much and it required a lot of work and preparation. I was comfortable with the way we had things going.

Other teachers' reactions to the transition process were "mixed."

I think the overall consensus was from the mature teachers and a lot of teachers that had been around, that this is just something else that had come around in passing that they talked about before I got into the district about the transitional model program. A lot of people were just looking at it as a fad or a faze and many people were surprised to realize or to find out that the first transitional model program came about in the late 50's and that this concept had been around for a very long time. But over that time, I don't know that I've ever read any research that had done any real studies to show a great impact of the transitional model program philosophy as opposed to doing a traditional model program.



We were discussing the common planning period. The researcher asked Ms. Only if this would be the solution for the interdisciplinary teams to coordinate a time to meet. She stated:

I don't think so and I'll tell you why. I need that planning period to do my own records, to do my own lesson plans, to do my own grades and grading, and just trying to keep up with all the paperwork and everything. I mean tomorrow, I will have 140, hopefully if everybody does it and turns it in, 145 health papers to get checked, along with that, I've got lesson plans to write, I have other things to do. I mean and what am I going to having the same schedule and come to me and say can you meet tomorrow during this period? I would say no. I have this paperwork to do and I know there are many people that are willing to take that paperwork home with them and unfortunately, I did that for a long time but it's just that the demands for my family and time for my family and other things and even form myself at this point, I'm not doing that anymore. It gets done here and writing lesson plan, checking the papers, doing the grades, keeping up with the grading sheet. If they schedule my planning period, my period to write lesson plans, to check papers at the same time as my partners. Will I sit down and integrate cross curriculum with them? Probably not. I'm sorry. It's going to take a lot more than putting us on the same time schedule.

### *Management*

Ms. Only made some suggestions as to what have been the major difficulties associated with the transition.

Maybe the real challenge is in scheduling and time. Those kinds of things have been very difficult. If I were to look at it from my administrator's point of view, I think it's very difficult to find how are we going to schedule, how can we offer all the things that we need to offer? I think from a curriculum standpoint, we sort of took a step back because it was easier when they were in the traditional model program setting. The kids were taking advanced math courses, you had a lot more flexibility in curriculum, without creating a greater demand for faculty. Administration for the most part has been very supportive, I mean, I haven't had anybody come around and tell me that my approach or what I'm doing is wrong or that I shouldn't do it that way or I should be more this way. They're letting me experiment, they're letting me find my own

way through the maze and I appreciate that because that lets me know that they respect me as a professional and they're allowing me to make certain decisions and things.

Ms. Only alluded to her preference for the traditional model program over the ninth grade transitional model program and explained why.

I do but I'm just saying, I don't know if some of the problems that we talked about in scheduling and some of things because we are tied in with the high school. I mean we're connected to their hip down there with transportation and everything else and with those kind of things, say you have all these constraints that my boss, who does a wonderful job and I really think the world of him. I think he put tremendous energy and I don't know how he can keep the pace that he is keeping and I tell him repeatedly how I turned down administrative certification because I was afraid I would wind up doing what he has to do which is just putting in these extremely long, hard days to do it and do it right and all the constraints that he has to deal with is just unbelievable. Would it be easier ok with our setup to do the scheduling, to do the types of things, if we were to connect more with the high school and exchange more with them? I think so, I think so.

### *Consequence*

Ms. Only believes the change from a traditional model program to a ninth grade transitional model program is an ongoing process.

I think it's still an ongoing process, I think we've made big strides or steps in that way but I think we need to do a lot more and I volunteered to be on a committee, as I said, I'm more interested in what we can do to help these kids emotionally and socially. Academically, I feel that with the fourteen years in education, that I have had a lot of different experiences. I've looked at a lot of different things. I can teach a good lesson, I can provide the kids with quality learning experiences, regardless of the type of model program that's implemented. I can give that to them. What I feel I'm not reaching is helping them adapt and adjust as they change socially and emotionally.

I asked her about any improvements she would like to see in the transitional model program concept.

That area I just addressed is the big one and I've talked to administration and they're very supportive of it. In fact, they offered to allow me to serve on a committee next year to do research in that area in order to understand a little bit better what the philosophy of a transitional model program is as it applies more to how we work in exchange with the students, not so much as an instructional or an educational approach.

### *Collaboration*

Ms. Only expressed her views on interdisciplinary teaming in the transitional model program.

I think the interdisciplinary (teaming) is another philosophy or an idea as well and there's a lot of good things that could be done and achieved through that but once again, it becomes a matter of your resources and having the time. Even physically, my team rarely so far get an opportunity to meet on a consistent bases. I'm working with 145 students a day, I'm responsible for all the record keeping, evaluation formal, etc. of all that and then plus putting my plans together and taking care of the physical aspect in the room, doing my club meetings, serving on an interdisciplinary team and asked to look into developing a philosophy of the transitional model and those things, all with a 40 minute a day planning period and it's just not reasonable. It's not possible. You think, well yes, but then time has to be made and how much do you want to put into it and then people start to look at it as down time and if you say well I need more time, I need more time to just sit and talk to people, they see it as nonproductive time. They want you teaching, teaching, teaching but there's no time to do these other things through the day and to do it and do it well, it's going to take time.

The researcher also inquired as to the changes in curriculum as a result of the transition process.

I know that this is my first year in this transitional model and with this curriculum. Not everything was going to be cross curriculum but from the very beginning, from the very get-go, we were told to have or asked to look at incorporating it slowly. I don't even have

the same planning period as any of the people on my team. I know administration is trying to address that but once again, it comes down to what I said earlier. I think a big problem is what administration faces with scheduling, how do we provide for the students and provide for the teachers and keep it financially reasonable without going out and hiring another ten teachers or that kind of thing.

### *Refocusing*

Ms. Only explained what she sees as having significant influence on this

high school in the next five years.

Well, I'm hoping that we can get things worked out, that we'll get through that. In the next five years, I know that the administration is committed to this transitional model program. I think that in the next five years, we're going to do everything we can, if we can continue to grow, if we can see the progress. I think we're still relatively in the early stages of all this. It hasn't been that long and I think for the next five years, we're going to continue to try and grow, that everybody understands what we need to do, and we'll just see, can we do it and if we can get it done with the constraints that we have, I think we'll continue to grow and we'll a successful transitional model program.

### Patterns and Trends

The seven categories consisting of (1) aspects of transitioning; (2) informational; (3) perceptions; (4) management; (5) consequence; (6) collaboration; and (7) refocusing surfaced with common patterns and trends.

The aspects of transitioning revealed that teachers were not involved in the decision making process that led to the introduction of the ninth grade transitional model program. The category of informational showed that teachers realized that they needed to be provided with more professional development workshops and in-service on the philosophy of a ninth grade transitional model program. The perception of this change was not well received by all due to the lack of involvement in the decision making process. The teachers also felt that the management of areas such as organization of time

and curriculum created challenges that needed to be addressed. All of the teachers view the consequence of this effort in the next five years would provide an opportunity to raise the ceiling and floor in student achievement. The last category collaboration focused on the challenge of scheduling and having time to meet as a team with common planning periods. This is something that administration indicated needed to be corrected.

### Artifacts

Artifacts that were released to me from the principal's secretary included: review notes from meetings on the renovation project, board minutes, and conference/workshop/meeting attendance request, and public hearing information for the high school building project.

#### *Newspaper Article*

Several years ago, school district officials started a lot of thinking which was prompted by parental concerns. District official came to believe that the urban schools could best serve students not in a traditional model but instead a transitional model due to the heightened awareness of the struggling ninth grade students. The district did not mandate at the time that all schools within this district switch, but they closely watched and monitored the progress of the program to see if such a program would be needed. In an August 20, 2002 article about a "new look philosophy" for the urban school district, the local newspaper reported that after two years of planning that some of the schools in the district would reopen with the transitional model program for ninth grade students. Besides the restructuring, including a different design, even more importantly, teaching methodology will be different. Ninth grade students would be broken down into teams. Students of each team will work with the same core of teachers throughout the day as

indicated in the article. Students will be assigned to a team and will remain with that team for the entire school year according to the principal. The focus is to give students a sense of security almost like a family setting as stated by the principal, so teachers can recognize students' need better.

The article also indicated that another nearby school district also planned to switch to a transitional model program format next year. The principal of the nearby school district emphasized in the article that the teachers are studying the philosophy of the transitional model program this year and a new was expected to implement the program for next school year.

#### *Brochure*

The brochure provided a description of the urban school district, outlining significant information such as location, enrollment, curriculum, and parent involvement. The brochure also made reference to the elementary schools, middle schools, and the high schools. Educational programs that pertained to the elementary, middle, and high schools were particularly noteworthy in the brochure. Examples included the urban school district's early intervention program, the middle school concepts, and the wide variety of educational and vocational program options available in the high school. Emphasis was also placed on the utilization of technology to enhance the learning process, particularly at the high school level.

#### *Review Notes 2007 Meeting*

Notes from the principal's secretary revealed that the renovation plan was approved on March 30, 2007 and completion date on May 2010. The board decided to utilize all available classrooms and space effectively at the same time permitting a

minimal amount of disruption in the academic program. Total moving costs were estimated at \$15,000.

*Conference Attendance Request*

Ms. Thedford and four other participants' names were listed to attend a HSTW (High School That Works) Conference on May 5-9, 2007 at Seven Springs Resort in Champion, Pennsylvania. The approximate total cost was listed as \$1750.00.

*Board Minutes ( August 10, 2007)*

The only noteworthy item remotely related to the transition process consisted of the Board approving the structure of a Ninth Grade House to encompass the high school while continuing plans for the renovation project. The motion for the issue was recorded as being made by two Board members.

*Board Minutes (November 15, 2007)*

A vote was taken for the motion on the floor to proceed with the building project. The motion was carried with 6 affirmative and 3 negative.

*Act 24 Public Hearing Packet*

The purpose of this hearing was to review the proposed construction and furnishing of the additions and alterations to the high school and receive public comment. The Board approved and adopted a maximum project cost of \$9,010,815.00 and a maximum building construction cost of \$1,961,100.00 for the project.

The urban school district has been facing increases in enrollments at the high school level over the past few years. These enrollment increases, along with added programs and problems caused by the physical condition of the high school, required both additions and alterations to the facility.

Although the existing building is in fair condition, it needs to be brought up to the prevailing standards and code “and have its useful life extended 25 years.” A project description was provided in the packet as pursuant to Act 24 outlining the specifications of the renovation of the existing facility.

### Summary

In this chapter, the researcher endeavored to present the data analysis through the use of interviews, patterns and trends, and artifacts. The following chapter will present a discussion of the findings in terms of the case study. Conclusions and recommendations for future research will be included as separate sections in Chapter 5.



## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Introduction

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section provides a discussion of the results from the interview questions. The second section focuses on the discussion of the findings as part of the conceptual framework. The third section offers recommendations based on the research findings that were presented in this qualitative case study. A fourth section includes suggestions for future research.

### Discussion of Findings

How do teachers describe their role in the transition process from a traditional model program to a ninth grade transitional model program?

A recurring statement from the majority of the teachers interviewed was the lack of involvement of teachers had in the decision making processes that led to the introduction of the transition process. Ms. Only was the only teacher who stated that teachers were given the opportunity to voice their opinions about the change to a transitional model program. This was possibly due to the fact that Ms. Only was appointed to serve on a committee focusing on an area of concern for her, school adolescents. Clark and Clark's (1999) research states that potential leaders among teachers can be found through membership on committees. The administrator also commented that the staff should have had more input in the decision making processes.

Teachers interviewed commented on being permitted only one visitation to an established high school and all of the teachers were in consensus about ninth grade transitional model program workshops being provided at the school district. Two of the

five teachers, who were interviewed, felt the school district did not provide a clear philosophy of the ninth grade transitional model concept.

The researcher became aware of opposing viewpoints on the topic of interdisciplinary teaming. The teachers commented that they participated to some extent on an interdisciplinary team, although one teacher, Ms. Tyler-Wiltzs remarked that there was not a “concerted effort” on behalf of all the ninth grade teachers. Ms. Merideth stated that the nine grade teachers “never worked as a team” and that interdisciplinary teaming was an area that needed to be improved. The interview responses substantiated prior research such as that by Rourke (2001) who stated that some of the ills of the junior high school and more specifically ninth grade stemmed from the fact that they are primarily staffed with secondary teachers, concerned mainly with subject matter. One artifact, the newspaper article, reflected a description of teachers’ roles in the transition process by alluding to the change in the teaching methodology, placing emphasis on interdisciplinary teaming.

What are teachers’ perceptions of the change?

The majority of the teachers during the interviews expressed positive views overall on the change from a traditional model program to a transitional model program. Ms. Only was the only teacher who expressed dissatisfaction with the change process. When the researcher elicited comments from the participants being interviewed about the teachers’ reactions in general to the change to a transitional model program, the participants indicated mixed reactions from their colleagues. Much of this was attributed to a fear that comes with any change according to Ms. Daniels, another reason offered for this mixed reactions was the lack of a vision or plan for teachers that should come from

the administration. Resistance to change can also be seen as individuals (teachers) consider their possibilities to buy into the vision and how the change will affect them personally. Fear and uncertainty are common during this phase (Hall & Hord, 2001). As Kneisler (2001) stated, it is not enough that a leader has a vision; principals must make that vision meaningful to others (teachers) in the school setting.

Ms. Fulton, a teacher, remarked that teachers were down because of the lack of support from the administration team. Ms. Fulton also complained that there has been too much emphasis placed on improving the state scores. Northouse (2001) specified that participants in high school reform are concerned that the new-found momentum for change is threatened by the high stakes accountability systems now in place in virtually every state. Ms. Only stated that the ninth grade transitional model concept was being perceived by her colleagues as a fad or phase. Ms. Only mentioned that other teachers were just unwilling to change. Because change facilitation is so often lacking, the typical assessment of the change effort is that the selected innovation was poor and therefore should be rejected (Hall & Hord, 2001).

To further enhance this research study, the researcher wanted to explore other school personnel's opinions on teachers' perceptions of the transition process. The administrator stated that the teachers were set in their ways, it's "easier to do the same thing instead of changing." As Evans (1999) stated "we don't after all, just put on and take off these gestalts, these big pictures, these paradigms, casually. Particular emphasis was placed those teachers, who were somewhat resistant to change (p. 254). Evans (1999) writes that change is difficult because teachers don't change their paradigms (patterns) easily. It usually takes an uprooting of beliefs, perceptions, policies, and traditions that

have been ingrained in them (teachers) for years. Just saying, “Ok, you have to change” is not that easy; it takes slow calculated steps to eventually have progress. The ninth grade school counselor saw teachers at different levels of adopting the change and used the term “covert resistance” when describing the change process for teachers. Ms. Merideth, the assistant principal, described teachers’ reactions to the process as “frustration.”

What has been the impact of the leadership of the school administrators on the change of implementing the ninth grade transitional model program?

Teachers revealed during the interviews that the transition process was primarily an administrative decision without any input from the teachers. Ms. Only was the only teacher who indicated during the interview that the administration has been supportive and has given her the opportunity as a teacher to participate in decision making opportunities.

The other four teachers stated that the change to the ninth grade transitional model program has not been successful. This was primarily attributed to the constant state of flux with the administration as it relates to the expectations as Ms. Thedford commented. Several of the teachers referred to a lack of vision for the transitional model program from the administration and a lack of communication between the teachers and the administration.

One teacher commented that the teachers as a whole are not currently getting much support from administration. Another teacher commented that teachers generally feel they can’t use their own judgment and are being “stifled.” Innovation depends hugely on the attitudes of teachers (Evans, 1999). Ms. Only commented that the current administration is very committed to the transitional model program, illustrating an

example of a follower and leaders inextricably bound together in the transformation process (Northhouse, 2001).

The voice of school personnel and teachers blended when discussing their roles in providing an education focusing on the developmental needs of adolescents. Ms. Only commented “how can we support our adolescents that are going through these transitions of high school life?” The counselor mentioned that “we need to work better at informing the parents at what it is that we are trying to accomplish.” She also stated that “The board and administration recognize that there are differences with the age groups that go into the high school configuration and they recognize that the ninth grade students have special needs. They’re developmentally going through some very interesting times in their lives.” These responses further mirrored the research which alluded to early adolescence as the most dramatic change in human development in terms of the breadth of physical, socio-emotional, and intellectual changes that occur (Campbell, 2001).

An artifact (Conference Attendance Request) reveals that the teaching staff was provided with opportunities to learn about the ninth grade transitional model program through workshops and conferences. Another artifact (newspaper article) referred to interdisciplinary teams for each grade level. The artifact further revealed that the focus of the ninth grade transitional model program was for the teachers to recognize students’ needs better.

### Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was based on the ninth grade transitional model philosophy and its direct correlation to the constructivist philosophy. The focal point for this study was teachers’ perceptions of their roles in the school’s ninth grade

transitional model program. Points of emphasis for the conceptual framework include: the changing role of constructivist teachers, academic and social growth, social collaboration, evaluating the total curriculum, and the role of educational leaders. This research study discerned if teachers' perceptions of their roles in the transition process were being immersed or contained within the constructivist and transitional model philosophies.

### *The Role Of Constructivist Teachers*

During interviews, teachers and school personnel spoke of the changes in the ninth grade teacher's position which has necessitated the shift in emphasis from a subject-centered approach aligned with the traditional model program to a student-centered approach. The ninth grade transitional model teaching methodology is viewed more with the teacher as a facilitator, scaffolder, and a problem or task provider through the use of interdisciplinary teaming. Knowledge is not imparted or deposited but rather negotiated (student to student, teacher to student) in the quest to make meaning. Gillock (1996) asserts that unexamined knowledge goes "against the use of social relationships that generate meanings from perceptions and voices of different cultural factors involved in the learning process."

### *Academic And Social Growth*

One perception of education is the process through which teachers learn "to alter their environments and their own behavior to better cope with life situations" (Henson, 2001) such as the transition from a traditional model program to a ninth grade transitional model program. These goals require both academic and social growth on the part of teachers. As Freire (1998) states, "...through transforming action, they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity." This process

involves acquiring new information and changing it into meaningful knowledge perceived by constructivists as the purpose of curriculum content (Henson, 2001).

During her interview, Ms. Only perceived the administration to be willing to allow teachers the opportunity to voice their opinions on the transition process. Ms. Only was appointed to serve on a high school adolescence committee, which was an area of student development she was very interested in. Ms. Only was the only teacher who commented positively on the current administration's commitment to the ninth grade transitional model program. Ms. Only's academic growth has further led to her social growth because she has acquired new information, changed it into meaningful knowledge with the overall purpose of benefiting the curriculum content with the emphasis on high school adolescents especially in the ninth grade. The acquisition of academic and social growth includes learning perceived as a lifelong quest of problem-solving, of exploration, and what Freire (1998) refers to creating a greater awareness of one's self and one's reality.

### *Social Collaboration*

Constructivists embrace social collaboration and encourage teachers to create learning environments containing multiple viewpoints, encouraging student exploration (Henson, 2001). In the best applications of constructivist philosophy, teachers create authentic tasks or problems and support student learning through interdisciplinary teaming, a premise for including opportunities for student exploration and expression of multiple viewpoints. However, truly collaborative culture in the high school cannot be implemented by simply structuring interactive opportunities and work arrangements. These may help such a culture develop, though often they lead to contrived collegiality in

which teachers are put through collaborative paces that have little impact and wither away (Evans, 1999). Understanding the culture of ninth grade students is important to teachers. Effective ninth grade transitional model programs must try to instill the value of cultural differences (through curriculum that reflects multiple viewpoints and student exploration) rather than perceiving differences as “deficits to be overcome” (MacIver, 1990, p.152).

Teachers’ social collaboration within an interdisciplinary team was correctly perceived by school personnel during interviews as participating on teams; however, this did not occur regularly due to the lack of time allotted in their teaching schedules. The teachers commented on the need for a common planning period to work collaboratively developing integrated units of study.

One artifact, the newspaper article, revealed that the focus of the transitional model program was for teachers to recognize students’ needs better (by providing opportunities to express multiple viewpoints and exploration in the ninth grade curriculum).

### *Evaluating The Total Curriculum*

Evaluating the total curriculum is a component of the conceptual framework of this study. Evaluating the total curriculum involves teachers being knowledgeable about the ninth grade transitional philosophies as it relates to the curriculum. Four of the teachers interviewed felt they were not given opportunities by administrators to make decisions regarding curriculum and were not given support from administration. Educational reform has stressed accountability as measured by student performance on standardized exams (Northhouse, 2001). School reform is also stimulating restructuring



of the curriculum (subject-centered approach of the transitional model to a more student-centered approach with interdisciplinary teaming). Maximum success with this process to avoid a regression to the academic rigor and achievement oriented reforms (such as standards based instruction) requires teacher involvement with evaluating the total curriculum.

The presence of a hidden curriculum, that is, the attitudes and impressions that are taught implicitly, amplifies each teacher's need to have a firm grasp of the concept of curriculum. A sound understanding of curriculum will prepare teachers to better support positive reform changes while suppressing undesirable trends (Henson, 2001). To achieve success in evaluating the curriculum ninth grade school teachers in diverse settings have a special need to eliminate the negative effects of the hidden curriculum and to instead use the hidden curriculum to provide positive experiences for all students (Henson, 2001).

### *The Role Of Educational Leaders*

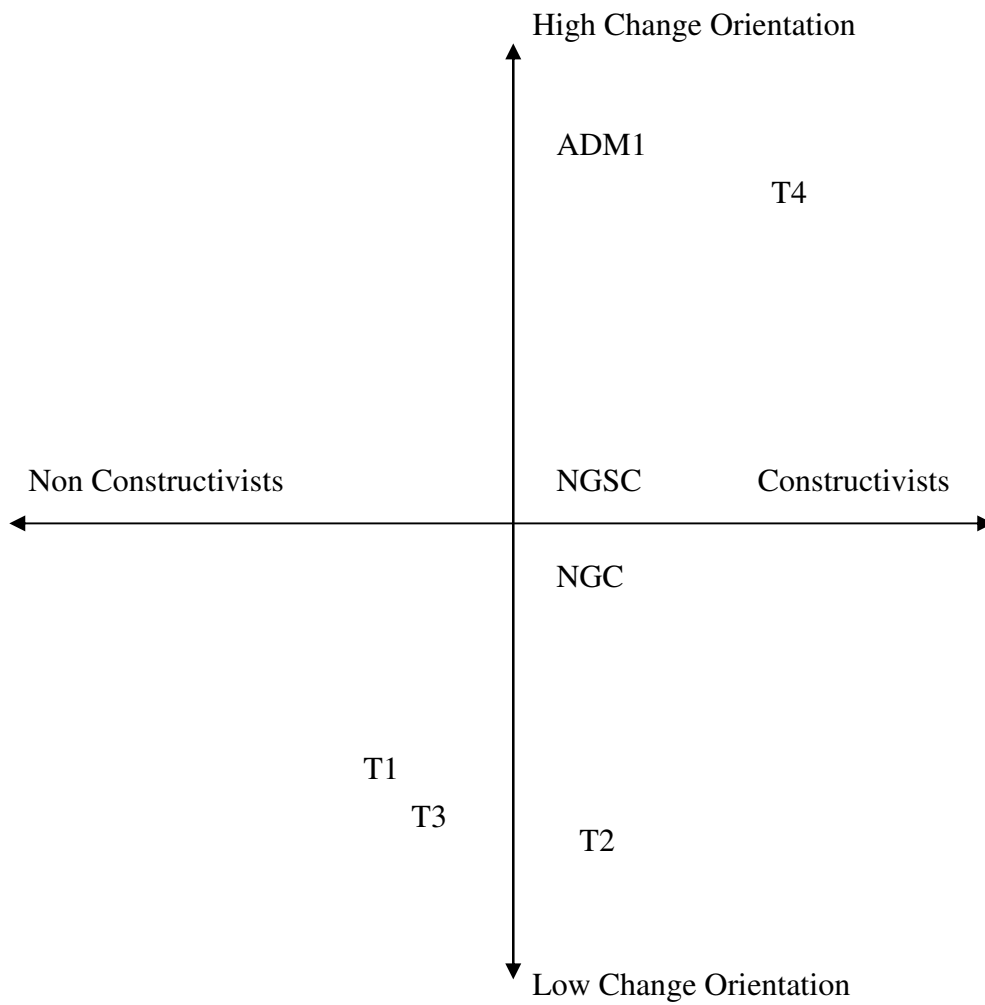
Interdisciplinary teaming emerged from what Henson (2001) referred to as the proactive of team leadership. Teachers perceived as leaders participate in the day-to-day problem solving and shaping of the school environment (Evans, 1999). With the onset of the ninth grade transitional model programs, there has been a change in leadership style from a top-down approach to collaboration. The metaphor for leadership must not be taken from the machine but instead from the ways that living systems organize, adapt, and change. Some argue there is a more effective way to lead, but to do so, leaders must see through a very different lens.

Interviews with four of the five teachers revealed that the administration was using a top-down style of leadership at the high school in which they wanted that perception to change by allowing the teachers to have more input with the decision making. Four of the teachers mentioned that due to the lack of involvement they had in decision making, there were no opportunities to voice their opinions.

Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the school personnel and teachers immersed or contained within the conceptual framework. The researcher has based this visual representation on information revealed during in-depth interviews with the participants as well as the focal points of emphasis for the conceptual framework. The figure depicts that teachers perceive themselves in the transition process from a traditional model program to a ninth grade transitional model program. The figure also shows that the teachers perceive the administrator in the transition to the new program.

Ms. Merideth (ADM1) felt that she was involved in the decision making process and was for change. Ms. Hall (NCSC) recognize that although change was alright, she did not have any parts in the decision making process. Ms. Fulton (NGC) expressed that she had no role in the decision making process and that the idea of change was not something she was very excited about. Ms. Daniels (T1) seemed very disturbed by the change and had no say so in regards of the decision making process. Ms. Thedford (T2) was not pleased with the change and shared no role in the decision making process. Ms. Tyler-Wiltz (T3) was not motivated or impressed with the change. She had no say in the decision making process. Ms. Only (T4) assumed that she had a role in the decision making process, but also felt that this change was not necessary and to time consuming.

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**



- ADM1 – Administrator (Mrs. Merideth)
- NGSC – 9<sup>th</sup> Grade School Counselor (Ms. Hall)
- NGC – 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Coordinator (Ms. Fulton)
- T1 – Teacher 1 (Ms. Daniels)
- T2 – Teacher 2 (Ms. Thedford)
- T3 – Teacher 3 (Ms. Tyler-Wiltz)
- T4 – Teacher 4 (Ms. Only)

## Recommendations

The results of this qualitative case study suggest that further research is warranted to adequately understand the transformative processes of teachers, focusing on the perceptions of the change from a traditional model program to a ninth grade transitional model program.

- 1) The result of this study indicates that the teachers were not involved in the decisions making processes that led to the introduction of the transitional model program process. The high school needs to empower teachers in order to tap their leadership potential, especially those teachers in the ninth grade. The ultimate benefit is to give teachers who are affected by decisions a chance to be involved in the decision making processes.
- 2) The high school should also provide a clear philosophy of the ninth grade transitional model concept which needs to reflect the culture of the urban school district.
- 3) The transitional model program for ninth graders should be recognized as a separate entity from the high school which should further necessitate a complete change in schedule regarding the time of day at the high school so teachers could have common time together.
- 4) The ninth grade teachers need to be provided with professional development workshops and in-service on interdisciplinary teaming.
- 5) The ninth grade curriculum should be centered on the developmental needs of the student rather than a traditional content-based program like the traditional model program. One way this can be accomplished is through teacher education, for

example, workshops, conferences and through the use and implementations of interdisciplinary teaming.

- 6) Low morale is perceived as a problem at this particular high school. There is a need to foster more open communication between the school personnel and the teachers.
- 7) Those outside the high school (such as parents and community members) need to understand and support the goals and objectives of the school.
- 8) New and varied teaching techniques as well as different perceptions of the ninth grade teacher's role will need to be acquired, particularly for beginning teachers. A partnership with the local university should be developed in order to facilitate the need for specialized preparation for those individuals who wish to teach in the ninth grade.
- 9) The conflicting goals of the traditional model program with those of the ninth grade transitional model program must be alleviated. To promote high academic achievement for all students, high schools must be sensitive and responsive to the varied developmental issues that impact young adolescents. The education of young adolescents has to be an integrated value that provides a balance between academic rigor and humaneness.
- 10) Change processes are easier and chances of sustained success are increased as the high school staff understands more about how to use external resources such as the community and as those external to the school recognize the importance of their roles in facilitating each high school in achieving change success (Hall & Hord, 2001).

## Suggestions for Future Research

One of the recommendations for further research in the area of teachers' perceptions of the change from a traditional model program to a ninth grade transitional model program includes that this study to be replicated in suburban and rural settings in order to compare and contrast the results. More studies about school reform and the need to focus on the human factors involved in the change process for all stakeholders including school personnel and teachers are significant aspects to consider in future areas of research. Also encouraged is a closer look at urban schools. These large urban schools can take steps to better meet the developmental needs of adolescents.

The teacher's role in the ninth grade education has been greatly expanded. Research needs to be conducted in teacher preparation programs in colleges and universities to 1) develop ninth grade level teacher preparation curriculum; 2) place emphasis on the need for specialized preparation for those individuals who wish to teach in the ninth grade level as part of the teacher preparation courses. Externally imposed models, rules, guidelines, or formula cannot create the preferred future. Only through our relationships, engagement, and dialogue with others in our sphere, do we create our own reality (Marshall, 1995). For years, "we have been trying to fix the parts, fix the curriculum, fix the schedules, fix the kids, and fix the tests. Now we realize we must first change the way we think and relate with one another. We must create a new way of seeing and being in the world, and this will cause us to change what we do" (Marshall, 1995, p. 148). Research is needed in the area of school leadership, particularly since the emphasis is to move away from hierarchy and fragmentation toward encouragement of collaboration with administration, faculty, staff, and students. As Hall

and Hord (2001) state, it is significant to remember that teachers play a critical leadership role in whether or not change is successful.

To transform our educational system, strong school leaders are needed to create conversations, to change the levels and kinds of discourse going on in and around schools, and to stimulate inquiry, questioning, problem-solving, and a focus on learning for everyone in the system, not just students (Marshall, 1995). What change is really about is people and their implementation of new practices in their classrooms, schools, school districts, and states (Hall & Hord, 2001, p. 123). The skilled school leaders as “change facilitator helps people become ready for implementation and change through a personalized approach and creates a context in which change flourishes” (Hall & Hord, 2001, p. 212).

Educational leaders working in collaboration with others have remarkable opportunities now to change the emphasis of public education in our nation by widening the circle of hope and opportunity for our children’s future. “To be responsible inventors and discoverers, though, we need the courage to let go of the old world, to relinquish most of what we have cherished, and to abandon our interpretations about what does and doesn’t work” (Marshall, 1995 p.135).

In summary, there is much promise in the ninth grade transitional model movement, yet much remains to be accomplished. However, it must recognize that the development of ninth graders is vulnerable to traditional societal and educational forces.

Ninth grade represents an opportunity for a paradigm shift, one exemplified by reflective professional practice, the “cognitive/cultural leadership, and authentic education” (Hochman, 1998). Much like all of the young adolescents high schools serve,

ninth grade students are seeking their identity. In spite of the richness of the literature, describing appropriate programs, far too many high schools still fail to incorporate programs and practices that are developmentally responsive (Clark & Clark, 1999).

While some high schools are making significant progress toward developmental responsiveness, much needs to be done. Those high schools that have implemented appropriate programs must continue their efforts to improve by making sure that these programs are functioning as intended and by pursuing new ways to help all young adolescents be successful. This study suggests that much more is required for successful implementations beyond merely setting up the structure for a ninth grade transitional program.



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## APPENDIX A

### CONSENT FORM FOR THE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Dear Superintendent:

As per our conversation, my doctoral dissertation will address the perceptions of the transition from a traditional model program to a transitional model program, focusing on teachers at an urban school district. Part of my preparation and requirements are to interview school personnel about the transition process. I will also be examining school policies and artifacts. Therefore, I would greatly appreciate permission to complete this project in the XXX School District. This would include obtaining written permission from you to complete my dissertation project at XXX Area Schools. Written permission from you and other school personnel involved in this research project, for example, through interviews, will be obtained after your approval. Participation in all aspects of the study is **VOLUNTARY**. All information collected will be held in the strictest confidence and the identity of the school district will remain confidential.

If you are willing to permit XXX Area Schools to participate in this study, please sign the attached form and return it to the researcher. If you have any questions regarding the research, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Samuel D. Wilder  
Principal Investigator

Sdw  
Enc.

## APPENDIX B

### COVER LETTER FOR INFORMED CONSENT FOR ADMINISTRATOR, 9<sup>th</sup> GRADE COUNSELOR, 9<sup>th</sup> GRADE COORDINATOR, AND 9<sup>th</sup> GRADE TEACHERS

I am a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University. After a great deal of study and research in the area of high school transitional model programs, I am inviting you to participate in a study to examine teachers' perceptions of the transition from a traditional model program to a transitional model program.

For this study, I will interview a school administrator, 9<sup>th</sup> grade counselor, 9<sup>th</sup> grade coordinator, and 9<sup>th</sup> grade teachers. I will request that all participants to volunteer to an audio taped interviews. Artifacts will be gathered and examined. Examples are written communication about the transition process such as faculty meetings, in-service training, communication with outside resources including other established high schools, human and financial resources available to support the transition process, adult leaders that helped with the transition process, input/feedback from teachers, counselor, administrator, and coordinator.

For the audio taped interview, I will be asking opinions about the change from a traditional model program to a transitional model program. The audio taped interviews will be approximately 25 to 45 minutes in length.

There are no risks or discomfort expected as a result of your participation. You may find this experience rewarding as well as adding to the knowledge of the transition process that is involved when high schools change from a traditional model program to a transitional model program.

Participation in all aspects of this study is VOLUNTARY. Participants may withdraw from the audio taped interviews at any time by notifying the principal investigator. If you do choose to withdraw, data will be destroyed. If you choose to participate, all information collected from you in combination with data collected from other participants will be held in the strictest confidence. The information obtained in this study may be published or presented at conferences but your identity will remain confidential.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign the statement on the attached pages (two copies, one to sign and return and one for your records) and give the signed copy to the high school secretary in the main office. If you choose not to participate in this study, discard the information.

Sincerely,

Samuel Wilder  
Principal Investigator  
316 King David Drive  
Ellenwood, GA. 30294  
(678) 874-1917  
E-mail  
icusaj@yahoo.com

Dr. Linda M. Arthur  
Committee Chair  
P.O. Box 8131  
Statesboro, GA. 30460  
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APPENDIX C

SIGNED CONSENT FORM FOR ADMINISTRATOR, 9<sup>th</sup> GRADE COUNSELOR, 9<sup>th</sup>  
GRADE COORDINATOR, AND 9<sup>th</sup> GRADE TEACHERS

I have read and understand the information on the form and I consent to volunteer to participate in this study. I understand that the information from the audio taped interviews will be completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw from the interviews at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this Informed Consent Form to keep in my own possession.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

School(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Position \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number where you can be reached \_\_\_\_\_

Best days and times to reach you \_\_\_\_\_

Samuel Wilder  
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APPENDIX D  
INTERVIEW FORM

ADMINISTRATOR, 9<sup>th</sup> GRADE TEACHERS, 9<sup>th</sup> GRADE COUNSELOR, AND  
9<sup>th</sup> GRADE COORIDINATOR

1. How many years of experience in the field of education do you have?
2. In your opinion, why did this school make the transition from a traditional program model to a transitional program model?
3. Tell me about your involvement. How were you involved in the move from a traditional program model to a transitional program model?
4. What training have you had to make the transitional program successful?
5. How do you feel about the transitional program model?
6. What was the biggest change that you personally encountered in the move to the new transitional program model?
7. Describe how your role has changed from a traditional program model to a transitional program model?
8. What are the advantages of the transitional program model over a traditional program model?
9. What changes to the transitional program model would you make if could?
10. Is there anything else that you want to tell me about that I didn't ask you about?

APPENDIX E

LITERATURE MATRIX

| ARTICLE                          | PURPOSE  | PARTICIPANTS   | DESIGN/DATA COLLECTION   | OUTCOMES/ CONCLUSIONS  | OUTLINE TOPIC |
|----------------------------------|--|--|--|--|---------------|
| Aikins, Bierman, & Parker (2005) | Determine the influence of pre-transition friendship and self-system characteristic on Jr. High School transition. | 123 sixth grade students (76 girls and 47 boys) from seven elementary schools in two school districts. Also 121 of their best friends. | Quantitative: Battery of tests Questionnaire                                     | Both friendship and self-system characteristics make contributions to youth's school adjustments.<br><br>Variations in Jr. High School environment such as small Jr. High Schools and teaming approaches might facilitate positive adjustment.<br><br>Negative self-expectations may stifle attempts at development and contribute to an overall sense of emotional distress in the face of transition obstacles and challenges. | IV            |
| Akos & Galassi (2004)            | Compare the perceptions of students, parents, and teachers involved in middle and high school transitions.         | 173 sixth-grade students, 83 of their parents, and 12 of their teachers.<br><br>320 ninth grade students, 61 parents, and 17 teachers. | Quantitative: Battery of tests Questionnaire for students, parents, and teachers | Transition concerns<br><br>Positive aspects of transitions<br><br>Difficulty of the transition<br><br>Adjusting to the new school<br><br>Transition programming  | IV            |
| Alspaugh (1998)                  | Determine the nature of the  | Compare 3 groups of 16   | Descriptive Statistics for   | Transition loss in   | II            |

|                       |  |   |  |   |   |
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|                       | achievement loss associated with school-to-school transitions from elementary school to middle school and to high school.  | school districts  | School Groups<br><br>Two-way analysis of variance for achievement loss associated with the transition from elementary to middle, with repeated measures on academic areas. | achievement was larger when students from multiple elementary schools were merged into a single middle school during the transition.<br><br>The students from the middle schools and K-8 elementary schools experienced an achievement in the transition to high school 9 <sup>th</sup> grade.<br><br>High school dropout rates were higher for districts with Grade 6-8 middle schools than for districts with K-8 elementary schools. |   |
| Berndt & Mekos (1995) | Determine if adolescents who move from elementary school to a traditional junior high school perceive the transition as largely stressful or as largely desirable. | 101 sixth grade students (48 girls and 53 boys) from four elementary schools in one school district who moved to junior high school in two consecutive years. | Quantitative: Battery of test Questionnaire  | After entering seventh grade, girls rarely mentioned problems in peer relationships.<br><br>Seventh grade boys made more negative comments about academics than they had in sixth grade.<br><br>Boys made more negative comments about  | I |

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|   |  |            |            | <p>victimization by older peers in sixth grade than in seventh grade.</p> <p>Girls rarely mentioned victimization at any time.</p>   |            |
| <p>Carter, Clark, Cushing, Kennedy (2005)</p> | <p>Determine how educators can support students with severe disabilities and their families as they make the transition from middle school to high school.</p> | <p>NA</p>  | <p>NA</p>  | <p>Start Planning Early</p> <p>Collaborate Across Schools</p> <p>Prepare Students Early</p> <p>Encourage and Support Family Involvement</p> <p>Encourage Ongoing Communication</p> <p>Address Organizational Issues</p> <p>Develop Peer Support Programs</p> | <p>IV</p>  |
| <p>Chapman &amp; Sawyer (2001)</p>            | <p>Determine a program that is designed to make connection between a supportive middle school program for at risk-students and high school environment.</p>    | <p>N/A</p> | <p>N/A</p> | <p>Students highly invested as evidence by their attendance, active participation, and willingness to plan the program.</p> <p>Enhance peer-mentoring</p>  | <p>III</p> |

|   |   |   |                      |   |     |
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|   |   |   |                      | <p>Broaden the type of career choices</p> <p>Pregnancy prevention</p> <p>Handling racial conflicts</p>  |     |
| Lan & Lanthier (2003)                     | Determine the changes in personal attributes of high-school dropout students between 8 <sup>th</sup> grade and 12 <sup>th</sup> grade.  | 1988-1994 in the 8 <sup>th</sup> , 10 <sup>th</sup> , and 12 <sup>th</sup> grades, but who dropped out before completing high school were identified. | Quantitative: Survey | <p>Showed a developmental pattern of the personal attributes of dropout students and identified that the transition to high school is a critical yet neglected time when interventions should be provided.</p>                | II  |
| Lapan, Tucker, Se-Kang, & Kosciolk (2003) | Determine the impact of four school to work opportunities act curriculum strategies and three levels of stakeholder support on the preparation of rural adolescents.  | 347(206 girls and 141 boys) that lived in the rural areas of a large Midwestern state.  | Quantitative: Survey | <p>Showed the correlation between the six career constructs, curriculum strategies, and stakeholder support.</p>  | IV  |
| McElroy (2000)                            | Determine programs to facilitate transitions from elementary to middle school and from middle school to high school, strategies to improve academic skills, a conflict management program to improve discipline, and incentive program to recognize student | N/A   | N/A                  | <p>The Bridges program</p> <p>Meeting about course requirements<br/>Eighth-grade parent meeting at the high school</p> <p>Students visits to high school</p> <p>Individual conferences</p> <p>Magnet school presentations</p> | III |

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|   | accomplishments.   |   |                             |   |     |
| Mizelle (2005)                                | Determine how parents, policymakers, middle and high school educators ensure that every student is prepared to make a successful transition into high school.        | N/A   | N/A                         | Challenging and supportive middle school experience.<br><br>Staying with the same teachers in grades 6-8.<br><br>Learning management system for middle school students.<br><br>Spring orientation   | III |
| Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi (2005)            | Determine how much time was used that was school related by students and perceptions of schools, teachers, and friends of Montessori and traditional middle schools. | 290 demographically matched students in Montessori and traditional middle school  | Quantitative: Questionnaire | Montessori students spent more time engaged with school-related tasks, chores, collaborative work, and individual projects; traditional students spent more time in didactic educational settings (listening to a lecture, note taking, and watching instructional videos). | I   |
| Rudolph, Lambert, Clark, & Kurlakowsky (2001) | Determine the role of maladaptive self-regulatory beliefs as vulnerability factors for academic and emotional difficulties during the transition to middle school.   | 187 adolescents who experienced a school transition between the 5 <sup>th</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> grade and 142 adolescents who did not experience a school transition between 5 <sup>th</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> grade. | Quantitative: Questionnaire | Despite the growing knowledge base concerning the changes and challenges associated with the transition to middle school, little is known about individual differences in adolescents' reactions to the transition and associated   | IV  |

|                                       |   |                                    |                      |  |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|----------------------|--|---|
|                                       |   |                                    |                      | stressors.   |   |
| Schlechty, P.C. (1998)                | Determine the role of principals been instructional leaders for teachers and empowering teachers as leaders                       | N/A                                | N/A                  | Principals as effective leaders acts as change agents in the process of organizational restructuring, such as transformation from a middle school to a high school   | V |
| Sergiovanni, T.J. (1996)              | Determine that principals themselves must be empowered in order to empower teachers.  | N/A                                | N/A                  | The appeal of empowering teachers has more of an effect on success of reform. Principals need to engage teachers in shared decision making in the continued long-term maintenance and improvement of the school.           | V |
|                                       |   |                                    |                      |  |   |
| Silverthorn, DuBois, & Crombie (2005) | Determine the relationship between self-perceptions of ability and achievement in math, science, and English from Grades 8 to 11. | 616 8 <sup>th</sup> grade students | Quantitative: Survey | Results of this study indicate that associations between self-perceptions of ability and academic achievement over time involve linkages between both their stable (trait-like) and time-specific (state-like) components. | I |
| Smith (1997)                          | Determine the effectiveness of middle school transition programs on high school retention and student performance.                | N/A                                | N/A                  | Create effective transition programs in the middle school.   | I |

|                           |   |   |                                 |  |   |
|---------------------------|---|---|---------------------------------|--|---|
| Zanobini & Usai<br>(2002) | Determine changes in specific aspects of self-concept, motivation and school achievement. | 92- 5 <sup>th</sup> grade students who had been promoted to 6 <sup>th</sup> grade | Quantitative:<br>Questionnaires | Results show areas of both stability and change in the transition from primary to lower middle school. | I |
|---------------------------|---|---|---------------------------------|--|---|



Title:

Ninth Grade Transitional Program in a Georgia Metro School District

Topics to be Addressed:

- I. Beliefs regarding school transition and school reform
- II. Societal Changes for Ninth Grade Students
- III. Examples of Transition Programs
- IV. Characteristics and Effects of School Transitions
- V. Impact of Leadership

Statement of Problem:

The purpose of this proposed qualitative study will be to explore and analyze teachers' perceptions of the transitional program model from the traditional program model for the school year 2007-2008. This study will be conducted in a local metro Georgia high school. The purpose of this study will also analyze the perception of the reform on an administrator, ninth grade counselor, and ninth grade coordinator

Research Questions:

1. How do teachers describe their role in the transition process from a traditional model program to a transitional ninth grade model program?
2. What are teachers' perceptions of the change?
3. What has been the impact of the leadership of the school administrators on implementing the ninth grade transitional model program?

APPENDIX F  
LETTER OF APPROVAL

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December 18, 2007

Mr. Samuel D. Wilder  
316 King David Drive  
Ellenwood, GA 30294

Reference: Research Proposal, *Ninth Grade Transitional Program in a Georgia Metro School District.*

Dear Mr. Wilder:

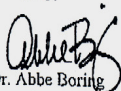
This letter is to advise you that your research proposal has been approved for implementation in the Bartow County School System with Cass High School as the site. Mr. Michael Nelson, Principal of Cass High School has agreed to work with you and a copy of this letter will be sent to him.

Please be advised that this approval is given for one year from the acceptance date. Should there be any addendums, design changes, or adverse events to the approved protocol, they must be submitted in writing to the Office of the Superintendent of Bartow County School System. Changes should not be initiated until written approval is received. Further, should there be a need to extend the time requested for the project, a written request must be submitted for approval at least one month prior to the anniversary date of the most recent approval and is the responsibility of the investigator. Should the time for which approval is given expire, it will be necessary to re-submit the proposal for another review by the Office of the Superintendent. Remember the name of the school or the school system must not appear in your final report. Even though the district and the local site administrator have approved your study, individual staff members, parents, and students still have the option to decline participation.

Please forward a copy of your results to me when they are completed.

Best wishes for a successful research project!

Sincerely,

  
Dr. Abbe Boring  
Superintendent