

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION PROGRAM

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2019

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TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION PROGRAM

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TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION PROGRAM

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the Graduate Education Department
Southwest Baptist University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

By

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December, 2019

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my family for all their support throughout this process.

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ABSTRACT

This quantitative study focused on teacher perception of student engagement in a one-to-one technology initiative. Missouri teachers working in a district having freshmen transition program were surveyed to determine their perception of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort, and social adjustment of freshman students. Teacher perceptions were analyzed to compare scores between teachers of freshmen and teachers of upper classmen. Also analyzed were scores between male and female teachers.

Independent samples *t*-test suggest no statistically significant difference between how teachers of upper classmen perceive higher success levels of freshmen students resulting from a transition program than teachers of freshmen. The independent samples *t*-test for gender revealed that female teachers perceive higher success levels of freshmen students resulting from a transition program.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

School districts spend time and resources on ensuring that students receive an effective and successful transition from one school to another. Transitions occur each year in schools as students move from one grade to the next, with a different teacher and a new set of standards and expectations. However, school-to-school transitions can be one of the most difficult aspects of education for some students (Lizar, 2017). Specifically, middle school to high school transition is complicated for many students because the philosophies of the two settings are diverse (Smith, 2018). This study will compare perceptions of successful transitions from middle to high school.

High schools can be apathetic to the needs of freshman transitioning to high school (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). High schools are significantly more impersonal when compared to the students' middle and elementary experiences (Beland, 2014). These differences have a negative impact on student success (Styron & Peasant, 2010). As students get older, the amount of support they receive decreases. When the support decreases, so does the attachment to school (Serino, 2017). Freshman transition programs are one way schools are addressing the student transitioning issues. By personalizing the transition for the student and creating a small community for the opportunity to learn, the school becomes a positive experience. This allows the establishment of relationships and connections with classmates and the school, which will increase academic success (McClure, Yonezawa, & Jones, 2010).

In accordance with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001, school districts nationwide were required to have all students meet state minimum requirements,

as measured on standardized tests, by 2014 (Davidson, 2016). Additionally, Missouri public school districts are under increasing pressure to make sure students graduate with their original cohort group from kindergarten. The resulting pressures have forced school administrators to develop a variety of intervention programs from peer mentoring to summer success programs to freshman academies, all designed to increase achievement and keep students on track towards graduation specifically in the areas of academic, social and structural.

Problem Statement

There is a lack of data on what teachers believe a student needs to have a successful transition to high school. A study determined student success as used by colleges and universities to recruit students was not clearly defined or measured (Baker, 2014). He further stated that several attempts have been made to redefine student success across various institutions but it simply has not happened. The confusion at the higher levels of education trickles down to the secondary levels. The lack of a clear definition of success has teachers disagreeing on how students should be assessed when it comes to their success (White, 2014). If the colleges and universities cannot agree on what success is, then secondary teachers will struggle with what they think will equate to success in grades 9-12 and beyond (Stunder, 2018). There are significant gaps in the ideas each group perceives as success in the first year of high school. Those differences could be contributing a negative impact on the students' ability to navigate the freshman transition (Hernandez, 2017). Students entering ninth grade are at risk of academic failure due to intellectual immaturity and may achieve greater academic success as a result of participation in a freshman transition program (Baker, 2014).

Purpose for the Study

This causal comparative study is to test Maslow's theory of motivation that compares the use of a freshman transition program to teacher perception of a successful transition from middle school to high school for ninth grade students in Missouri public high schools. The independent variables will be grade level taught and gender of the teachers. The dependent variable of a successful transition will be defined the teacher's perception of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort of students, and social adjustment of freshman. Maslow's theory of motivation (1954) states a human's basic needs must first be met before they will seek to satisfy higher needs. A student transitioning to high school must first have a sense of safety and belonging. Once that need is met, then the student will become successful. The use of a transitioning program will relate to the teachers' perception of the success of those students. The transition program will be defined as a program that uses strategic and intentional actions designed to support freshman during their transition to high school. The teachers' perception of the students' success will be their idea of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort of students, and social adjustment of freshman. For the purposes of this study, if a teacher teaches any freshmen they will considered a freshmen teacher. Teachers will be asked to identify whether they teach ninth grade, tenth through twelve grade, or both. The results of the surveys will identify differences and similarities in the idea of success. This data could assist school personnel in identifying strategies for the incoming ninth graders to ensure their success in the first year of high school. Students that struggle either academically or socially in the middle school setting often are unsuccessful, in their first year of high school, in earning the number of credits needed to maintain

significant progress towards graduation and are more likely to end up as a school dropout (Nanney, 2016). In response, many districts have implemented a variety of transition programs designed to increase attendance, decrease discipline referrals, and generally ease the transition to high school, all in an effort to aid students in maintaining adequate academic progress towards graduation during their first year of high school.

Determining if there is a difference between a freshman transition program and student success will allow school and district personnel to make informed decisions on the allocation of financial resources. Determining a difference may provide insight for high schools in school improvement mode as to the type of interventions needed to reach and maintain high standards of academic excellence. The information provided will also allow parents of students identified as at-risk to determine the importance of attendance at a transition program, when one is available.

Theoretical Framework

When students transition from school to school, they often feel anxious. To help alleviate this anxiety, schools work with students to ensure a smooth transition. Transitioning programs are designed to meet the specific needs most students have and work with them. Identifying these needs can begin with Maslow's theory of motivation (1954). When Maslow introduced his model on human motivation, he suggested all human's have five needs: (a) physiological, (b) safety, (c) love and belonging, (d) esteem, and (e) self-actualization. His theory stated that when basic human needs are met, only then will they seek to satisfy higher needs. This applies to students during transitions. Students need the sense of safety and belonging to transition successfully. Freshmen transition programs provide the basic needs for the student, which should give them the

opportunity to achieve. These programs improve social interactions between teachers and students (Way, 2015). In his findings, Lev Vygotsky states that social interactions play a major role in the cognitive development of a child (Vygotskij, Rieber, Hall, & Robbins, 1999). His social interactive view of development is based on the internalization of speech. Vygotsky states that when students interact with teachers, they internalize those encounters and use it in their own endeavors. It is through the student/teacher relationship that knowledge is acquired (Vygotskij, Rieber, Hall, & Robbins, 1999).

The distance between the developmental level of the student and the teacher or more capable peer plays an important role. Vygotsky believed mental development stemmed from children interacting with teachers, parents and peers. Social interaction is a key to the success of the child (Vygotskij, Rieber, Hall, & Robbins, 1999). Transition programs use these crucial interactions to both teachers and peers and foster them to prepare them for freshman year and beyond (Joyner, 2014).

Research Questions

RQ1. What is the difference in perception score of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort, and social adjustment of freshman between teachers of ninth grade students and teachers of upper classmen?

RQ2. What is the difference in perception score of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort, and social adjustment of freshman between male and female teachers?

Null Hypotheses

This study was designed to test the following hypotheses:

H₀1. There is not a statistically significant difference in perception score of

academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort, and social adjustment of freshman between teachers of ninth grade students and teachers of upper classmen.

H₀₂. There is no statistically significant difference in perception score of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort, and social adjustment of freshman between male and female teachers.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following terms are defined:

At-risk. Students at a greater risk of dropping out of school, failure in core subjects and consistent misbehavior (Garrett, M., 2019).

Academic success. Attainment or progress toward established academic goals or benchmarks (Sweet, 2016).

Teacher perceptions. The thoughts or mental images teachers have about their students (Zunino, 2017).

Transition program. A program of varying length and scope designed to ease the transition to high school and improve academic success for ninth grade students. The program should provide services to students that focus only on transition education (Samples, 2018).

Limitations/Delimitations/Assumptions

Limitations.

1. Time period of the survey.
2. Perspective of teachers may be limited by experience and personal preferences.
3. Teachers may not respond truthfully or follow directions.

4. Sample not representative of desired population.
5. Absence of psychometrics validity of instrument.
6. Random sampling.

Delimitations.

1. The study will focus solely on the state of Missouri and, as a result, may not be generalizable to other national regions.
2. The study will focus only on high school teacher perceptions and therefore may not be generalizable to private, parochial, or charter schools or to the perceptions of students, administrators, or parents.
3. The scope of the research will be limited to comparing the differences of the means and identifying relationships between stated variables to support the theoretical framework potentially missing other variables.
4. The objective of the study will propose that freshman transition programs were related to certain areas of success.
5. The study will focus on comparing the differences of the means of data for RQ1 and RQ2.

Assumptions.

1. Honest and truthful responses.
2. Generalizability as it applies to the larger population.
3. Statistical Assumptions.
4. Teachers know what makes a student successful.
5. People who received the surveys took the survey themselves.

Design Control

Data for this study will be collected by survey and include demographic information in addition to Likert Scale rating utilizing a 5-point scale of teacher perception on student success. A survey will be used because it provides attitudes and opinions of a population by questioning a sample group (Creswell, 2014). The questionnaire layout is also designed to minimize bias in results between a sample and the target population (Mercer, 2018). Cause will not be determined because the survey measures teacher perceptions. The study is limited to public high schools in Missouri that have a freshman transition program. This will make the scope reasonable to measure the relationship between the transition program and the perceptions of a successful transition to high school. The survey will be sent electronically to all public school superintendents in Missouri to control participation by district level administration. Including all public high schools in Missouri for sampling allows the survey to measure perceptions of high school teachers by using a manageable population. The administrators and teachers will be given a description of the survey with the opportunity to decline and the option to opt out at any time during the survey. Participation will be voluntary and consent will be obtained as part of the instrument. QuestionPro will be used as a resource through the university library to write, deliver, and collect results of the survey. Participation involved no risk for participants regarding the purpose, participation, anonymity, and confidentiality. Once data is collected, survey results will be analyzed for construct validity using principal component analysis. Data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics in addition to comparative analysis for differences

between teachers of freshman and teachers of upperclassmen in high schools that have a transition program. In an attempt to moderate the limitation of focusing on districts that have implemented a freshman transition program, the potential sampling population includes all high schools in the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Summary

With the increasingly difficult standards that districts advance students to graduation with their original cohort group, districts are increasingly searching for programs to increase academic success. While there is research that addresses the use of a freshman transition program, there is not any on the teachers' perceptions of the success of students that are in those programs. Specifically, the teachers of ninth grade students and the teachers of upperclassmen and how they perceive the success of those students as they transition from middle school to high school. The theoretical framework for this study will be Maslow's theory of motivation (1954). The purpose of this casual comparative study is to compare teachers' perception of a successful transition from middle school to high school for ninth grade students in Missouri public high schools that have a freshmen transition program. One of the more difficult obstacles to academic success in the public school system is the transition from school to school, especially as it relates to the high school transition (Rideau, 2014). As a result, districts have implemented a variety of freshman transition and monitoring programs. This study will attempt to determine if there is a relationship to the use of a freshman transition program and success of the ninth grade student.

Chapter Two presents the review of relevant literature on transition programs and

factors affecting the academic success of first year high school students. Chapter Three details the methodology used for the study. Chapter Four presents the results of the study after data collection. Chapter Five lists researchers' conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

School to school transitions has been a topic of research for years as evidenced by the amount of information available. Research of particular interest for study is the transition from middle school to high school for students. The freshman year is a time of unparalleled development (Morris, 2015). While students have difficulty transitioning from one school to another, at any age, students feel increased pressure when moving from middle school to high school due to increased responsibilities and standards in the high school setting (Coley, 2015). Looking at the transition through Maslow's Theory of Motivation, schools need to fulfill those needs to allow students the opportunity to succeed. The philosophies of the middle and high schools are different and can cause stress for students, which could lead to academic and social shortcomings. Successful transitions will help students form lasting attachments to school and may increase the likelihood of academic success.

“The transition from the security of a middle level school to a high school isn't easy” (Lundblad & Tappan, 2008, p. 5). As Maslow states, safety is one of the most basic of needs in his theory of motivation (1954). Not only are students attempting to deal with developmental and environmental changes; but, also the issue of attempting to keep a strong self-esteem through the process (Scambray, 2014). Students need to be supported by a community of caring adults during this time of transition (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2014). Teachers and parents need to work together to ensure a successful transition. Teachers of freshman students tend to communicate with parents more than teachers of

upperclassmen (Bacchus, 2014). Adolescents “begin to worry about high school as the eighth grade year winds down” (Lundblad & Tappan, 2008, p. 5). The first year of high school is a critical point in the lives of students (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005). Almost one in three eighth grade students in America will not graduate (Dedmond, 2008). School districts should put effective and proper transition programs into place to provide the foundation for students. The selection of these programs should be wise and informed decisions that provide the educational support for students (Whitworth, 2016).

Freshman Needs for Successful Transition

One of the keys to ensure the success of a program is to have the freshman feel supported (Ashley, 2014). The emotional security is essential to transitioning in any setting. Ninth grade students need to feel they belong and that sense of belonging is supported by Maslow’s theory as an important key to success. School districts need programs that instill a sense of belonging for the incoming freshman (O’Connor, 2018). The faculty and staff exercise increased sensitivity to the incoming students; however, it is important that the entire student body make the ninth graders feel welcome (Whitworth, 2016). Administrators tend to choose more nurturing teachers for freshman to ease the anxiety associated with the transition (Cook, 2018). Freshman can feel lonely and alienated during this transition and need the support of everyone around them to navigate the new environment.

Another element to successful transitions is giving the students the necessary information for the transition. Freshmen need to know about the opportunities and programs the school offers them (Morris, 2015). The most successful transitioning programs tutoring, personal development, and parental involvement; but, those programs

need to be utilized to contribute (Wycoff, 2014). The teachers of ninth grade students play an important part in all elements of the transition. Their daily contact and ability to communicate with the ninth graders is one of the components that will determine the success of the student. While the teacher has a role, so does the individual student. Freshmen students need to take advantage of what is offered (Alghamdi, 2017). In addition to opportunities, the freshman should be informed of new academic standards. Students need to understand how those standards vary from school to school.

The final element necessary for successful transitioning of students is the development of relationships. According to Maslow, human beings have a fundamental need to feel love and have a sense of belonging. He listed love and belonging as one of the strongest needs for humans. This is especially true when a person is transitioning in any aspect of life. The stress of the transition from middle school to high school magnifies the students' sense of belonging (Lewis, 2016). The desire to interact with other people is instinctive. The transitioning student will seek out those relationships, good or bad, and form bonds as quickly as possible in an attempt to belong. A freshman's sense of belonging needs to be developed. A successful freshman transition program will have time dedicated to acclimating students to the building. One of the greatest contributing factors to academic success of ninth grade students is teacher to student relationships and a caring teacher can influence confidence motivation (Lewis, 2016). The teacher that teaches ninth grade students should have a more nurturing side and be willing to work with the freshmen to ease the transition. The teachers that have positive student relationships have more engaged, comfortable students (Jamison, 2014). The gender of the teacher can influence these relationships and will be discussed later in

Chapter Two. While these three factors are what every student needs to transition successfully, there are many more factors that impact the individual student's hope for success. A transition program will attempt to fulfill the safety, information, and relationship pieces for the students but the schools will need to be aware of the additional factors and ensure those needs are being met as well (Serino, 2017). The thought that the students' success in all four years of high school depends solely on the implementation and use of a transition program misses some key components (Watson, 2015). The program will put the structures in place and most students will benefit from them but when a student is not seeing the expected growth the school should examine additional inhibitors discussed in this chapter.

Existing Freshman Transition Programs

Currently, freshman transition programs are abundant, each and every one touting a certain amount of success. Many options exist for school districts all of which vary in quality and depth (Joyner, 2014). Schools can send staff and faculty to an off-site facility to be trained by professionals. A school can also choose to purchase curriculum to be implemented without formal training. Another common option is for schools to develop their own program tailored to the demographics unique to its location (Chandler, 2015). Any of these can illustrate the program's success and can be appealing depending on the interested school district (Roybal, Thornton, & Usinger, 2014).

One such program is the *9th Grade Nation* program developed and implemented by the Pittsburgh Public School system. This program envelopes the characteristics mentioned in the previous section. *9th Grade Nation* emphasizes the need for emotional security, information, and new relationships. All elements of this program support

Maslow's theory of motivation. The program continues for a full week and includes activities such as aerial ropes, camping with faculty and discussions about required summer readings. Pittsburgh School District started this program in hopes of reducing its thirty-five percent drop-out rate. The executive director of the program, John Easton, has dedicated five years in hopes that the culture will change stating,

Another program is *For Freshmen Only*, developed by Professor Joseph Haviland of Temple University. This is a curriculum and idea that can be brought to any school. The program is run by the local chapter of the National Honor Society. Teams of members of NHS run an orientation for transitioning students. The freshmen are given tours and workshops that are taught by the upperclassmen. The program teaches the students what it takes to acclimate to the school but does not strive to give them a sense of belonging.

One of the more successful programs is the *Boomerang Project*, located in California. This program has been in existence for more than twenty years and can produce some convincing success rates from high schools around the country. Schools can send faculty to be trained on the techniques and strategies used in the program. Built on the belief that upperclassmen can help younger students succeed (Martin, 2018), members of the junior and senior classes are trained to run the transitioning program. "As positive role models, upperclassmen are motivators, leaders and teachers who guide the freshmen to discover what it takes to be successful during the transition to high school" (Jacobson, 2004, p. 5). The *Boomerang Project* transition program provides the structure for "freshmen to receive support and guidance from juniors and seniors who have been through the challenges that high school poses, and understand that the transition to a

different school can sometimes be overwhelming” (Jacobson, 2004, p. 6).

Existing Programs for Parents of Transitioning Freshmen

Programs for parents of transitioning students seem to be lacking. There does not appear to be any formal program offered to schools geared towards the parents of incoming freshman. Maslow’s love and belonging needs for students need to include the family as well as the school. Research indicates that students with highly involved and supportive parents do significantly better and are more likely to persist in response to academic difficulty (Black, 2018). While the research indicates the need for parent involvement during this time, there is an absence of programs on the topic. Most of the studies and resources used for this research emphasized the necessity of involving parents in the process to ensure the students’ feel supported in the transition. Transition programs should address the needs of students and parents (Goldstein, 2016).

Studies conducted by researchers show parents can be just as misguided about high school as the students themselves. Teachers and parents need to work together to ensure a successful transition. The parent and teacher relationship will give the student more of a sense of belonging and support Maslow’s theory of motivation. Administrators should recognize this and choose teachers for freshman that will foster the parent relationship as much as the student relationship. The more they communicate with the parents the better the transition will be for everyone involved. Teachers of freshman students tend to communicate with parents more than teachers of upperclassmen (Bacchus, 2014). Recommendations for easing the anxiety of the parents include both an orientation for the students and their parents before school begins (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). The researchers discuss including the parents to ease the transition;

however, none of the articles propose or recommend any particular program. Some schools write pamphlets or brochures, pass out information sheets, or have a meet the teacher night, but the research does not indicate if these programs add to the success of the transitioning student.

School districts nationwide are under increasing pressure from state and federal agencies to improve academic performance and decrease dropout rates (Sanders, 2015). As a result, there is significant effort being placed on determining the risk factors associated with dropping out and identifying the critical points in the educational process where targeted interventions will have the greatest impact on academic achievement (Helm, 2018). Generally speaking, students make a determination on whether or not they will continue their education to graduation within the first few weeks of their freshman year of high school (Nanney, 2016). Therefore, overcoming the obstacles students face and making this first year successful is vital in the effort to increase graduation rates (Sterling, 2015). This section will detail, not only the importance of the first year of high school, but also the obstacles to success students face and the types of interventions schools have initiated to mitigate those obstacles and increase the likelihood of success (Killeen, 2017).

The Importance of Success in the First Year of High School

Estimates suggest that nearly one quarter of all freshman in the U.S. that began high school in the fall of 2005 did not achieve graduation within four years (Nanney, 2016). Nearly 90% of those students that failed to graduate within four years were off track by the end of their freshman year. Clearly, student achievement levels in the first year of high school set the stage for graduation (Steffen, 2015). Those students earning

five full credits in their freshman year are four times more likely to graduate than their peers that experience at least one failing grade in a core course. Nanney (2016) found that freshman year academic performance is more strongly associated with graduation than either student background or prior achievement. Poor achievement can be attributed to many factors but Maslow states it begins with the basic needs of human beings. Nearly 40% of freshmen in large urban areas repeat the ninth grade. Of those repeaters, only 10-15% reach graduation (Martin, 2018). This lack of early success accounts for a nationwide ninth grade bulge and a tenth grade dip in student populations.

Factors Affecting Student Success in the Freshman Year of High School

With success in the first year of high school serving as such an important predictor of future success, it becomes important to identify those factors that affect ninth grade success. For many, the transition to high school comes with a decrease in academic achievement, increased stress, and decreased motivation and self-esteem. Academic performance and success in managing the transition in the first year of high school rely on the way in which schools help students navigate a number of potential obstacles including academic preparation, social and economic factors, and physical and emotional factors (Salisbury, 2014).

Academic Factors

Attendance rate within the first 30 days of the ninth grade school year serves as one early predictor of future success (Binder, 2014). This attendance rate sets the stage for ninth grade success and serves as a stronger predictor that a student will drop out than any other to include eighth grade achievement, test scores, and age (Nanney, 2016). However, there are additional academic factors that serve as roadblocks to freshman

success. Significant numbers of students entering ninth grade are arriving at the nation's high schools lacking in the academic skills necessary to be successful (Block, 2016). The lack of academic skills can cause a student to feel uneasy. This discomfort will result in the student not feeling safe and safety is one of the key factors of motivation according to Maslow. Research indicates that nearly 80% of students in large urban districts failed to demonstrate proficiency in either math or reading during that spring of their eighth grade year (Grigg, 2014). These students are arriving at high school already at a significant disadvantage (Elia, 2016). To compound this problem, many freshmen are encountering true academic rigor for the first time combined with a significant increase in homework requirements and are doing so in a credit based environment where, for the first time, failure automatically leads to repeating a course (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). Additionally, since ninth grade is typically viewed as the least desirable teaching assignment, students are often facing their first academic challenge under the direction of inexperienced teachers that may have an emergency certification or even a long-term substitute (Fragomeni, 2017). The combination of these academic factors with the typical social and emotional factors associated with the transition to high school present significant obstacles for adolescents. Findings highlight the challenges of the transition to high school and identify who could benefit from interventions for a smoother transition (Benner, 2017).

Economic Factors

The current economic crisis is affecting the lives of our youth and their families. According to the U.S. Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate is 3.7% as of August 2019, and poverty has been shown to have a negative impact on academic achievement (Doyle,

2015). The stress of living in poverty affects a child's ability to learn. Student assessment data in many studies determined strong relationships can be linked between students living in poverty and academic achievement (Huddleston, 2015). Poverty affects the manner in which a child concentrates and their memory; thereby affecting their aptitude to learn. High school students from families within the lowest 20% income range are six times as likely as those with families in the top 20% income distribution to drop out of high school. Students in socioeconomically distressed neighborhoods feel that school completion offers little either to improve the quality of life in their neighborhood or to provide mobility to a better one. These economic factors affect the student's sense of belonging and Maslow states this is one of the most basic of needs for success. Studies emphasize that children who live in poverty are more likely to drop out of school due to the following factors:

Inadequate Nutrition

Malnutrition or poor nutrition can lead to "Food Insecurity" which means that at some point during the year, the household had limited access to an adequate supply of food due to lack of money or other resources. Over 31 million students utilize the National School Lunch Program every year according to the Food Research Action Center (Arbogast, 2014). Students tend to keep their "Food Insecurity" hidden because they feel embarrassed about their lack of food. Maslow's theory states that the most basic of needs for humans are physiological. One cannot survive without food. This can affect the students making them feel isolated and ashamed.

Studies have found that hungry children are at more risk to receive special education services, to have been retained in school, drop out of school and receive mental

health counseling. Other findings indicate that being hungry interfered with students' ability to pay attention during class (Cassar, 2017). These students also tend to be more anxious, irritable, aggressive and oppositional; which can lead to psychiatric and functional problems. These characteristics hit on many levels of Maslow's theory of motivation.

Substance Abuse

Studies show that children who live in poverty have an increased risk of being exposed to drugs and alcohol that can cause stunted neurological disorders that lead to learning disabilities. Analysis also shows that a significant and consistent pattern exists in the relationship between type of disabilities and frequency of substance or weapons offences. Students with emotional disturbance had been more likely to have substance abuse or weapons offences when compared to students who were in the categories of specific learning disabilities, traumatic brain injury or an intellectual disability (Foster, 2015). Maslow would put this factor in the physiological category of his theory of motivation. Substance abuse overlaps significantly with learning disabilities and behavioral disorders such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and disabilities affect 10.8 million children in the United States (Deas, 2014).

Exposure to Environmental Toxins

Children in poverty are more likely to be exposed to neurotoxins such as lead which causes poor brain development which also leads to student who will be in need of special education services. When children have chronic health conditions they have more difficulty learning and retaining material than their healthy counterparts and have lower grade point averages and standardized test scores. Again, physiological needs must be

met first and foremost in order for a child to succeed according to Maslow.

“The strength of the associations between air toxics and reduced school performance suggest that the impact of environmental toxins may account for the association between poor health and reduced school performance observed in other studies, although this has never been tested” (Clark-Reyna, 2015, p. 2).

Social Factors

In addition to economic factors that affect success in school, there are a number of social factors, some of which are unique to the high school transition, that affect student achievement. The challenges that students will have to face are linked to the transition itself, however, in addition to their bodily changes, including physical, emotional, and cognitive changes. This is a time students are struggling with how to achieve their own identity (Farzad, 2014). This is a challenging time for all adolescents. It is a time when social relationships have a great deal of importance, especially at school. This is a time when adolescents are trying to find their own identity and build meaningful friendships. Teens have an internal sense of desire to succeed and belief in the education system is the key to increasing their resources for the future (Mercado, 2014). Maslow places the sense of belonging as a central necessity in his theory of motivation. There are correlations between academics and peer influences and most do not allow social relationships negatively affect academics. Developing relationships with peers with similar academic goals are more likely to be successful (Mercado, 2014). The influence that peers have on an individual is related to the person’s ideas about their own identity. Others view them the way they view themselves. School kids were often found to be engaged with school oriented peer groups, possibly suggesting that peers holding similar

academic goals propelled their ambitions (Mercado, 2014). Adding the stress and anxiety of moving to a new school and facing the unknown can be quite daunting for a young teen. Young people in this stage of development must be supported emotionally if they are to be successful in the transition from middle to high school (Drummond, 2018).

Lack of parental involvement

Studies have shown that parents tend to back off when students enter high school. Lack of parental involvement has become a topic of many districts (Shavers, 2018). Parents tend to back off from their students leaving them without the support they have become accustomed to throughout their elementary years. Reason being that parents can no longer help with the schoolwork or that they feel they are of an age they need to be responsible for their work themselves. Comparing a middle school to a high school the enrollment and the size of the building itself can be a challenge for parents. Complicating this is the teen's need for autonomy. The need for independence permits the parents to limit their own involvement in the student's life (Harris, 2018). Some parents feel that at the high school level their child is of an age they can advocate for themselves. In an effort to improve parent involvement, schools are encouraged to maintain communication with parents through correspondence and inviting parents to workshops and conferences. Freshman teachers that foster the parent relationship will communicate more with the parents thus making the transition better for everyone. According to Maslow, this improved relationship between parents and school will help students attain academic success. Also, encouraging parents to take an active interest in their children's lives by attending orientations and serving on school committees, which can lead to higher achievement and less behavior problems in school. Invite parents to

volunteer in the classroom (Pendergraft, 2014).

Behavioral Issues

Students with behavioral issues are more likely to fail and drop out in transition years due to their lack of engagement in school sometimes due to boredom, as well as, difficulty and rigor of the curriculum (Pettis, 2017). The more transitions there are and the later the last transition to high school is, the greater the drop-out rate. Students have a greater likelihood of becoming disengaged when they endure more transitions (Rideau, 2014). They also can be “pushed out” by administration. Push Outs are students who are perceived to be difficult, dangerous or detrimental to the success of the school. The implications for schools with poor student behaviors can lead to lower graduation rates (Jones-Griffin, 2017). It benefits schools to remove the students with bad behaviors or high suspension rates to improve outcomes. According to Maslow, once a student loses the sense of belonging they will never be successful in school. Male teachers tend to be used to address these problems. Men are often placed in the upper grades because they can handle the students with discipline problems (River, 2016). This may be why fewer men teach freshmen classes. Older students do not require the nurturing required for freshman (Cook, 2018). Students with discipline problems, particularly in upper grades, are targeted and subtly or not so subtly encouraged to withdraw from the school, transfer to another school or are simply dropped from the rolls if they fail too many courses or miss too many days of school and are past (or in some cases not even past) the legal dropout age (Pettis, 2017).

Anxiety and Stress

Anxiety and stress about high school-students are worried whether or not they

will fit in, about the rigor of the coursework, the changes in teaching philosophy from middle school to high school, will they be bullied by the older students, will they get lost in the building, will they be able to find their classes and the fact that grades really count. When students suffer from social anxiety, they worry about social interactions with their peers (Miner, 2016). They may feel uncomfortable in social situations and may fear or dread socializing with peers. To escape uncomfortable peer interactions, students refuse to come to school. Maslow emphasizes the sense of belonging needs to be present. School refusal can result in a lack of academic progress, failure to develop social relationships, and ultimately be detrimental to their success (Thurwanger, 2016).

Mobility

Students who change schools within the eighth through tenth grade years are more likely to not be successful academically and have a higher chance of drop out. School changes are on the whole harmful for students, at least in the short term. There is a relation between mobility and student outcomes. Schools and teachers find mobile students, especially those who change schools during the school year, to be challenging. Being new to a school requires students to undertake challenging and stressful activities, including the social interactions and different curriculum. This all comes at a psychological cost. A student who transitions so much will never have a true sense of belonging. Maslow believes a person needs this belonging to want to succeed. Whether it is an out of sequence move or the more traditional grade level switch, students on either side of an expected transition find that higher levels of anonymity and lower levels of self-esteem after a structural school change, often coincident with a decrease in course grades (Grigg, 2014).

Life Events

Some students are at risk due to life events such as; pregnancy, death of a parent, incarceration, taking care of younger siblings or working in order to support their families. Students in higher poverty areas also have to deal with higher chances of violence, being pressured to join a gang, one or no parent home life due to parents' death, incarceration or addictions. Trauma is defined as a mental result of an unexpected, unexplained emotional external event or series of events that are prolonged and intense causing stress and feelings of fear and threatens physical or psychological harm (Wilson, 2019). Traumatic experiences can impact an individual physically, socially, and emotionally not to mention their cognitive development and overall well-being. Trauma can affect a person's feeling of safety and security. Maslow lists these as central to a person wanting to be successful. Schools that provide an environment where all students feel safe, welcomed, and supported will impact the academic and social needs of the students dealing with traumatic life events (Doughty, 2018). The classroom environment is potentially a protector against negative effects of trauma and emotional and cognitive aspects of education are given equal attention. Developing positive, supportive relationships with teachers are critical for traumatized children who present academic and behavior problems (Peterson, 2019). Teachers that discuss, rehearse, and frequently revisit rules, expectations, and rewards reinforce that schools are a safe place for children. If a teacher is willing to discuss the rationale for rules, avoid battles for control will strengthen the child both physically and emotionally, which lead them towards success in high school (Peterson, 2019).

Lack of Engagement in School

Students who enter ninth grade who are absent often or disengaged in class due to boredom or difficulty are more at risk of failure and drop out (Tash, 2018). These students are failing to succeed in school and the school has failed to provide them with the support and environment they need to be successful. Those basic needs, identified as necessary by Maslow, play a key role in the success or failure of a student. Initial failure, which is often seen at the ninth grade transition year, is the result of poor academic preparation for some but for others it is due to unmet social needs. It is evident that students who earn a 2.0 GPA or less in the freshman year, have lower chances of graduating as opposed to counterparts with more than 2.5 GPA. Students with a GPA of 2.0 and below should be considered at enhanced risk of dropout while those that fail a course or do not accumulate the required number credits and are no longer on track to graduate. Identifying troubled students in ninth grade is necessary to reduce dropouts (Helms, 2016). When the child separates from the parent facilitating, this increases peer influence and reduces parental control. The child transitions to high school resulting in a breakdown of established bonds with peers and teachers (Tash, 2018). These students do not dropout at the first failure, which explains the 9th grade bulge. Many will continue school until they have become so far behind that it seems impossible to see graduation or they have just lost confidence due to repeated failure. These students are usually those that have poor attendance, act out or have course failures. This year's drop out is last year's truant (Pettis, 2017).

Emotional Factors

In addition to the social and economic obstacles many students face, the transition

to high school is often made more difficult by complicating physical and emotional factors. While students have difficulty transitioning from one school to another, at any age, students feel increased pressure when moving from middle school to high school due to increased responsibilities and standards in the high school setting. Ninth grade year is considered one of the most critical years in high school due to increased academic rigor, graduation requirements, and new social pressures accompanied with poor middle school preparation and reduced family support (Walker, 2016). The philosophies of the middle and high schools are different and can cause emotional stress for students, which could lead to academic and social shortcomings. According to Lundblad and Tappan (2008), the transition from the security of a middle school to an often large and less structured high school is not easy. Not only are students attempting to deal with developmental and environmental changes; but, also the issue of attempting to keep a strong self-esteem through the process. Adolescents start worrying about the transition to high school long before the first day of their freshman year. In fact, many begin to develop anxiety as they feel their eighth grade year winding down (Lundblad and Tappan, 2008). Michael J. Butts and Patricia A. Cruzeiro (2005) believe the transition from eighth grade to high school is a critical point in the lives of students. School districts should put effective and proper transition programs into place to provide the foundation for students. One of the keys to ensure the success of a program is to ensure that freshman feel a sense of confidence and support as they move through the high school (Gerwertz, 2007). The emotional security is essential to transitioning in any setting. According to Butts and Cruzeiro (2005), this feeling of support and confidence is essential to the academic success of freshmen. School districts need programs that instill a sense of belonging for

the incoming freshman. As supported by Maslow's theory, students will not achieve success until they feel the sense of belonging in school. The faculty and staff exercise increased sensitivity to the incoming students; however, it is important that the entire student body make the ninth graders feel welcome. Freshman can feel lonely, or alienated during this transition and need the support of everyone around them to navigate the new environment.

Another emotional factor to consider is the gender of the teacher. Research states that the students of female teachers outperform the students of the male teachers (Sykes, 2017). Sykes' study suggests that male teachers may not provide the same level of care, understanding or nurturing that may be required to help students perform in the classroom. There are fewer male teachers due to the unfavorable perception of the female-dominated profession (Lancaster, 2014). Men are often placed in the upper grades because the administration thinks they can handle the classroom discipline of students and because older students do not require the nurturing required for freshman (Cook, 2018). Also, male teachers reported being singled out as the person on campus to be the disciplinarian for students in other classrooms (River, 2016). This tends to be detrimental to student relationships. Studies have shown students are most comfortable with the gender of the teacher with which they have the most history (Schwartz, 2018). Because there are far fewer male teachers at the elementary level, students tend to be most comfortable around female teachers (Hood, 2015). When examining the influence of teacher gender on student motivation and engagement, there a statistical difference among the motivation and engagement scores of students of female teachers (Varughese, 2017). Female teachers typically try to deal with behaviors in a non-threatening by

building relationships and having a knowledge of intervention strategies (Gibson, 2015). These interactions between male and female teachers impact the relationships of the students. Maslow emphasizes the importance of love and belonging in his theory. The better the connection between the teacher and student, the more successful a student will be during the transition to high school.

Physical Factors

Other considerations are the physical factors that place a student in the high-risk category. Obvious physical disabilities can hinder a student's ability to navigate school. Some less obvious physical factors include gender, weight, diet, abuse, and neglect. When considering gender, boys are at a significant disadvantage. According to Wallace (2016), boys account for 60% of all high school dropouts and are, regardless of race, ethnicity, or economic class more likely to struggle in high school. Diet quality and obesity are factors that should be considered when identifying high risk students. Students with a decreased overall diet and/or issues with obesity were significantly more likely to perform poorly on assessments. Abuse and neglect can physically and emotionally place a child in a high risk category. The lack of safety, according to Maslow, can contribute significantly to the student's health. The health and medical needs and suffering associated with the stress of dealing with abuse and neglect can place a student at a disadvantage. Even students that face no complicating factors still face the daunting task of a difficult academic and social transition to the high school level. These obstacles and challenges point to a need for increased preventative measures designed to ease the transition and make students more successful. These preventative transition programs vary widely in scope and design as outlined below.

Freshman Transition Programs

A typical high school organization is usually a bureaucratic model. This is a challenge for some freshman students. Therefore, various school interventions focused on the ninth-grade students are implemented to create a positive and personal school culture (Kenney, 2017). Although there are many interventions implemented by schools, one common theme among the ninth-grade interventions is the attempt to create a personalized high school experience for the ninth-grade student (Kite, 2015). They also attempt to meet as many of Maslow's needs to lay the foundation for a successful transition. Schools should create a safe and academically challenging school climate. Another strategy would be to develop a remedial academic program for students not performing at grade level in reading and math. Interdisciplinary instructional teams work but are more of a middle school model. Most high schools do not have the ability to use this strategy. A more common practice in high school is to establish advisory committees to ensure students are known well by at least one adult and that every student has a teacher who serves as an advocate for him or her, communicating on his or her behalf with other teachers, administrators, and parents (Caldwell Templeton, 2017). Maintaining a good working relationship between the middle school and high school administrators improves the transition. This works with the counselors as well. Schools that offer student-centered activities, including having middle school students attend regular classes at the high school, having summer meetings at the high school, and having a buddy program that pairs new students with older students on entry to the high school (Pendergraft, 2014). While there are numerous interventions, the interventions that will be focused on in this paper will be advisories, student led parent-teacher conferences,

freshman orientation, transition program, data to make decisions, peer mentors, adult mentors and a specific counselor directly assigned to ninth grade students.

Teachers of Freshmen

Freshman can also feel lonely and alienated during the transition to high school and need the support of everyone around them to navigate the new environment. As a result, administrators tend to choose more nurturing teachers for freshman to ease the anxiety associated with the transition (Cook, 2018). The teachers of ninth grade students play an important part in all elements of the transition. Their daily contact and ability to communicate with the ninth graders is one of the components that will determine the success of the student. One of the greatest contributing factors to academic success of ninth grade students is teacher to student relationships and a caring teacher can influence confidence motivation (Lewis, 2016). Those relationships give the student the sense of belonging identified as crucial by Maslow. The teacher that teaches ninth grade students should have a more nurturing side and be willing to work with the freshmen to ease the transition. The teachers that have positive student relationships have more engaged, comfortable students (Jamison, 2014).

Students need to be supported by a community of caring adults during this time of transition (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2014). Teachers, students and parents need to work together to ensure a successful transition. Administrators should recognize this and choose teachers for freshman that will foster the parent relationship as much as the student relationship. Communication is an important element of the transition. Teachers of freshman students tend to communicate with parents and students more than teachers of upperclassmen (Bacchus, 2014). The more they communicate with the parents the

better the relationship will be with those parents. Freshman teachers that foster the parent relationship will make the transition better for everyone. A good relationship between parents and school will help students attain academic success. Another difference between teachers of freshmen and teachers of upperclassmen is the instructional method chosen by those teachers. The upperclassmen teachers' instructional decisions are guided primarily by the goal of covering a large amount of content during the regular school year. Because the curriculum includes a large list of topics and the expectation of mastery is high, strategies are a challenge to upperclassmen teachers who must cover a broad range of topics lightly rather than addressing fewer topics in greater depth. As a result, lecture is the most common instructional method of upper level teachers (Deas, 2014). Other methods such as experiments, hands-on activities, and in-depth investigation are considered to time consuming and are not used as often by teachers of upperclassmen. The perception of success that these teachers have of their students has nothing to do with the overall life of students. What is important is the teachers perceptions of their students' success at school. Studies find that the perception of the teacher is directly tied to the students' daily functioning (Bruni, 2015). If a teacher perceives the student as successful, they will strive to attain that success.

Research shows the need for a freshman transition program in schools (Coley, 2015). It is not known if the teachers of freshman view the success of the ninth grade students as an attribute of the transition programs. Research has been on the use of transition programs and how they correlate with student achievement but a gap in literature exists in the teachers' perceptions of the students' success after having participated in these programs. This study will address the gap by surveying teachers of

freshman and teachers of upper classmen, this study will identify any differences to the grade level taught and their perception of the success of the student that participates in a transition program.

Gender of Teachers

Another factor to consider is the gender of the teacher. Research states that the students of female teachers outperform the students of the male teachers (Sykes, 2017). Sykes' study suggests that male teachers may not provide the same level of care, understanding or nurturing that may be required to help students perform in the classroom. There are fewer male teachers due to the unfavorable perception of the female-dominated profession (Lancaster, 2014). Also, male teachers reported being singled out as the person on campus to be the disciplinarian for students in other classrooms (River, 2016). This tends to be detrimental to student relationships. Studies have shown students are most comfortable with the gender of the teacher with which they have the most history (Schwartz, 2018). Because there are far fewer male teachers at the elementary level, students tend to be most comfortable around female teachers (Hood, 2015). When examining the influence of teacher gender on student motivation and engagement, there a statistical difference among the motivation and engagement scores of students of female teachers (Varughese, 2017). Female teachers typically try to deal with behaviors in a non-threatening way by building relationships and having knowledge of intervention strategies (Gibson, 2015). The sense of security a student may receive from a more nurturing teacher will meet the needs in Maslow's theory of motivation. These interactions between male and female teachers impact the relationships of the students. In a study of high school students, perceptions of the effectiveness of gender-based

instruction and teachers' perceptions regarding the most effective instructional strategies resulted in positive results of gender-differentiated instruction and improved concentration and academic performance (Taylor, 2014). The negative aspect of gender-differentiated instruction was the challenge of interacting with the same gender. Maslow emphasizes the importance of love and belonging in his theory and the feeling of connection with a teacher will impact achievement. The better the connection between the teacher and student, the more successful a student will be during the transition to high school. Studies have been done to addressing the differences between male and female teachers and student success but a gap in literature exists in the teachers' perceptions of the students' success by the different genders. This study will address the gap by surveying teachers to identify if any differences exists between male and female teachers and their perceptions of the success of ninth graders that went through a transition program.

Advisory Interventions

Advisory class periods allow students and teachers to meet at various times throughout the freshman year. This is one way schools attempt to create a more personalized schooling environment for their ninth-graders. Studies find that advisories could be used to increase student motivation, guide class selection, and celebrate student achievement (Novick, 2015). Advisories can be used as a way to combat some of the feelings of isolation that ninth-graders so often feel when transitioning to a high school (Brodie, 2014). In addition, advisory teachers may use the time to teach study skills, allow time for homework completion, or simply act as a mentor to their students. This will allow a student to move into the esteem level of Maslow's theory and push them to

achieve. Brodie (2014) found that advisories increase student personal support. This can be helpful when students struggle with the new academic standards implemented in high school. Another benefit to student advisories is that they may increase teacher/parent communication (Mooney, 2017). In general, advisories can act as an intervention that attempts to connect students to teachers and teachers to parents.

Student Led Interventions

While peers can have a positive influence on ninth-graders, adult and parent support is needed, too. In today's society parents have a great impact on adolescent motivation, which can be a problem for many ninth-graders. Assuring parent involvement in their ninth-grade child's education through student-led conferences is an important aspect of student success (Harris, 2018). Leading their own conference will give them more ownership and push them to feel self-actualized, according to Maslow. Ninth-grade students in some schools are able to facilitate a conference between the teacher and parent about the progress the student is making, class assignments, and other school-related topics. This allows the ninth-grader some ownership in his or her learning. By improving relationships between school and the family, schools can positively impact student achievement (Lyman, 2014).

Transitional Program Interventions

Research shows that transition programs reduce dropout rates and are beneficial to students (Wallace, 2016) because of the social connection these interventions can create between the school, the student, and the real world. When ninth-graders transition to the high school, new feelings of loneliness and isolation can occur that can adversely affect student achievement (Klalus, 2017). Maslow states these feelings can be

detrimental to a child's success. Transitional interventions help to prevent or at least lessen some of those feelings. Transition programs can be offered in a variety of ways. The most advantageous programs take the form of summer programs that occur even before the student enters high school. Freshman orientation programs may entail a freshman-only registration day or a freshman-only first day of school. This type of orientation may include interactions with upperclassmen as buddy type system, scavenger hunts to familiarize with the layout of the high school campus, meeting teachers, getting to know other ninth grade students (if various middle schools are involved) and self-esteem building activities (Olmsted, 2014).

Data Interventions

It is crucial to provide feedback to students throughout their ninth grade year. This data about the student's performance can ultimately increase test scores. Use of data to support positive outcomes for students requires the ability of those educators to effectively access, understand and apply data. Using data to determine appropriate instructional practices or appropriate interventions or supports requires teachers to engage in the process of systematically gathering and analyzing data to inform decisions. This process can be guided by the emphasis in which data use exists. Teachers consider data analysis as a process for a decision that has already been made rather than as information to form a decision (Rodriguez, 2017). Administrators making school wide considerations use data to make informed decisions. These leaders are now required to analyze, interpret and use data to make informed decisions in all areas of education, ranging from professional development for staff members to assessing student learning (Rodriguez, 2017). Data should be actively used to improve instruction in schools, however

individual schools often lack the capacity to implement what is suggested by the data as best practices. Education is a field in which the practitioners make their decisions based upon intuition, gut instincts or fads. This is corroborated when the implementation of a program fails and no data was used before implementation. Advocates of data-driven decision-making practices argue that effective data use not only identifies successes and challenges a school faces, but also helps schools identify areas of improvement and helps them to evaluate whether programs and practices are effective (Rodriguez, 2017). The use of a problem-solving method and on-going progress monitoring ensure that the proper interventions are being implemented and that they are being effective. Practices such as the evaluation of progress toward state and district standards, monitoring student performance and looking at local curriculum and instructional practices benefit all students but are especially necessary for freshmen. Response to Intervention systems are designed to give the students the interventions but requires frequent progress monitoring to make decisions about changes in instruction and apply student response data to those decisions. When teachers use data in progress monitoring, students learn more, teaching improves and students become more aware of their own performance. This awareness is an important key in Maslow's theory. Data-driven decision-making is important in creating more effective schools. Data used for successful freshmen transitions can include attendance reports, behavior reports, test scores, and overall achievement. Ninth-graders who have more personalized support that provides a descriptive picture of how they are doing in school will do better in their academics (Watson, 2015). Thus, sharing a student's own data has positives benefits for that student and can be used as a ninth-grade intervention.

Peer Mentor Interventions

Researchers have found that there is a need for freshman students to be socially connected to other students and that students possess a strong need to belong. The relationships students experience with peers may be especially important during the transition from middle school to high school. These peer relationships are so important because of the much larger student population, which presents new social challenges for students (Pendergraft, 2014). A strong relationship between the rejection of peers and problems with students transitioning from middle school to high school, and that school-based peer status is of significant importance to the lives of children and adolescents (Pendergraft, 2014). Peers tend to be the most influential group for freshman students indicating a need for peer mentors (Thurwanger, 2016). This social element is addressed by Maslow's theory of motivation. Often, when students drop out of high school it is because they did not connect with the school and subsequently formed friendships with students who did not value education. Therefore, one intervention is the use of peer mentors. Some schools have programs that allow time for older students to mentor the younger ninth-grader (Pendergraft, 2014). During this mentorship, they may have conversations about academics, homework, or simply talk about the social aspect of school. Peer mentors can have a positive impact on the emotionally needy and peer dependent ninth-grader.

Adult Mentor Interventions

Studies have found that students are less likely to drop out of school when a positive relationship exists between teachers and students such as those intended by the use of adult mentors. Ninth-graders often flourish with an adult connection (Lewis,

2016), which can be attained by providing an adult mentor to every student. Mentors in mentoring programs do not just provide students with emotional support they need, they also inspire these young people to be more active in school and encourage participation in activities and events. Programs offer role models through relationships as they instill social skills needed in the world (Butler, 2016). The relationships formed add to the sense of belonging identified by Maslow. The adult advocates can offer advice, help keep the student organized, or be someone who will listen to the ninth-grader. When ninth-grade students have strong emotional connections and attachments to the school, they are more likely to have academic success. Mentoring does have an impact on all aspects of the students' lives. In order to achieve any significant beneficial effects however, the mentor and student must have a strong relationship and spend time together on a continual basis for an extended period. Ending these relationships after a very short time may be harmful to the student (Butler, 2016). Butts and Cruzeiro (2005) found that connections to school keep students more engaged. Adult mentors act as a way to link the sometimes emotionally needy or isolated ninth-grader to the school.

Counselor Led Interventions

Dedicating a counselor to the ninth-grade students can be an effective intervention. Brigman and Campbell (2003) found that counselor-led interventions for ninth-graders had a positive effect on students. The school counselor's role as support personnel for student academic success is especially pivotal during these years. Freshman year is a transition time for students. Many freshmen are transitioning from being the oldest students at middle school to the youngest in high school. During that time, tremendous changes in development occur. In addition, high schools also include larger

populations, which may contribute to feeling less confident about the new challenges before them. The school counselor provides support to help students adapt to the changes in academic expectations and establishes a foundation for future success in high school level (Niforos, 2016). The freshman year features several developmental stages. Unlike other levels of high school, freshmen year is a time when young adolescents are changing physically, cognitively, and socially all within the short time. In addition, there is an increase in academic expectations and challenges. The middle school student transitions to the high school experience and prepares for the increase in demands. The school counselor assists students as they experience these changes. High school counselors build on the student's middle school experience and are in a unique position to impact self-concept development, academic achievement, peer interactions, and personal challenges that occur daily. A positive relationship between counselor and student provides support during a student's transition from middle school to high school (Niforos, 2016). The relationships formed add to the sense of belonging identified by Maslow. The ninth-grade counselor can be given extra time for ninth-grade scheduling so that the incoming student is appropriately placed into classes. Having an active counselor identify at-risk students prior to the students' entry into the high school can be valuable as well (Thurwanger, 2016). The counselor can also aid staff with academic and behavioral interventions and can facilitate meetings with students, parents, and teachers prior to the beginning of the school through the freshmen orientation day, IEP meetings or a freshmen open house day. The ninth-grade counselor can act as another adult with whom the ninth-grader may bond and can add another layer of connection and support to the ninth-grade student.

Summary

Only the number of graduates it produces often measures the success of our public schools. This means that the public school system must work to ensure students are successful throughout their K-12 education and reach high school graduation on time. Transitioning from one school to another within a school district system seems to complicate the process with the most significant difficulties taking place during the transition from middle school to high school. The ability of schools to help students navigate this transition and have a successful freshman year of high school plays a critical role in determining the school's overall success at producing graduates. Given that this transition is difficult under even the best of circumstances and given that many adolescents face significant academic, economic, social, physical and emotional obstacles, it becomes essential for high schools to develop transition programs that will increase the likelihood of success for first year high school students. The selection of the freshman teacher plays a role in the success of the ninth grade student. Research shows the need for a freshman transition program in schools. It is not known if the teachers of freshman view the success of the ninth grade students as an attribute of the transition programs. Research has been on the use of transition programs and how they correlate with student achievement but a gap in literature exists in the teachers' perceptions of the students' success after having participated in these programs. This study will address the gap by surveying teachers of freshman and teachers of upper classmen, this study will identify any differences to the grade level taught and their perception of the success of the student that participates in a transition program. Another variable is the gender of the teachers chosen to teach freshman. Studies have been done to addressing the differences

between male and female teachers and student success but a gap in literature exists in the teachers' perceptions of the students' success by the different genders. This study will address the gap by surveying teachers to identify if any differences exist between male and female teachers and their perceptions of the success of ninth graders that went through a transition program.

In Chapter Three, the researcher will present the methods used in the study. The researcher will outline the methods and materials used for collecting data and the process used to implement it into the study. In Chapter Four, the researcher will present the results of the study. In Chapter Five, the researcher will summarize the complete study and present the conclusions of the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology that will be used to analyze the data. It includes the purpose of the study, the participants, the sampling/selection process, the research setting, the research design and instrumentation, and how the data will be analyzed. The purpose of this casual comparative study is to compare teachers' perceptions of the success of a student that participates in a freshman transition program when entering high school. The idea that Maslow's theory of motivation states a human's basic needs must first be met before they will seek to satisfy higher needs. A student transitioning to high school must first have a sense of safety and belonging. Once that need is met, then the student will become successful. The use of a transition program will relate to the teachers' perception of the success of those students. The transition program will be defined as a program that uses strategic and intentional actions designed to support freshman during their transition to high school. The teachers' perception of the students' success will be their idea of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort of students, and social adjustment of freshman. The results of the surveys will identify differences and similarities in the idea of success. This data could assist school personnel in identifying strategies for the incoming ninth graders to ensure their success in the first year of high school. Students that struggle either academically or socially in the middle school setting often are unsuccessful, in their first year of high school, in earning the number of credits needed to maintain significant progress towards graduation and are more likely to end up as a school dropout (Watson, 2015). In response, many

districts have implemented a variety of transition programs designed to increase attendance, decrease discipline referrals, and generally ease the transition to high school, all in an effort to aid students in maintaining adequate academic progress towards graduation during their first year of high school.

Determining if there is a relationship between a transition program and student success will allow school and district personnel to make informed decisions on the allocation of financial resources. Determining a correlation may provide insight for high schools in school improvement mode as to the type of interventions needed to reach and maintain high standards of academic excellence. The information provided will also allow parents of students identified as at-risk to determine the importance of attendance at a transition program, when one is available.

Participants

Participants for this study will include current high school teachers at high schools that have a transition program in the state of Missouri. Missouri's enrollment is approximately 880,000 students in 518 districts serving K-12 students. There are 583 high schools within the 518 school districts in the state of Missouri that employ 20,000 certified teachers. This study will look at differences of teacher's perceptions of a transition program between teachers of ninth grade students and teachers of upper classman. Further exploring the relationship of teacher's gender and those perceptions. Specifically, this study will attempt to answer the following questions:

RQ1. What is the difference in perception score of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort, and social adjustment of freshman between teachers of ninth grade students and teachers of upper classmen?

RQ2. What is the difference in perception score of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort, and social adjustment of freshman between male and female teachers?

Null Hypotheses

This study was designed to test the following hypotheses:

H₀1. There is not statistically significant difference in perception score of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort, and social adjustment of freshman between teachers of ninth grade students and teachers of upper classmen.

H₀2. There is no statistically significant difference in perception score of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort, and social adjustment of freshman between male and female teachers.

Selection/Sampling

Missouri school districts, which had the identifying criteria for a transition program, will be asked to participate in the survey through single stage, purposive, sampling. Sample size calculations for the independent-samples *t*-test in RQ1 and RQ2 indicates a required return of 51 surveys per group (ninth grade teachers and teachers of upperclassman) with $n=102$ based on $\alpha = .05$, power of .8 and medium effect size (Faul, et. al., 2009).

The superintendent, or designee of identified districts were asked to participate in the study by forwarding an electronic survey link to teachers working in the district's high schools. Once the superintendent agreed to participate in the study, all high school teachers were asked to complete the survey. The number of teachers working within

districts with a transition program was calculated and the sample size was based upon the overall rate of return. A four-week timeline was set up to complete all aspects of questionnaire and survey distribution and acquisition. Missouri superintendents were sent the initial questionnaire and given two weeks to respond. A follow-up email was sent and phone calls were made directly to districts not responding to email requests. Teachers in districts agreeing to participate in the survey were given two weeks to complete the survey. A follow-up survey request was sent after one week to all districts participating in the survey. Selection is limited to Missouri public school districts in Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Research Setting

The research setting will be limited to public high schools, to include charter, vocational, and alternative schools in the state of Missouri DESE. The Missouri DESE is comprised of 518 districts with 583 high schools. Approximately 71% of Missouri public school students select White as their primary demographic group, with another 16% selecting Black as their primary demographic group. Nearly 51% of Missouri public school students qualify for the federal Free and Reduced Lunch program. Only those schools that have previously implemented a freshman transition program are considered for this study. The research setting will include a participation of high school teachers in the State of Missouri DESE who teach in schools that have a freshman transition program. Schools with a transition program vary from district to district or even building to building. That is because options exist for school districts, all of which vary in quality and depth (Joyner, 2014). Schools can send staff and faculty to an off-site facility to be trained by professionals and run their own version once trained. Another option is for

schools to choose a curriculum to be implemented without formal training. Other schools may opt to develop their own program tailored to the demographics unique to its location. Depending on the program of choice, the school needs to decide if the program will have the ninth grade students working in smaller learning communities or separate areas of the building. Some schools use partnerships with local businesses provide job shadowing, internships, and career exploration and preparation opportunities, and may partner with local universities or community colleges to engage students in academic programs. All encourage students to further academic goals. Freshman classes can be any class taken by a ninth grade student. These include all core classes and electives. Because freshman are starting with little or no credits, most students must take a large amount of required classes to start high school. This limits the number of options most ninth grade students can take. Because of this, freshman classes tend to be homogenous and are heavily weighted with ninth grade students. As students progress to the upper classes, their options become more varied and classes can consist of multiple grade level students. Teachers of freshmen are aware of the additional pressures of the freshman transition. After a student has finished ninth grade, the stress of the transition is replaced by other problems and concerns. Teachers of upperclassmen see the anxiety of the students in the grade they teach. This study will also look for difference in the perceptions of the freshmen teachers' gender. Male teachers may not provide the same level of care, understanding or nurturing that may be required to help students perform in the classroom (Sykes, 2017). When examining the influence of teacher gender on student motivation and engagement, there a statistical difference among the motivation and engagement scores of students of female teachers (Varughese, 2017).

Research Design

This study was designed to examine teachers' perceptions concerning the relationship between ninth grade teachers and teachers of upperclassman about the success of students involved in a transition program at high schools in Missouri public schools. This study will be a non-experimental, quantitative research study using a causal-comparative design that seeks to find relationships between independent and dependent variables. It is appropriate because the researcher's goal is to determine whether the independent variable of each research question affected the outcome, or dependent variable, by comparing two or more groups of individuals (Creswell, 2014). The independent variables will be grade level taught and gender of the teacher. Survey participants will be limited to those teachers serving in a school that has a freshman transition program. The dependent variable of student success will be measured using a rating scale measuring teachers' perceptions of success.

RQ1 and RQ2 involves a causal-comparative design to compare differences in perceptions of success between teachers of ninth grade students and teachers of upperclassman. The survey instrument was used, with analysis through independent samples *t*-test, for RQ1 and RQ2 to determine if a difference existed between perceptions teachers of freshman and teachers of upperclassman.

Instrumentation

The survey instrument used in this study was first used in *Freshman Academy: Transitioning ninth grade students through the academic and social rigors of the high school experience and the students', parents', and teachers' perceptions* (Clinton, 2012). Permission to use this instrument was granted by the author, Dr. Yulanda West Clinton.

The survey was developed to collect data from the questionnaire regarding the teachers' perceptions of the freshman transition program at their school. Teachers' attitudes were measured by an average score obtained from a questionnaire designed by Dr. Yulanda West Clinton utilizing a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neither agree or disagree, 4=disagree, and 5=strongly disagree. The minimum score for the survey could be 33 and the maximum score could be 165. The survey is an appropriate instrument for this study because it provides attitudes and opinions of a population by questioning a sample group (Creswell, 2014). The questionnaire layout is also designed to minimize bias in results between a sample and the target population (Mercer, 2018).

The survey was developed to determine the perceptions and attitudes of teachers in a school that has a freshman transition program. The survey was designed using a focus group consisting of a student, a teacher, a parent, and the researcher. The group that identified specific areas to be measured developed an initial draft of the questionnaire. The areas of academic concern, social concerns and structural concerns were all measured. The survey consisted of no more than thirty-five items with the responses being measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The survey was designed to reveal an overall attitude score consisting of the mean of the combined responses. Once the data are collected, it will be run through principal component analysis using SPSS statistics for construct validity. Principal components analysis is a variable-reduction technique. Its aim is to reduce a larger set of variables into principal components. The principal components account for most of the variance in the original variables (Principal Components Analysis (PCA))

using SPSS Statistics, 2018). This analysis is used when the researcher wants to create a new measurement scale but is unsure whether all the variables included measure the construct of interest. The PCA will test whether the construct being measured applies to all or some of the variables. This will explain whether some of the variables chosen are not sufficiently representative of the construct and should be removed from the instrument. This will be a post-hoc way to test for construct validity. Construct validity is used to assess the validity of an instrument by measuring a given construct (Creswell, 2014). Reliability of the questionnaire was calculated by the author and revealed a Cronbach's Alpha of .724 in the academic area, .791 in the social area, and .751 in the structural area indicating the instrument was reliable (Clinton, 2012).

Data Analysis

This will be a non-experimental quantitative study. Once data are collected it will be analyzed with Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software program. For RQ1, the independent variable is teachers of freshmen and teachers of upperclassmen. This study is concerned about whether a teacher teaches any freshmen classes. For the purposes of this study, if a teacher teaches any freshmen they will be considered a freshmen teacher. Teachers will be asked to identify whether they teach ninth grade, tenth through twelve grade, or both. For RQ2, the independent variable is the gender of the teacher. All students entering the ninth grade in the school participate in a transition program. Independent sample *t*-tests were used to identify statistical differences in research questions one and two. The desired sample size for this study was $n=102$ (Faul, et. al., 2009) with alpha level of .05, medium effect size and a power of .8. Sample size calculations for the independent *t*-test sample in RQ1 and RQ2 indicates a

required return of 51 surveys per group (middle school and high school) with $n=102$ based on $\alpha = .05$, power of .8 and medium effect size (Faul, et. Al., 2009). Data were exported to Excel and cleaned for missing cases and significant outliers. Post hoc analysis was conducted for each test to determine and report effect size with the null hypothesis tested at the $p < 0.05$ level.

Research question one attempts to identify differences in teacher perceptions between teachers of ninth grade students and teachers of upperclassmen and research question two attempts to identify differences between male and female teachers. Since RQ1 and RQ2 attempts to identify differences between two groups, in addition to descriptive statistics, independent samples t -tests was used to compare mean survey responses from high school teachers to determine differences in the mean scores of the variables (Creswell, 2014). The following assumptions were met for independent t -test sample calculations for RQ1 and RQ2:

1. Dependent variable of transition program is measured on a continuous scale.
2. Independent variable is comprised of two categorical groups for RQ1 are freshman teacher perceptions and upperclassman teacher perceptions and for RQ2 are male and female teachers.
3. There is no relationship between observations in each group, satisfying the assumption of independence.
4. Outliers, normality of the independent variable, homogeneity of variances, and effect size ($p < 0.05$) were tested for using SPSS during data analysis.

Once the assumptions are met, a t -test will be used to compare mean survey responses from high school teachers to determine differences in the mean scores of the variables.

The independent-samples *t*-test compares the means between two unrelated groups on the same dependent variable. The independent-samples *t*-test is appropriate because RQ1 and RQ2 each consist of two independent groups and there is no relationship between the observations in each group or between the groups themselves. The data will be used to test the evidence against the null hypothesis. The researcher will calculate a probability (*p*-value) of observing the sample results if the null hypothesis is true. As is widely used in academic research, a *p*-value of < 0.05 (less than 5% chance) will be used. Then an effect size will be calculated to determine both effect size of identified differences between the means in the independent samples *t*-test. The value of the mean difference will be divided by the standard deviation to determine effect size. Using a Cohen's *d* of 1.0 indicates that statistical means of two groups vary by one standard deviation. A Cohen's *d* value of 0.2 is considered a small effect size with values of 0.5 and 0.8 generally considered medium and large effects (Creswell, 2014).

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher provided a brief overview detailing the objective of the study and detailed the methodology of this study. This included the three primary research questions and associated hypotheses. RQ1 focused on identifying differences in perceptions of teachers between those teaching freshmen and those teaching upperclassmen through the use of an independent samples *t*-test as a part of a causal-comparative study. RQ2 focused on identifying differences of perceptions' of teachers between male and female teachers through the use of an independent samples *t*-test as a part of a causal-comparative study. Chapter Three also identified participants, selection and purposive sampling procedures in addition to identifying the required sample size for

statistical analysis. Finally, Chapter Three described the research setting and design, the instrumentation, reliability and validity, and data analysis for each research question as described above. In Chapter Four, the researcher analyzes the collected data and reveals the findings of the study. Chapter Five presents a summary of the study findings and conclusions from the causal comparative study. Additionally, Chapter Five offers recommendations from the study and topics for future study.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Introduction

This quantitative study set out to compare the differences in teachers' perception of a successful transition from middle school to high school for ninth grade students in Missouri public high schools that have a freshmen transition program. The independent variables were grade level taught and gender of the teachers. The dependent variable of a successful transition was defined the teacher's perception of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort of students, and social adjustment of freshman.

Maslow's theory of motivation (1954) states a human's basic needs must first be met before they will seek to satisfy higher needs. A student transitioning to high school must first have a sense of safety and belonging. Once that need is met, then the student will become successful. This applies to students during transitions. Students need the sense of safety and belonging to transition successfully. Freshmen transition programs provide the basic needs for the student, which should give them the opportunity to achieve (Joyner, 2014).

The use of a transitioning program will relate to the teachers' perception of the success of those students. The transition program was defined as a program that uses strategic and intentional actions designed to support freshman during their transition to high school. The teachers' perception of the students' success will be their idea of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort of students, and social adjustment of freshman. For the purposes of this study, if a teacher taught any freshmen they will considered a freshmen teacher. Teachers were asked to identify whether they teach ninth grade, tenth through twelve grade, or both. The results of the surveys will

identify differences and similarities in the idea of success. This data could assist school personnel in identifying strategies for the incoming ninth graders to ensure their success in the first year of high school. Students that struggle either academically or socially in the middle school setting often are unsuccessful, in their first year of high school, in earning the number of credits needed to maintain significant progress towards graduation and are more likely to end up as a school dropout (Nanney, 2016). In response, many districts have implemented a variety of transition programs designed to increase attendance, decrease discipline referrals, and generally ease the transition to high school, all in an effort to aid students in maintaining adequate academic progress towards graduation during their first year of high school.

Determining if there is a difference between a freshman transition program and student success will allow school and district personnel to make informed decisions on the allocation of financial resources. Determining a difference may provide insight for high schools in school improvement mode as to the type of interventions needed to reach and maintain high standards of academic excellence. The information provided will also allow parents of students identified as at-risk to determine the importance of attendance at a transition program, when one is available. This chapter presents the findings of this quantitative, causal comparative research.

Results will help to fill a gap in research literature on perceptions of a successful transition from middle school to high school for ninth grade students by teachers of ninth grade students and teachers of upper classmen. The theoretical framework for this study is based on Maslow's theory of motivation (Maslow, 1954). His theory stated that when basic human needs are met, only then will they seek to satisfy higher needs.

Chapter Three, presented the methodology of the study and described the participants, research setting, research design, sampling selection, instrumentation, and data analysis. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the items in the survey and were presented in this chapter to address the questions and hypotheses of this study. Descriptive statistics were used to present the data while inferential statistics were used to infer what the data revealed about participants' perceptions of a successful transition from middle school to high school for ninth grade students.

Data are presented in this chapter to identify if a difference existed between high school teachers' perceptions of a successful transition from middle school to high school for ninth grade students and will attempt to identify perceptions of success based on grade level taught and gender of the teacher. Quantitative data analysis was used to investigate answers to the research questions and corresponding null hypotheses based upon the surveys distributed by the researcher. Chapter Four presents the research questions and null hypotheses of this study, the demographic data, data cleaning process, and research findings related to each of the research questions.

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. What is the difference in perception score of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort, and social adjustment of freshman between teachers of ninth grade students and teachers of upper classmen?

RQ2. What is the difference in perception score of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort, and social adjustment of freshman between male and female teachers?

Null Hypotheses

This study was designed to test the following hypotheses:

H₀₁. There is not a statistically significant difference in perception score of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort, and social adjustment of freshman between teachers of ninth grade students and teachers of upper classmen.

H₀₂. There is no statistically significant difference in perception score of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort, and social adjustment of freshman between male and female teachers.

Demographics

Participants for the study included Missouri public high school teachers in districts that had a freshmen transition program. Participants for this study included current high school teachers at high schools that have a transition program in the state of Missouri. Missouri's enrollment is approximately 880,000 students in 518 districts serving K-12 students. There are 583 high schools within the 518 school districts in the state of Missouri that employ 20,000 certified teachers. This study looked at differences of teacher's perceptions of a transition program between teachers of ninth grade students and teachers of upper classman. Of the 118 respondents, the majority of them were teachers of freshmen as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Survey Demographics-Grade Taught

Grade taught	Valid		Missing		Total	
	<i>N</i>	Percent	<i>N</i>	Percent	<i>N</i>	Percent
Teachers of freshmen	81	68.7%	0	0.0%	81	68.7%
Teachers of upper classmen	37	31.3%	0	0.0%	37	31.3%

Further exploring the relationship of teacher’s gender and those perceptions, only 36.4% of the 118 respondents were male as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Survey Demographics-Gender

Gender	Valid		Missing		Total	
	<i>N</i>	Percent	<i>N</i>	Percent	<i>N</i>	Percent
Male	43	36.4%	0	0.0%	43	36.4%
Female	75	63.6%	0	0.0%	75	63.6%

Information on current district superintendents and high school principals was obtained using the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s database, Missouri Comprehensive Data System (MCDS). The MCDS database was used to generate a school district list report that provided superintendent and principal contact emails for all public high schools in Missouri.

Requests for participation were sent to each district superintendent as well as building principals. Within the request for participation, district and building leaders were asked to determine if their buildings met the qualifying criteria of a freshmen transition

program. If their building met the criteria, they were asked to forward the survey instrument to staff. As a part of the survey, respondents were asked to provide demographic information for the study. Respondents provided information on grade level taught and gender.

Data Cleaning

Teacher survey responses were collected using the QuestionPro survey distribution website and saved in Microsoft Excel format. Survey responses identifying grade levels taught were combined into a single column identifying teachers of freshmen with a 0 and teachers of upperclassmen with a 1. Survey responses identifying gender were combined into a single column identifying female teachers with a 0 and male teachers with a 1. Responses using the Likert scale rating were converted to scores on a 1 to 5 scale and summed in Excel with total possible scores on the thirty-three items ranging from 33 to 165. The scores were then uploaded and analyzed in SPSS for statistical analysis. Thirty-nine teacher survey responses were dropped from the study as the surveys were opened but never finished. An additional two surveys were removed from the study during data cleaning due to missing data points within the Likert scale portion of the survey leaving 118 completed surveys with useable data. Teachers completed the survey at a 75.47% rate with an average completion time of three minutes.

Research Findings

A principal components analysis (PCA) was run on the 33-question survey that measured teachers' perception of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort, and social adjustment of freshman. The suitability of PCA was assessed prior to analysis. Inspection of the correlation matrix showed that all but six variables

had at least one correlation coefficient greater than 0.3. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure is used as an index of whether there are linear relationships between the variables and it is appropriate to run a principal components analysis on set of data. Its value can range from 0 to 1. KMO measures need to be as close to 1 as possible, with values above 0.5 an absolute minimum and greater than 0.8 considered good and indicative of principal components analysis being useful. The overall KMO measure was 0.732 classifying it as 'middling' according to Kaiser (1974). Bartlett's test of sphericity tests the null hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix. Effectively, it is saying that there are no correlations between any of the variables. This is important because if there are no correlations between variables, the researcher will not be able to reduce the variables to a smaller number of components and there would be no point to run a principal component analysis. As such, the researcher will have to reject the null hypothesis. Bartlett's test of sphericity for this study was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), indicating that the data was likely factorizable. The KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.732
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1677.271
	<i>df</i>	528
	Sig.	<.001

PCA revealed nine components that had eigenvalues greater than one and which explained 19.8%, 12.7%, 6.8%, 4.9%, 4.6%, 4.5%, 4.1%, 3.5%, and 3.1% of the total

variance, respectively. A scree plot was used to determine the number of components to retain for the PCA. A scree plot is a plot of the total variance explained by each component against its respective component. As there are as many components as there are variables, there are 33 components in the scree plot. The components to retain are those before the inflection point of the graph. The inflection point is meant to represent the point where the graph begins to level out and subsequent components add little to the total variance. As the graph in this case begins to level off after the third component, visual inspection of the scree plot would lead to the retention of three components (Cattell, 1966). The scree plot is presented in Figure 1.

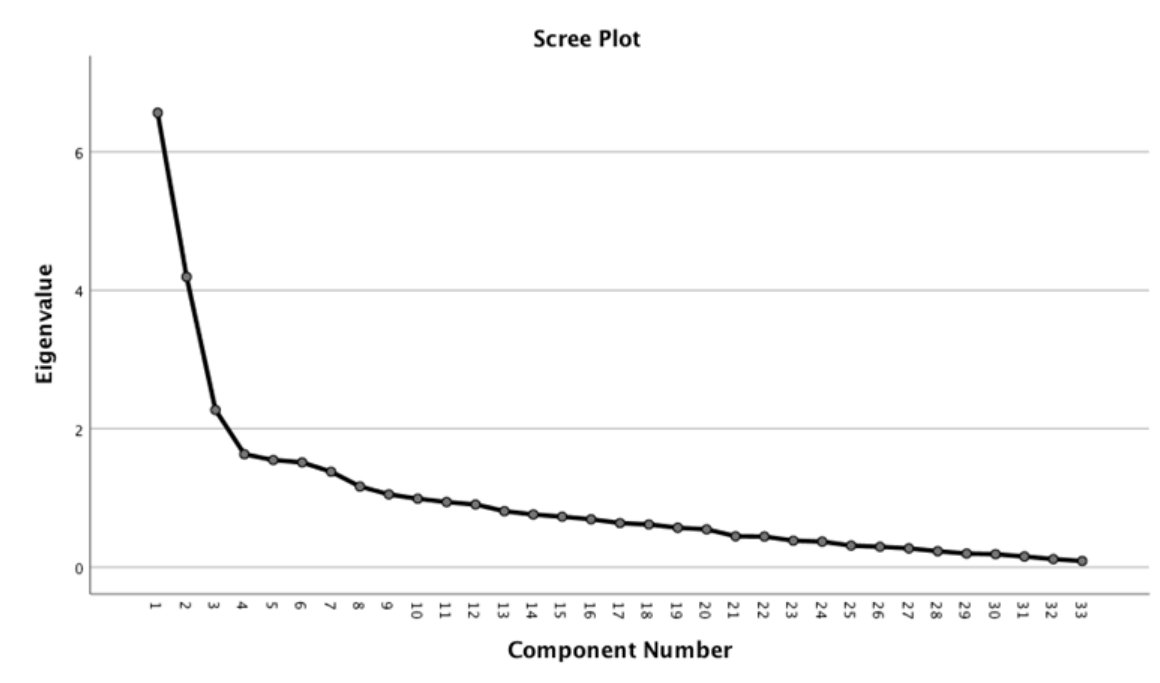


Figure 1. Scree Plot. The scree plot (Cattell, 1966) illustrates one of the criteria used to determine the number of components to retain for rotation and interpretation.

In addition, a three-component solution met the interpretability criterion. The interpretability criterion revolves around the concept of "simple structure" and whether the final solution makes sense. For the number of components to influence the

interpretability of the final solution, you first need to inspect the rotated component matrix. The rotated component matrix table shows how the retained, rotated components load on each variable. As such, three components were retained. The three-component solution explained 39.5% of the total variance. Simple structure is when each variable has only one component that loads strongly on it and each component loads strongly on at least three variables. The overriding concept of the interpretability criterion is whether the final rotated solution makes sense. The rotated solution exhibited simple structure (Thurstone, 1947). The interpretation of the data were consistent with the attributes the survey was designed to measure with strong loadings of achievement on Component 1, social items on Component 2, and stress/emotional on Component 3. Component loadings are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Rotated Component Matrix

	Component		
	1	2	3
VAR00011	.856		
VAR00012	.842		
VAR00013	.824		
VAR00001	.810		
VAR00014	.657		
VAR00015	.653		
VAR00021	.634		
VAR00017	.595		.361
VAR00002	.582		
VAR00003	.558	-.326	
VAR00020	.474		
VAR00016	.411		.368
VAR00025		.810	
VAR00033		.807	
VAR00031		.732	
VAR00024		.705	
VAR00008		.579	.325
VAR00023		.568	
VAR00028		-.551	
VAR00006		.520	.320
VAR00007		-.481	
VAR00030		.432	
VAR00032		.415	
VAR00022		.316	
VAR00019			
VAR00009			.627
VAR00029			.486
VAR00026			.455
VAR00018			.443
VAR00027		-.332	.393
VAR00004			.348
VAR00005			.333
VAR00010			.320

The simple structure and strong loadings on the components were not ample evidence for the instrument to have construct validity. Due to a total variance of less than forty percent for three components and larger than 0.4 difference on the loaded variables, this instrument does not have construct validity and the results of this study should be interpreted with caution.

The analysis of data revolved around two research questions. Missouri public, high school teachers were surveyed for demographic data and their perceptions of a successful transition from middle school to high school for ninth grade students. Respondents included 118 high school teachers. Demographic data for respondents included grade level taught and gender.

Research Question 1

Survey respondents totaled 118 high school teachers. An independent-samples *t*-test was run to determine if there was a difference in the perceptions of a successful transition from middle school to high school for ninth grade students by teachers of ninth grade students and teachers of upper classmen. Outliers, normality of the independent variable, and homogeneity of variances were tested for using SPSS during data analysis with effect size calculated after testing ($p < 0.05$). SPSS identified no significant outliers. Teacher perceptions of student success were normally distributed for teachers on ninth grade and teachers of upper classmen, as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk's test ($p > .05$) as shown in Table 5.

Table 5

RQ1-Test of Normality

Grade taught	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	<i>df</i>	Sig.
Teachers of freshmen	.992	81	.895
Teachers of upper classmen	.949	37	.090

The assumption of homogeneity of variances was violated, as assessed by Levene's test for equality of variances ($p = .021$) as shown in Table 5, requiring interpretation of the Welsh *t*-test for these results (Welsh, 1947).

Descriptive Statistics

Teacher perceptions of student success were measured for both teachers of ninth grade and teachers of upper classmen. Results are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

RQ1-Descriptives

Grade taught		Statistic	Std. Error	
1.00	Mean	117.7778	.69121	
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	116.4022	
		Upper Bound	119.1533	
	5% Trimmed Mean	117.7387		
	Median	118.0000		
	Variance	38.700		
	Std. Deviation	6.22093		
	Minimum	103.00		
	Maximum	133.00		
	Range	30.00		
	Interquartile Range	8.00		
	Skewness	.055	.267	
	Kurtosis	-.151	.529	
	2.00	Mean	120.0270	1.41288
95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Lower Bound	117.1616	
		Upper Bound	122.8925	
5% Trimmed Mean		120.2778		
Median		120.0000		
Variance		73.860		
Std. Deviation		8.59421		
Minimum		103.00		
Maximum		133.00		
Range		30.00		
Interquartile Range		12.50		
Skewness		-.409	.388	
Kurtosis		-.552	.759	

There were 81 teachers of ninth grade and 37 teachers of upper classmen that responded. Perceptions of freshmen success were lower for ninth grade teachers ($M=117.78$, $SD=6.22$) than teachers of upper classmen ($M=120.03$, $SD=8.59$).

Inferential Statistics

An independent-samples t -test was run to determine if there were statistically significant differences between teachers of ninth grade perceptions and of student success and teachers of upper classmen perceptions of success with results displayed in Table 7.

Table 7

RQ1-Independent Samples Test

	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances not assumed	-1.430	53.905	.158	-2.24925	1.57290	-5.40284	.90435

Teachers of ninth grade perception score was -2.25 ($SE = 1.57$) lower than teachers of upper classmen perception score. A Welch t -test was run to determine if there were differences in perceptions of student success between teachers of freshmen and teachers of upper classmen. The perception score was lower for teachers of freshmen ($M = 117.78$, $SD = 6.22$) than teachers of upper classmen ($M = 120.03$, $SD = 8.59$), no statistically significant difference, $M = -2.25$, 95% CI [2.75, 5.73], $t(53.905) = -1.430$, $p = .158$. Effect sizes were small $d = 0.3$. Cohen (1988) categorized effect size as < 0.2 , very small; 0.2, small; 0.5, medium; and 0.8, large. There was not a statistically significant

difference between means ($p < .05$), and therefore, the researcher fails to reject the null hypothesis for RQ1.

Research Question 2

Survey respondents totaled 118 high school teachers. An independent-samples t -test was run to determine if there was a difference in the perceptions of a successful transition from middle school to high school for male teachers and female teachers. Outliers, normality of the independent variable, and homogeneity of variances were tested for using SPSS during data analysis with effect size calculated after testing ($p < 0.05$). SPSS identified no significant outliers. Teacher perceptions of student success for male and female teachers was normally distributed, as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk's test ($p > .05$) shown in Table 8.

Table 8

RQ2-Test for Normality

Gender	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	<i>df</i>	Sig.
Male	.980	43	.629
Female	.979	75	.256

There was homogeneity of variances, as assessed by Levene's test for equality of variances ($p = .689$).

Descriptive Statistics

Teacher perceptions of student success were measured for both male and female teachers. Results are shown in Table 9.

Table 9

RQ2-Descriptives

Gender		Statistic	Std. Error
1.00	Mean	116.4884	1.01122
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	114.4477
		Upper Bound	118.5291
	5% Trimmed Mean	116.5724	
	Median	116.0000	
	Variance	43.970	
	Std. Deviation	6.63100	
	Minimum	103.00	
	Maximum	130.00	
	Range	27.00	
	Interquartile Range	9.00	
	Skewness	-.129	.361
	Kurtosis	-.409	.709
	2.00	Mean	119.6267
95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Lower Bound	117.9850
		Upper Bound	121.2684
5% Trimmed Mean		119.7407	
Median		119.0000	
Variance		50.913	
Std. Deviation		7.13532	
Minimum		103.00	
Maximum		133.00	
Range		30.00	
Interquartile Range		9.00	
Skewness		-.080	.277
Kurtosis		-.324	.548

Perceptions of student success were higher for female teachers ($M=119.63$, $SD=7.14$) than male teachers ($M=116.49$, $SD=6.63$).

Inferential Statistics

An independent-samples t -test was run to determine if there were statistically significant differences between male and female teacher perceptions of student success with results displayed in Table 10.

Table 10

RQ2-Independent Samples Test

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	-2.358	116	.020	-3.13829	1.33074	-5.77400	-.50259

An independent-samples t -test was run to determine if there were differences in teachers perceptions scores of student success between males and females. The perception score was higher for female teachers ($M = 119.63$, $SD = 7.14$) than male teachers ($M = 116.49$, $SD = 6.63$), indicating a statistically significant difference, $M = -3.14$, 95% CI [3.28, 4.08], $t(116) = 2.358$, $p = .020$. Effect sizes were medium $d = 0.455746$. Cohen (1988) categorized effect size as < 0.2 , very small; 0.2, small; 0.5, medium; and 0.8, large. There was a statistically significant difference between means ($p < .05$), and therefore, the researcher rejects the null hypothesis for RQ2.

Summary

Chapter Four analyzed the results the survey and determined the findings of the

study. The researcher contacted 577 high schools in the state of Missouri. The leaders of those schools were asked to forward the survey to faculty if the schools had a transition program. One hundred fifty-nine survey responses were received. Thirty-nine were dropped from the study, as the survey was opened but never finished. An additional two surveys were removed from the study during data cleaning due to missing data points within the Likert scale portion of the survey, leaving 118 completed surveys with useable data. Data were disaggregated by teachers of ninth grade, teachers of upper classmen, male teachers, and female teachers. To analyze data, the researcher used the SPSS program to evaluate the inferential statistics and to determine if a statistically significant difference occurred between group responses. The researcher found no statistically significant difference between the perceptions of teachers of ninth grade and teachers of upper classmen. As a result, the researcher failed to reject the null hypotheses for RQ1. Finally, the researcher found a statistically significant difference occurred between perceptions of male and female teachers. As a result, the null hypotheses was rejected for RQ2.

Chapter One identified the need to continue seeking ways to ease the transition from middle school to high school for ninth grade students. Chapter Two summarized the research on Maslow's theory of motivation, how it impacts success of freshmen students, identified factors that affect freshmen success, and programs used by schools to ease the transition to high school. Chapter Three outlined the research process, instrumentation, and data analysis for this study. Chapter Four presented the findings of the study and Chapter Five will summarize the findings of the research and present the implications of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In Chapter Five, the researcher will provide a summary of the methods used to collect and analyze data. A summary of findings will be included in Chapter Five to answer the overarching research question of this study: “What are teachers’ perception of a freshman students’ success and their idea of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort of students, and social adjustment of freshman?” The researcher will propose implications to the profession of education and recommendations for future research to be conducted. Lastly, Chapter Five will provide the researcher’s conclusions to the study.

The purpose of this research study was to answer the overarching question: “What are teachers’ perception of a freshman students’ success and their idea of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort of students, and social adjustment of freshman?” To understand the differences in perceptions the researcher used research questions to determine if a statistically significant difference occurred in perceptions between gender and grade taught. Both were believed to be elements that could affect the perception scores in this study.

This causal comparative independent sample study tested Maslow’s theory of motivation that compares the use of a freshman transition program to teacher perception of a successful transition from middle school to high school for ninth grade students in Missouri public high schools. The independent variables were grade level taught and gender of the teachers. The dependent variable of a successful transition was defined the

teacher's perception of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort of students, and social adjustment of freshman. Maslow's theory of motivation (1954) states a human's basic needs must first be met before they will seek to satisfy higher needs. A student transitioning to high school must first have a sense of safety and belonging. Once that need is met, then the student will become successful. The use of a transitioning program will relate to the teachers' perception of the success of those students. The transition program was defined as a program that uses strategic and intentional actions designed to support freshman during their transition to high school. The teachers' perception of the students' success was their idea of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort of students, and social adjustment of freshman. For the purposes of this study, if a teacher taught any freshmen they were considered a freshmen teacher. Teachers were asked to identify whether they teach ninth grade, tenth through twelve grade, or both. The results of the surveys identified differences and similarities in the idea of success. This data could assist school personnel in identifying strategies for the incoming ninth graders to ensure their success in the first year of high school. Students that struggle either academically or socially in the middle school setting often are unsuccessful, in their first year of high school, in earning the number of credits needed to maintain significant progress towards graduation and are more likely to end up as a school dropout (Nanney, 2016). In response, many districts have implemented a variety of transition programs designed to increase attendance, decrease discipline referrals, and generally ease the transition to high school, all in an effort to aid students in maintaining adequate academic progress towards graduation during their first year of high school.

Determining if there is a difference between a freshman transition program and student success will allow school and district personnel to make informed decisions on the allocation of financial resources. Determining a difference may provide insight for high schools in school improvement mode as to the type of interventions needed to reach and maintain high standards of academic excellence. The information provided will also allow parents of students identified as at-risk to determine the importance of attendance at a transition program, when one is available.

Summary of Methods

This quantitative research study was conducted after the approval of the Research and Review Board, which was approved in October of 2019. Upon approval, the researcher obtained a list of Missouri public school principals in the state of Missouri from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Principals were asked to forward the survey directly to high school teachers that work in a school with a freshmen transition program (defined as any program used to ease the transition from middle to high school). The quantitative data were collected and analyzed using IBM SPSS software. Independent samples *t*-tests were utilized by the researcher to determine if statistically significant differences occurred. Using this information, the researcher then determined the need to reject or fail to reject null hypotheses.

Summary of Findings

The overarching research question of this study: “What are teachers’ perception of a freshman students’ success and their idea of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort of students, and social adjustment of freshman?” To determine if there was a difference in perceptions of a successful transition from middle school to high

school for ninth grade students in Missouri public high schools between teachers of ninth grade and teachers of upper classmen. Also to determine if there was a difference in perceptions of a successful transition between male and female teachers. The following research questions guided the study.

RQ1. What is the difference in perception score of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort, and social adjustment of freshman between teachers of ninth grade students and teachers of upper classmen?

RQ2. What is the difference in perception score of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort, and social adjustment of freshman between male and female teachers?

The following null hypotheses were used to guide this study.

H₀1. There is not a statistically significant difference in perception score of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort, and social adjustment of freshman between teachers of ninth grade students and teachers of upper classmen.

H₀2. There is no statistically significant difference in perception score of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort, and social adjustment of freshman between male and female teachers.

RQ1 Conclusions

For RQ1, the researcher sought to determine if a statistically significant difference occurred between teachers of ninth grade and teachers of upper classmen perception scores of a freshman students' success and their idea of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort of students, and social adjustment of freshman. Data were

collected and an independent samples *t*-test was run. The perception score was lower for teachers of freshmen ($M = 117.78$, $SD = 6.22$) than teachers of upper classmen ($M = 120.03$, $SD = 8.59$), no statistically significant difference, $M = -2.25$, 95% CI [2.75, 5.73], $t(53.905) = -1.430$, $p = .158$. Effect sizes were small $d = 0.3$ (Cohen, 1988). After analyzing the data, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. A statistically significant difference did not occur between the teachers of ninth grade and teachers of upper classmen and their perceptions of a freshman students' success and their idea of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort of students, and social adjustment. The study was designed to determine if a difference occurred between the two groups of teachers based on the relationships they have with freshmen students. As the theoretical framework for the study, Maslow's theory of motivation states that people need to have a sense of love and belonging (Maslow, 1954). His theory stated that when basic human needs are met, only then will they seek to satisfy higher needs. This applies to students during transitions. Students need the sense of safety and belonging to transition successfully. The review of literature showed one of the greatest contributing factors to academic success of ninth grade students is teacher to student relationships and a caring teacher can influence confidence motivation (Lewis, 2016). Those relationships give the student the sense of belonging identified as crucial by Maslow. The teachers that have positive student relationships have more engaged, comfortable students (Jamison, 2014). The relationship was believed to be stronger with the freshmen teachers than the teachers of upper classmen. The proximity and closeness of the freshmen and their teachers should have increased the perception scores of freshmen teachers. The teachers of upper classmen do not spend as much time with those students building relationships

with ninth grade students. Those teachers still perceived the freshmen as successful despite the lack of relationships. One possible reason may be the attitudes of the ninth grade teachers about their students. One study found that teachers of freshmen thought ninth grade students did not take responsibility, were not accountable, and school was not a priority (Garrett, 2014). The researcher indicated in previous chapters, that a limitation to this study included the return rate of the respondents who were provided the survey by the principal along with the number of surveys completed by the respondents. When comparing the number of respondents from this testing group, the teachers of upper classmen represented 27% of the population of this testing group and teachers of ninth grade represented 73%; therefore, more than half of the respondents were freshmen teachers. The researcher did not find studies comparing the differences in grade taught concerning teacher perceptions of a freshman students' success and their idea of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort of students, and social adjustment.

RQ2 Conclusions

For RQ2, the researcher sought to determine if a statistically significant difference occurred between gender of a teacher and their perceptions of a freshman students' success. Data were collected and an independent samples *t*-test was run. The perception score was higher for female teachers ($M = 119.63$, $SD = 7.14$) than male teachers ($M = 116.49$, $SD = 6.63$), a statistically significant difference, $M = - 3.14$, 95% CI [3.28, 4.08], $t(116) = 2.358$, $p = .020$. Effect sizes were $d = 0.455$, which is defined as medium (Cohen, 1988). Although the study determined a statistically difference between the different genders with a medium effect size, because the instrument had no validity the

results have no significant value. After analyzing the data, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis. A statistically significant difference did occur between the gender of teachers and their perceptions of a freshman students' success and their idea of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort of students, and social adjustment of freshman. Female teachers showed higher perception scores when viewing the success of the freshmen students. This is not surprising to the researcher considering the findings the review of literature. In Chapter Two, the research states that the students of female teachers outperform the students of the male teachers (Sykes, 2017). Sykes' study suggests that male teachers may not provide the same level of care, understanding or nurturing that may be required to help students perform in the classroom. The sense of security a student may receive from a more nurturing teacher will meet the needs in Maslow's theory of motivation. Maslow emphasizes the importance of love and belonging in his theory and the feeling of connection with a teacher will impact achievement. The better the connection between the teacher and student, the more successful a student will be during the transition to high school. These interactions between male and female teachers impact the relationships of the students. When examining the influence of teacher gender on student motivation and engagement, there a statistical difference among the motivation and engagement scores of students of female teachers (Varughese, 2017). In a study of high school students, perceptions of effectiveness of gender-based instruction and teachers' perceptions regarding the most effective instructional strategies resulted in positive results of gender-differentiated instruction and improved concentration and academic performance (Taylor, 2014). The researcher indicated in previous chapters, that

a limitation to this study included the return rate of the respondents who were provided the survey by the principal, along with the number of surveys completed by the respondents. When comparing respondents from this testing group, there were only 39% male respondents and 61% female respondents. The researcher did not find studies comparing the differences in gender concerning teacher perceptions of a freshman students' success and their idea of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort of students, and social adjustment of freshman.

Discussion

The purpose of this research study was to answer the overarching question: "What are teachers' perception of a freshman students' success and their idea of academic achievement, stress and emotional discomfort of students, and social adjustment of freshman?" To understand the differences in perceptions the researcher used research questions to determine if a statistically significant difference occurred in perceptions between gender and grade taught. Both were believed to be elements that could affect the perception scores in this study. The theoretical framework of the study, Maslow's theory of motivation (1954), states a human's basic needs must first be met before they will seek to satisfy higher needs. A student transitioning to high school must first have a sense of safety and belonging. Once that need is met, then the student will become successful. Both independent variables in this study were thought to be factors that would contribute to the students' sense of love and belonging. The results however stated otherwise.

As indicated in previous chapters, a limitation to this study included the return rate of the respondents. Less than 10% of the teachers who were provided the survey by the principal responded. Of the responses, 69% were freshmen teachers and 31% were

teachers of upper classmen. The researcher found that two of the district leaders were confused by the request to forward the survey. These leaders, when forwarding the survey, included the researcher on the forwarded email. The leaders only forwarded to teachers of freshmen or faculty involved with the transition program of the district. The researcher believes this may have occurred with other leaders as well. The respondents, including the teachers of upper classmen, may have all been involved in the transition program and ultimately viewed the success of the freshmen as something their own contribution. If indeed some of the teachers of upper classmen did work with freshmen on any level, the relationship piece, as explained by Maslow in his theory of motivation, may have existed and the perception of the success may have been influenced. This creates a team mentality for those teachers. As team teachers working together in their schools with the same students, the students and teachers naturally develop stronger relationships (Rich, 2015). Teachers who are on teams view school climate and culture in a positive way, have an enhanced sense of professionalism, and are more collegial in their work. Students who are learning in the team model develop a sense of bonding with teachers, present fewer behavior issues, and increase their academic achievement (Cucciuffo, 2018).

The problems experienced with the first research question were not a problem for the second research question. The analysis of data revealed normality, homogeneity of variances, and more reliable results. Homogeneity of variances means that the level of variance for a variable is constant across the sample. When homogeneity of variance is violated, there is a greater probability of falsely rejecting the null hypothesis. Normality means data has been drawn from a normally distributed population. If the assumption of

normality is not valid, the results of the tests will be unreliable. The results of the findings were not surprising either. Based on the literature, the gender of the teacher is an important factor in the student to teacher relationship. Female teachers typically try to deal with behaviors in a non-threatening by building relationships and having a knowledge of intervention strategies (Gibson, 2015). These interactions between male and female teachers impact the relationships of the students. Maslow emphasizes the importance of love and belonging in his theory. The better the connection between the teacher and student, the more successful a student will be during the transition to high school. As stated earlier, female teachers have a more nurturing nature and higher perception scores were expected (Sykes, 2017).

The lack of validity also has to be considered when discussing the results of this study. The respondents may not have understood the questions and what the researcher was trying to target with the instrument. The principal component analysis exposed the lack of constructs in the questions of the survey. The study's results have to be interpreted with caution and as such the researcher cannot make valuable determinations based on the results.

Implications

The results of this study may be used to gain a better understanding of teachers' perceptions of the high school transition. This research provides data that may be useful in training teachers to work with students in transition and in the evaluation of high schools' transition programming and practices. Incorporating that which is known from this and other studies may be useful in developing staff training initiatives. It is

suggested from the results of this study that teachers are relatively knowledgeable regarding students in transition and transition practices and procedures, however, there appears to be room to improve. Administrators can use findings from this study to change current practice. Through staff training initiatives and continuing professional development, school personnel would have the opportunity to be educated about the existing differences in perceptions and any new findings.

Administrators could provide training so the teachers understand the crucial role they play in a student's successful transition to high school. Administrators should provide teachers with time for collaboration regarding the transition. By providing time for middle school teachers to meet with high school teachers, administrators can help the middle school teachers understand the high school program and the resources available to students. Teachers can then answer questions and continue to share and reinforce pertinent transition information with students. This would allow the middle school teachers to incorporate knowledge of the high school in their practices.

Another way administrators can support the transitioning student is to offer experiences and design structures at the middle school level that closely resemble high school procedures and practices. These can include implementing a system to imitate the academic structure of the high school, aligning procedures and behavioral expectations to those of the high school, and providing students the opportunity to connect with the campus through extracurricular activities. Administrators could arrange for the high school counselors to visit with middle school students throughout the eighth grade to inform students about graduation and college/career entrance requirements, clubs and activities, and resources available to them.

When looking more closely at specific stressors, all teacher groups frequently indicated that social elements of the transition was one of the most difficult for freshmen students. Districts as a whole can use the findings of this study and may want to consider addressing social stressors for all students during the transition by implementing interventions related to peer pressure. Regarding differences between the perceptions of different genders, female teachers rated procedural aspects, such as getting lost and, as being stressors for their students whereas male teachers did not view them as such. Therefore, finding one's way around might begin to be specifically addressed while students are still in middle school and continue into the beginning of high school. The similarities and differences in perceptions of male and female teachers may also be useful in informing transition programming and practices. Teachers of both genders in the current study generally viewed the social aspects of the transition as being most stressful for their students in general. In contrast, male teachers indicated increased amounts of homework much more frequently as a stressor than did female teachers. Therefore, when developing transition programs, teachers may want to specifically focus on the development of homework skills beginning in eighth grade and continue to regularly reinforce and build on these skills once in ninth grade. Based on this study's findings, teacher training initiatives may also want to consider including education on the apparent differences that may exist between teachers' perceptions of academic stressors.

Schools may consider incorporating older peers into transition activities in order to ease incoming students' anxiety by encouraging relationships with older students and providing them with familiar faces once in the new school. This may be accomplished by asking older students to serve as tour guides of the high school or as peer mentors. These

relationships will give the students the sense of belonging Maslow talks about in his theory of motivation. Also, through training initiatives it may be advantageous to make teachers aware that students are known to report academic concerns such as doing well in class and getting good grades as top stressors both pre- and post-transition. In addition to strengthening homework skills, teachers at the high school level may also want to incorporate teaching study and organizational skills during transition interventions. Teachers should know that others, like parents, friends, and siblings, do not always provide positive information about the transition to high school (Montgomery, 2015). School personnel may consider incorporating these individuals in transition activities to educate them on the importance of also discussing the positive aspects of high school. Through training, it may also be beneficial to make teachers aware of the types of social support being perceived by students, the value students place on this support, and the school-related implications of providing support.

Although teachers of freshmen and teachers of upper classmen reported providing all types of support to students and viewed each as important to some degree, teachers may not be aware of the importance students place on this support or the academic implications of providing informational and emotional support in particular. Without this awareness, teachers may be less likely to provide the support students need. Teacher training may want to place added importance on including parents and friends in transition interventions and let these individuals know the effect their support has on making the transition easier for students. Examples of activities that schools may want to consider include relationship building and ice-breaker activities and those that promote parent involvement such as parent nights. There may be a need to more clearly

communicate school districts' transition procedures through teacher training initiatives. During trainings, school administrators may want to ensure that information on the programs available be made known to teachers and reiterated to parents as well. Training teachers in how best to work with students across the transition to high school may also include disseminating literature outlining programming and activities regarded as best practice and/or information on existing comprehensive transition programs. Equipping teachers with this knowledge may provide them with new ideas and allow them to make informed decisions about the use and effectiveness of specific interventions. Another area for which the current study provides useful information is in the evaluation of the transition programming and practices at the school and district level. Consistent with best practice and the push toward implementing evidence-based practices in schools, districts may want to consider specifically outlining programming practices and procedures.

The limitations of this study, such as limiting it to the state of Missouri, will make the decision to use its findings difficult for some school districts. While Missouri educators represent much of middle America, the rest of the country may not perceive their freshmen in the same light. Applying Maslow's theory of motivation to the process of determining what is of value in this study will assist with those decisions. The findings in this study, while limited, can be useful when considering a transitioning student's sense of belonging and the value of fostering relationships for those students.

Future Research

1. Future research may attempt to survey a greater number of teachers in more diverse school districts and see how results relate to current findings.

2. Differences in perceptions may exist for those teaching in an urban or rural setting, or in schools that are characterized as being more racially/ ethnically or socioeconomically diverse.
3. Perhaps the number of non-respondents would have been reduced had the surveys been disseminated at a different point during the school year or had tangible incentives been given/offered.
4. Perhaps use "rank order" to determine importance of specific items instead of Likert scale.
5. Prospective studies may include in-depth investigation of the degree to which teachers are informed of the transition programs implemented in their schools or district.
6. Teachers' perceptions should be compared to how they compare to the perceptions of students.

With respect to improving transition efforts, many teachers at each level indicated satisfaction with how their district and/or school handled transition-related programming and practices. The results of this study hold preliminary implications for the field of education, primarily with respect to staff training initiatives and evaluation of transition programming and practices. Although the current findings contribute to the existing literature base on high school transition, without proper dissemination, schools may be less likely to provide students with the supports they need.

Conclusions

In chapter two, teachers' perceptions of academic achievement, stress and

emotional discomfort, and social adjustment of freshman are not reported in the literature. This research has therefore partially filled that void with recommendations above that may improve transition programs in high schools. The findings of this study support the conclusion that the transition from middle school to high school is a complicated process involving numerous academic, procedural, and social concerns. Students must successfully manage new academic expectations, procedural expectations, and new relationships. The faculty and staff should exercise increased sensitivity to the incoming students; however, it is important that the entire student body make the ninth graders feel welcome (Whitworth, 2016). Administrators tend to choose more nurturing teachers for freshman to ease the anxiety associated with the transition (Cook, 2018).

Students must balance their academic responsibilities with social concerns such as making friends and also changes in their relationships with significant adults. One of the keys to ensure the success of a program is to have the freshman feel supported (Ashley, 2014). Ninth grade students need to feel they belong and that sense of belonging is supported by Maslow's theory as an important key to success. School districts need programs that instill a sense of belonging for the incoming freshman (O'Connor, 2018).

According to Maslow's theory of motivation, providing support as students transition from middle school to high school is just as important as providing support to address academic or procedural concerns. This social support may be mentoring, counselors and other adult staff members, conversations and lessons about relationships that may occur at the high school level, and activities designed to help students develop self-confidence. Most of the needs are met with the implementation of a transition program.

This transition to high school is difficult for students and the findings of this study indicate teachers at all levels play an important role in supporting students in transitioning. One of the greatest contributing factors to academic success of ninth grade students is teacher to student relationships and a caring teacher can influence confidence motivation (Lewis, 2016). The teachers that have positive student relationships have more engaged, comfortable students (Jamison, 2014). The teachers in this study have similar perceptions of students' academic, procedural/organizational, and social concerns regarding the transition. They agree teachers must work to build students' skills, help students develop meaningful relationships, and support students if they are to successfully transition into high school. Maslow's sense of belonging from his theory of motivation supports the importance of communication in supporting students as they transition. This communication comes in many forms including, most importantly, communication between teachers at all levels and between teachers and students. Also helpful in supporting students is communication between teachers, students, administrators, and parents. Direct communication regarding the transition allows for all parties involved to understand the expectations at the high school level, providing the opportunity for everyone to address student needs.

The findings of this study support that the transition from middle school to high school must be carefully planned with input from everyone at both the middle school and high school levels. Providing support to address the academic, procedural, and social aspects of the transition will ensure the success of the students. Studies find that the perception of the teacher is directly tied to the students' daily functioning (Bruni, 2015). Understanding teachers' perceptions of the transition from middle school to high school

is important in supporting students in the process. This study has shown the perceptions of teachers of freshmen and teachers of upper classmen are largely similar. Teachers understand the transition is a complicated and difficult process for students and they recognize the important role they play in supporting students as they transition from middle school. Developing responsive transition programs with the input of teachers is the best way to ensure student success at the high school level. These programs must provide academic, procedural, and social support and must be responsive to the individual needs of the students for their future.

While all these elements are important and this study tried to add to the body of literature on this topic, the results simply failed to do so. The researcher wanted to produce significant results supporting beliefs of the study. The data from this study should be considered by future researchers to support or defend their positions. Administrators and district leaders should still consider the elements of the study when hiring and placing teachers in positions that will affect ninth grade students. They should also consider these elements when planning professional development in their schools.

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Appendix A

Freshmen Transitions Survey

Grade taught

- A. 9
- B. 10-12
- C. Both

Gender

- A. Male
- B. Female

	Question
1.	I expect my students to do well in my class.
2.	I set realistic and reasonable expectations for my students.
3.	I do not expect my students to do well in my classes.
4.	My classes are harder than I expected for my students.
5.	My classes require students to do a lot of work.
6.	My classes are easier than expected.
7.	I understand why the school requires students to take certain classes.
8.	The school should not require students to take certain classes.
9.	My students are required to complete a lot more homework than they expected.
10.	My students have a lot less homework than expected.

	Question
1.	I care about my students.
2.	I listen to what my students have to say.
3.	My students are important to me.
4.	I know more about my students than their grades.
5.	Many of my students' friends go to this school.
6.	I feel more comfortable because my students' friends are with them at school.
7.	It is important to my students to be with their friends at school.
8.	The move from middle school to high school was difficult for my students.
9.	The move from middle school to high school was easy for my students.
10.	I expect my students to get good grades.
11.	I do not care about how well my students do in school.
12.	I am worried about my students being bullied.
13.	I am worried about my students being around upperclassmen.

	Question
1.	The size of my school makes my students feel uncomfortable.
2.	I worry about my students getting lost because of the size of the school.
3.	The size of the school does not bother my students.
4.	I do not understand my school's discipline procedures.
5.	I think our school's discipline procedures are fair.
6.	My students understand how they are to behave in school.
7.	Our freshmen are isolated from the upperclassmen.
8.	I worry about my students going to lunch without a teacher.
9.	I worry about my students being late for class.
10.	I worry about my students getting lost.

Appendix B



Paul Hoggatt <phoggatt@afftonschools.net>

Dissertation

1 message

Paul Hoggatt phoggatt@afftonschools.net

Thu, Aug 29, 2019 at 1:34 PM

Dissertation

Dr. Clinton:

I am a doctoral student at Southwest Baptist University in Missouri. I found your survey instrument while searching ProQuest and it fits my topic well. Can I have your permission to use it in my dissertation?

Thank you for your consideration.

Paul Hoggatt
Assistant Principal
Rogers Middle School
phoggatt@afftonschools.net
314-810-9130



Paul Hoggatt <phoggatt@afftonschools.net>

Message accepted: RE: Dissertation

1 message

Yulanda Clinton, Ph.D. <hit-reply@linkedin.com>

Thu, Aug 29, 2019 at 1:42 PM

Reply-To: "Yulanda Clinton, Ph.D."

To: Paul Hoggatt <phoggatt@affionschools.net>

Yulanda Clinton, Ph.D. has accepted your request.

Title: RE: Dissertation

Hi Paul, thanks for reaching out! Yes, you have permission to use my survey.