An investigation of potential benefits of an eighth to ninth grade transition program in an Atlanta metro school district high school on attendance, grades, and discipline referrals as comparable high school without a transition program in a comparable high school without a transition program in another metro school district

Edward Williams Jr.
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The purpose of this mixed methods study was to investigate if the potential benefits of a presence of an effective eighth to ninth grade transition program (BRIDGES Program) within School Cluster A had a positive impact on student attendance, student grades, student discipline referrals, and high school dropout rate, in comparison to School Cluster B, that lacks a transition program, using the same variables. The researcher conducted an unstructured, modified open-ended interview of 20-35 select eighth and ninth grade teachers, administrators and counselors from each cluster. The modified
The interview process consisted of participants being interviewed verbally as well as a written portion to complete the demographic information in an effort to gain the best responses. The interview was audio taped and transcribed. In this research study, the qualitative methods targeted the number of students in after school tutoring program and BRIDGES Mentoring Program. Attendance in the two programs, overall school attendance, discipline referrals and grade point averages were also investigated. The researcher also examined data of 35-48 students from School Cluster A. The results from this research suggest that the BRIDGES after school tutoring program had a positive relationship in the areas of student attendance, discipline referrals and dropout rate. The BRIDGES after school tutoring program did not have a relationship on student grades. The results from this research also suggest that the BRIDGES Mentoring program had a positive relationship in the area of discipline referrals yet had a negative relationship in the areas of student attendance, grade point average (GPA) and discipline referrals. Results also showed that there was a significant difference in attendance, grades, discipline referrals and dropout rate between a school with a transition program and a school without. Implications and recommendations for educational leaders concerning transition programs are offered.
AN INVESTIGATION OF POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF AN EIGHTH TO NINTH
GRADE TRANSITION PROGRAM IN AN ATLANTA METRO SCHOOL
DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL ON ATTENDANCE, GRADES, AND
DISCIPLINE REFERRALS AS COMPARED TO THOSE
FACTORS IN A COMPARABLE HIGH SCHOOL
WITHOUT A TRANSITION PROGRAM IN
ANOTHER METRO SCHOOL DISTRICT

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

BY
EDWARD WILLIAMS JR.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Ephesians 3:20 (KJV) reads, "Unto Him that is able He is to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we can ask or think." This verse acknowledges my progress throughout this journey.

I am indeed thankful to God for allowing me to accomplish such a feat as this. I never thought in a million years I would be in this position and for this I am eternally grateful. I would also like to thank Dr. Trevor Turner and Dr. Moses Norman for allowing me access to those wonderful minds over the years. I am always in awe when I get the opportunity to talk with you all. To Dr. Barbara Hill, I cannot find the words to tell you how much I appreciate you. You will forever be a part of my life and I thank you for your undying support you have shown me throughout this process. I want to extend a special thanks to my fellow doctoral candidates. I could not have made it without your support. We have created a bond that will never be broken. A special thanks to Mrs. Betty Cook for your support as well. You are truly the juggernaut of the Educational Leadership Department. I would also like to acknowledge my family and friends for their support. Lastly, I want to thank the love of my life, my wife, Erika, for her unwavering support and encouragement not only throughout this process, but through all of my endeavors. You mean more to me than you will ever know and I thank you for being a part of my life. You and the girls are the reason I strive for greatness every day.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Surviving difficult life transitions is one of the most important things we need to know if we desire to live a full and meaningful life. Transition follows us from the moment we were born until the moment we die. First, we make the transition from childhood to adolescence, adolescence to adulthood, single life to married life, and active career to retirement. In between are many other difficult transitions challenging us (Mastering Life Transitions, 2011). Dictionary.com defines transition as movement, passage, or change from one position, state, stage, subject, or concept. Google.com defines transition programs as programs designed to identify appropriate intervention and to provide training to facilitate the transition from level to level within school and from school to life after school. Much of the success individuals have in life can be attributed to how successful they are in transitioning. Transition programs are important in every aspect of our lives. Experiencing success or failure during transition can be a pivotal point in a person’s life. In order to become successful in the workforce or armed services there are a number of transitional steps that must take place. The military provides an excellent example of transitional steps. The purpose of recruit training is to prepare an individual for military life (Military Recruit Training, 2011). The training is deliberately challenging and designed to prepare recruits to be a soldier in today’s Army.
Colleges and universities also have orientation programs required for incoming freshman in an effort for them to be successful. Just like military recruitment, colleges and universities must also merge students together from all walks of life on college campuses. New student orientation facilitates a hospitable transition for new students and their families to all aspects of life in college (Trinity International University, 2011). Most college transition programs promote discussion among parents, new students, continuing students and faculty and staff on the expectations and perceptions of the campus community (Clemson University, 2011). During new student orientation, students will:

1. Complete a class schedule in his/her major.
2. Have an effective and comprehensive academic advising session.
3. Gain more knowledge of student support services.
4. Reduce anxiety about transition to collegiate life and,
5. Understand the necessity of students taking ownership and academic responsibility in their educational process. (www.clemson.edu)

All students, regardless of their personality, educational or cultural background will experience a period of transition. The transition from eighth and ninth grade has proven to present one of the greatest challenges for many high school students. Research shows that ninth graders often experience a decrease in academic achievement and an increase in problem behavior (National Middle School Association [NMSA], 2006). The Center for Equity and Excellence in Education (2009) at George Washington University recommended that state and district leaders provide structures to support middle school students with extra help they need for success in high school.
Entering ninth grade may be one of the most academically challenging times in a young person’s life (Roskosky, 2006). Students often approach the transition to high school with feelings of both worry and excitement (Akos & Galassi, 2004). Many ninth grade students have a difficult time adjusting to the demands of high school, resulting in lower grades, more disciplinary problems, higher failure rates, and feelings that they do not “fit in” the high school community. Graduation rates are also a reflection of some of these troubling concerns. The average freshman graduation rate in Georgia for 2007-2008 was a staggering 65.4%, while the national average was 74.9% (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2003). Economically disadvantaged students face even greater challenges as they make the transition to high school and may often lack motivation, interest, and support needed to become successfully integrated into the new school environment (Braddock & McPartland, 1993; Bryck & Thum, 1989; Legters, 2000; Roderick, 1993). Many students are retained in the ninth grade, creating what is known as the ninth grade bulge and drop out by the 10th grade, which contributes to the 10th grade dip. The National High School Center released the following data:

1. Students in ninth grade comprise the highest percentage of the overall high school population because students in disproportionate numbers are failing to be promoted to the 10th grade. According to Table 1, promotion rates between ninth and tenth grade are much lower than rates between other grades (Wheelock & Miao, 2005).
Table 1

Student Enrollment by Grade and Percentage of Total Enrollment in 2004-2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>8th</th>
<th>9th</th>
<th>10th</th>
<th>11th</th>
<th>12th</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3,824,670</td>
<td>4,281,345</td>
<td>3,750,491</td>
<td>3,369,339</td>
<td>3,094,349</td>
<td>18,230,194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. In the last 30 years, the bulge of students in grade nine has more than tripled, from approximately 4% to 13% (Haney, Madaus, Abrams, Wheelock, Miao, et al., 2004).

3. Researchers at John Hopkins University found that up to 40% of ninth grade students in cities with the highest dropout rates repeat the ninth grade, but only 10-15% of those repeaters go on to graduate (Balfanz & Letgers, 2004).

4. Twenty-nine of 51 states see their greatest “leakage” in the “education pipeline” occur during the ninth grade (EPE Research Center, 2006). Some states have as high as a 20% decrease in enrollment between ninth and 10th grades (Wheelock & Maio, 2005).

5. Low attendance during the first 30 days of the ninth grade year is a stronger indicator that a student will drop out than any other eighth grade predictor, including test scores, other academic achievement indicators and age (Jerald, 2006).

The research is very clear that the first year of high school is pivotal, and school districts need effective transition programs. Effective transition programs typically are
defined as ones that improve student attendance, achievement, and retention (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). Schools across the country see the importance of an effective transition program. New South Wales describes a transition program as a series of strategies or activities that a cluster of schools agree to implement to assist students making the transition from primary to secondary school (New South Wales Public Schools, 2011). A transition program provides activities for incoming students such as visiting the new school, offering social and academic activities, meeting the counselors and teachers, and visiting the classrooms. A transition program ideally contains activities linked together to ensure that the four phases of transition are reflected in the program (New South Wales Public Schools, 2011). New South Wales Government describes the four phases of transition as follows:

1. **Preparation**: Deals with carefully planned activities during primary school that can prepare students for secondary school. Plans to support transition should begin in year five, or even earlier, to create an environment that promotes a confident transition from the primary school classroom to the secondary school classroom.

2. **Transfer**: Refers to that period of time when there is a high level of direct interaction between the outgoing primary school students and their new secondary school. The most common transfer activities include student/parent meetings and student visits to the new secondary school.

3. **Induction**: Upon entry into year seven, secondary schools typically provide a variety of programs intended to orientate students to the expectations and
operation of the school. Programs also provide support for learning and the social and personal aspects of transition.

4. **Consolidation:** As transition activities eventually merge into the secondary school’s overall student welfare and support programs, late year seven and early year eight present an opportunity to introduce activities specifically designed to provide students with the means of managing their own learning. (www.schools.nsw.edu.au)

A transition program that incorporates these four phases is essential for students to experience effective transition from middle school to high school. Transition programs from middle to high school level seek to create much-needed successful social, academic, and educational and career planning experiences (Anafara & Schmid, 2007). However, “as researchers look to understand why students are dropping out of school, there is a concern over whether the programs that schools have developed to get students into high school are effective” (Smith, 2007, p. 74).

Until now, transition programs have varied widely within schools, and designs range from a one-day overview of a new school to a full year of career-focused curriculum. According to a 2006 research summary by the National Middle School Association (NMSA), many current transition programs focus on providing eighth-grade students with information on course selection and the physical layout of the school. Although this information is necessary, it does not address affective concerns, such as anxieties students may experience when entering high school (Oakes, 2009). What, then, are the factors that make for a successful transition? Not surprisingly, they appear to
center around the dual themes of academic emphasis and personal support and engagement (National Association of State Boards of Education [NAASBE], 2008).

**Components of Effective Transition Programs**

The National Middle School Association (2006) presents four key actions as essential to effective transition programs:

1. Ensuring collaboration between eighth and ninth grade building personnel.
2. Providing targeted early intervention to support academic recovery for failing students.
3. Making available to students and families pertinent and consistent information about academic, social, and organizational similarities and differences between middle school and high school; and
4. Offering information on the curriculum, facilities, safety, and discipline.

(p. 2)

Providing effective middle-to-high school transition is further supported by research by the Center for Equity and Excellence in Education (2009) at George Washington University. The research report made the following recommendations to state and district leaders:

1. Ensure that curriculum standards are aligned to prepare eighth grade students for the challenge of high school work.
2. Communicate the importance of literacy, mathematics, science, and social studies through policy and funding initiatives.
3. Prepare teachers for teaching challenging content in the middle grades.
4. Provide structures to support middle school students with the extra help they need for success in high school.

5. Ensure that middle school leaders are prepared to implement a program that prepares all students for the transition to college preparatory courses in high school.

6. Provide technical assistance to turn around low-performing schools serving middle grades.

7. Ensure middle-grade students and parents receive guidance and advice to plan for high school, postsecondary learning, and careers.

Both sources point to the shared responsibility of the middle and high school personnel along with parental support to help students make this transition successfully (Oakes, 2009). There are a few schools, nationally, as well as locally that implement successful transition strategies within middle and high schools.

**Effective Transition Practices**

There are a few schools in Frederick County (Maryland) Public Schools that have worked together to create a successful middle-to-high school transition program. For example, Brunswick Middle School and Brunswick High School in Frederick County Maryland have created SUCCESS (Students Under Cluster Care Experience School Success). In this program, teams of two or three teachers from each school building meet every other month to discuss and share instructional issues and assessment data on students (Oakes, 2009). SUCCESS teams receive monthly reports from school administrators and meet monthly to discuss common issues and develop common
practices that are instituted in all of their schools. The Brunswick schools have specific activities that help students to see high school graduation as their goal while they are still in primary grades. Posters that depict “The Ideal Brunswick Graduate” are posted throughout Brunswick schools and community buildings, outlining key characteristics of what each Brunswick student will know and be able to do when he or she graduates (Oakes, 2009). This serves as a visual reminder to students, families, and community members of the responsibility and expectation of all members of the community for student success.

Brunswick guidance counselors also meet with eighth graders to share information about high school courses and social expectations in high school. Students are also required to write a four-year plan for their high school career with supporting information from their teachers, parents, and guidance counselors. These plans are sent home to parents, kept in students’ school files, and used to help students select their ninth grade classes during ninth grade registration and monitored over the course of their high school careers, to match eighth grade planning with the four years of high school reality (Oakes, 2009). Students involved in this program are successfully staying in school and more than 80% of its graduates are enrolled in some type of college.

Regionally, a local middle school and feeder high school, both part of a Georgia County school system, see themselves as one large school system, not as two separate buildings. Both schools serve students with high needs. At the local middle school, 92% of students are economically disadvantaged and 41% are English language learners. At the feeder high school, 83% of a student population of 831 students are economically
disadvantaged and 36% are English language learners (Oakes, 2009). These issues have not kept the two schools from achieving success and setting the bar high. All middle school students travel to the feeder high school twice a year, and each is paired with a ninth or 10th grade student for a full day, seeing classes and extracurricular activities through the eyes of that student. Each eighth grader receives a transition packet, with a picture of his or her counselor. Students keep the same counselor for all four years at the feeder high school.

In 2008, both schools worked together and created a summer bridge program, during which incoming ninth graders attend a week of orientation at the high school. The program dealt with academic, as well as social issues. It was also gender-specific, with boys and girls separated. This allowed teachers to address academic and social issues that specifically relate to gender. The district provided transportation for the students and funds to feed them breakfast and lunch. More than a third of the incoming freshman attended the inaugural program.

Another high school in Georgia has decided to make an attempt to bridge the gap between middle school and high school as well. However, the program at this particular high school is only a one day event. The high school has a program called the Summer Soiree. The Soiree is a four hour program in which freshman teachers and counselors are required to attend. The session consists of presentations by the Principal and ninth grade administrator. They also have three break-out groups. One group deals with graduation requirements and the HOPE scholarship. The second group talks about student activities and is a question and answer session led by the student leadership team. The third group
talks about student accountability, student handbook, rules, regulations and expectations. This is spearheaded by the administrative team. Each session is roughly fifteen minutes. The counseling department at the high school feels that this is a great way to help freshman make an easier transition to high school, socially and academically. When asked if they felt the program was effective they stated that they were not sure. As stated earlier, schools must provide a variety of activities that address the concerns of students and their parents and help make the experience a seamless and successful one (Oakes, 2009).

**Statement of the Problem**

Transitioning into and out of middle school can be difficult for many students, and as a result, many students are retained, particularly in the ninth grade. Ninth grade retention strongly correlates with dropping out of high school (Pennsylvania State Education Association [PSEA], 2010). Student grades tend to decline during the first year of high school, attendance drops upon entry to high school, and school engagement in schooling decreases (Weiss & Bearman, 2004). If the staff, students, and parents were trained, more prepared and involved, would the ninth grade students be more successful?

This study investigated the potential benefits of an eighth to ninth grade transition program (*Independent Variable*) in a metro Atlanta school district (School Cluster A) upon attendance, grades, discipline referrals, and high school dropout rates (*Dependent Variables*) in comparison to a comparable school district that lacks a transition program (School Cluster B). The study compared the data in the areas of attendance, discipline referrals, grades and high school dropout rates, from students enrolled as freshman in
High School during the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 academic school year from School Cluster A, with a transition program and School Cluster B, without a transition program. This study also interviewed eighth and ninth grade teachers, counselors, and administrators within both clusters. Cluster A also conducted a District Wide Annual Assessment of their transition program, which was done through surveys. The survey questions are general in nature and not specific to faculty and students. The District Wide Annual Assessment was also examined for this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the potential benefits of a presence of an effective eighth to ninth grade transition program within Cluster A and to determine the impact on student attendance, student grades, student discipline referrals, and the high school dropout rate, in comparison to Cluster B, that lacks a transition program, using the same variables. If an effective transition program proves to be more effective, then what steps should a school without a transition program take?

Research Questions

RQ1: Is there a relationship between the BRIDGES Transition after-school tutoring program and student attendance?

RQ2: Is there a relationship between the BRIDGES Transition after-school tutoring program and student grade point averages (GPA)?

RQ3: Is there a relationship between the BRIDGES Transition after-school tutoring program and discipline referrals?
RQ4: Is there a relationship between the BRIDGES Transition after-school tutoring program and the dropout rate?

RQ5: Is there a relationship between the BRIDGES Transition Mentoring Program and student attendance?

RQ6: Is there a relationship between the BRIDGES Transition Mentoring Program and student grades?

RQ7: Is there a relationship between the BRIDGES Transition Mentoring Program and discipline referrals?

RQ8: Is there a difference in attendance, grades, discipline referrals and dropout rate between a school with a transition program and a school without?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was to investigate if there is a potential benefit of a school cluster that utilizes a ninth grade transition (School Cluster A) program versus a school that does not (School Cluster B). If there is a difference, this research will help secondary school leaders create, or implement an effective ninth grade transition program for what has proven to be the most difficult year in high school. Some schools may already have transition programs in place but building leaders may also want to examine current practices to determine if they are effective or not.

Summary

The beginning of high school is a critical time for students. Making a successful transition to high school can have a positive impact on students and increase the likelihood of graduation from high school. The purpose of this study was to investigate
student attendance, discipline referrals, student grades and the high school dropout rates between a school that has a transition program (School Cluster A) and a school that currently does not have a formal transition program (School Cluster B). The eight research questions listed guided this study in an effort to determine if there was a difference between the two schools.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

A major event in a young adolescent's life is transitioning to high school. According to Jacobson (2008), the transition from middle school to high school is one of the most difficult situations young people face; expectations are greater, schools are larger and individual attention from the teacher and school staff is often diminished. Research has shown that if a student makes it successfully through his or her first year of high school, he or she will have 'made it,' and can be expected to graduate.

Traditionally, schools have used a reactionary wait-and-see approach for students as they make the transition from middle school to high school, providing interventions only after students experience academic and/or behavioral failings in the early months of their high school career (Dufour, Dufor, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004; Sorenson, 2007). Research has shown that the wait-and-see approach has proven to be ineffective. Nationally, a recent study of public school enrollment patterns shows that (a) there is a sharp increase in the number of students enrolled in the ninth grade over the last 30 years, indicating that an increasing number of students are being retained, and (b) the rate at which students disappear between ninth and 10th grade has tripled over the same time period (Haney, 2004). Course failures, suspensions and expulsion rates, and high school
Dropout rates are higher in the ninth grade than any other high school grade levels (Hertzog & Morgan, 1998; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2005; Roderick & Camburn, 1999).

Clearly, the transition into high school is difficult for many students. However, it is usually the end result of unsuccessful transition programs that contribute to high dropout rates, low on-time graduation rates, and low achievement (Cook, Fowler, & Harris, 2008). The review of relevant literature identifies different aspects of a transition program. The first section focuses on the difference between middle and high school followed by the academic concerns that ninth grade students’ exhibit. The literature review also examines how the high school graduation rate is determined. This section investigates the reason students drop out of high school, the purpose of transition programs, as well as practices that support a successful program. Finally, the literature review concludes with examples of the types of transition programs and best practice currently implemented in high schools.

Differences between Eighth and Ninth Grades

Building and district administrators are concerned about the transition to high school; therefore, the following question is necessary: What are the major differences between middle school and high school structural programs? Dr. Mike Hall (2008), in his presentation on *High School Redesign: Making the Transition from Middle School to High School*, discussed size, scheduling, classroom expectations, academic competition, mixed grade level classrooms, discipline, and parent involvement.
Classroom expectations at the high school level may be different than the middle school level for students. Students must adapt to a variety of instructional styles and conform to a different system of rules and expectations.

One of the biggest challenges when moving from middle school to high school is the focus often shifts from teaching and nurturing the whole child to focusing—in a more limited way—on instructing student's to learn the content of academic subjects. (Herlihy, 2007, p. 19)

Compared with middle school teachers, many high school teachers find it much more difficult to form strong supportive relationships with their students. Because they interact with hundreds of students a day, they may be less responsive to individual needs (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Class schedules are also different at the high school level. Students are assigned a class schedule and move to the classes as individuals rather than groups (Hall, 2008). Students will also have more teachers. Students also experience a different, usually higher grading standard. The environment becomes more competitive as students move through high school (Herlihy, 2007).

High school is the first time students earn credit for graduation. Unfortunately, some ninth graders do not realize the importance of passing courses. More rigorous classes and frequent homework assignments are also some of the problems freshmen face.
Academic Concerns of Ninth Grade Students

Some researchers state that some students are not successful in the ninth grade because they are not adequately prepared for high school. Ninth graders have the lowest grade point average, the most missed classes, the majority of failing grades, and more misbehavior referrals than any other high school student (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). High-achieving students may also experience lower grades than they are accustomed to when they move from middle to high school (Oakes, 2009). One major academic transition issue is how students earn credit in middle school as opposed to high school. High school is the first time that students earn credit for graduation over the course of four years (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). When students who struggle academically in the middle grades or who might have earned decent grades but were inadequately challenged before high school enter ninth grade, their lack of knowledge and skills finally catch up with them (Neild, 2009). According to this theory, students with poor math and reading skills are overwhelmed by the academic demands of high school. Students who enter high school with academic skills below grade level are at a higher risk of getting off track to graduation than those with on-grade skills. Floundering academically, they become discouraged about ever completing high school, may become truant, and finally drop out (Neild, 2009).

Drawing on research in mathematics education as well as the structure of mathematics itself, the National Mathematics Advisory Panel’s (NMAP) 2008 report recommended that to succeed in algebra, students need to have acquired a “thorough
understanding” of fractions, decimals, and signed numbers during middle grades (NMAP, 2008).

**Determining High School Graduation Rates**

The federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) requires states to report graduation rates every year and calls for annual improvements. It sets some general requirements for how states should measure graduation rates. For example, graduates must finish with a regular diploma in the standard number of years (Southern Regional Education Board, 2011). In 2006, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) concluded that the best available estimated rate was the average freshman graduation rate (AFGR). It reflects the portion of ninth graders who graduate from high school in four years. For states with data systems, a cohort based rate also can take into account any students who transferred into high school or left for any reason (Southern Regional Education Board, 2011).

The U. S. Department of Education [USDOE] (2008), defines the four-year adjusted cohort rate (hereafter referred to as “the four-year graduation rate”) is the number of students who graduate in four years with a regular high school diploma divided by the number of students who form the adjusted cohort for the graduating class. From the beginning of ninth grade, students who are entering that grade for the first time form a cohort that is subsequently “adjusted” by adding any students who transfer into the cohort later during the ninth grade and the next three years and subtracting any students who transfer out, emigrate to another country, or die that same period (U.S.

The Reason Students Drop Out

The high school dropout problem has been called a national crisis. Nationally, research puts the graduation rate between 68% and 71%, which means that nearly one third of all high school students leave the public school system before graduating (Swanson, 2004). Research is clear that ninth grade is a "make or break" year. More students fail ninth grade than any other grade in high school, and a disproportionate number of students who are held back in ninth grade subsequently drop out (Herlihy, 2007). In the report, The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Drop Outs, Civic (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006), Enterprises surveyed and interviewed young people aged 16-25 who identified themselves as high school dropouts. The report states that most high school students leave school with less than two years to complete their high school education (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). The decision to drop out is rarely the result of a single life event. Respondents report a number of different reasons for dropping out of school. The Silent Epidemic listed the top five reasons dropouts identified as major factors for leaving school:

1. Classes were not interesting
2. Students missed too many days and could not catch up
3. Students spent time with people who were not interested in school
4. Students had too much freedom and not enough rules in life
5. Failing Classes (p. 3)
Dropouts in this report also discussed what they believe would improve students’ chances for staying in school. The reasons are (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006):

1. More opportunities for real-world learning (internships, service learning, etc.) to make classrooms more relevant.
2. Better teachers who keep classes more interesting.
3. Smaller classes with more individual instruction.
4. Better communication between parents and school, as well as getting more parents involved.
5. Parents should make sure their kids go to school every day and,
6. Increase supervision at school: ensure students attend classes. (p. 13)

Researchers from John Hopkins University, the Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR), and the Parthenon Group also examined the academic history of dropouts. Students who dropped out usually had received a failing grade in core courses (especially in math of English), earned a low grade point average (GPA), or scored low on achievement tests (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008). They were often retained in grade because they had not earned enough credits to be promoted; as a result, many were older than the other students in their class. Students also had low attendance rates and discipline problems. Dropouts themselves acknowledge the importance of attendance; in a recent survey of those who chose to leave school without attaining a diploma, missing too many days of school and having trouble catching up was the second most reported reason for dropping out (Bridgeland & Morison, 2006). These students were frequently not engaged in their education or aware of its importance to future opportunities
(Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008). Seventy-five percent of the dropouts from the Boston Public Schools’ Class of 2004 fit into one of four distinct categories: (a) students with multiple ninth-grade course failures, (b) students with one or more eighth-grade risk factors (attendance below 80%, two or more years over-age, or failing multiple courses), (c) late-entrance English language learners; or (d) special education students taught in “substantially separate” classrooms (Parthenon Group, 2007).

The Purpose of Transition Programs

Transitions into high school often are unnecessarily difficult for students. Evidence-based programs have been able to reduce the negative impacts of transition and help more students succeed in ninth grade and beyond (PSEA, 2010). One purpose of a transition program is to keep students from dropping out of high school. Academic failure in the ninth grade is a high predictor of dropout rates in school districts (Pinkus, 2008). Research shows that it is imperative that measures be put in place to smooth transition. Schools with fully operational transition programs have an average dropout rate of only 8%, while schools without such programs have a dropout rate of 24% (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). Another purpose of a transition program is to create a warm and safe social environment for students (Anafara & Scmid, 2007). Many students develop a more negative view of themselves than they had in middle school; they feel less competent to handle the academic and social demands of high school (Mizelle, 2005). Students need to feel a sense of belonging during times of transition (Anafara & Scmid, 2007). Anafara and Scmid also link school connectedness to academic achievement, social and personal attitudes, and participation in school. Students
are less likely to drop out and be involved in delinquent behavior when they feel a sense of belonging.

**Practices That Support A Successful Transition Program**

High schools are constantly trying to improve student achievement, and many are taking a look at a student’s initial year of high school. Several practices are beginning to emerge to ease the transition from middle school to high school. Research suggests that students who experience four or more teacher directed transition activities in support of this move from middle school to high school are much more likely to experience success than their peers who experience three or fewer positive teacher directed transition practices (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999; McIntosh & White, 2006). Many of the positive teacher directed transition practices highlighted in the research center on ways that school communities work to: (a) ease the anxieties associated with the enrollment process, (b) create a warm, welcoming atmosphere where students feel encouraged to engage in all aspects of the school, and (c) create a more personalized environment that supports the unique academic, personal, and social issues outlined above (Blum, 2005; Bottoms, 2008; Cushman, 2006; DuFour et al., 2004; Gideon, 2004; McIntosh & White, 2006; Mizelle, 2005; National Association of Secondary School Principals [NASSP], 2004; Quint, 2006).

Communication between eight grade and ninth grade teachers, counselors, and administrators prior to the enrollment process helps professionals identify students’ particular learning needs and make appropriate course recommendations (DuFour et al., 2004; Mizelle, 2005). Such professional dialogue also affords teachers the opportunity to
align curriculum content and expectations between grade levels, ensuring students experience continuity and appropriate rigor in their coursework as they move from middle to high school (Bottoms, 2008; DuFour et al., 2004; Mizelle, 2005).

Inviting students and their parents to tour the high school facility during the spring semester of the students’ eighth grade year during the summer prior to starting ninth grade has become a common practice for many schools (Cushman, 2006; DuFour et al., 2004; Gideon, 2004; Hertzog & Morgan, 1999; Mizelle, 2005; Smith, 1997). Some tours offer an open house setting where members from extracurricular activities and cocurricular clubs and activities set up information booths as a way to inform incoming high school students of the myriad of opportunities available to them at their new school (Dufour et al., 2004; Hertzog & Morgan, 1999; McIntosh & White, 2006). The Center for Equity and Excellence in Education (2009) at George Washington University made the following recommendations to state and district leaders in an effort to provide effective middle-to-high school transition programs:

1. Ensure that curriculum standards are aligned to prepare eighth-grade students for the challenge of high school work.

2. Communicate the importance of literacy, mathematics, science, and social studies through policy and funding initiatives.

3. Prepare teachers for teaching challenging content in middle grades.

4. Provide structures to support middle school students with the extra help they need for success in high school.
5. Ensure that middle school leaders are prepared to implement a program that prepares all students for the transition to college preparatory courses in high school.

6. Provide technical assistance to turn around low-performing schools serving middle grades.

7. Ensure that middle-grade students and parents receive guidance and advice to plan for high school, postsecondary learning and careers.

**Types of Transition Programs**

With the number of ninth grade students being retained and dropout on the rise, educators are desperately seeking alternative methods in an effort to ease transition challenges that are leaving to many students behind. The most obvious of these challenges is the physical environment. During the past 40 years, the average size of high schools has increased drastically, creating more support for smaller school settings (Cook, Fowler, & Harris, 2008). The 1970s gave rise to a wave of smaller learning community (SLC) models developed to address the complexity of high school environments. Smaller learning communities have since become a staple for ninth grade transition (Cook, Fowler, & Harris, 2008). High Schools That Work (HSTW), Career Academy and Talent Development are three of many SLC models utilized for ninth grade academies.

The High Schools That Work (HSTW) model is developed from the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) initiative that is dedicated to obtaining 85% of career bound high school students to complete a rigorous course of study and to meet or exceed
the High Schools That Work performance goals in mathematics, reading and science (Southern Regional Education Board, 2011). While the model was developed for the entire high school population, several schools are using HSTW as a framework for implementing Ninth Grade Academies (Cook, Fowler, & Harris, 2008). The High Schools That Work model revolves around ten research-based practices that include (Southern Regional Education Board, 2011).

1. **High Expectations**: Motivate more students to meet higher standards by integrating high expectations into classroom practices and providing frequent feedback.

2. **Program of Study**: Require each student to complete an upgraded academic core and concentration.

3. **Academic studies**: Teach more students the essential concepts of the college-preparatory curriculum by encouraging them to apply academic content and skills to real-world problems and projects.

4. **Career/technical studies**: Provide more students access to intellectually challenging career/technical studies in high-demand fields that emphasize the higher-level academic and problem solving skill needed in the workplace and in further education.

5. **Work-based learning**: Enable students and their parents to choose from programs that integrate challenging high school studies and work-based learning and are planned by educators, employees and students.
6. **Teachers working together**: Provide cross-disciplinary teams of teachers time and support to work together to help students succeed in challenging academic and career/technical studies.

7. **Students actively engaged**: Engage students in academic and career/technical classrooms in rigorous and challenging proficient-level assignments using research-based instructional strategies and technology.

8. **Guidance**: Involve students and their parents in a guidance and advisement system that develops positive relationships and ensures completion of an accelerated program of study with an academic or career/technical concentration.

9. **Extra help**: Provide a structured system of extra help to assist students in completing accelerated programs of study with high-level academic and technical support.

10. **Culture of continuous improvement**: Use data continually to improve school culture, organization, management, curriculum and instruction to advance student learning.

HSTW believes everyone—teacher, school, district, local and state leaders—must work together to create the conditions in which student achievement, graduation rates and school culture can improve (Southern Regional Education Board, 2011).

The Career Academy Concept is another model being used in high schools. Career academies are defined as schools within schools that link students with peers, teachers, and community partners in a disciplined environment, fostering academic
success and mental and emotional health (Cffee & Pestridge, 2001). Formed 40 years ago by business and community leaders as a way to provide youth improved educational and career opportunities (Association for Career and Technical Education [ACTE], 2009), career academies provide college preparatory curricula that integrate academic and career and technical education (CTE) courses, engaging students in applied learning in a setting that requires a cohort group of students and staff working as a team (ACTE, 2009). The Association for Career and Technical Education Issue Brief lists the common features of Career Academies. They are:

1. A small learning community comprised of a group of students within the larger high school, who take classes together for at least two years and are taught by a team of teachers from different disciplines.

2. A college preparatory curriculum with a career theme, enabling students to identify relationships among academic subjects and their application to a broad field of work.

3. Partnerships with employers, the community and local colleges that bring resources from outside the high school to improve student motivation and achievement.

4. Use of the National Standards of Practice for career academies that were developed by an informal consortium of natural career academy organizations and are framed around 10 key elements for successful, sustained implementation. (www.acteonline.org)
The National Academy Foundation (2011), which supports 529 academies in 49 states, reports that 90% of students enrolled in its program graduated and 80% of those go on to college. The data show that career academies are very relevant for high school students.

The Talent Development High School (TDHS) Program is a comprehensive reform model for large high schools that face serious problems with student attendance, discipline, achievement scores, and dropout rates. The Center for Social Organization at John Hopkins University (2011) states that the talented development program model consists of specific changes in school organization and management to establish a strong, positive school climate for learning; curricular and instructional innovations to transition all students into advanced high school work in English and mathematics; parent and community involvement activities to encourage college awareness; and professional development systems to support the implementation of the recommended reforms. The key components of the TDHS models are as follows (Center for Social Organization, 2011):

1. **High Expectations:** The TDHS requires basic college preparatory courses for all students over four years.

2. **Ninth-Grade Academy:** A self-contained school-within-a-school with interdisciplinary teacher teams designed to provide ninth-graders a smooth transition to high school and caring, respectful environment in which to begin their high school careers.

3. **Extended Class Periods:** The schedule is made up of four classes a day of 80-90 minutes each. This allows teachers the time to teach in depth and to use
a variety of instructional strategies that meet the needs of different kinds of learners.

4. **TD Specific Courses:** Ninth, 10th, and 11th grade in the Talent Development High Schools offer courses designed by researchers and curriculum developers for students performing below grade level.

5. **Extra Help:** The Talent Development model offers after hours credit recovery programs, an alternative program, called Twilight School, and other summer and weekend activities for making up or catching up. Computer-assisted lab courses in English and mathematics can also be built into the schedule to provide a “triple dose” of these subjects for needy students.

6. **Career Academies for upper grades:** Career academies are self-contained small learning communities of 250-350 students in grades 10-12. They are typically three career academies in a school, depending on its size, each with a career focus in core subjects, as well as elective courses.

7. **Professional Development:** Extensive and on-going Professional Development is one of the hallmarks of the model. Training sessions and workshops are held throughout the year and there is also a coaching system that brings assistance into an individual’s classroom on a regular basis. These curriculum coaches are veteran teachers on special assignment to work with classroom teachers regularly to help them handle recurring problems, expand the lessons and use the TD strategies to their full potential. Curriculum coaches do not evaluate teachers. Their role is collegial.
8. **Teaming:** The ninth-grade academy is organized into several teams of four
teachers and approximately 100 students each. This allows teachers and
students to know one another and respect one another. Common planning
time is another aspect of teaming, so that teachers can not only plan integrated
lessons, but also share information about the needs and performance of their
students. (www.web.jhu.edu)

**Summary**

The transition from middle to high school can be a very stressful time for students
and parents (Clark & Hunley, 2007). This literature review examined the differences
between middle and high school, the academic concerns ninth grade student’s exhibit,
examining how high school graduation rates are determined and the reason student’s drop
out of high school. It also examined the purpose of transition programs, practices that
support transition program and the types of transition program currently being
implemented in some high schools across the country.

The review of literature showed that there may be a significant need for a high
school transition program. This study analyzed if a high school with a freshman
transition program has an impact on student attendance, student grades, student discipline
referrals and the high school drop out, in comparison to a high school that does not have a
transition program. Chapter Three explains the methodology that was used in this study.
CHAPTER III
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was designed to identify the correlation between a selected independent variable between high school programs with or without a transition program and selected items related to a system-wide developed transition program. To be more precise, this research was designed to investigate four major areas that might impact ninth grade transition programs: (a) student attendance, (b) student discipline, (c) student grades, and (d) high school dropout rates. Figure 1 identifies the variables of this study. This chapter includes the theoretical basis of the study, diagrams of variables, definitions of variables and other related terms, relationship among the independent and dependent variables, as well as a concluding summary. Cherry (1999) stated:

Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions, this coded information serves as a guide for action.

(p. 1)

The foundation of transitioning stems from the Social Learning Theory, which provides the theoretical basis for the research. Figure 1 illustrates the concepts that structure the framework for this study.
Figure 1. Diagram of Theoretical Framework

Social learning theory takes a look at transitioning from a broader perspective. Social learning theory focuses on the learning that occurs within a social context. It considers that people learn from one another, including such concepts as observational learning, imitation, and modeling (Cherry, 1999). There are three core concepts at the
heart of social learning theory. First is the idea that people can learn through observation. Next is the idea that internal mental states are essential part of this process. Finally, this theory recognizes that just because something has been learned, it does not mean that it will result in change behavior (Cherry, 1999).

Definition of Variables and Other Terms

Independent Variable

The Bridges After-School Tutoring Program and the Bridges Peer Mentoring program serve as the independent variables in this study. The Bridges After-School tutoring is a long term program that is held twice a week. The program assists students with mastering standards in their weakest subjects. The Bridges mentoring program is a program that allows the upperclassmen in the school to lead freshmen advisement lesson throughout the school year. The Bridges After-School Tutoring program and the Bridges Mentoring program were examined to determine if they had a positive effect on the dependent variables; attendance, discipline, student grades and dropout rates.

Dependent Variables

The dependent variables in this study are student attendance, student discipline referrals, student grades, and high school dropout rates. The terms are defined as follows:

**High school dropout rates:** The U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports the Cohort rates reflect the percentage of a single group of students who drop out over time.
**Student attendance**: Refers to the number of students that are present during a school day. Attendance could also be defined as the frequency with which a student is present.

**Student discipline referrals**: Discipline referrals are issued for academic and behavioral misconduct. Discipline referrals are also used in an effort to gain control or enforce obedience within schools. For the purpose of this study, the number of referrals issued was examined.

**Student grades**: Refers to a standard set of grades and symbols used by schools to mark a student’s progress in courses taken throughout the school year. Students are graded on a number scale from 0-100, which converts into a letter grade from A-F.

**Other Operational Terms**

**Cluster**: Refers to two middle schools that send their eighth grade students to the same feeder high school.

**Cohort**: Refers to a group of students having a statistical factor in a common demographic study. For the purpose of this study, it would be ninth grade students.

**Emigrate**: To leave one’s country or region to settle in another; relocate.

**Retention**: Refers to students that have not earned the specified credits during the school year to be promoted to the next grade level.

**Student enrollment**: Refers to the actual number of individual students enrolled at a particular school.
Relationship among the Variables

Evidence is growing that students who fall off track during the freshman year have very low odds of earning a high school diploma (Neild & Balfanz, 2006). According to the National Middle School Association (NMSA), many current transition programs focus on providing eighth-ninth grade students with information on course selection and the physical layout of the school. That information is somewhat beneficial; however, research shows that ninth graders often experience a decrease in academic achievement and an increase in problem behavior (Oaks, 2009).

Related research shows that transition from one level of schooling to another is a process that unfolds over time. Schools have a responsibility to provide students with comprehensive supports for the normal, predictable challenges they face during these extended period of transition (Oliver & Popadiuk, 2009). Recently, a number of school districts have introduced freshman transition programs as an organizational structure to combat poor performance in the ninth grade. One major philosophy of freshman transition programs is to ease the academic and social transition from middle to high school. The National Middle School Association (2006) presented four key actions as essential to effective transition programs:

1. Collaboration between eighth and ninth grade building personnel;
2. Provide early intervention to support academic recovery for failing students;
3. Providing consistent information to students and families in reference to academic, social, and organizational similarities and differences between middle school and high school; and
4. Offering curriculum, facilities, safety, and discipline of the high school. (p. 2)

Student attendance, student discipline referrals, as well as student grades and the dropout rate are all predictors of a successful or unsuccessful transition program. If student attendance and grades improve, discipline referral and the dropout rates will decrease.

**Summary**

This chapter summarized the theoretical framework for this study. Figure 1 shows the significant relationship between the independent and dependent variables as well as definitions of other variables being used.
CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the potential benefits of a ninth grade transition program within School Cluster A in order to determine the impact on student attendance, student grades, student discipline referrals, and the high school dropout rate, in comparison to a school that has no transition program, School Cluster B, using the same variables. This chapter contains a description of the mixed methodology of the study.

Research Design

A Mixed Method approach was used for this study which is a procedure for collecting and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data. The Mixed Method Study was selected to determine whether a transition program has a positive correlation on program participants in School Cluster A in the area of attendance, student grades, student discipline referrals and high school dropout rate in comparison to School Cluster B operating without a transition program. The research occurred within similar school districts. Both School Clusters, A and B, consisted of a single high school, with two middle schools serving as feeder schools to the high school.
Description of the Setting

The data were collected from two local school clusters located just outside the metro Atlanta area. Both school districts’ demographic data consisted of an ethnic diverse group of ninth grade students. The following is a description of each school cluster used in this research.

School Cluster A

Cluster A consists of two feeder middle schools, and a high school. Middle School A1 opened in 2009 and is located in the western metro Atlanta region of the participating school district. The school consists of grades 6 to 8 and the 2009-2010 enrollment was 822 students. The student demographics were 42% black, 43% white, 10% Hispanic, 3% multiracial, and 1% Asian. Sixty-one percent of the students are economically disadvantaged and Title I eligible.

Middle School A2, which opened in 1957, is located in the same region as the high school/Cluster A1. The school consists of grades 6 to 8 and the 2009-2010 enrollment was 292. The student demographics were 79% black, 9% white, 9% Hispanic, and 3% multiracial. Eighty-nine percent of the students are economically disadvantaged and are Title I eligible.

High School A3 is the feed-school for the two middle schools in Cluster A. The school consisted of grades 9 to 12 in 2009-2010 and the student enrollment was 2055. The student demographics were 63% black, 26% white, 6% Hispanic, 4% multiracial, and 2% Asian. Sixty-one percent of the student population falls under the economically disadvantaged category. Data from the 2009-2010 ninth grade class was examined for
this study. Select eighth and ninth grade teachers as well as administrators and counselors from both clusters were interviewed.

BRIDGES Transition Program

The County School System currently has a transition program called Building Rigor in D... to Graduate Every Student (BRIDGES). This program is funded by a $4.7 million grant received from the U. S. Department of Education. It is designed to enhance Freshman Academies at each high school within the county school district. The 2011-2012 school year marks the fourth year of the five-year grant. BRIDGES offered a number of freshman transition programs that help rising ninth graders ease into high school and provide support during that most critical first year of high school. Some examples of the eighth to ninth grade transition program consist of the following:

1. **Freshman Expo**: This is a component where the high school assistant principal in charge of the Freshman Academy goes to their feeder middle schools to talk about high school and invite the eighth graders to attend the Freshman Expo.

2. **Freshman Summer Camp**: Camp is held three half days and normally takes place two weeks before school starts. Students are divided into small groups and rotate throughout the three days to academic and non-academic sessions. Freshman teachers from each core area participate which allows them to get to know some of the students. Team building activities are facilitated by 10th, 11th, and 12th grade volunteers who also serve as mentors.
3. **Freshman Fiesta**: This activity takes place prior to the opening of school. Fiesta is a mini version of summer camp. Students take a tour of the campus, learn about extracurricular opportunities, meet their teachers, pay for lockers and receive their schedules. At the end of the evening, parents return to hear pertinent information.

4. **Freshman Newsletter**: BRIDGES provides a bi-monthly newsletter to freshman parents. The newsletter contains information regarding academic tutoring, student of the month, career pathways upcoming meetings, etc.

5. **BRIDGES Buddies**: This is a peer mentoring program. Upperclassmen mentors lead freshman advisement lessons a few times each semester. Mentors are trained one day over the summer and are trained throughout the year to teach them advisement lessons.

6. **After-School Tutoring**: Tutoring sessions are held before and after school twice a week. The BRIDGES Program also provides students transportation home in the afternoons. The program is long term and is not intended for drop-ins; therefore students must apply to be a part of the program.

7. **Parent Involvement**: Through the grant, the program provides postcards, newsletters and a website to keep parents up to date with BRIDGES. The program also host parent nights to keep parents informed and involved.

   Additionally, the BRIDGES Program provided field trips, job-shadow days, test prep as well as professional development for staff members.
School Cluster B

The second participating School Cluster B also consisted of two feeder middle schools, and a High School all located in the metro Atlanta area. Middle School B1 is located in the heart of the County. Serving as a middle school since 1970, Middle School B1 2009-2010 enrollment was 682. The student demographics were 54% white, 31% black, 10% Hispanic, 4% multiracial, and 1% Native American. Fifty-eight percent of the students are economically disadvantaged and eligible for Title I services.

Middle School B2 has served the south side of the county since 1992. The enrollment for 2009-2010 was 585. The student demographics were 75% white, 14% black, 5% Hispanic, 5% multiracial, and 1% Native American. Thirty-nine percent of the students are economically disadvantaged and eligible for Title I services.

High School B3 is located five minutes from Middle School B1 and Middle School B2. The enrollment for 2009-2010 was 1396. The student demographics were 60% white, 28% black, 7% Hispanic, and 4% multiracial. Fifty percent of the students are economically disadvantaged. Data from the 2009-2010 ninth grade class were examined for this study. Eighth and ninth grade teachers as well as administrators and counselors from the middle and high school level were interviewed for this study. At the time of this research study, the second participating county school district did not have a functional transition program.

Participants and Sampling Procedures

The procedure consisted of a purposeful study which allowed the researcher to select the potential participants. The qualitative method used small focus groups
consisting of select eighth and ninth grade teachers, administrators and counselors from Cluster A, the school with a transitional program, and Cluster B, the school system without a transitional program (see Appendices A and B). The researcher conducted an unstructured, modified open-ended interview of 20-35 educators from each cluster. The modified interview process consisted of participants being interviewed verbally as well as a written portion to complete the demographic information in an effort to gain the best responses. Interview groups were based on two categories: all teachers and counselors in category one and administrators only in category two. The interview was audio taped, transcribed and the written section was tabulated. Upon completion of the transcribed script, participants were sent copies of the interview session. An examination of the data from Cluster A, the school system with a transitional program, the researcher sought to determine if a transition program had an impact in the areas of attendance, discipline referrals, grades and the dropout rate.

Additionally, the qualitative method examined two other factors: teacher preparation to effectively implement the transition program and any unforeseen challenges that may have occurred and to determine if the BRIDGES Transition Program satisfied any gaps or special needs in student transition from eighth to ninth grade. Further examination was conducted to assess what types of resources were needed to implement the BRIDGES Program successfully. The researcher asked both Cluster A and Cluster B information related to demographic data in terms of number of years in education and highest level of education attainment.
In this research study, the quantitative methods targeted the number of students in the after school tutoring program and BRIDGES Buddies, a peer mentoring program. Attendance in the two programs, overall school attendance, discipline referrals and grade point averages were also investigated. The researcher examined 35-48 student data, including attendance, assessments, and reported discipline records, from each program. For this study, the students’ names remained anonymous. This data indicated whether or not the Bridges program had a definitive impact in identified areas.

**Working with Human Subjects**

The information gathered in this research remained confidential. All participants were notified of the confidentiality agreement when they received an email request and/or hard copy notification. The identities of the focus groups remained concealed because the instrument did not ask for their names or any other information that directly linked them to the study. Participants were notified before conducting the interview to explain the purpose for this study and to discuss confidentiality and anonymity to ensure that the target sample was completely aware of the conditions for participation.

**Instrumentation**

The instrumentation consisted of a review of school records in order to collect data on student attendance, student discipline referrals, and grades, and to determine if any students departed the program for any reason. Interviews, with structured questions, were conducted with modified focus groups from both school districts to solicit responses to the same dependent variables. The results of the study were analyzed to explain whether or not a transition program administered in School Cluster A had a positive
correlation on attendance, student grades, discipline referrals, and high school dropout rate. The interview questions were referred to the Educational Leadership faculty at Clark Atlanta University to determine face validity.

**Data Collection Procedures**

The following procedures were used to collect data from the target sample:

1. The researcher received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) from Clark Atlanta University and within each designated county.

2. Permission from Cluster A School System was obtained by meeting with the Associate Superintendent for Student Achievement and Leadership who granted approval.

3. Permission from Cluster B School System was obtained by meeting with the Associate Superintendent of Curriculum who granted approval.

4. The researcher identified and personally met with the contact person(s) at each school who assisted in administering the interviews with the focus groups.

5. Issued a letter to each administrator at each school introducing the researcher and seeking their participation in the study.

6. The researcher scheduled and conducted interviews with chosen participants from both Clusters.

7. The researcher reviewed school documents on attendance, discipline referrals, grades, dropout rate and components of the transition program.
Statistical Applications/Data Analysis

Data were analyzed through the review of the questions from the modified focus groups to determine the extent to which they helped to answer the research questions. A $t$-test was used to compare attendance, student grades, discipline referrals and predicted dropout rate of both school clusters. A $t$-test assessed whether the means of the two clusters are statistically different from each other. The $t$-test assessed whether the means of two groups were statistically different from each other. Data from the components from the sample group were correlated with the dependent variables to determine the relationship with the research questions.

Summary

Chapter Four described research methodology and design. This chapter also identified the instrumentation and implementation of the study. A description of the target sample was also provided in Chapter Four. The rationale for a mixed methods study was that neither quantitative nor qualitative methods would be sufficient enough to allow for a complete analysis. The interview of focus groups as well as review of the documents of the dependent variables provided validity to the research.
CHAPTER V
DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the potential benefits of an eighth to ninth grade transition program in a metropolitan school district on attendance, grades, discipline referrals and dropout rate. The dependent variables in this study were student attendance, student discipline referrals, student grades, and high school dropout rates. The independent variables were the BRIDGES After School Program and the BRIDGES Peer Mentoring Program. A Mixed Method approach was used for this study which is a procedure for collecting and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data. The researcher conducted focus groups discussions with educators from two school districts. The discussions were guided by predetermined questions located in Appendices A and B. The data were collected from the two participating school clusters located outside of metropolitan Atlanta. The two clusters, A and B, each consisted of two middle schools and a feeder high school. The study population consisted of teachers, counselors and administrators from each cluster. After a review of the data, the findings from the research were examined and displayed in tables. The findings from the focus groups were analyzed, transcribed and coded.

Description Summary

The researcher interviewed a total of 53 participants in the two focus groups, which consisted of teachers, counselors, and administrators. The participants from the
two districts became known as Cluster A and Cluster B. Table 2 provides a breakdown of each cluster. Cluster A had 20 participants and Cluster B had 33 participants. The focus group interview questions were structured differently based on the participation status of the two clusters. Cluster A focus group questions consisted of nine questions and Cluster B focus group consisted of five questions all based on their participation or non-participation in a planned transitional program. Both Clusters consisted of the same three demographic background questions which were answered in a written format. Participants completed a process which consisted of participants being interviewed in an effort to gain the best responses. Demographic data was completed in written form. Descriptive data was provided to support the research questions.

Table 2

*Cluster Description*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control Group</th>
<th>Treatment Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Cluster A</em></td>
<td><em>Cluster B</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School A1</td>
<td>Middle School B1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School A2</td>
<td>Middle School B2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School A3</td>
<td>High School B3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Research Questions Results*

RQ1: Is there a relationship between the BRIDGES Transition after-school tutoring program and student attendance?
The data with respect to this research question are provided in Figure 2. In the figure, the following relationships are observed: The percentage of freshman absent more than 15 days during the 2008-2009 school year was 19.1%. The percentage in the 2009-2010 school year was 18.7%. That was an improvement of .4%. There was a substantial relationship between the BRIDGES Transition after school program and student attendance. Decreasing the number of students absent for more than 15 days was a long term objective for the BRIDGES Transition Program.

![Figure 2](image)

**Figure 2.** Percentage of Freshman Students Absent for More Than 15 Days in Cluster A3

RQ2: Is there a relationship between the BRIDGES Transition After-School Tutoring Program and student grades?

The data with respect to this research question are provided in Appendices C and D. The tables include data from mathematics and American government as the two
subject areas the ninth grade students received tutoring support. In the tables, the following noted relationships are observed: In the Fall 2009 semester, 567 Freshman were enrolled in school. Of those, 567, 48 students attended the BRIDGES After-School Program. Twenty ninth graders attended American government tutoring and 28 participated in math one tutoring. Eleven students out of 20 passed American government (25%) at the end of the semester. Five students out of 28 passed Math I at semester’s end (21.4%).

In the Spring 2010 Semester, 558 freshman were enrolled in school. Of the 558, 38 students attended the BRIDGES After-School Program. Thirty-eight students attended Math I tutoring. Four students were passing Math I at the end of the 9 week period (10.5%). There was no relationship between the BRIDGES after school tutoring program and student grades in mathematics. Mathematics was the only course ninth grade students needed tutorial support. Mathematics is one of the core content subjects that students must pass on the Georgia High School Graduation Test.

RQ3: Is there a relationship between the BRIDGES Transition after-school tutoring program and discipline referrals?

The data with respect to this research question are provided in Figure 3. These data focus on student discipline. Under No Child Left Behind, schools are determined to be safe or not based on this reported data. In Figure 3, the following strong relationships are observed: In the academic school year 2008-2009, the Freshman class in High School Cluster A3 had a total of 405 reported disciplinary actions.
In the 2009-2010 school year, the numbers of disciplinary actions at the same site were reduced by 65 for a total of 340 referrals. There was a positive relationship between the BRIDGES Transition after-school program and the number of reported student discipline referrals.

RQ4: Is there a relationship between the BRIDGES Transition after-school tutoring program and the dropout rate?

The data with respect to this research question are provided in Table 3. In the table, the following relationships are observed: The dropout rate in the 2008-2009 school year was 3.60% and in the following school year 2009-2010, the dropout rate was 2.90%, a .7% difference. This indicated that the BRIDGES Transition After-School Tutoring Program might have had a positive relationship on the dropout rate.

Figure 3. Number of Disciplinary Actions of the Freshman Class in High School Cluster A3
Table 3

*High School Cluster A3 Enrollment Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School Year</th>
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</tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment Total</td>
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<td>1,396</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman Enrollment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>567</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>558</td>
<td>581</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation Rate</td>
<td>73.5%</td>
<td>74.20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Average</td>
<td>78.9%</td>
<td>80.80%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropout Rate</td>
<td>3.60%</td>
<td>2.90%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Average</td>
<td>3.80%</td>
<td>3.60%</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RQ5: Is there a relationship between the BRIDGES Transition Mentoring Program and student attendance?

The data with respect to this research question are provided in Table 4. In the table, the following relationships are observed: The average number of reported unexcused absences in school year 2008-2009 was 1.1 days. The average number of reported unexcused absences in school year 2009-2010 was 4.8 days. There was not a relationship between the BRIDGES Transition Mentoring Program and student attendance.
Table 4

*BRIDGES Buddies Ninth Grade Participants' Attendance Data Cluster A3*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Male (M)</th>
<th>Female (F)</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>#Unexcused</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>#Unexcused</th>
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</table>

RQ6: Is there a relationship between the BRIDGES Transition Mentoring Program in Cluster A3 and student grade point average (GPA)?
The data with respect to research question 6 are provided in Table 5. In the table, the following relationships are observed: There was an average of 563 students during the 2008-2009 school year. There were a total of 15 students that participated in the BRIDGES Transitioning Mentoring Program. The average Grade Point Average (GPA) for the 2008-2009 school year was 2.47. There was an average of 586 students during the 2009-2010 school year. Fifteen students participated in the BRIDGES Transition Mentoring Program. The average Grade Point Average (GPA) for the 2009-2010 school year was 1.8. That is a difference of .67. The GPA was based on a 4 point scale. There was a negative relationship between the BRIDGES Transition Program and student GPA.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BRIDGES Buddies Ninth Grade Participants' Grade Point Average Data Cluster A3</th>
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(continued)
Table 5 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

RQ7: Is there a relationship between the BRIDGES Transition Mentoring Program and discipline referrals?

The data with respect to this research question are provided in Table 6. In the table, the following relationships are observed: During the 2008-2009 school year, the average number of referrals was 1.7 for a total of 23 referrals. In the 2009-2010 school year, the average number of reported discipline referrals almost tripled to 4.4 for a total of 66 referrals. The 2008-2009 school year indicated a positive relationship between the BRIDGES Transition Program and reported discipline referrals. However, the 2009-2010 school year had a negative relationship between the BRIDGES Transition Program.
Table 6

*BRIDGES Buddies Ninth Grade Participants’ Discipline Referrals Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Male (F)</th>
<th>Female (F)</th>
<th>2008-09 Grade</th>
<th>2008-09 #Discipline</th>
<th>2009-10 Grade</th>
<th>2009-10 #Discipline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RQ8: Is there a difference in attendance, grades, discipline referrals and dropout rate between a school with a transition program and a school without?
Data concerning this research question was conducted in focus group interviews. Additional data are located in Appendices E-J. The data were collected from two school clusters outside of metropolitan Atlanta. Clusters A and B each consisted of two middle schools and a feeder high school. Cluster A had the BRIDGES Transition Program. Cluster B did not have a transition program. The interviews are summarized in this chapter. The entire transcribed script is located in Appendices E-J. Participant’s demographic data are also located in Appendices K-L.

**Summary of Transition Questions—Cluster A**

**Middle Schools A1 and A2**

Clusters A1 and A2 consisted of 12 participants in this study. The BRIDGES Transitional Program is a five year grant funded system-wide program in Cluster A.

1. **Describe the BRIDGES Program.**
   - One-hundred percent of the participants (12) stated that the program is primarily in high school, and middle schools staff did not participate in the implementation of the BRIDGES Program.
   - Twenty percent of the participants (2) stated that the feeder high school distributed flyers to the middle school students to advertise the BRIDGES Program.
   - Thirty percent of participants (3) responded that they were not familiar with the BRIDGES Program located at the feeder high school.

2. **In your opinion, does the BRIDGES program satisfy any gaps or special needs in student transition from eighth to ninth grade?**
• One percent of the participants (1) stated that the most meaningful connection they have was staff members from the high school would come and speak to the eighth grade students about what to expect at the high school level and courses would be offered. This was the only time the high school staff connected with the middle school.

• One percent of the participants (1) stated that one day out of the school year, high school administrators reported to the middle school and meet with social studies classes to explain to students about the high school experience. Administrators discuss the registration process, and counselors follow up to determine interest in the summer program. Teachers distributed flyers to advertise the program.

3. In regard to Professional Development, what type of training/support did you receive in order to implement the BRIDGES Program and when?

• One hundred percent of the participants (12) reported that they have not received any training in regards to the BRIDGES program.

• Fifty percent of the participants (6) reported that a Power point was presented at the beginning of the year but they were not certain if it was related to the BRIDGES program.

4. In your mind, do you feel the training provided for the program was sufficient? Why or why not?

• One hundred percent of the participants (12) interviewed stated that they had not had sufficient training for the program to be effective.
• Fifty percent of the participants (6) stated that if the intent of the program was to benefit eighth grade students, then the eighth grade teachers should be better informed about the content of the program to help prepare the students for the transition.

5. What resources were necessary for implementation of the BRIDGES program to be successful and were they provided?

• One hundred percent of the participants (12) reported that other than an informational flyer that was all the resources provided.

6. What difficulties, if any, have you had in implementing the BRIDGES program?

• One hundred percent of the participants (12) reported that there were no difficulties in implementing the program because the program was nonexistent at the middle school level.

7. Has the BRIDGES program had an immediate impact in the following areas:

A. Attendance: One hundred percent of the participants (12) stated the BRIDGES program has not had an immediate impact on attendance.

B. Discipline Referrals: One hundred percent of the participants (12) stated the BRIDGES program had not had an immediate impact on discipline referrals.

C. Grades: Ninety percent of the participants (10) stated that the BRIDGES program had not had an immediate impact in the area of grades.

D. Dropout rate: N/A
8. On a scale from 1-10, one being least effective and ten being very effective, how would you rate the effectiveness of the BRIDGES Program?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Least</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. What is your reason for selecting this rating?

**Teacher 1 - Rating: 0**

Comments: This is my first year hearing of the BRIDGES Program. The last 2 years I was in the Connection’s department

**Teacher 2 - Rating: 5**

Comments: Eighth grade teachers do not usually see the results. We do not have a coordinator at our school. Rising eighth graders are contacted to participate

**Teacher 3 - Rating: 5**

Comments: We don’t really see any results. We are just starting to learn about GA 411.

**Teacher 4 - Rating: 8**

Comments: I am aware of the BRIDGES program for transitioning from MS to HS. However, I am not aware of statistics that show how effective it is. I do know that many eighth graders attend summer programs to prepare them for high school. I’ve heard back from some of my previous eighth graders that it was helpful to them and made high school less stressful and scary.
Teacher 5- Rating: 6
Comments: The program is beneficial but does not seem to impact all students.

Teacher 6: Rating: 6
Comment: N/A

Teacher 7- Rating: 5.
Comments: Program exists in high school, where I am certain it is effective. It could be more effective if begun in middle school.

Teacher 8- Rating: 4
Comments: As middle school teachers we know very little about the program and I do not think our students know a lot about it.

Teacher 9: Rating: 2
Comments: The program needs to be implemented in the middle school beginning with eighth grade, first semester.

Teacher 10- Rating: 2
Comments: The BRIDGES program should be initiated in the middle school in eighth grade.

Administrative Responses

Administrator #1

1. How many students who enter your school in ninth grade graduate in 4 years?
   NA
2. Are the aspirations, strengths, and weaknesses of each student known by at least one faculty member or other member of your staff?

- We believe that each teacher must form a relationship with each student. It is imperative that faculty know where strengths and weaknesses are. How do you ensure the staff member uses that information appropriately to help the student become successful in all classes and activities? We meet in a collaborative setting once a week. We often talked about students and how or why they were having issues with a subject or teacher.

3. Do you feel that you have been supportive of the BRIDGES transition program? If yes, explain how.

- We feel that in order to decrease the dropout rate, there must be action taken with our eighth graders heading into ninth grade.

4. Is there an opportunity for staff to collaborate with eighth and ninth grade building personnel in the feeder schools?

- Not much, we could stand for more organized meetings.

5. Has the BRIDGES program had an immediate impact in the following areas:

   A. Attendance: Yes

   B. Discipline Referrals: No

   C. Grades: No

   D. Dropout rate: Yes
6. On a scale from 1-10, one being least effective and ten being very effective, how would you rate the effectiveness of the BRIDGES Program?

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7. What is your reason for selecting this rating?

- I think the aspects of this program will continue to be felt as our students move through the high school program. The dropout rate should drop with these interventions.

**Administrator #2**

1. How many students who enter your school in ninth grade graduate in 4 years?

- Do not have this information.

2. Are the aspirations, strengths, and weaknesses of each student known by at least one faculty member or other member of your staff? How do you ensure the staff member uses that information appropriately to help the student become successful in all classes and activities?

- The students do goal sheets, so they discuss their aspirations, strengths, and weaknesses with their faculty advisor.

3. Do you feel that you have been supportive of the BRIDGES transition program? If yes, explain how.

- I think that my school has been supportive of the Bridge Bill. We have been following the prescribe roll out and requirements of the law.
4. Is there an opportunity for staff to collaborate with eighth and ninth grade building personnel in the feeder schools?
   
   - At the moment, there is not a program that allows eighth and ninth grade teachers to collaborate.

5. Has the BRIDGES program had an immediate impact in the following areas:

   A. **Attendance**
   B. **Discipline Referrals**
   C. **Grades**
   D. **Dropout rate**
   
   - It is hard to see an immediate impact with the Bridge Bill because of our other programs that also address these items.

6. On a scale from 1-10, one being least effective and ten being very effective, how would you rate the effectiveness of the BRIDGES Program?

   
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7. What is your reason for selecting this rating?

   - I feel that there is still room for improvement in what we are doing.

**High School A3**

Cluster A3 consisted of 8 participants in this study. The BRIDGES Transitional Program is a three year grant funded system-wide program in Cluster A.

1. Describe the BRIDGES Program.
• Sixteen percent of the participants (1) stated that the Bridges program is a grant that was state-funded and there was a coordinator that has been with the program for three years. They relied on that person to bring information to the forefront for teachers to disseminate to the students from each grade level. Participants stated that the coordinator did a great job by sharing an array of activities, different types of information (based on grade appropriate level that students should be considering for future life options for college), technical schools, graduation requirements and credit recovery if students have failed classes. The coordinator made certain that students knew about up-coming college fairs.

• Sixteen percent of the participants (1) stated that there was a tutoring aspect to the Bridges program in which they have seen a lot of success with their students because of the program.

2. In your opinion, does the BRIDGES program satisfy any gaps or special needs in student transition from eighth to ninth grade?

• Thirty-three percent (2) of the participants stated that they were not certain if they should wait for students to enter the tutoring program once they are failing. Participants stated that teachers should identify the upcoming eighth-grade students that were struggling, failed the CRCT, and were placed in ninth grade. Participants think that the tutoring program would be more beneficial if the start-up time was at the same time school started at the beginning of the school year and they met with at risk students twice a
week. At the time the focus groups met with select teachers they had to wait at least nine weeks in order for students to attend tutoring and the general consensus was more an after-the-fact strategy. Based on the records received from summer receiving teachers already know who would need extra help and the placement should not be an option.

- Sixteen percent of participants (1.2) stated that in their T.A.P. (Tiger Advisory Program) program Bridges buddies come in and students were familiar with them because of the summer activities.

3. In regard to Professional Development, what type of training/support did you receive in order to implement the BRIDGES Program and when?

- Sixteen percent of participants (1.2) stated that they have not received any formal training for the program.

- One hundred percent of participants (8) stated that the program director does most of the communication via e-mail, or via printed messages.

- One hundred percent of participants (8) explained that the program director or coordinator explains what is needed in detail through e-mails. Directions are given based on grade level needs.

- One hundred percent of participants (8) stated that teachers generally follow the directions provided.

4. In your mind, do you feel the training provided for the program was sufficient? Why or why not?
• One-hundred percent of the participants (8) stated that information is given to the teachers to implement the Bridges program but the teachers were not able to provide input.

• Fourteen percent of participants (1.1) believe that with proper training they would be able to provide feedback on which lessons worked and which ones did not. As well as what could be done to improve them to meet the needs of the students.

• Fourteen percent of the participants (1.1) stated students should be surveyed. Teachers see things from an adult perspective and fail to realize that kids have not had the experiences that teachers have had. Even though teachers know that there are things students need to know, how it is delivered to the students is a very important element.

5. What resources were necessary for implementation of the BRIDGES program to be successful and were they provided?

• One hundred percent of participants (8) interviewed stated that most Bridges information is listed on the school’s common directory. The entire Bridges manual is listed on the school’s common directory.

6. What difficulties, if any, have you had in implementing the BRIDGES program?

• One hundred percent of the participants (8) interviewed stated that being in other teachers’ classrooms created difficulties. The advisement program had each grade level in different parts of the building (for example, the
freshman class was in one area of the building, sophomore class was in another). The different locations around the building caused a number of issues. For example upon arriving at another teacher’s classroom the door maybe locked, logging on to other teacher’s computers invasive/privacy issues. The entire school moving at the same time within 6 minutes created another set on student management issues. Teachers thought that was dangerous. With such a large campus, some teachers arrived to classes late because they came from the other side of the campus, which left their classes unsupervised for a period of time.

- One hundred percent of the participants (8) stated that with all of the student movement school-wide, the front office did not know where students were located during the advisement period.

7. Has the BRIDGES program had an immediate impact in the following areas:

A. Attendance: One hundred percent of participants (8) interviewed stated that a number of students skipped the advertisement period. Once teachers understood that they could take attendance during that time, the attendance improved because students were being referred for skipping.

B. Discipline Referrals: Fourteen percent of participants (1.1) stated that they were not sure if the BRIDGES Program had an impact on discipline referrals.

C. Grades: Fourteen percent of the participants (1.1) interviewed stated grades were improving because of the Bridges program. Tutoring teachers
were able to go over the standards with a different approach than the regular teacher. This allowed students to get a different view of the lesson.

D. Dropout rate: One hundred percent of participants stated they were not familiar with the data on dropout rates.

8. On a scale from 1-10, one being least effective and ten being very effective, how would you rate the effectiveness of the BRIDGES Program?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Least Somewhat Very
Effective Effective Effective

9. What is your reason for selecting this rating?

Teacher 1- Rating: 6

Comments: Some students take advantage of what BRIDGES has to offer and others do not.

Teacher 2- Rating: 8

Comments: BRIDGES was all over the campus and used in every aspect academically and socially for students. It also provided resources for teachers to administer to our students.

Teacher 3- Rating: 9

Comments: Very effective; can see growth of all grade levels; tutoring opportunities/test cram sessions; college opportunities; great eight to ninth grade transition.
Teacher 4- Rating: 6

Comments: I'm learning this process of advisement as I go so I'm still a "work in progress" as far as advisement goes. BRIDGES is still really new to me. However, I do see BRIDGES in effect in more aspects of the school. Unfortunately, as a new teacher to the school, I'm not fully aware of all aspects of how the program is in effect here.

Teacher 5- Rating: 4

Comments: I am not knowledgeable about BRIDGES and I am not sure I can make that judgment well. I do know that I have several students who do well in BRIDGES tutoring.

Teacher 6- Rating: 9

Comments: We have a good BRIDGES Coordinator and BRIDGES offers many supportive options.

Teacher 7- Rating: 7

Comments: Most students can only fit Math tutoring into their schedule for Bridges so other core subjects do not get the attention they need.

Administrative Responses

Administrator #1

1. How many years have you served as an administrator? 16
2. How many years have you served at this particular school? 1
3. What is your highest level of education? Ed. D.
4. How many students who enter your school in ninth grade graduate in 4 years? 
   375

5. Are the aspirations, strengths, and weaknesses of each student known by at least one faculty member or other member of your staff? How do you ensure the staff member uses that information appropriately to help the student become successful in all classes and activities?  
   We work to build relationships with all students through advisement.

6. Do you feel that you have been supportive of the BRIDGES transition program? If yes, explain how.  
   Yes, by working with all stakeholders in the program.

7. Is there an opportunity for staff to collaborate with eighth and ninth grade building personnel in the feeder schools?  
   Some, but not as much as needed.

8. Has the BRIDGES program had an immediate impact in the following areas:  
   A. Attendance: Yes  
   B. Discipline Referrals: Unsure  
   C. Grades: Yes  
   D. Dropout rate: Yes

8. On a scale from 1-10, one being least effective and ten being very effective, how would you rate the effectiveness of the BRIDGES Program?  

   1  2  3  4  5  6+  7  8  9  10
   Least  Somewhat  Very  Effective  Effective  Effective
9. What is your reason for selecting this rating? I feel that we can do a better job of helping our student succeed.

Summary of Transition Questions—Cluster B

Middle Schools B1 and B2

Clusters B1 and B2 consisted of 21 participants in this study. This Cluster does not have a transition program.

1. Do you feel a transition program for eighth graders would benefit the students at your school?
   - One hundred percent of the participants (21) felt as if a transition program was needed for eighth grade students. Respondents stated that students will be better prepared for ninth grade if there was a transition program involved.
   - One hundred percent of participants (21) stated that students don't understand the credit based system in high school, because they have not earned credits in middle school.

2. Describe any Professional Development opportunities given to the staff to assist rising freshmen with transition.
   - One hundred percent of the participants (21) interviewed reported that they had not had any professional development opportunities to assist freshmen with transitioning to the ninth grade. The high school counselors came and met with students for one period to discuss scheduling.
3. Describe the current transition process for rising ninth grade students into high school. (When it begins, what it entails, who is responsible for it.)

- One hundred percent of participants (21) interviewed reported that the High School Counselors came to the middle school to register students for ninth grade classes. A standard PowerPoint is shown that tells requirements that students have to meet.

4. Do you know of any programs with your feeder middle schools aimed at supporting in transitioning eighth graders to high school?

- Fifty percent of participants (10.5) reported that Special Education services are the only services that support transitioning to high school.

- Fifty percent of participants (10.5) reported that Georgia College 411 is the only program that discussed transitioning. Other than that, there was little worth noting.

5. Does your school have difficulty in the following areas:

A. **Attendance**: One hundred percent of participants (21) stated that attendance was a huge problem.

B. **Discipline Referrals**: One hundred percent of participants (21) stated that discipline was not a problem within their school.

C. **Grades**: One hundred percent of participants (21) interviewed stated that grades were a problem. Participants gave the following responses:

1. Lack of accountability
2. Students realize that they will be promoted to the ninth grade regardless of their grades.

3. Middle school has become a joke because students know it does not matter.

4. Students do not turn in work and they do not care.

D. Dropout rate: Fifty percent of participants (10.5) reported that they have a number of students that disappear off the roll or are home-schooled.

Administrative Responses

Administrator #1

1. How many students who enter your school in ninth grade graduate in 4 years?

   NA

2. Are the aspirations, strengths, and weaknesses of each student known by at least one faculty member or other member of your staff? How do you ensure the staff member uses that information appropriately to help the student become successful in all classes and activities?

• We do have students in advisement groups for a 3 year period and the student will stay with that staff member each school year. The students have a portfolio with academic, behavior and attendance information that assist the advisor to follow the progress of the student. They can recommend tutoring, math connections or counseling to the student or they can choose to assist the student. The small group allows the student/teacher to build a better relationship. We use technology and small group sessions
to review data and identify students that need assistance and we serve them during our NBI period.

3. How would you feel about a transition program at your school? Would you be supportive?
   - I believe this type of program is very beneficial to students and I would support such a program.

4. Is there an opportunity to collaborate with eighth and ninth grade building personnel for the purpose of planning for a smooth transition for students moving from eighth to ninth grade?
   - The counselors and parents do meet and the eighth grade teachers attend one parent night at the high school for a parent information meeting but as far as eighth teacher the interaction is limited.

5. Does your school have difficulty in the following areas:
   - We made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and fall into average range on ITBS/Cogat.

A. **Attendance:** Our rate is at 96% per month and we did make our second indicator of attendance on the CRCT but if you have a large percentage that misses over 15 days it has a huge impact. We had about 60 students fall into this category last year. We put an incentive in place that will hopefully decrease that number this year. (Renaissance program)

B. **Discipline Referrals:** Less than 2% any given week are in ISS or OSS

C. **Grades:** (bell curve few A’s few F’s most in the middle range)
D. Dropout rate: NA

Administrator #2

1. How many students who enter your school in ninth grade graduate in 4 years?
   N/A – Middle School A.P.

2. Are the aspirations, strengths, and weaknesses of each student known by at least one faculty member or other member of your staff? How do you ensure the staff member uses that information appropriately to help the student become successful in all classes and activities?
   • Each student, at our Middle School, meets with their homeroom teacher to discuss their strengths, weaknesses, and goals for the year. There are various checkpoint meetings throughout the year to update status and progress. Each content area teacher also studies/examines/evaluates each student’s data pertaining to that content area, thus determining academic strengths and weaknesses as well.

3. How would you feel about a transition program at your school? Would you be supportive?
   • I think a truly well-defined transition program, that both middle school and high school administration and building personnel could support would be a wonderful benefit for our eighth grade students. This type of program does not currently exist in this county.
4. Is there an opportunity to collaborate with eighth and ninth grade building personnel for the purpose of planning for a smooth transition for students moving from eighth to ninth grade?

- The only collaboration that occurs at this time is the handling of registration by the Middle School counselors, the parent night (of rising ninth graders) at the high school, and the meeting with eighth grade students by the High School counselors to discuss courses. There is no collaboration that currently takes place that encompasses the whole child—takes into account, not just academic strengths and weaknesses, but also interests, backgrounds, personal strengths and weaknesses (emotional and social) of the child.

5. Does your school have difficulty in the following areas:

   A. **Attendance**: Runs pretty close to 10% of students with 15 or more days absent (second AYP indicator).

   B. **Discipline Referrals**: Discipline referrals are a constant part of the day.

   C. **Grades**: There have been some incredible gains in test scores during the last four years. However, there is a fairly high percentage of students who have consistently low grades in the classroom setting – due to what seems to be a total lack of motivation to do any kind of work for some of the teachers.

   D. **Dropout rate**: We are a middle school and do not follow the dropout rates as closely as a high school would in the county.
Administrator #3

1. How many students who enter your school in ninth grade graduate in 4 years?
   N/A

2. Are the aspirations, strengths, and weaknesses of each student known by at least one faculty member or other member of your staff? How do you ensure the staff member uses that information appropriately to help the student become successful in all classes and activities?
   • Teachers set academic and professional goals with students during individual conferences. The conferences are documented in a SMART book, which is a school based initiative to get to know each student.

3. How would you feel about a transition program at your school? Would you be supportive? Yes

4. Is there an opportunity to collaborate with eighth and ninth grade building personnel for the purpose of planning for a smooth transition for students moving from eighth to ninth grade?
   • In past years we have conducted middle and high school collaboration meetings with English and Math teachers.

5. Does your school have difficulty in the following areas:
   A. **Attendance:** No
   B. **Discipline Referrals:** No
   C. **Grades:** No
   D. **Dropout rate:** No
High School B3

Cluster B3 consisted of 12 participants in this study.

1. Do you feel a transition program for eighth graders would benefit the students at your school?
   • One hundred percent of the participants (12) responded that yes, a transition program would help eighth grade students.

2. Describe any Professional Development opportunities given to the staff to assist rising freshmen with transition.
   • Ninety percent of participants (10) stated that they could not think of any opportunities for professional development.

3. Describe the current transition process for rising ninth grade students into high school. (When it begins, what it entails, who is responsible for it).
   • Ninety percent of participants (10) interviewed talked about freshman orientation night in the spring for incoming freshmen. This is where counselors and administrators meet with the students and the parents. A number of students do not attend this function because it is voluntary.

4. Do you know of any programs with your feeder middle schools aimed at supporting in transitioning eighth graders to high school?
   • One hundred percent of the focus group participants (12) stated that there were no programs with feeder middle schools.

5. Does your school have difficulty in the following areas:
A. **Attendance:** One-hundred percent of participants (12) stated that attendance is a problem.

B. **Discipline Referrals:** One-hundred percent (12) stated yes, with the majority of referrals being tardies, and classroom behavior. Teachers stated that there is no fear of consequences.

C. **Grades:** Ninety percent of focus group participants (10) reported teacher that grades are horrible.
   - Students are failing multiple classes, not just one.
   - The average is around three classes.
   - Math, Science and Social Studies are the most commonly failed courses in ninth-grade.

D. **Dropout rate:** One hundred percent of focus group participants (12) reported that they have experienced students dropping out of high school.

**Administrative Responses**

**Administrator #1**

1. How many students who enter your school in ninth grade graduate in 4 years?
   
   64% last year

2. Are the aspirations, strengths, and weaknesses of each student known by at least one faculty member or other member of your staff? How do you ensure the staff member uses that information appropriately to help the student become successful in all classes and activities?
• Probably not for each student. We are currently in the process of improving our advisement program. We have set up a committee to study ways we can have more of an impact in this area. We will increase the number of advisements and direct involvement with the advisors.

3. How would you feel about a transition program at your school? Would you be supportive?

• If we change the advisement process that would be one of the things we would need to focus on for the ninth grade advisors and counselors.

4. Is there an opportunity to collaborate with eighth and ninth grade building personnel for the purpose of planning for a smooth transition for students moving from eighth to ninth grade?

• Not to my knowledge (unless it is done district wide).

5. Does your school have difficulty in the following areas:

A. Attendance: Yes

B. Discipline Referrals: Yes

C. Grades: Yes

D. Dropout rate: Yes

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided information as it related to the researcher’s findings and data analysis. All data obtained from the respondents from the focus groups regarding the study’s research objectives were transcribed by the researcher and entered into Microsoft Office Word 2007. The qualitative data collected for this study was analyzed
using the traditional format. The quantitative portion for this study observed descriptive
data. This mixed methods format was used to assist the researcher with developing a
comprehensive understanding of an effective eighth to ninth grade transition programs.
The focus group participants were identified prior to the actual focus group sessions. All
contact information on the participants is anonymous. More detailed information for
Chapter Five is located in the appendices section of this research.
CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the potential benefits of an eighth to ninth grade transition program in a metropolitan school district on attendance, grades, discipline referrals and dropout rate. The dependent variables in this study were student attendance, student discipline referrals, student grades, and high school dropout rates. The independent variables were the BRIDGES after school program and the BRIDGES Peer Mentoring program. Transitioning into and out of middle school can be difficult for many students, and as a result, many students are retained, particularly in the ninth grade. Ninth grade retention strongly correlates with dropping out of high school (PSEA, 2010). This study investigated the potential benefits of an eighth to ninth grade transition program (Independent Variable) in a metro Atlanta school district (School Cluster A) upon attendance, grades, discipline referrals and high school dropout rates (Dependent Variables) in comparison to a comparable school district that lacks a transition program (School Cluster “B”). The second chapter provided an extensive review of the literature on the research topic in relation to the selected independent variables. Factors that were theoretically relevant to the transitional program were the difference between middle and high school academic and structural programs, the academic challenges that ninth grade students’ exhibit, how the current high school graduation rate is determined, the reason
students drop out of high school, the purpose of transition programs, as well as practices that support a successful program. Chapter Three explained the theoretical framework for this study. The theoretical framework stems from Social learning theory. This theory examines transitioning from a broader perspective. Social learning theory focuses on the learning that occurs within a social context. It considers that people learn from one another, including such concepts as observational learning, imitation, and modeling (Ormond, 1999). Chapter Four established the research methodology employed for this study. Included in this chapter was the research design, description of the setting, the sampling procedures, working with human subjects, instrumentation, data collection procedures, description of data analysis, as well as the summary. This research design was based on a mixed methods study. This included findings from both quantitative and qualitative data. Chapter five discussed the analysis of the data collected from the research.

This chapter seeks to discuss the findings, conclusions, implications and recommendations for educational leaders, policy development and further research. The study addressed the following research questions:

RQ1: Is there a relationship between the BRIDGES Transition after-school tutoring program and student attendance?

RQ2: Is there a relationship between the BRIDGES Transition after-school tutoring program and student grades?

RQ3: Is there a relationship between the BRIDGES Transition after-school tutoring program and discipline referrals?
RQ4: Is there a relationship between the BRIDGES Transition after-school tutoring program and the dropout rate?

RQ5: Is there a relationship between the BRIDGES Transition Mentoring Program and student attendance?

RQ6: Is there a relationship between the BRIDGES Transition Mentoring Program and student grade point average (G.P.A.)?

RQ7: Is there a relationship between the BRIDGES Transition Mentoring Program and discipline referrals?

RQ8: Is there a difference in attendance, grades, discipline referrals and dropout rate between a school with a transition program and a school without?

Findings and Conclusions

The relationship between the BRIDGES Transition after-school tutoring program and student attendance: The percentage of freshman absent more than 15 days during the 2008-2009 school year was 19.1%. The percentage in 2009-2010 was 18.7%. That was an improvement of .4%. Therefore, the research concluded that the BRIDGES Transition After School Program had a positive relationship on student attendance.

The relationship between the BRIDGES Transition after-school tutoring program and student grades: Findings from the descriptive data set concluded that in the Fall 2009 semester 11 students out of 20 passed (American Government 25%) at the end of the semester. Five students out of 28 passed Math I at semester’s end (21.4%). In the Spring 2010 semester, 38 students attended Math I tutoring. Four students were passing Math I at the end of the 9 week period (10.5%). Therefore, the research concluded that
The BRIDGES Transition After-School Program did not have a relationship on student grades.

The relationship between the BRIDGES Transition after-school tutoring program and discipline referrals: Findings from the descriptive data set concluded that in 2008-2009, the freshman class in High School A3 had a total of 405 disciplinary actions. In the 2009-2010 school, the numbers of disciplinary actions were reduced by 65 for a total of 340 disciplinary referrals. Therefore, the research concluded that The BRIDGES Transition After-School Program did have a relationship on discipline referrals.

The relationship between the BRIDGES Transition after-school tutoring program and the dropout rate: Findings from the descriptive data set concluded that the dropout rate in 2008-2009 was 3.60% and in 2009-2010 the dropout rate was 2.90%, a .7% difference. Therefore, the research concluded that The BRIDGES Transition After-School Program did have a relationship on the dropout rate.

The relationship between the BRIDGES Transition Mentoring Program and student attendance: Findings from the descriptive data set concluded that the average number of unexcused absences in 2008-2009 was 1.1 days. The average number of unexcused absences in 2009-2010 was 4.8 days. Therefore, the research concluded that The BRIDGES Transition Mentoring Program did not have a relationship on student attendance.

The relationship between the BRIDGES Transition Mentoring Program and student grade point average (GPA): Findings from the descriptive data set concluded that the average GPA for the 2008-2009 school year was 2.47. The average Grade Point
Average for the 2009-2010 school year was 1.8. That is a difference of .67. Therefore, the research concluded that there was no relationship between the BRIDGES Transition Mentoring Program and student GPA.

The relationship between the BRIDGES Transition Mentoring Program and discipline referrals: Findings from the descriptive data set concluded that during the 2008-2009 school year, the average number of referrals was 1.7 for a total of 23 referrals. During the 2009-2010 school year, the average number of discipline referrals almost tripled to 4.4 for a total of 66 referrals. Therefore, the research concluded that the 2008-2009 school year had a positive relationship between the BRIDGES Transition Program and discipline referrals. The 2009-2010 school year reported discipline referrals had no relationship between the BRIDGES Transition Program.

The difference in attendance, grades, discipline referrals and dropout rate between a school with a transition program and a school without: Findings from the descriptive data set and focus group transcripts concluded that there is a difference in attendance, grades, discipline referrals and dropout rate between a school with a transition program and a school without. Appendix M shows a difference in discipline as well as dropout rate. Appendix N shows a significant difference in attendance between the two clusters.

Implications

The rationale behind the BRIDGES program is that all schools in the feeder cluster have activities that support the transition of students from middle to high school. One of the major implications for educational leaders, from this research study, was the
fact that there appears to be no cohesion between the middle schools and the feeder high school in reference to eighth and ninth grade transition. The BRIDGES Annual Evaluation Report, prepared by the local school district for reporting purposes, located in Appendix O, states that the program is implemented primarily in high school. One hundred percent of middle school participants (12) in Cluster A stated that they were familiar with the BRIDGES program but had no direct role in the implementation of the program.

The effectiveness of the BRIDGES After-School tutoring program is another implication for educational leaders. Based on the results of this research study, the fall 2009 school data from the Bridges After-School Program revealed that eleven students out of 20 passed American Government (25%), while only five students out of 28 passed Math I at the end of the semester (21.4%). In the Spring 2010 semester, 38 students attended Math I tutoring. Four students were passing Math I at the end of the 9 week period (10.5%). Again, the local school district BRIDGES Annual Evaluation Report (2009-2010) stated that over 50% of students agreed that the program has helped them improve their grades and 70% agree that tutoring sessions gave them a better understanding of course material, yet the data indicated the opposite.

Another implication for educational leaders from this research study is the effectiveness of the BRIDGES Buddies program. Involvement of other stakeholders may cause students to improve in the areas of attendance, grades, discipline referrals as well as graduating in four years. The professional responsibility, age and maturity level of older mentors could greatly enhance this aspect of the program.
The lack of Professional Development is another implication for educational leaders. The participants in this study indicated that they were not familiar with all the components of the BRIDGEs transition program. They were provided all information through the program coordinator.

The reliability of survey data is another implication for educational leaders. When compared to focus group responses, the data does not corroborate in all areas. Focus group interviews may create more open responses in reference to the transition program.

There are also several implications for educational leaders in the control group, the county without a transition program. Attendance, discipline referrals, grades and dropout rate are all significant issues within the control group. The lack of a transition program has an obvious negative effect in those areas.

Finally, Professional Development in the group without a transition program is another implication for educational leaders. One hundred percent of participants (33) that participated in the focus group interview stated that they have not received any type of training in an effort to help eighth grade students make the transition to the ninth grade.

**Recommendations**

**Local School Level Recommendations**

1. It is recommended that district level administrators should examine the impact of implementing transitional programs district wide in an effort to increase ninth grade student achievement.
2. It is recommended that districts consider implementing a strong collaboration model between eighth and ninth grade teachers in an effort to better serve rising ninth grade students.

3. It is recommended that districts should pursue grants to compensate transition programs during low budget years.

4. It is recommended that counties without a transition program investigate and examine counties that have a transition program in an effort to improve eighth to ninth grade transitioning.

5. It is recommended that board members review the impact and outcomes of a comprehensive transition reform model with the belief that it makes a difference in counties that currently do not have transition programs.

Recommendations for the Restructuring of the BRIDGES Tutoring Program

1. It is recommended that the format for the annual internal assessment of the BRIDGES Program be reviewed. This is a grant funded program that must be evaluated annually. Program Leaders should consider focus groups as well as online surveys. This allows teachers and administrators to provide feedback on items not included in the survey assessment; thus creating different responses in order to make better recommendations for future growth.

2. It is recommended that building level administrators should provide more local training to all faculty members. The BRIDGES program is controlled and operated by a single staff person known as the program director. This program director is responsible for all training and teaching modules. This is
done in a silo. Teachers are not given opportunities to provide feedback in reference to types of lesson designs for their students. Teachers who are knowledgeable about the ability levels of their students should be able to provide feedback and discuss what works and does not work for the academic success of their students.

3. It is recommended that in order to provide a seamless implementation model for the BRIDGES Program, project leaders for the program should seek to actively involve middle school stakeholders. This will allow middle school staff members to become more engaged and knowledgeable about the program as well as ensuring better participation of their students at the ninth grade level.

4. It is recommended that the current structure delays the enrollment of ninth grade students in the BRIDGES tutoring program until nine weeks in to the grading period. This delay in placing students in remedial programs maybe too late for a number of students. Ninth grade is the nation’s number one failure grade across the board. Upon entering ninth grade, students should be required to take a tutoring course based on data from the eighth grade CRCT test results. Students would only be released from tutoring based on passing grades at the end of each semester.

5. It is recommended that building level administrators re-visit the transition program annually, in an effort to ensure all staff members are properly trained.
Additionally, BRIDGES training should be required during new teacher orientation.

6. It is recommended that the BRIDGES Buddies Mentoring Program should involve more outside mentors. The use of upperclassmen as mentors does not provide a consistent and cohesive program for students who have a greater need for support. The program would be more effective if college leaders, business owners and other professional stakeholders are involved with students.

7. It is recommended that, based on annual assessment data, counties and schools re-evaluate transition programs annually to analyze what areas were effective and which areas were not, to improve the implementation quality of the program and its impact on student achievement.

Suggestions for Future Research

- This study was comprised of data from two school clusters located outside the Atlanta Metropolitan area. The schools were selected based on one cluster with a transition program and one without. A county that has more middle school involvement with eight to ninth grade transitioning would create a more comprehensive study and thus would benefit future research.

- Examining a transition program with more teacher engagement and comprehensive staff development would benefit future research.

- A county that has an active level of parent involvement could also create a more comprehensive study.
Limitations of the Study

The findings from this research proved to be significant; however, several limitations may have impacted the study.

- A major limitation to this study was that the researcher is an employee for one of the counties used in this study.

- Although the focus groups received prearranged questions, participants did not respond as openly because of the researcher’s job position within the school.

- Interviews provide indirect information filtered through views of the interviewees which created a limitation to the study. Participants may respond to the focus group questions based on their feelings about the transition program, which may not illicit a true response.

- Another limitation to this study was that administrators may not be truthful in their responses to the focus group questions. This may be in an effort not to bring attention to their particular schools.

- Information was provided in a designated site rather than the natural field setting. Focus groups were conducted in a conference setting. If the focus groups were conducted in the natural field setting, different responses may be yielded.

Summary

This chapter provided a discussion of the findings, implications for educational leaders, recommendations, as well as suggestions for future research. The primary focus
of this study was to investigate the potential benefits of an eighth to ninth grade transition program in an Atlanta Metro School District High School on selected variables such as attendance, discipline referrals as well as student grades as compared to those factors in a comparable high school without a transition program in another metro school district. Based on the findings of this study, the BRIDGES Transition Program (Cluster A) has proven to be beneficial in the areas of attendance, reduction of discipline referrals and dropout rate. The BRIDGES Program has not been beneficial in the areas of after school tutoring and the BRIDGES Buddies mentoring program. In order for the program to thrive in all variables, district and building level officials need to revisit the tutoring and mentoring programs.

The findings of this study also found that Cluster B does not have a planned transition program for eighth to ninth grade students. The only interaction with high school staff members involves the counseling department reporting to the middle school to register students for ninth grade courses. Participants in Cluster B reported that there were no professional development opportunities to assist rising freshman with transitioning and all of the participants in this research reported that there is a great need for a county wide transition program. Attendance, discipline referrals as well as student grades were all areas of concern in Cluster B.

The issue of an effective transition program has become a major challenge for middle school and high school administrators and staff members. District level officials need to examine trends with eighth to ninth grade transition to determine what can be done in an effort to improve attendance, discipline referrals, student grades and ultimately
reduce the dropout rate. This dissertation is intended to assist district level administrators as well as building level administrators, faculty and staff in improving the effectiveness of middle school to high school transition programs. This dissertation is also proposed to let districts without transition programs examine the findings of this study to examine the current policies and determine if a transition program is needed.
APPENDIX A

Focus Group Questions: Cluster A

Interview Questions: Teachers and Counselors

Background Questions

1. How many years have you taught in public education?
2. How many years at this particular school?
3. What is your highest level of education?

Transition Questions

4. Describe the BRIDGES Program.
5. In your opinion, does the BRIDGES program satisfy any gaps or special needs in student transition from eighth to ninth grade?
6. In regard to Professional Development, what type of training/support did you receive in order to implement the BRIDGES Program and when?
7. In your mind, do you feel the training provided for the program was sufficient? Why or why not?
8. What resources were necessary for implementation of the BRIDGES program to be successful and were they provided?
9. What difficulties, if any, have you had in implementing the BRIDGES program?
10. Has the BRIDGES program had an immediate impact in the following areas:
    a. Attendance
    b. Discipline Referrals
    c. Grades
    d. Dropout rate
Appendix A (continued)

11. On a scale from 1-10, one being least effective and ten being very effective, how would you rate the effectiveness of the BRIDGES Program?

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12. What is your reason for selecting this rating?

**Interview Questions: Administration**

1. How many years have you served as an administrator?

2. How many years have you served at this particular school?

3. What is your highest level of education?

4. How many students who enter your school in ninth grade graduate in 4 years?

5. Are the aspirations, strengths, and weaknesses of each student known by at least one faculty member or other member of your staff? How do you ensure the staff member uses that information appropriately to help the student become successful in all classes and activities?

6. Do you feel that you have been supportive of the BRIDGES transition program? If yes, explain how.

7. Is there an opportunity for staff to collaborate with eighth and ninth grade building personnel in the feeder schools?

8. Has the BRIDGES program had an immediate impact in the following areas:
   a. Attendance
   b. Discipline Referrals
   c. Grades
   d. Dropout rate
9. On a scale from 1-10, one being least effective and ten being very effective, how would you rate the effectiveness of the BRIDGES Program?

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10. What is your reason for selecting this rating?
APPENDIX B

Focus Group Questions: Cluster B

Interview Questions: Teachers and Counselors

**Background Questions**

1. How many years have you taught in public education?
2. How many years at this particular school?
3. What is your highest level of education?

**Transition Questions**

4. Do you feel a transition program for eighth graders would benefit the students at your school?

5. Describe any Professional Development opportunities given to the staff to assist rising freshmen with transition.

6. Describe the current transition process for rising ninth grade students into high school. (When it begins, what it entails, who is responsible for it).

7. Do you know of any programs with your feeder middle schools aimed at supporting in transitioning eighth graders to high school?

8. Does your school have difficulty in the following areas:
   a. Attendance
   b. Discipline Referrals
   c. Grades
   d. Dropout rate

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Interview Questions: Administration

Administrative Section

1. How many years have you served as an administrator?

2. How many years have you served at this particular school?

3. What is your highest level of education?

4. How many students who enter your school in ninth grade graduate in 4 years?

5. Are the aspirations, strengths, and weaknesses of each student known by at least one faculty member or other member of your staff? How do you ensure the staff member uses that information appropriately to help the student become successful in all classes and activities?

6. How would you feel about a transition program at your school? Would you be supportive?

7. Is there an opportunity to collaborate with eighth and ninth grade building personnel for the purpose of planning for a smooth transition for students moving from eighth to ninth grade?

8. Does your school have difficulty in the following areas:
   a. Attendance
   b. Discipline Referrals
   c. Grades
   d. Dropout rate
# Appendix C

BRIDGES After School Tutoring Program: Fall Semester 2009

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APPENDIX E

Focus Groups Transcripts: Middle School A1

Teachers and Counselors

Transition Questions – Cluster “A”

1. Describe the BRIDGES Program
   • One teacher reported that she was not familiar with the Bridges program. The teacher stated that she was aware of the Bridges program at the high school, primarily because she has two children in high school.

   • The teacher was aware of the freshman fiesta that the feeder high schools have during the summer.

   • One teacher reported that all they hear about is Georgia 411, more than the Bridges program.

   • Another teacher reported that they make recommendations to the high school counselors for scheduling.

   • Information is sent out to students from the feeder high school in reference to the transition program.

   • One teacher basically said that they are not involved in the Bridges program.

   • Another teacher stated that the first time she heard of it was when they were informed in January that they will be mentors to the eighth-grade students. The mentor program has not started yet.

   • Another teacher stated that this was their first year hearing of the BRIDGES Program.
2. In your opinion, does the BRIDGES program satisfy any gaps or special needs in student transition from eighth to ninth grade?

- One teacher stated that there are a number of students that you would think would fall into a gap that would be at risk and they are the ones that usually take advantage of the summer program the feeder high school offers under the Bridges program.

- Another teacher stated that the program takes the fear out of being a freshman in that students can learn how to get into their lockers and to their next class on time.

- One day out of the school year, high school administrators report to the middle school and take a social studies class for a one-day and explained to them what high school is going to be like, the registration process, and the counselors follow up to see who is interested in the summer program. Teachers pass out flyers to advertise the program.

3. In regard to Professional Development, what type of training/support did you receive in order to implement the BRIDGES Program and when?

- One teacher stated a PowerPoint was presented at the beginning of the year but is not sure if it was related to the Bridges program.

- Another teacher stated that the PowerPoint discussed the sixth to eighth grade transition process which was presented by the state.

- Another teacher stated that she was familiar with the program, the training has not been provided.

4. In your mind, do you feel the training provided for the program was sufficient? Why or why not?

- One teacher stated that if it was supposed to be a transition from eighth to ninth grade that it would really be nice to know in eighth grade to provide the kids with information to be able to do that.

- Majority of the teachers stated that they had not had enough training for the program to be sufficient.
5. **What resources were necessary for implementation of the BRIDGES program to be successful and were they provided?**

- All the teachers responded that other than a flyer that was all the resources provided.

- One teacher stated that they needed a lot more resources on the middle school level.

- Another teacher felt that the County focuses more on the high school in reference to the Bridges program. He stated that he thinks the county goes as far to even higher administrator to focus on the brakes program.

5. **What difficulties, if any, have you had in implementing the BRIDGES program?**

- All teachers stated that they had not had any difficulties (laughter).

6. **Has the BRIDGES program had an immediate impact in the following areas:**

*Do you all have a problem with the following areas*

a. Attendance- no

b. Discipline Referrals- average

c. Grades-runs the gamut, some students do well, some students don't care; others fall in between. Some students just don't turn in work. They are capable, but just don't do.

d. Dropout rate- N/A

7. **On a scale from 1-10, one being least effective and ten being very effective, how would you rate the effectiveness of the BRIDGES Program?**

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8. **What is your reason for selecting this rating?**

**Teacher 1- Rating: 0**
Comment: *This is my 1st year hearing of the BRIDGES Program. The last 2 years I was in the Connection department.*

**Teacher 2- Rating: 5**
Comment: *8th grade teachers do not usually see the results. We do not have a coordinator at our School. Rising 8th graders are contacted to participate.*
Appendix E (continued)

Teacher 3- Rating: 5
Comment: We don’t really see any results. We are just starting to learn about GA 411.

Teacher 4- Rating: 8
Comment: I am aware of the BRIDGES program for transitioning from MS to HS. However I am not aware of statistics that show how effective it is. I do know that many eighth graders attend summer programs to prepare them for attending high school. I’ve heard back from some of my previous eighth graders that it was helpful to them and made going to high school less stressful and scary.

Teacher 5- Rating: 6
Comment: The program is beneficial but does not seem to impact all students.

Teacher 6: Rating: 6
Comment: N/A
APPENDIX F

Focus Groups Transcripts: Middle School A2

Teachers and Counselors

Transition Questions – Cluster “A2”

1. Describe the BRIDGES Program.

   • One teacher stated that they did not think it was called the BRIDGES Program. It was just called a transition program for student in eighth grade going to ninth.

   • All teachers stated that the program primarily in high school, and they did not deal with it.

   • The high school brings flyers to the middle school to advertise the Bridges program.

   • There is a freshman orientation at the high school, but middle school teachers are not involved.

2. In your opinion, does the BRIDGES program satisfy any gaps or special needs in student transition from eighth to ninth grade?

   • One teacher spoke from personal level in reference to her children participating in the Bridges program.

   • Another teacher stated that the biggest connection that they have is that staff member from the high school will come and speak to the eighth grade students about the house will be like, what courses offered, and expectations. That is the only time the hospital connects with the middle school.

   • One teacher reported that they had the opportunity to take the eighth-grade students to the high school to spend the day. They had opportunity to speak to high school students.
Appendix F (continued)

3. In regard to Professional Development, what type of training/support did you receive in order to implement the BRIDGES Program and when?

   • All teachers reported that they had not received any training in regards to the Bridges program.

4. In your mind, do you feel the training provided for the program was sufficient? Why or why not?

   • One teacher said no, because if it is a program to benefit eighth-grade students, then it should be something that eighth-grade teacher should know more about to help prepare them for the transition. She also stated that teacher should be able to give students background information about the program that they don't have.

   • Second teacher stated that training was probably need. The only thing the high school's does when they come to the middle school is talk about scheduling.

5. What resources were necessary for implementation of the BRIDGES program to be successful and were they provided?

   • Teachers reported that flyers about the Bridges program development resources provided.

   • Flyers are disseminated in March, right before the freshman expo, which is like an open house.

6. What difficulties, if any, have you had in implementing the BRIDGES program?

   • There were no difficulties because the program has not been implemented on the middle school level.

7. Has the BRIDGES program had an immediate impact in the following areas:

   a. Attendance- no
   b. Discipline Referrals- no
   c. Grades- no
   d. Dropout rate-no
Appendix F (continued)

8. On a scale from 1-10, one being least effective and ten being very effective, how would you rate the effectiveness of the BRIDGES Program?

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
   Least Effective Somewhat Effective Very Effective

9. What is your reason for selecting this rating?

   **Teacher 1- Rating: 5.**
   Comments: Program exists in high school, where I am certain it is effective. It could be more effective if begun in middle school.

   **Teacher 2- Rating: 4**
   Comments: As middle school teachers we know very little about the program and I do not think our students know a lot about it.

   **Teacher 3: Rating: 2**
   Comments: The program needs to be implemented in the middle school beginning with eighth grade, first semester.

   **Teacher 4- Rating: 2**
   Comments: The BRIDGES program should be initiated in the middle school in eighth grade.
APPENDIX G

Focus Groups Transcripts: High School A3

Teachers and Counselors

Transition Questions – Cluster “A”

1. Describe the BRIDGES Program.

- One teacher stated that the Bridges program is a grant that is state-funded and there is a coordinator that has been with the program for three years and they rely on her to bring the information to the forefront for teachers to disseminate to the students from grade levels. Teachers stated that she does a great job. She brings in an array of activities, different types of information, based on grade level things that students should be considering for the future life options for college, technical schools, graduation requirements, credit recovery if they have failed classes. The coordinator makes sure the students know about college fairs.

- Another teacher stated that there is also a tutoring aspect to the Bridges program in which she has seen a lot of success with her students because of the program.

- Another teacher stated that the program does provide resources to help students, incoming freshman as well the students here academically and socially.

- One teacher stated that he was not too familiar with the Bridges program because he's from out-of-state and this is his first year teaching in Georgia. The teacher taught 11 years in Missouri.

2. In your opinion, does the BRIDGES program satisfy any gaps or special needs in student transition from eighth to ninth grade?

One teacher said that yes the Bridges program allows students to come in during the summer, they pair them up with older students, juniors and seniors who are knowledgeable about the school. Freshmen are given their schedules ahead of time to help them get familiar and not be so afraid on the first day.
Appendix G (continued)

• Another teacher stated that in their T.A.P. (Tiger Advisory Program) program Bridges buddies come in and students are familiar with them because of the summer activities.

• One teacher stated that she is not sure if we should wait for students to enter the tutoring program once they're failing. She feels that teachers should identify the eighth-grade students that are struggling, that the CRCT, and was placed in the ninth grade. She feels that the tutoring program would have a lot of benefit if it started alongside the teachers at the beginning of the school year and met with students was twice a week that are at risk. Teachers have to wait at least nine weeks in order for student to attend tutoring and they feel that it is after-the-fact.

• Based on the records received from summer teachers already know who will need extra help and it should not be an option.

• Another teacher stated that when the assistant principal goes to the middle schools to talk about schedules, maybe the Bridges coordinator go as well and explain what their purpose is, what services will be provided and go in and start giving information about the program. Maybe even having some of the freshman teachers go down to the middle school and introduced themselves to eighth-grade students.

• Freshman teachers could actually meet with eighth-grade teacher to gain some ideas especially content wise in reference to the upcoming freshman.

3. In regard to Professional Development, what type of training/support did you receive in order to implement the BRIDGES Program and when?

• One teacher stated that she came after the school year started, so she missed all of training provided.

• Another teacher stated that they have not received any formal training for the program.

• A number of teachers stated that the program director does most of the communication via e-mail, or a printed copy.

• Everything is explained in detail through the e-mail. Directions are given for each grade level.

• Teachers pretty much follow everything that is provided.

• One teacher said that the lesson plans are very simple to follow.
Appendix G (continued)

4. **In your mind, do you feel the training provided for the program was sufficient? Why or why not?**

- One teacher's concern was that she feels that teachers would value the program more if they better understood what it means to the kids. The only reason she values the program as much is because she had a student at another high school which has the Bridges program, and I don't provide as much as this school, so she sees the difference. So as a parent she can recognize was they are doing at the school and the value starting off with the freshman class and following them up to the 12th grade.

- When you have an intrinsic value that you can relate to, you can then get the kids to buy in.

- All of the information is given to the teachers to implement the Bridges program but the teachers are not able to give input.

- One teacher stated that she has taken the lessons and tweak the lesson to fit the needs of particular T.A.P Students.

- A number of lessons provided or short and teachers have to add to it to make it work the entire class period.

- One teacher felt that students should be surveyed. Teachers see things from an adult perspective and fail to realize that kids have not had the experiences that teachers have had. Even though we know that there are things our students need to know, how we deliver it is very important.

- For example, teachers were given a lesson on managing money. It was a really long lesson and one teacher felt that she would lose her class within the first 5 min. because she knew the students would wonder why they were doing this assignment, what was the purpose because as freshman they don't have income. So she set up a budget for them, gave them a monthly allowance and options on what they would pay for a mortgage or rent. This made them more involved in the lesson because it made sense to them.

- One teacher stated that her students were irritated by that lesson they did not make sense of it.

- Another teacher felt that with training they would be able to provide feedback on which lessons worked and which lessons did not and see what we can do to make it work.
5. What resources were necessary for implementation of the BRIDGES program to be successful and were they provided?

- Most Bridges information is listed on the school’s common directory. The entire Bridges manual is listed on the school’s common directory.

6. What difficulties, if any, have you had in implementing the BRIDGES program?

- One teacher noted that is difficult to make copies, sometimes the projector does not work in classes, or not being able to get into a video feed due to technical difficulties.

- Being other people's classrooms. The advisement program as each grade level in different parts of the building. For example, the freshman class is in one area of the building, sophomore class is in another area. That causes a number of issues. For example when you get to another teacher's classroom the door maybe locked, logging on other teacher's computers. Plus you have the entire school moving at the same time within 6 min. Teachers feel that is dangerous. With such a large campus, some teachers arrive to classes late because they may be coming from the other side of the campus, which means their classes are unsupervised.

- With all of that movement, the front office does not know where students are located during the advisement period.

7. Has the BRIDGES program had an immediate impact in the following areas:

A. Attendance: all of the teachers stated that a number of students skip the advertisement period. Once teachers realized that they can take attendance during that time the attendance improved because students were being referred for skipping.

- Another teacher stated that students don't come because they don't see the value in the program.

- One teacher stated that her students attend because they like her and she makes it fun.

B. Discipline Referrals: one teacher stated that she was not sure if the Bridges program had an impact. She did say that students know what is expected of them in the program.
Appendix G (continued)

C. Grades- one teacher said that grades are improving because of the Bridges program. Teachers are able to go over the standards with a different approach than the regular teacher. This allows students to get a different view of the lesson.

D. Drop-out rate- all of the teachers were not familiar with the data on dropout rates.
APPENDIX H

Focus Group Questions: Middle School B1

Focus Group Interview

1. **Do you feel a transition program for eighth graders would benefit students at your school?**

   - Teacher one: Yes, because students don't understand how high school works. Students don't understand credits.

   - Teacher two: high school is so different; the way credits work in high school.

   - Teacher three: students come back to middle school to visit and they say how hard high school is, how different it is.

   - Teacher four: feels that a transition program is necessary for eighth grade students.

   - Teacher five: yes, because we're losing a number of kids in ninth grade, that's why we need a transition program. One thing that bothers me is that every kid going to college is the thing that you should say, but some of these kids have no desire to go to college but we pushed him to go to college. Some of the students would prefer to take the technical track and learn a trade.

   - Teacher six: feels that it should serve as a sorting program because you're sorting out students that know they're not college-bound, they're not going to try and go to college, they may want to go to the military or straight to the workforce, so it should be a way that you can find out if the student does not want to go to college, maybe they want to take auto mechanics or go straight to the workforce, that may cut down the dropout rate.

   It's a misconception, if you got any eighth-grade class in this county how many students will go to the University of Georgia, 80% of them will raise their hand, but they have no idea that they would not be able to make it based on their test scores in the classes that they're taking.
Appendix H (continued)

- Teacher seven: students don't understand the credit based system in high school, because they have not earned credits in middle school.

2. **Describe any professional development opportunities given to the staff to assist rising freshman with transition.**

- All teachers responded that they have not had any professional development opportunities to assist freshman with transition. The high school counselors come and meet with the students for one period to discuss scheduling.

3. **Describe the current transition process for rising ninth-grade students enter high school (when he begins, what it entails, who was responsible for).**

- The counselors register them for classes in high school. The teachers complete forms to make sure students qualify. Students are not given an explanation of what a particular class is. Some students are encouraged not to take more than one advanced class.

4. **Do you know of any programs with your reader middle schools aimed at supporting in transitioning eighth-graders to high school?**

- Teachers reported that the special ed services are the only services that support transitioning to high school.

5. **Does your school have difficulty in the following areas:**

   A. **Attendance:** Teacher’s report that attendance is a huge problem.

   B. **Discipline referrals:** compare to previous years the numbers are fairly low; less frequent in nature.

   C. **Grades:** students realize that they will be promoted to the ninth-grade regardless of their grades. Middle school has become a joke, because they know that it does no matter. If that have older siblings or friends telling them that teachers are going to pass them anyway. Students don't turn it work and they don't care. Students at Herschel Jones has a no missing work policy, teachers do not take late work, because it was doing the students a disservice. Students are given a 60 as a grade.

   D. **Dropout rate:** teacher report that they have a number of students that disappear off of their roll, or are home schooled.
APPENDIX I

Focus Group Questions: Middle School B2

1. Do you feel a transition program for eighth graders would benefit the students at your school?

   • Majority of the teachers felt as if a transition program was needed for eighth grade students. One teacher responded that students will be better prepared for ninth grade if there was a transition program involved.

   • Another teacher reported that she feels eighth grade does not adequately prepare them for high school. Teaching them the responsibility that they need in high school has been taken away from them, they have been babied throughout middle school.

   • Another teacher stated that there's no accountability for students in middle school.

   • One teacher talked about students being tardy in middle school, she stated that there are no consequences, however, in high school, if a student is late they automatically get the attention the first time. Getting students acclimated to the culture in high school is a lot different than middle school.

2. Describe any professional development opportunities given to the staff to assist rising freshman with transition.

   • All teachers reported that there aren't any opportunities given to staff to assist with freshman transition.

3. Describe the current transition process for rising ninth-grade students enter high school (when it begins, what it entails, who is responsible for it).

   • One teacher stated, that the high school counselor comes in speaks of eighth-grade students entails and what to expect. They have a standard PowerPoint that they show that tells the requirements that students have to meet. It talks about their career paths, the credits they have to have, chicken figure Tuesday, it kind of tells them what to expect.
Appendix I (continued)

- Another teacher stated, that if you teach an advanced section, we have to monitor our advanced classes to see if the kids that opt for honors classes in high school, are legitimate honors candidates. If they are legitimate candidates, we want to make sure that they don't overextend themselves in high school and take too many honor courses.

- One teacher stated that special ed students are better prepared for high school because they have an IEP, and they do a lot to aid in transition.

- One teacher stated that when students were registering for classes for their ninth grade year, teachers were trying to explain to them the classes they need to take and students were registering for classes that teachers knew they were not going to be successful for.

4. Do you know of any programs with your feeder middle schools aimed at supporting in transitioning eighth-graders to high school?

- Georgia College 411 which a state required. Other than that there is nothing. The school counselor stated that there was nothing worth noting.

5. Does your school have difficulty in the following areas:

A. Attendance: Yes

B. Discipline referrals: No

C. Grades: Yes; lack of accountability, students are not doing their work, they don't do it but teachers at the find a way to make sure they pass. Students know that they can fail classes because there's no accountability.

D. Dropout rate: N/A
APPENDIX J

Focus Group Questions: High School B3

Focus Group Interview

1. Do you feel a transition program for eighth graders would benefit the students at your school? Why do you feel that?

- All teachers in the focus group responded that yes, the transition program would help eighth-grade students.

- Students don't know what to expect.

- Students don't realize that if they fail a course a semester, they have to take it over again.

- Math failure rate is horrendous. Students don't understand that failing math impacts their future.

- One teacher reported that he had a student to tell him that he has always gotten by by not doing my work, and he wasn't going to do it now. The teacher tried to explain to him that the classes were a credit-based system and it took the entire year for the student to realize what the teacher was explaining to him.

- Another teacher stated that the transition program would be good because students need to come in to the ninth grade knowing our expectations.

- Size of campus freaks some of the students out. Students need to be familiar with the campus.

- Transition program is needed because a number of students get lost in the shuffle.

- It would help parents understand how to keep in touch with teachers to check on their child's progress throughout the year.
2. **Describe any professional development opportunities given to staff to assist rising freshman with transition.**

- A number of teachers stated that they couldn't think of any opportunities for professional development.
- One teacher stated that they held a mock graduation during the summer but everyone was not involved.
- There was a one-day freshman camp during the summer.

3. **Describe the current transition process for rising ninth-grade students enter high school (when he begins, what it entails, who is responsible for).**

- One teacher responded that students are thrown in, sink or swim.
- Freshman orientation night in the spring for incoming freshmen, where counselors and administrators meet with the students and the parents. A number of students do not attend this function because it is voluntary.
- Open house.

4. **Do you know if any programs with your feeder middle schools aimed at supporting and transitioning eighth-graders to high school?**

- The entire focus group stated that there were no programs with feeder middle schools.

5. **Does your school have difficulty in the following areas:**

A. **Attendance**-yes

B. **Discipline referrals**-yes, with the majority of referrals being tardies, and classroom behavior. Teachers stated that there is no fear of consequences.

C. **Grades**- teachers stated that grades are horrible. One teacher stated that students do not understand that what they're doing ninth-grade is going to affect them. Another teacher reported that a number of ninth-grade students have gotten to high school by not doing anything and they think they can still sit in class and do nothing. A number of ninth graders do not realize the importance of passing until it's too late. Another teacher stated that students are failing multiple classes, not just one. The average is around three classes. Math science and social studies are
Appendix J (continued)

the most commonly failed courses in ninth-grade. If they are failing math, they are failing science. Students have to pass math one in order to get into math two.

- One teacher stated that the repeater math courses consist of an average of 36 students. Majority of those students are discipline problems in school. This is a nightmare for teachers. Majority of the time is spent dealing with discipline. Teachers feel that repeater students would benefit from small group instead of large classes.

D. Dropout rate - teachers reported that they have experienced students dropping out of high school. Some teacher stated that they didn't know if students were true ninth graders when they dropped out. Another teacher reported that there are quite a few pregnancies as well.
APPENDIX K

Focus Groups Background Data: Cluster A

Table K1

*Middle School A1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Many Years in Education</th>
<th>How Many at Middle School A1</th>
<th>Highest Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

Table K2

*Middle School A2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>How Many at Middle School A1</th>
<th>Highest Degree</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>*Administration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Admjnjstratjon*
Appendix K (continued)

Table K3

*High School A3*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Many Years in Education</th>
<th>How Many at High School B3</th>
<th>Highest Degree</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>Masters</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td><em>16</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
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</table>
APPENDIX L

Focus Groups Background Data: Cluster B

Table L1

_Middle School B1_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Many Years in Education</th>
<th>How Many at Middle School B1</th>
<th>Highest Degree</th>
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<td>5.5</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Masters</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Masters</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
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<td>Masters</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>*6</td>
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</table>

*Administration
Appendix L (continued)

Table L2

**Middle School B2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Many Years in Education</th>
<th>How Many at Middle School B2</th>
<th>Highest Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Specialist</td>
</tr>
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<td>Specialist</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>.5</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Specialist</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*11</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Administration

Table L3

**High School B3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Many Years in Education</th>
<th>How Many at Middle School B3</th>
<th>Highest Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Masters</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
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<td>Masters</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Administration
APPENDIX M

Enrollment Data: Cluster B/Cluster A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment Data</th>
<th>Cluster B Fall</th>
<th>Spring</th>
<th>Cluster A Fall</th>
<th>Spring</th>
<th>Cluster B</th>
<th>Cluster A</th>
<th>State Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>558</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>591</td>
<td>581</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduation Rate</th>
<th>Cluster B</th>
<th>Cluster A</th>
<th>State Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>70.9%</td>
<td>73.5%</td>
<td>78.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>75.4%</td>
<td>74.2%</td>
<td>80.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dropout Rate</th>
<th>Cluster B</th>
<th>Cluster A</th>
<th>State Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline Date: Freshmen Referrals Per Year</th>
<th>Cluster B</th>
<th>Cluster A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>1,227</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>2,174</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX N

Cluster B: 15 Day Absence Rate

Figure 01: Percentage of Students Absent 15 or more days in Cluster “B3”
APPENDIX O

Annual Evaluation

Bridges Executive Summary

In July of 2008, the U.S. Department of Education awarded a Smaller Learning Communities grant to a local County School District in Georgia. The program, known as BRIDGES (Building Rigor in D to Graduate Every Student), is designed to promote the creation of school environment that foster the academic and personal growth of all students. BRIDGES is being implemented in four high schools.

The BRIDGES program strives to improve the educational outcomes of students by implementing strategies that enhance the learning environments in each of the schools. BRIDGES has two overarching goals: (a) Ensure that all students attain the skills and content knowledge required to succeed in postsecondary education and careers without requiring remediation. (b) Increase educational expectations and requirements for all students while engaging and motivating them to maximize their full academic potential. All schools have activities that support the transition of students from middle to high school. Most rising ninth grade students participate in at least one of these activities.
Appendix O (continued)

Table O1

**Strategies of BRIDGES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <em>Middle to High School Transition</em> (MS to HS)</td>
<td>Rising ninth grade students participate in activities that promote their successful transition to high school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <em>Advisory</em></td>
<td>Students participate in an advisory program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <em>Parental Involvement</em></td>
<td>Parents are provided with opportunities to become active participants in the academic career(s) of their child(re).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. <em>Academic Support</em></td>
<td>Students have the opportunity to master rigorous Course work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. <em>Advanced Courses</em></td>
<td>Students have the opportunity to participate in advanced courses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. <em>Postsecondary Education</em></td>
<td>Students have the skills required to apply to postsecondary institutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. <em>Career Pathways</em> (Pathways)*</td>
<td>Students select a career pathway.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
You are invited to be in a research study of the benefits of an eighth to ninth Grade Transition Program. You were selected as a possible participant because you serve as an eighth or ninth grade teacher, counselor or administrator. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Edward Williams, a Doctoral Student at Clark Atlanta University.

**Background Information**

The purpose of this study is: to investigate the potential benefits of a presence of an effective eighth to ninth grade transition program within the High School Cluster “A”, and to determine the impact on student attendance, student grades, student discipline referrals, and the high school drop-out rate, in comparison to High School Cluster “B”, that lacks a transition program, using the same variables.

**Procedures**

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

Participate in a modified interview process which will consist of participants being interviewed verbally as well as completing a written portion in an effort to gain the best responses. The entire process should take no more than 15-20 minutes to complete.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study**

The study does not contain any risks. The benefit of this study is to show if an effective transition program has a positive impact in the areas of attendance, grades, discipline referrals and student drop-out rate. If an effective transition program proves to be more effective, then what steps should schools without a transition program take?

**Confidentiality**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher
Appendix P (continued)

will have access to the records. Focus group interviews will be recorded and retained for five (5) years. At the end of year five (5), all tape recordings will be destroyed. The Principal Investigator as well as the Dissertation Committee will be the only persons with access to the recordings.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the researcher, or Clark Atlanta University, or with the Douglas County or Paulding County School Districts. Your participation in this research is completely voluntary and you have the freedom to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships previously identified. If a participant decides to withdraw from the study, a verbal request will be accepted to withdraw and their data will not be included in this study.

**Contacts and Questions**

The researcher conducting this study is: Edward Williams

You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact the researcher(s) at: Phone: (404)376-9778, or email at mrelove@yahoo.com.

If you have any questions now, or later, related to the integrity of the research, you are encouraged to contact Dr. Georgianna Bolden at the Office of Sponsored Programs (404 880-6979) or Dr. Paul I. Musey, (404) 880-6829 at Clark Atlanta University.

**You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.**

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature ________________________________ Date: ______________

Signature of Investigator __________________________ Date: ______________

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.
REFERENCES


