NINTH GRADE TRANSITION: 
A CASE STUDY OF 
TEWKSBURY MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL’S PROGRAM

A thesis presented 
by 
Mary Eileen Taylor Osborne 

to 
The School of Education 

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

in the field of 

Education 

College of Professional Studies 
Northeastern University 
Boston, Massachusetts 
June 2012
### TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. 6

Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 7

Statement of Problem and Significance ............................................................................. 7

Purpose of the Study .......................................................................................................... 9

Research Questions and Design ....................................................................................... 10

Limitations of the Study .................................................................................................. 12

Outline of the Study ......................................................................................................... 12

Literature Review .............................................................................................................. 13

Theoretical Framework ..................................................................................................... 13

Drop-Out: A Problem for Students and Society .............................................................. 19

Ninth Grade Success Prevents Dropout ........................................................................... 21

Successful Transition: Important in Dropout Prevention .............................................. 22

School Organization: A factor in ninth grade achievement .......................................... 25

Attendance and Discipline: Predictors of Dropout ......................................................... 26

Adolescent Development: An important factor in designing transition programs ..... 27

Student Concerns: Effect on High School Success ......................................................... 29

Benefits of Ninth Grade Transition Programs ................................................................. 29

Transition Models ............................................................................................................ 31

Elements of Successful Transition Programs ................................................................. 33

Research Design .............................................................................................................. 35

Research Questions ........................................................................................................ 35
Research Sequence ........................................................................................................... 36
Case Study Method ........................................................................................................... 36
Site and Participants ........................................................................................................ 37
Protection of Participants ............................................................................................... 39
Data Collection and Analysis .......................................................................................... 40
Validity and Reliability ..................................................................................................... 47
Limitations ....................................................................................................................... 49
Report of Research Findings ........................................................................................... 51
Research Question 1 ......................................................................................................... 52
Research Question 2 ......................................................................................................... 59
Research Question 3 ......................................................................................................... 66
Research Question 4 ......................................................................................................... 74
Research Question 5 ......................................................................................................... 86
Conclusion of Research Findings ..................................................................................... 92
Discussion of Research Findings ..................................................................................... 93
Research Question 1 ......................................................................................................... 94
Research Question 2 ......................................................................................................... 96
Research Question 3 ......................................................................................................... 97
Research Question 4 ......................................................................................................... 98
Research Question 5 ......................................................................................................... 99
Summary of Findings ....................................................................................................... 101
Delimitations and Limitations of the Study ................................................................... 102
Recommendations .............................................................................................................. 102
Recommendations for Further Study .................................................................................. 104
References ............................................................................................................................. 106
Appendices .............................................................................................................................. 116
Appendix A - Student Survey ............................................................................................... 116
Appendix B - Approval to Modify Buhrman Survey ............................................................. 118
Appendix C - Tables from Principal Survey ......................................................................... 119
Appendix D - IRB APPROVAL ............................................................................................ 121
Appendix E - Results of Closed-ended Student Survey Data .............................................. 128
Appendix F - Results of Open-ended Student Survey Data ............................................... 137
**LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1. Number of Students in the Study ................................................................. 38
Table 2. Number of Ninth Grade Students per Year of Graduation ............................. 60
Table 3. Summary Statistics by Year of Graduation ...................................................... 62
Table 4. Summary Statistics by Participation in the Transition Program ....................... 63
Table 5. Results of Normality Testing, One Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test .......... 65
Table 6. Results of Mann-Whitney Test ...................................................................... 66
Table 7. Number of Ninth Grade Students per Year of Graduation ............................. 68
Table 8. Summary Statistics by Year of Graduation ...................................................... 69
Table 9. Summary Statistics by Participation in the Transition Program ....................... 70
Table 10. Results of Normality Testing, One Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test ......... 72
Table 11. Results of Mann-Whitney U-Test .................................................................. 73
Table 12. Summary of Data Collected in Student Survey ............................................. 76
Table 13. Participants of the Focus Group ................................................................. 87
Table 14. Results of Coding, Faculty Focus Group ....................................................... 91

**LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1. Histogram of the Number of Failures .......................................................... 64
Figure 2. Histogram of MCAS Biology Data ............................................................... 64
Figure 3. Histogram of Absence Data ......................................................................... 71
Figure 4. Histogram of the Number of Suspensions .................................................... 71
Abstract

Students who graduate with a high school diploma increase their educational and career opportunities. The majority of students who drop out of high school are those who have had to repeat the ninth grade. Ninth grade failure is associated with increased absenteeism, increased discipline referrals, and lower scores on state assessments. Schools that have established ninth grade transition programs have demonstrated a positive impact on student’s social and academic success. Using the lens of Eccles and Midgley’s (1989) stage-environment fit theory, this study explores the process by which a suburban, east coast, public high school designed and implemented a ninth grade transition program despite significant budget constraints. This formative assessment demonstrates that although participation in the program did not result in significant decreases in the number of absences or courses failed, students who participated in the program had fewer suspensions and increased performance on the state biology exam. These findings taken together with student and faculty feedback about the design and implementation of the program provide the foundation for specific modifications to the existing program. Taken as a whole, this study may inform the implementation of ninth grade transition programs in other similar suburban high schools.

Keywords: transition, ninth-grade, freshman, discipline, attendance, high school
Introduction

“The entrance to ninth grade marks a critical juncture in American schooling”
- Neild, 2009. p. 54

Statement of Problem and Significance

Educators in the twenty-first century continue to face many of the same challenges as in the past. One primary challenge is how to ensure student success. Although the percentages of students who drop out of high school have decreased in the past few decades, the most recent statistics indicate that in 2008 there were approximately three million 16 to 24 year-olds who are not enrolled in high school and who have not earned a high school diploma or alternative credential (Chapman, Laird, KewalRamani, 2010). By obtaining a high school diploma, students increase the opportunities that are accessible to them (work, college, trade school, etc.) and will generally earn more money over their lifetimes than those who do not receive a high school diploma (Koonar, 2008). In addition, it is estimated that the total cost to society for individuals who drop out of high school is in the billions of dollars (Rouse, 2005; Buckley, Storino, & Saami 2003).

The majority of students who drop out of high school are those who have had to repeat ninth grade; more students fail ninth grade than any other grade (Allensworth and Easton, 2005). Ninth grade failure is associated with increased absenteeism, increased discipline referrals and lower scores on state assessments (Smith, Akos, Lim & Wiley, 2008; Christie, Nelson, & Jolivette, 2004; Wheelock & Miao, 2005). Ninth-grade difficulties can lead to low achievement, high retention, and increased time required to
achieve a high school diploma, which can lead to students choosing to drop out of high school (Copeland, 2006; Herlihy, 2007; Herlihy, Kemple, and Smith, 2005, and T. Smith, 2007). The difficulties that freshman students experience are compounded by the fact that, developmentally, these students are changing physically and emotionally and experience decreased connection to their education (MacIver, 1990; Eccles, Midgley, Wigfield, Buchanan, Reuman, Flanagan, MacIver, 1993).

The transition experience of students from middle to high school is a factor in determining high school success (Allensworth and Easton, 2005; MacIver, 1990; Mizelle & Irvin, 2005; Shore & Shore, 2009) and studies have shown that implementing a ninth grade transition program is beneficial for students both academically and socially (Cook, Fowler, & Harris, 2008; Herlihy & Kemple, 2004; Kerr, 2002; McGrew, 2001; and Walsh, 2002). Participation in a transition program correlates positively with students obtaining a high school diploma (Kerr, 2002; MacIver, 1990). Many researchers have indicated that directing resources and creating programs that assist students with their first year in high school is one way to help reduce the number of students who drop out (Shore & Shore, 2009; MacIver, 1990; Allensworth & Easton, 2005). Transition programs afford students the structure and support they need as they navigate between the more nurturing environment of the middle school and the high school environment where students have more freedom and less structure.
Purpose of the Study

The ineffective transition of students from eighth grade to ninth grade has been recognized in the literature (Allensworth et al., 2005; MacIver, 1990; Mizelle et al., 2002; Shore et al., 2009) and at Tewksbury Memorial High School (TMHS) as a major area of concern. The majority of students who drop out of TMHS are those who have had to repeat ninth grade (Tewksbury Public Schools, 2011). Ninth grade failure at TMHS is associated with poor academic achievement, poor attendance, inappropriate behavior, and a high incidence of grade retention (Tewksbury Public Schools, 2011).

In 2008, in order to assist incoming ninth graders and to help mitigate the negative effects that the students experienced as they transitioned from middle school to high school, TMHS designed and implemented the following transition activities:

- A half-day orientation during which the freshmen are paired up with upper-classmen
- An eighth-grade visit to the high school during which current eighth graders see demonstrations from the various clubs, activities, and special programs.
- Various visits of high school student and faculty groups to the middle school throughout the school year
- A concerted outreach program to the parents of eighth graders including the distribution of a “Freshman Success Guide”
- The appointment of a freshman advisor who serves as both guidance counselor and behavioral specialist
A designated freshman lunch period

Using the lens of Eccles and Midgley’s (1989) stage-environment fit theory this descriptive, single-case study informs whether the freshman transition program implemented at TMHS has helped students academically and socially during their first year of high school. Eccles and Midgley and their colleagues assert that some of the negative outcomes generally associated with adolescents (lack of motivation, lack of interest in school, etc.) are often caused by a mismatch between the needs of the adolescents and the environment afforded them by their educational environment (Midgley, Wigfield, Buchanan, Reuman, Flanagan, and MacIver; 1993). Transition programs seek to make the school environment better match the emotional and academic needs of its ninth grade students by increasing the support given to students to build their ability to cope with the new environment gradually and more in-line with the physical, emotional, and cognitive needs.

Research Questions and Design

In order to begin to understand whether the freshman transition program implemented at TMHS has helped students academically and socially during their first year of high school, the following research questions will be explored:

1. Why was the freshman transition program at TMHS developed and how was it implemented?
2. Does participation in freshman transition activities relate to student achievement as measured by the number of courses failed and the students’ performance on the MCAS Biology?

3. Does participation in freshman transition activities relate to social acclimation as measured by attendance rates and the number of days suspended during TMHS students’ freshman year?

4. How do students who participated in the transition program interpret their freshman year experience and are there any modifications in the current program that they view as important?

5. How do faculty and administrators describe the contribution of the individual components of the transition program and are there any modifications in the current program that they view as important?

A case study approach was chosen to address these questions because case studies attempt to examine systems holistically, take into consideration the perspectives of multiple stakeholders, and can utilize both quantitative and qualitative data (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1990). The quantitative phase of this study will evaluate whether academic and behavioral data of students graduating prior to 2011 are statistically different from those who graduated after 2011, while the qualitative phase will explore the development and implementation of the program as well as its perceived success and limitations by way of a focus group comprised of staff members and a student survey.
Limitations of the Study

This study provides a formative assessment of the transition program at a single, east-coast, suburban high school. As a result, there may limitations with respect to generalizing the findings of this study with other suburban high schools with different contexts and demographics. Every effort has been made to minimize potential researcher bias as a result of the researcher’s role as an assistant principal at TMHS or as a result of any potential pressure from other stakeholders for the study to meet their individual or collective needs.

Outline of the Study

This study is divided into five sections. The first section includes the introduction to the study, the statement of the problem and its significance, a brief discussion of the practical and intellectual goal, a brief summary of the research questions as well as a summary of the contents of the paper and its organization. The second section includes the theoretical frameworks upon which this study was conceived as well as an overview of pertinent literature. The third section presents details of the research methodology and design including an overview of the study, restatement of the problem and research questions, the research design, the population sample, and the method of data collection and analysis. The next section consists of the research findings and the final section presents a discussion of those findings along with the limitations of the study and recommendations for future studies.
Literature Review

It is important to assist students with their transition from one type of educational setting to the next (Kerr, 2002; MacIver, 1990). For some students that transition is much more problematic than for others (Eccles et al., 1991). Eccles et al. (1993) indicate that most students sail through this transition relatively unscathed but others experience a great deal of “storm and stress” (p. 90). Many ninth grade students experience lower grade point averages and attendance rates as well as higher failure and drop out rates than students in other grades (Simmons & Blyth, 1987; DaGiau, 1997; Watt, 1998). The juxtaposition of other transition programs to that of TMHS will be beneficial in identifying best practices and effective transition activities. In addition, examining other research will show where TMHS’s specific ninth-grade transition program fits within the spectrum of previous research and will better define the general characteristics of successful transition programs, the strengths and weaknesses of the existing research, as well as the extent to which the existing research address the particular concerns of TMHS.

Theoretical Framework

Using the lens of Eccles and Midgley’s (1989) stage-environment fit theory, this study explores the process by which a suburban, east coast, public high school designed and implemented a ninth grade transition program despite significant budget constraints. Eccles and Midgley proposed a model of stage-environment fit to guide their research on the impact of school transitions on adolescent development (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles et al., 1993). They claim that over time the social, emotional and cognitive needs
of individuals change and that if the environment of individuals does not adapt to those changes, then individuals may experience negative outcomes which include declining motivation, engagement and learning.

Stage-environment fit theory is based on the ideas about how the “fit” or “unsuitable” match between the individual and his/her social setting effect how the individual behaves within that setting (Erickson, 1959; Hunt, 1975; Murray, 1938; Lewin, 1935). In the 1930’s, Murray (1938) and Lewin (1935) indicate that a combination of the individual’s personality and that of his/her immediate environment determine how an individual functions in certain situations. Erik Erikson’s psychosocial development theory also speaks toward the relationship of identity formation and the individual’s social environment. An important part of Erikson’s (1959) definition of identity includes the “maintenance of an inner solidarity with a group’s ideals and identity” (p. 102). This idea was expanded and focused on workplace productivity in the 1970’s and entitled Person-environment Fit Theory.

Person-Environment fit theory states that difficulties develop when there is a discrepancy between the demands of a job and a person’s ability to meet those demands (Caplan, R., Cobb, S., French, J., VanHarrison, & Pinneau, S., 1975; Hunt, D., 1975). Hunt (1975) applied the ideas about the “fit” or “unsuitable” match between the individual and his/her environment to the educational setting. Hunt (1975) emphasized that an individual’s motivation would decrease if the environment did not meet the individual’s developmental needs. Hunt (1975) indicated, “not only does environment affect the person, but the person affects the environment (p. 224). “Not only do students
exert an effect on their educational environment, but they are also becoming increasingly responsible for selecting which one of a variety of educational environments they will experience” (Hunt, 1975, p. 224). Hunt (1975) asserts that school environments must adapt to the students’ changing needs as they mature.

Eccles and Midgley (1989) expanded on the ideas of Hunt (1975) and applied them to the transition of students from elementary to middle school. They looked at “the effect of the transition from elementary to middle or junior high school on early adolescent development” (Eccles & Midgley, 1989, p. 139). In subsequent writings, they generalize this concept to include how “some of the negative psychological changes associated with adolescent development result from a mismatch between the needs of developing adolescents and the opportunities afforded them by their social environments” (Eccles et al., 1993, p 90).

Stage-Environment fit theory states that the way traditional middle and high schools are organized are not consistent with the developmental needs of the adolescents they serve and that changes in the educational environment could result in negative consequences if the environment does not match the students’ needs (Eccles & Midgley, 1989). This mismatch of needs often results in students’ experiencing a lack of motivation and a decrease in engagement (Eccles, Midgley, & Adler, 1984; Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles, Midgley, Wigfield, Buchanan, Reuman, Flanagan, and Maclver, 1993; Roeser, Eccles, & Strobel, 1998). By extension, when the characteristics of the traditional classroom environment and the needs of adolescents are more closely aligned, student outcomes will be better and students will benefit both academically and socially
(Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989). Eccles and Midgley (1989) ask the questions, “What are the developmental needs of the early adolescent?” and “What kinds of educational environments would be developmentally appropriate in terms of both meeting these needs and stimulating further development?

Although much of Eccles and her colleagues’ work focused on the transition from elementary to junior high school (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles et al., 1993), its relevance to this study is unmistakable. They question:

“If it is true that different types of educational environments may be needed for different age groups to meet developmental needs and to foster continued developmental growth, then it is also possible that some of the types of changes in educational environments may be inappropriate at certain stages of development (e.g., the early adolescent period). In fact, some types of changes in the educational environment may be developmentally regressive. Exposure to such changes is likely to lead to a particularly poor person-environment fit, this lack of fit could account for some of the declines in motivation seen at this developmental period (Eccles et al., 1993, p. 92)

The transition from middle school to high school happens at a time in the students’ development when they are becoming more concerned with peer relationships and may also benefit from a positive relationship with an adult who is not in their family (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles et al., 1993).

“The environmental changes often associated with the transition to junior high school seem especially harmful in that they emphasize competition, social comparison, and ability self-assessment at a time when the desire for control is growing; they emphasize lower level cognitive strategies at a time when the ability to use higher level strategies is increasing; and they disrupt social networks at a time when adolescents are especially concerned with peer relationships and may be in special need of close adult relationships outside the home” (Eccles et al., 1993, p. 94).
Although not ideal, the middle school environment consists of small interdisciplinary teams that allow teachers and students to develop relationships. The teams often have time scheduled during the week to discuss individual students and how they are performing. The goal of common planning time is to allow the teachers to better understand their students’ strengths and weaknesses and to use them to improve the students’ performance. The high school environment, on the other hand, is more departmentalized. There is no scheduled time to meet with other teachers to discuss students’ performance and strategize the best way to assist them.

Since the high school environment may not meet the developmental needs of students, thus increasing the risk of negative outcomes (lack of engagement, decreased motivation, drop out), it is incumbent upon the school to ensure that its environment and programs more closely match the needs of its students. Schools that are organized to best serve the social and emotional needs of its students are preferred and students in schools where these needs are met experience smoother transitions, higher grades, and fewer negative outcomes (Eccles & Midgley, 1989, Eccles et al., 1993).

Eccles et al. describe the “departmentalized courses taught by different teachers, a changing peer group, letter grade report cards reflecting academic ability in various subject matter areas, between-class grouping by ability, and a more controlled, teacher-dominated environment” (p. 323) of the junior high school. However all of these factors are present in the high school. As a student moves up in grades, “the environment becomes more impersonal, formal, competitive, and evaluative or ability-centered” (Eccles, et al, 1984, p. 302). Eccles et al. (1991) “recommend that serious efforts be
made to improve and expand the nature of student-teacher relationships in schools that serve early adolescents regardless of the grade included in the schools” (p. 539). The transition program at TMHS has attempted to foster these relationships.

The social connection that students have to their school environment tends to affect how the student performs academically. “The more students feel that they do not belong in school, the more school may become less inviting and rewarding…The earlier that children experience academic failure and find school uninviting and unrewarding, the less likely they are to become successful and academically engaged later in their academic experiences” (Hickman, Bartholomew, Mathwig, & Heinrich, 2008, p. 4). The “perceptions of school climate (feelings of belonging and school liking) reflect students’ ties to their academic institutions” (Benner & Graham, 2009, p. 357) and has a tremendous effect on his/her school-related motivation and subsequent academic success or failure (Eccles, 1991).

Eccles & Midgley’s (1984) Stage Environment Fit Theory states that certain “negative psychological changes associated with adolescent development result from a mismatch between the needs of developing adolescents and the opportunities afforded them by their social environments” (Eccles et al., 1993, p. 90). It is the goal of transition programs to make the school environment better match the emotional and academic needs of its ninth grade students. The program at TMHS was designed to help make the high school more developmentally appropriate to its ninth graders by increasing the support given to students to build their ability to cope with the new environment gradually. This study attempts to determine whether the freshman transition program in
place at TMHS has created an environment that is more compatible with the physical, emotional, and cognitive needs of the freshmen students.

**Drop-Out: A Problem for Students and Society**

Programs designed to reduce dropout rates benefit all stakeholders, including policy makers, educators and families, as well as society as a whole (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). Dropout prevention is an important area of study because society's cost for individuals who drop out of high school is estimated at billions of dollars (Rouse, 2005; Buckley, Storino, & Sami 2003). Failing to obtain a high school diploma causes both economic and occupational disadvantages (Caspi, Wright, Moffitt, & Silva, 1998). Over a lifetime, a high school dropout earns nearly $1.4 million dollars less than someone who earns a bachelor’s degree on average (Minnesota Office of Higher Education, n.d.) and possessing a degree allows a broader range of positions for which one is qualified.

In addition to the individual economic advantages of a high school diploma, there are social advantages too. According to Levin and Belfield (as referenced in Chapman et al., 2010), the average high school dropout costs the economy almost a quarter of a million dollars over his or her lifetime. These costs are associated with lower tax payments, a higher reliance on welfare, unemployment and other government services like Medicare and Medicaid, and higher rates of criminal activity and incarceration. (Chapman et al., 2010, p. 1).

Obtaining a high school diploma increases the future opportunities that are available to graduates. In addition, those who graduate from high school have more options available to them than those who do not graduate. These options include not only
the ability to attend college but also the ability to obtain higher paying jobs (Koonar, 2008). Although the importance of obtaining a high school diploma is widely accepted, and there are United States laws and regulations that afford students the opportunity to attend public school through the twelfth grade, many students do not avail themselves of this education. From 1991 through 2006, the graduation rate of students in the United States has ranged from 71.0 to 74.7 percent (Stillwell, 2009). These statistics show that over one quarter of students who enter high school as ninth graders do not receive their high school diploma within four years.

In 2006, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation prepared a study of high school drop out from the points of view of students who have dropped out. The study found that although many students drop out because of major academic and social challenges, most dropouts believe that they could have succeeded in school but for circumstances in their lives and an inadequate response to those circumstances from the schools (Bridgeland, DiIulio, Burke-Morrison, 2006). According to the study, most of the students took responsibility for not graduating but they also pointed out that there were things that schools could have done to increase their chances of successfully finishing high school. In the study, students who were surveyed indicated five major “supports” that could be provided to students that would improve their chances of graduating. These include making classes more relevant and engaging, improving instruction and supports for struggling students, fostering a climate that stresses academics, ensuring that students had one person to whom they could turn in times of trouble, and increasing the involvement of parents in their child’s education (Bridgeland et al., 2006, p. v). The program
instituted at TMHS incorporated these supports into the transition program that they instituted.

**Ninth Grade Success Prevents Dropout**

The beginning of high school is critical and making a successful transition to high school can “help students form lasting attachments to school and increase students’ likelihood of graduating from high school” (Kerr, 2002, p. 4). Planning and preparing for transition is one way to decrease dropout rates among ninth grade students (Turner, 2007). Students experiencing a positive transition experience show not only benefits during the year of transition but also throughout their entire academic career (Delisio, 2009). The more varied the transition activities, the more supportive the environment, and the more people who are involved, the more likely it is that students will graduate from high school (Delisio, 2009). Dedmond (2008) explained that students’ graduation plans as well as their plans for postsecondary education are often related to students’ attitudes and experiences in eighth and in ninth grade.

The transition of students from the middle school to the high school environment is not only difficult, but pivotal in determining whether the student will be successful or will end up dropping out of school (Allensworth and Easton, 2005; MacIver, 1990, Mizelle and Irvin, 2002; Shore and Shore, 2009). In addition, other studies have mentioned that these ninth-grade difficulties are linked to low achievement, high retention rates causing an increase in the amount of time required to achieve a high school diploma, as well as student’s choosing to drop out of high school (Copeland, 2006; Herlihy, 2007; Herlihy, Kemple, and Smith, 2005, and T. Smith, 2007).
Jordan (2001) examined the results of a questionnaire given to students and teachers at 20 comprehensive high schools to investigate the experiences and behaviors of ninth grade students and their effect on their grades and educational goals. Jordan (2001) states that “the first year of high school is a time when adolescents take either a critical step towards graduation and a successful adult life, or conversely, toward dropping out of school and a future life of uncertainty” (p. 3). His study underscores the widely held belief that although the students’ social and economic background play an important role in whether the students are successful, the students’ ninth grade experiences and the support that the school gives them can make a significant difference in whether the students are ultimately successful (Jordan, 2001).

Cook, Fowler, and Harris (2008) studied ninth grade transition programs in South Carolina and quote National High School Center (NHSC) statistics that indicate that “schools with operational transition programs reflect a dropout rate of only 8% on average compared to schools without transition programs at an average of 24%—three times higher (NHSC)” (p. 1). Cook et al., (2008) conducted a qualitative study of 82 freshman academies in South Carolina and determined that from 2001-2007, ninth-grade retention rates for schools with ninth grade academies were 32% lower than the state average.

**Successful Transition: Important in Dropout Prevention**

Students face difficulties when transitioning from middle school to high school (Allensworth & Easton, 2005). In high school, more students fail ninth grade than any other grade and more students who fail ninth grade end up dropping out of school
23

(Herlihy, 2007). While the academic demands and expectations increase, the students experience a shift in their social status from being the oldest, most knowledgeable students in the middle school to the youngest and most inexperienced students at the high school (Kerr, 2002). The ineffective transition of students from eighth grade to ninth grade has been recognized in the literature as a major area of concern (Allensworth et al., 2005; MacIver, 1990; Mizelle et al., 2002; Shore et al., 2009) and the findings of TMHS have been similar. Poor achievement, poor attendance, inappropriate behavior, lack of motivation, a lack of participation in school activities, and a high incidence of grade retention characterize this transitional period of TMHS ninth graders (TPS, 2011). A 2008 study performed by Neild, Stoner-Eby, and Furstenburg show that ninth-grade course failure and attendance are strongly correlated with dropout. A study by Eccles & Barber (1999) “found clear evidence that participation in extracurricular activities during the high school years provides a protective context in terms of both academic performance and involvement in risky behaviors” (p. 25).

DeGiau (1997) discussed the need for programs to address the specific emotional and social needs of adolescents as they transition from middle school to high school. She references statistics from a study that monitored a cross-section of ninth grade students during the 1996-1997 school year. At the end of the year, the study found that 33% of ninth grade students failed one or more classes, 15% failed to earn enough credits to move to sophomore status and 12% failed to earn credits due to poor attendance. This study concluded that counseling should be an integral part of transition programs.
Hertzog and Morgan (1997) studied the transition between 450 mid-western high schools and their feeder middle schools. They found that high schools with minimal or no transition activities (fewer than three) had higher failure rates in the ninth grade than those that did not. They found that 25% of students failed ninth grade and in some schools this percentage was as high as 46%. In addition, they found a strong negative correlation between the rate of student retention and dropout rate. This relationship was present for both male and female students.

A July 2009 study performed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation found that providing additional academic and social support during the first (freshman) year in high school is one way to help reduce the number of students who drop out (Shore & Shore, 2009). Shore and Shore (2009) indicate that many ninth graders who enter urban high schools are several years below grade level and that urban students who drop out of high school have experienced academic problems in the ninth grade (p. 5). However, this is not just a problem among urban schools. According to MacIver (1990), more students are retained in the ninth grade than in any other grade level (p. 259). Allensworth and Easton (2005) point out that students who experience success in the ninth grade are more likely to do well in the following years and eventually graduate (p. 1).

According to researchers Mizelle and Irvin (2000), “the transition to high school has never been more treacherous nor the consequences more personally disastrous for so many”. Upon their transition, students often experience a mixture of expectation and apprehension (Mizelle and Irvin, 2000). In comparison to their sheltered experience in the middle school setting, students find themselves in the fast-paced, less structured
environment of a high school. Although many ninth graders arrive at high school with a positive outlook and high aspirations, soon after their arrival, their expectations give way to anxiety. Ninth graders find that high school is a lot more difficult and demanding than middle school (Mizelle and Irvin, 2000).

**School Organization: A factor in ninth grade achievement**

Reform movements in education have shaped the configuration of American schools throughout the twentieth century (Clearinghouse on Early Education and Parenting, 2005). Although well-intentioned, these changes did not take into account the students’ emotional, social, or academic preparedness. According to Seller (2004), very often it was financial constraints of the district that caused ninth grade students to be moved to the high school rather than the students’ academic or developmental readiness.

By 2005, the middle school, usually grades 6-8, had replaced the junior high in many communities and relocated ninth graders to the high school in a ninth-through twelfth-grade configuration. Franklin and Glascock (1996) describe this “Middle School Movement” from the late 1960’s to the present and trace the placement of the ninth grade from middle schools to high schools. A statistical analysis performed by the National Center for Education Statistics showed that the number of public schools that moved from junior high schools to middle schools over the period from 1967 to 2000 increased significantly (2002).

Many critics believe that these changes that began a half-century ago resulted in the problems encountered by secondary education (NASSP, 1985; Noguera, 2004; Quint, 2006). The reorganization of high schools to address the many social, economic, and
theoretical developments over the years has been an ongoing debate (Ravitch, 2000). According to the NASSP (1985), moving ninth graders to the high school has resulted in many ninth grade students feeling lost and forgotten.

**Attendance and Discipline: Predictors of Dropout**

Attendance is a strong predictor of dropping out and national studies show that poor attendance as early as elementary school is correlated with dropping out of school (Bridgeland et al., 2009). “Research data tells us that students who become truant and eventually drop out of school put themselves at a long term disadvantage in becoming productive citizens” (US DOE, 1996). It is difficult, however, to isolate the role of attendance from other variables that ensure success. Many times, students who have good attendance are often also more motivated and dedicated to their education (Martins and Walker, 2006). Although it is evident that students cannot learn if they are not present, the factors that underlie the reasons for high absenteeism may be much more difficult to remedy. According to Smith et al. (2008), some freshmen do not understand the high school’s attendance policy and how it pertains to course credit and graduation requirements.

In addition to attendance, discipline is another facet that has an impact on student success. A variety of strategies have been employed to exclude disruptive students from the regular education setting. One of the most common strategies is to suspend a student from school (Christle et al., 2004). Compared to other high school students, ninth-grade students are more likely to be expelled or suspended (Smith et al., 2008). As a result, these exclusionary practices cause ninth grade students to miss instruction and result in
an increased feeling of alienation from school. This sense of disconnection and resulting academic failure may result in students not graduating. Wheelock and Miao (2005) recommend that schools use minor disciplinary infractions to reinforce positive behavior and decrease the undesirable behavior rather than using exclusionary disciplinary practices.

**Adolescent Development: An important factor in designing transition programs**

The transition of students from middle school to high school is influenced by their physical and emotional development. Adolescents around the time of their transition to high school, or about age 14, are undergoing a host of physical and emotional changes that make their transition to a new environment even more challenging. During this transition into high school, many students find themselves in a larger, more impersonal and competitive environment that is centered on academic achievement and the accumulation of credits (Eccles, Midgley, and Adler, 1984).

People go through many stages of physical, emotional, cognitive, moral, and social, development throughout their lives (Craig & Baucum, 2002). Just prior to transitioning from middle school to high school, children begin puberty. Puberty begins for boys at about age 12 and begins for girls slightly earlier at about age 10 (Craig & Baucum, 2002). However, the students’ maturation continues into their teen years and usually ends during their first or second year of high school (age 14 for girls and a little later for boys). During this time of puberty, children change not only physically but also emotionally, socially, and cognitively (Craig & Baucum, 2002).
According to Hough (1995), “young adolescents (ages 10-14) become acutely aware of a host of social issues, including sex, drugs, and violence … giant gaps emerge between maturation and children’s ability to cope” (p. 10). The social issues are apparent during a student’s ninth grade experience. Frequently these young 14 and 15 year-old students find it difficult to navigate the high school environment with older, more mature students. They are unsure of their place within the social structure, as they have just come from an environment where they were the oldest and most mature students to the high school where they are the youngest and least knowledgeable.

Many ninth grade students enter high school worried about their physical development. Since adolescents’ bodies develop faster or slower than their peers, these differences may cause students to become self-conscious. As a result, their physical development, or lack thereof, causes additional stress. These physical changes are often uncomfortable for the student (Watt, 1998).

Teenagers’ brains are still developing and the part of the brain that controls insight is one of the last to mature (Graham, 2008). Insight, which allows people to see the consequences of their actions, is often underdeveloped in teenagers. Because of this physiological factor, it may be difficult for high school students to realize a future benefit from their current education and how their current negative actions (i.e., disciplinary infractions and truancy) play a role in their being able to reach their goal of successfully obtaining a high school diploma.

Adolescence is a complex time for students in terms of the magnitude of challenges and types of development (biological, cognitive, social and psychological) that
occur. These physical and emotional changes play an important role in how students experience their transition from middle school to high school.

**Student Concerns: Effect on High School Success**

Many studies have identified that students have specific concerns as they transition from the middle school environment to the high school (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006, Hertzog & Morgan, 1997). These concerns cause students to question their ability to be successful (Eccles et al., 1991). Ninth grade students have reported that they are concerned about academic performance, extracurricular activities, conflict with peers, and general procedural issues (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). These concerns are sometimes due to ninth-graders experiencing a larger, less nurturing, and more competitive environment than the middle school (Eccles et al., 1984).

Ninth-graders feel anxious and concerned about transitioning to high school and report having a negative view of themselves during this time (Hertzog & Morgan, 1997). Some ninth-graders do not possess the skills needed, such as self-direction, self-motivation, and self-reliance to be successful in the high school environment. Studies show that students who feel they are a part of the school community are more motivated and show higher academic achievement (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999).

**Benefits of Ninth Grade Transition Programs**

Kerr (2002) studied the experiences of ninth graders in the Maryland Public Schools. She targeted ninth grade because of the uniqueness of their stage of development and the difficulties they faced in their transition from a middle school to a
high school (Kerr, 2002). Kerr (2002) looked at the programs that attempted to resolve the poor attendance rates, high dropout rates, poor behavior and inferior academic achievement that the Maryland schools were facing (Kerr, 2002). She found that students seemed ill equipped and incapable of handling the more demanding social and academic expectations of the high school environment. The faculty and administrators that were interviewed remarked that even talented students saw a decrease in academic achievement during ninth grade and that many of them were academically and socially unprepared for high school (Kerr, 2002).

*Breaking Ranks* and *Breaking Ranks in the Middle* from the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP 1999, 2006) indicate the importance of creating programs that ensure a successful transition from middle school to high school. The Talent Development High School Model (Herlihy and Kemple, 2004) advocates for the development of Ninth Grade Success Academies where ninth grade students are separated from the rest of the high school population and where programs at the academy “encourage good attendance and promote positive learning behaviors” (Herlihy & Kemple, 2004, p. 11). Herlihy and Kemple (2004) found that first time freshmen in Talent Development High Schools showed great improvement in their core academic subjects and were promoted to the tenth grade at a higher rate than those students who did not attend Talent Development High Schools.

There are many benefits to having the freshman located in a grade 9 – 12 high school but housed separately so that the unique needs and challenges of the ninth-grade population can be addressed. Many studies have shown that Freshman Academies make
the educational and social experiences of the students more relevant so that the students can achieve greater success both academically and socially. Although the actual structure of the academies may differ among schools, what stands out in all of the different models is that their design attempts to give students the academic and social support that ninth graders need to be successful and ultimately receive their high school diploma.

**Transition Models**

“Many high schools try to pave the way for ninth graders, but one-shot orientation programs or remedial summer school sessions do little to solve ninth grade’s deeply rooted problems” (Black, 2004, p. 44). Rather, Dedmond (2006) indicates that a multi-dimensional approach is most effective. However, separating ninth grade students from the rest of the student body by creating houses, schools-within-a-school or career development freshman academies is a relatively new practice and as a result, there is little research concerning these programs and their effectiveness.

The Talent Development High School (TDHS) model was founded by the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR) at Johns Hopkins University and was designed to reform the configuration of large high schools. This model was created in response to the need to reconfigure Patterson High School in Baltimore, Maryland because of its persistent poor performance (Herlihy and Kemple, 2004). According to the TDHS website,

The model includes organizational and management changes to establish a positive school climate; curricular and instructional innovations to prepare all students for high-level courses in math and English; parent and community involvement to encourage college awareness; and professional development to support the recommended reforms (Center for Social Organization of Schools, n.d).
Some of these changes include reforming curriculum, creating smaller learning communities, and providing focused professional development for teachers (Herlihy & Kemple, 2004). A separate Ninth Grade Success Academy is included in the TDHS model. These academies are made up of teams comprised of teachers from at least 4 different disciplines along with 150-200 students. Results of a study performed by Herlihy and Kemple (2004) indicate a 30% increase in the percentage of ninth-grade students who completed a core academic curriculum and the promotion rates were 10 percentage points higher than in the comparison schools. In addition, increases in attendance rates were also noted in the Talent Development High Schools (Herlihy & Kemple, 2004).

Walsh (2002) describes the city of Alexandria, Virginia’s creation of a separate school for ninth graders. In 1992, the city decided to move the sixth grade students to a newly created middle school. However, the city’s only high school was overcrowded. This left the city with the problem of what to do with the ninth graders who were displaced from the middle school with the arrival of the sixth graders (Walsh, 2002). As a result, Alexandria created a separate school for them. The results of housing the students in a separate building were positive. The programs that were put in place at the newly designed Minnie Howard School, which included a faculty-student advisory program and a student support team, had positive effects on the students’ academic and social achievement. These programs contributed to the schools’ having the honor of being named a “high flying” secondary school in the greater Washington DC area. The explanation of the school’s success is, according to Walsh, “maintaining a consistent,
talented staff, holding high expectations for adults and students, providing support at every juncture and listening to the children” (2002).

The studies outlined above recognize that freshmen academies have a positive effect on students’ academic and social achievement during the transition from eighth grade to ninth. The studies suggest that creating freshman academies can result in increased achievement, attendance rates and decreased non-promotion rates, which ultimately result in a decrease in the drop out rate. However, there needs to be more studies to determine whether these studies can be replicated with different populations of students. The majority of studies on transition models have been performed in cities with a large number of minority students and a high percentage of lower-income students. Looking at whether transition programs in a variety of school districts with differing demographics will be valuable in generalizing whether certain aspects of transition programs are more or less beneficial to the students.

**Elements of Successful Transition Programs**

Students who participate in transition programs that actively involve students, parents, and staff members are less likely to drop out of high school even when demographic and other information is held constant (Smith, 1997; Hertzog & Morgan, 1997). Successful programs are multi-dimensional. Feller (2003) indicates that successful programs blend youth development approaches with contextual and authentic learning to include caring relationships, cognitive challenges, a culture of support, community, and connection to learning and career opportunities. Students need more mentoring, life skills, and information about why school and learning are important
(Holland & Mazzoli, 2001). This provides a meaningful and comprehensive context for learning. It connects the student not only to their schoolwork, but makes the crucial connection between schoolwork and its impact on life following graduation.

Palisade High School in California implemented a Freshman Orientation Training Program to “orient (freshman) to the social side of high school life and provide them with good study skills for academic success” (Rollenhagen, 1989, p. 130). In addition, staff members added components to this program that would address the low achievement that they had recognized as a problem facing their ninth grade students.

The “Freshman Getaway” program implemented at Franklin Pierce High School in Tacoma, Washington was designed to “ease this most important transition from middle school to high school” (Hewins, 1995, p. 21). As part of this program, guidance counselors from the high school spent three to five days with the eighth grade students to discuss what to expect at the high school and “and all that goes with it” (p. 21).

The Southern Regional Education Board and High Schools That Work (HSTW) indicate that offering summer programs for incoming ninth-graders who are academically at risk is another effective strategy (SREB, 2002). In Woodside Delaware, the POLYTECH High School requires all incoming ninth graders to attend a special summer program that emphasizes math and reading. Tri-County Regional Vocational Technical School in Franklin, Massachusetts offers a summer academy to help incoming freshmen improve their academic skills as well as adjust to the increased demands of the high school environment (SREB, 2002).
Research Design

Research Questions

The ninth grade transition program at TMHS was designed and implemented in response to a number of concerns including: poor achievement, poor attendance, inappropriate behavior, lack of motivation, a lack of participation in school activities, and a high incidence of grade retention (TPS, 2011). In order to provide a formative assessment of the ninth grade transition program at TMHS, the following research questions were asked:

1. Why was the freshman transition program at TMHS developed and how was it implemented?
2. Does participation in freshman transition activities relate to student achievement as measured by the number of courses failed and the students’ performance on the MCAS Biology?
3. Does participation in freshman transition activities relate to social acclimation as measured by attendance rates and the number of days suspended during TMHS students’ freshman year?
4. How do students who participated in the transition program interpret their freshman year experience and are there any modifications in the current program that they view as important?
5. How do faculty and administrators describe the contribution of the individual components of the transition program and are there any modifications in the current program that they view as important?

Research Sequence

In order for the researcher to better understand the program, the interview with the principal took place prior to the analysis of the quantitative data. As this is a retrospective case study, the number of course failures, attendance rates, number of suspensions, and MCAS biology test results have already been collected and currently reside in the Tewksbury Public Schools’ SIMS database from which it was extracted. The student survey was administered and the focus group met within two-weeks prior to the initial evaluation of the archival data.

Case Study Method

The goals of this descriptive, single-case study are to describe the process by which the freshman transition program at TMHS was developed and implemented, to assess the extent to which the program has helped students academically and/or socially during their first year of high school, and to inform how the program can be improved.

A case study research approach was chosen because this design is used when “the researcher explores in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process for one or more individuals (Creswell, 2009, p. 13). The case study approach was also chosen because this method allows for the collection of “detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time” (Creswell, 2009, p. 13). Lastly,
this method was chosen because “case studies are appropriate when collecting data from within its real-world context by using a mix of quantitative and qualitative evidence" (Yin, 2009, p.19).

The quantitative phase of this study evaluated whether academic and behavioral data of students graduating prior to 2011 are statistically different from those who graduated after 2011 while the qualitative phase will explore the development and implementation of the program as well as its perceived success and limitations by way of a focus group comprised of staff members and a student survey.

This study employed an embedded design that includes multiple units of analyses (quantitative statistical analyses, qualitative questionnaires and focus groups) using various sources of evidence (archival records, interviews, and surveys) to possibly identify consistencies among them (Yin, 2009). The “embedded units” in this study consist of the quantitative data extracted from the TMHS SIMS database, the interview with the principal, the student survey, and the faculty focus group.

**Site and Participants**

This study took place at TMHS, a public high school containing approximately 900 students in grades 9 through 12 where the researcher is an assistant principal. The population of TMHS is 95.4% Caucasian, 1.8% African American, 1.4% Asian, 1.3% Hispanic, and 0.1% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (Mass DESE, 2012a). Tewksbury is a suburban community of 27,266 residents, located in Middlesex County approximately 21 miles north of Boston (Commonwealth of Massachusetts). The Tewksbury Public School District is made up of eight school buildings: one pre-kindergarten school, two lower
elementary schools serving grades K-2, two elementary schools serving grades 3-4, one upper elementary school serving grades 5-6, one middle school serving grades 7-8, and one high school serving grades 9-12. The district has 4,952 students and 249 teachers and a 16:1 student/teacher ratio, which is 14% higher than the state average student/teacher ratio of 14:1 (Mass DESE, 2012b).

The freshman transition program was put into practice beginning with the graduating class of 2012. In looking at whether a statistically significantly difference exists between students who participated in freshman transition activities and those students who did not, TMHS students whose year of graduation (YOG) is 2010 and 2011 will be compared to students whose YOG is 2013 and 2014. The class of 2012 was the first year of the program and data from that year has been omitted from this study because the transition program had not been implemented fully during that year. The following table outlines the number of students in each of the four classes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation in Transition</th>
<th>Year of Graduation</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Protection of Participants

Throughout this study, the integrity of the evaluation as well as the dignity of the participants was maintained. “Ethical practices involve much more than merely following a set of static guidelines” (Creswell, 2009, p. 88). Furthermore, ethical issues can occur at any time from the inception of the project to the development of the intellectual goals and the research questions, the collection and analysis of the data and even to the writing and disseminating the research paper (Creswell, 2009).

During the development of the intellectual goals and research questions of this study, the goals that were chosen would benefit not only a few students but all of those students who will attend TMHS and will be useful in informing decisions about the future of the ninth-grade transition program. When the goals and research questions are disseminated to the participants, information relating to the purpose of and reason for the study in order to establish trust and credibility (Creswell, 2009, p. 89) will be included.

During the data collection phase of the project, the rights and privacy of both the participants and the site of the research were protected. Permission was obtained from the school’s principal and the district superintendent was notified about the collection of the data and of the results upon the completion of this study. Parents were notified of the study and an informed consent form “acknowledging that participants’ rights will be protected during data collection” (Creswell, 2009, p. 89) was disseminated. In addition, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Northeastern University reviewed the study and the researcher followed all policies and procedures set forth by the IRB.

While performing data analysis and interpretation, the identity of the individuals
who participate in the study were protected by having their names redacted from any transcribed responses. In addition, the researcher ensured that the electronic data was kept in a password-protected computer and the paper surveys were kept in a locked file cabinet. Upon completion of the study, the electronic files will be erased and the paper copies shredded. Information that can be used to identify individual students (names, address, etc.) was eliminated from the dataset and numerical codes were assigned to protect the identity and to respect the anonymity of each participant.

Data Collection and Analysis

Research Question 1. Why was the freshman transition program at TMHS developed and how was it implemented?

This question is broken down into the following open-ended sub-questions:

a. What factors led up to the decision to implement a freshman transition program implemented at TMHS?

b. What were the constraints and opportunities in program development?

c. What were the various transition activities that were considered but not implemented?

d. Why were the activities that are currently employed at TMHS selected?

e. What, if any, difficulties or issues were encountered upon implementation of the program? How were these issues dealt with?
To answer this research question an interview with the principal who implemented the transition program at TMHS took place. The principal was instrumental in determining which activities would be included in the program and in working with the school committee and superintendent to implement the program. The information gathered from this portion of the study helped shed light on why the program was implemented, identified what transition activities were considered, and determined why certain activities were implemented.

The interview session was recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were analyzed by the method of King and Horrocks (2010, pp.142-174). Specifically the transcript was read through twice before making an attempt to code it, to become familiar with the text. Next, descriptive coding was used to describe relevant features of the text followed by interpretive coding.

**Research Question 2:** To what extent does participation in freshman transition activities relate to student achievement as measured by the number of courses failed and by performance on the MCAS Biology exam?

This question was broken down into two hypotheses:

1. If students participate in the freshman transition program at TMHS, then they will fail fewer courses during their freshman year than students who did not participate in the freshman transition program.
2. If students participate in the freshman transition program at TMHS, then they will obtain higher scores on the MCAS Biology exam than students who did not participate in the freshman transition program.

A quantitative evaluation of archival data determined whether a statistically significant difference exists between students who participated in freshman transition activities and those students who did not. The number of course failures and MCAS biology test results were compared. The MCAS biology test was chosen, as it is the MCAS test that is given to all freshmen. This data was extracted from the SIMS system (X2 Aspen) and then imported into Microsoft Access. The data was then checked for accuracy and completeness. Any anomalies in the dataset were noted and modifications were made. (For example, data existed for students who transferred to TMHS during their freshman year; that data was removed from the working dataset.) The data was then transformed from the relational Microsoft Access database into a flat data file, which was transferred into Microsoft Excel. The Microsoft Excel table was then loaded into SPSS Version 7.5 software for the quantitative evaluation.

**Research Question 3**: Does participation in freshman transition activities relate to social acclimation as measured by attendance rates and the number of days suspended during TMHS students’ freshman year?

This question was also broken down into two hypotheses:
1. If students participate in the freshman transition program at TMHS, then they will experience fewer disciplinary referrals during their freshman year than students who did not participate in the freshman transition program as measured by the number of suspension.

2. If students participate in the freshman transition program at TMHS, then they will miss fewer days of school during their freshman year than students who did not participate in the freshman transition program.

A quantitative evaluation of archival data determined whether a statistically significant difference exists between students who participated in freshman transition activities and those students who did not. The numbers of days absent and number of suspensions were compared. This data was extracted from the SIMS system (X2 Aspen) and then imported into Microsoft Access. The data was then checked for accuracy and completeness. Any anomalies in the dataset were noted and modifications were made. The data was then transformed from the relational Microsoft Access database into a flat data file, which was transferred into Microsoft Excel. The Microsoft Excel table was then loaded into SPSS Version 7.5 software for the quantitative evaluation.

**Research Question 4**: How do students who participated in the transition program interpret their freshman year experience and are there any modifications in the current program that they view as important?
A cross-sectional survey (see Appendix A) was used to collect data to determine how students who participated in the transition program describe their freshman year experience and whether there are any modifications in the current program that they view as important. According to Creswell (2009), a survey “provides a quantitative or numeric descriptions of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population” (p. 397). The information collected in this portion of the study was used to help determine whether the program has been implemented as intended and to identify positive and negative areas of the program. In addition, students will help identify areas in which additional supports may be necessary.

The purpose of the survey was to gather data regarding students’ opinions and perceptions of their ninth-grade experience. It is based on a survey created by Brita Buhrman (2010) with her permission (see Appendix B). Buhrman (2010) created this survey using Fink (2006) as a guide and established content validity by asking a team of experts to evaluate the survey with a survey rubric as well as by performing a pilot survey. In addition, Buhrman (2010) calculated Cronbach’s alpha coefficient to “judge the reliability of the survey items by estimating how well items of similar construct produced similar results” (p. 147).

The survey began with general questions asking the student’s gender, year of graduation, number of courses failed in the ninth grade, and whether the student attended TMHS in the ninth grade. Students who did not attend TMHS during their freshman year were excluded from this study. The introductory questions were followed up with ten statements to which the student expressed his/her agreement using a 5-point differential
scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”. The final section of the survey consisted of four open-ended questions relating to the student’s ninth grade experience. It took approximately 15 minutes for students to complete the survey. A copy of this survey is included in Appendix A. The data collected in this section of the study served to furnish additional data to add to the findings of the quantitative data analysis of the archival data taken from the student information system.

This survey will add to the richness of this case study by soliciting information from an important stakeholder group. The survey was administered to a stratified-random sample of tenth grade students. Tenth grade students were selected because they have just completed their ninth grade year and are be in a position to give their retrospective feedback. This sample of students included all academic levels of students who are not in a substantially separate special education classroom. The levels at TMHS consist of Honors Level, intensive college preparatory (CP-1), and less rigorous College Preparatory (CP-2). In order to get a random sample of students, the sample will consist of students in the first numerical section of each level (Honors, CP-1 and CP-2) of sophomore math. The actual students chosen to participate in the survey is random because the scheduling software randomly assigns students to sections; therefore, selecting the first section ensured that it is random.

**Research Question 5:** How do faculty and administrators describe the implementation of the transition program and are there any modifications in the current program that they view as important?
The sub-questions are as follows:

a. What aspect of the transition program has had the most benefit on students?

b. What aspect of the transition of the transition program is most in need of modification? In what way?

c. What activities should be removed from the program? Why?

d. What additional activities would be beneficial to include in the program?

A focus group made up of six to eight staff members was held to shed light on the quantitative data evaluation and to discuss the beneficial as well as the unfavorable aspects of the program to formatively evaluate the program. It is the goal of the focus group to gather information to better understand how the faculty feels about the transition program and its efficacy relating to the social and academic achievement of freshmen students. This information was used to make recommendations to improve the current program and ensure its successful implementation. “A focus group consists of people who are willing to share their thoughts, attitudes, and experiences” (Daponte, 2008, p. 132) and the researcher solicited participants that included teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators.

In order to create an effective focus group, the participants had certain characteristics in common (i.e., a passion to improve the experience of freshmen students at TMSH) and consisted of a focused discussion among people from different groups (teachers, administrators, guidance counselors) thus ensuring a range of opinions of people across several groups (Krueger, 2009). In order to maintain a non-threatening
environment to facilitate relaxed and candid discussions, the focus group met in the
teacher lounge.

The open-ended questions asked of the focus group stimulated discussions about
the positive and negative features of the program and served as a springboard to discuss
potential changes to the current program. The data gathered through the focus group
provided insights regarding freshman transition to better assist the in the development of
new programs and led to inquiries that could be the topic of future studies.

Validity and Reliability

“The goal of reliability is to minimize the errors and biases of a study” (Yin,
2009, p. 45). According to Yin (2009), following a protocol can increase the reliability
of a case study. There are four sections of a case study that should be included to
maintain study reliability. This study attempted to include each of these: an overview of
the case study project which was addressed by the researcher keeping the project
objective and case study issues in mind when designing the study, field procedures in
terms of the researcher having access to the study site and keeping in mind the protection
of human subjects, specific case study questions that the researcher kept in mind when
collecting and tabulating data, and a guide for the case study final report keeping in mind
the outline of the study including the format for using and presenting data (Yin, 2009, p.
81).

According to Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006, validity is the “appropriateness,
correctness, meaningfulness, and usefulness” (p. 151) of the study. They describe
internal validity as ensuring that “the observed differences on the dependent variable are
directly related to the independent variable and not due to some other unattended variable” (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2006, p. 169). The researcher attempted to ensure the internal validity of the study through “triangulation of data, member checking,…participant involvement in the questions, and follow-up questions, and clarification of researcher bias” (Creswell, 2009, pp. 199-200). In addition, since the use of multiple methods improves the validity of studies (Creswell, 2009), using qualitative methods to make sense of the quantitative results and to shed light on best practices will improve the validity of this study. The Tewksbury Public Schools’ SIMS, from which the quantitative data was collected, has been used extensively for the past ten years and is an accurate and reliable source of attendance, MCAS test scores, conduct, and academic data.

Construct validity refers to “identifying correct operational measures for the concepts being studied” (Yin, 2009, p. 40). In general, maintaining construct validity was especially challenging in this case study research because of potential investigator bias. The researcher is an assistant principal at TMHS so this was a major consideration that was taken into account when designing this study. According to Yin (2009), there are ways to offset potential researcher subjectivity. One way is to use multiple sources of evidence. In this study data from focus groups, student surveys, and empirical data gathered from the Tewksbury Public Schools’ SIMS was used.

Because the data was collected from one high school, the external validity, or generalizability, of the results is minimal. However, using quantitative data from over 900 students ensured that a representative selection of students was used in the data
analysis. The data used in the quantitative analyses will include all students who have years of graduation 2010, 2011, 2013, and 2014.

The qualitative data collected from the focus group and student survey will allow the researcher to examine and explain the results of the quantitative analyses. This data will also allow for the examination of opposing results that may be found as part of the quantitative analysis. In addition, being able to solicit qualitative data from staff members will allow the interpretations of the results of the study to be validated.

Limitations

The data collected from the student survey and faculty focus group takes place at one point in time. Due to the lack of access to students who did not participate in the transition program, the student survey data could not be compared with a control group to determine whether there was a difference in the students’ perceptions of the two groups. The archival data compared two distinctly different groups of students, which, inherently, may possess different characteristics that may influence their attendance, the number of suspension days, the number of courses they failed, and their performance on the MCAS Biology exam. In addition, determining whether the effects of individual transition activities influence these measures is impossible due to the myriad of factors that could possibly impact them.

There are also limitations inherent in data collected from surveys, interviews, and focus groups. There are three potential areas of bias in surveys (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006): ensuring that the questions are clear and not misleading, ensuring that the respondents answer the questions truthfully, and ensuring a sufficient number of
respondents to make the analysis meaningful (p. 13). There also limitations to
interviews and focus groups. Because the researcher was present during the data
collection process, her vocal intonation or facial expressions may have inadvertently
influenced the respondents’ answers. In addition, like the survey data, the respondents
may be answering with what they consider to be the “right” answer and not truthfully.
The researcher’s role as an assistant principal at TMHS could be a potential source of
bias and another limitation of this study. However, she will accurately describe the
findings of the study regardless of her role as an employee of the Tewksbury Public
Schools or as a result of any potential pressure from other stakeholders for the study to
meet their individual or collective needs.
Report of Research Findings

The ninth grade transition program at TMHS was designed and implemented in response to a number of concerns including: poor achievement, poor attendance, inappropriate behavior, lack of motivation, a lack of participation in school activities, and a high incidence of grade retention (TPS, 2011). The major features of the program included:

- A half-day orientation during which the freshmen are paired up with upper-classmen.
- An eighth-grade visit to the high school during which current eighth graders visit TMHS to see demonstrations from the various clubs, activities, and special programs
- Various visits of high school student and faculty groups to the middle school throughout the school year
- A concerted outreach program to the parents of eighth graders including the distribution of a “Freshman Success Guide.”
- The appointment of a freshman advisor who serves as both guidance counselor and behavioral specialist
- A designated freshman lunch period
In order to formatively assess the freshman transition program and to determine whether and to what extent these changes have been beneficial, data were collected from a variety of sources in an attempt to address the following research questions.

**Research Question 1**

*Why was the freshman transition program at TMHS developed and how was it implemented?*

This question was by interview data from the current principal of TMHS. Prior to serving as the school’s principal, she was one of two assistant principals at TMHS and was directly responsible for design and implementation of the ninth grade transition program after becoming principal five years ago. The interview began by asking the following interview questions which were supplemented with a number of follow-up questions as needed:

What factors led up to the decision to implement a freshman transition program at TMHS?

a. What were the constraints and opportunities in program development?

b. What were the various transition activities that were considered but not implemented?

c. Why were the activities that are currently employed at TMHS selected?

d. What, if any, difficulties or issues were encountered upon implementation of the program? How were these issues dealt with?
Analysis of the transcript revealed that there were a number of factors that led up to the decision to implement a freshman transition program. The school’s data team (an interdisciplinary group made up of teachers and administrators) looked at number of freshman failures and minor behavioral infractions (detentions) compared to other classes. A survey of eighth-grade students was performed to see what the students thought high school would be like (their concerns). In addition, a comparison between the number of failures during ninth grade for students who ended up dropping out of school and those who graduated with a TMHS diploma was made. The data collected was consistent with the staff’s concerns that the majority of minor behavioral issues were caused by freshman students. The tables generated as part of the principal’s evaluating the data can be found in Appendix C.

The data showed that TMHS students who fail three or more courses during their freshman year are two to three times more likely to drop out of school than other students who failed courses. The data collected from freshman in 2007 showed that freshmen who failed one or more class during their freshman year were 3.5 times more likely to be suspended than the general population and \( \frac{1}{3} \) less likely to participate in extra/co-curricular activities. In addition, the 22% of freshman in 2007 who failed a course comprised 46% of all absences. As a result, it was evident to the principal that there was a need to work with the freshmen to give them the tools to make them more successful at the high school.

The opportunities that were described in program development centered on the entire school community. According to the principal, the school possesses a “wonderful
staff (that is) willing to do what is necessary to help our students” (Lally, 2012). In addition, she added, “without the willingness of everyone (staff, students, community) to pitch in and embrace the program, we could not have been successful” (Lally, 2012). She indicated that various departmental programs were implemented as a way to help students. For example, the science department held after-school MCAS study sessions and the guidance department visited classrooms and discussed curriculum and the options that are available within the school and community to help students academically and socially (clubs, activities, sports, etc.).

In addition to the staff, the parent group supports the ninth grade transition program by offering funding for the orientation-day pizza party. Members of the school’s Peer Leadership and Student Council run the entire orientation day from generating an agenda to performing a skit that outlines acceptable behavior. The day consists of a welcome by the administrators, guidance counselors, the resource officer, and the class advisor; a skit that depicts the school’s mission statement and a few key school rules (i.e., dress code and electronic device usage); a tour of the building when they find their classrooms, meet their classroom teachers, and try their locker combinations; an activities fair; a meeting with their mentor groups; and a pizza lunch where all students leave with a little something with the school mascot on it (pencil, cup, etc.).

The main obstacle towards implementation of the program was the absolute lack of additional financial resources. The program had to be developed without spending additional funds. Like other schools in Massachusetts, the funding is capped at a 2.5% increase annually. When contracted raises and increases in out-of-district special
education placements and transportation costs are factored in, there is an extremely limited amount of funds for new programming. Also, Tewksbury’s per pupil expenditure is approximately 28% lower than the state average. As a result, there wasn’t any money for additional programming or staff. In addition, the building is crowded and does not contain any space for special programs and/or classes. Any change in the current schedule would also require a change to the teachers’ employment contract. As a result, the program had to be developed within the current school building, during the current school hours, and without any changes to the school budget.

Due to obstacles described above, a number of activities were considered, but could not be implemented. Based on the literature (Herlihy & Kemple, 2004; Kerr, 2002; Walsh, 2002), the principal considered a separate freshman academy. A separate freshman academy was not implemented due to funding and space constraints. The principal looked at the layout of the current building to determine if a section of the building could be used for freshman-only courses. The only area that was separate but near enough to the science laboratories, gymnasium, and cafeteria, was the wing that contained three computer classrooms. This did not happen because moving the computer labs would cost money in terms of additional wiring and manpower to physically relocate all of the computers. In addition, a formal advisor/advisee program was considered but was not implemented due to scheduling issues. Any change to the school day would be subject to negotiations between the teachers’ union and the school committee and would have to wait until the next negotiation cycle probably resulting in an increase in funding.
The activities that were implemented, while not requiring an increase in staffing or resources, attempted to address the concerns of the administration, staff, students, and families. As mentioned, these activities include scheduling a freshman-only lunch, reassigning a guidance counselor to a “freshman dean”, arranging a half-day orientation program, giving an evening presentation to eighth-grade parents to discuss the differences between the high school and middle school, organizing a breakfast meeting for ninth-grade parents to discuss courses and services available at the high school and taking various high school students and staff to the middle school and a visit of eighth-grade students to the high school (Lally, 2012).

The freshman-only lunch was implemented because many social conflicts happened during lunchtime. “When mixed in with the older students, the freshmen may feel some pressure to act in a certain way to impress the older students. In addition, by creating a freshman-only lunch, there is less of a pecking order to who gets to sit where” (Lally, 2012). A byproduct of the freshman lunch is that it is much less crowded than the two other lunches. There is room for everyone to have a seat. The lunch monitors are also freshman teachers so that they have a rapport with the students; they know them and can intervene if a situation arises.

Having a “Freshman Dean” gives the students someone who can counsel students and make them aware of the future consequences of their actions while making them accountable. The goal was not to have a different set of disciplinary rules for the freshmen but to be able to teach the students about the consequences of their actions in a nurturing manner. The discipline is progressive and the goal is to make discipline as
much a learning experience as a punishment. The person who was chosen to be the freshman dean is a guidance counselor as well as the Athletic Director. As a guidance counselor, this person was well qualified to work with students to ensure that both their academic and social needs were being met. As the Athletic Director, this person was in a unique position to help students become involved in a variety of co-curricular and athletic activities. Having the Athletic Director involved with the freshmen students was intentional in that the literature has indicated that students who are involved in school activities are less likely to drop out of school (Mahoney, J. & Cairns, R., 1997).

The half-day orientation that takes place the day before school starts allows students to become acclimated to the building. Based on the survey that the principal conducted prior to implementing the program, one of the concerns of students before they arrive is that the upper classmen would pick on them. By taking students around the building in small groups, students begin to feel comfortable finding their classrooms so that they will not feel lost and overwhelmed on the first day. By having a number of upperclassmen Peer Leaders who volunteer at the orientation, the program helps the freshmen understand that a large percentage of students want to help them. The peer leaders are issued a t-shirt which they wear on the first day of school; this helps the freshmen identify a friendly face to whom they can ask questions.

Both students and faculty visit the middle school. Students who are involved in a variety of sports and activities “talk about all of the opportunities that await them at TMHS” (Lally, 2012). Current freshmen students are included in these visits “because they know the eighth graders and they can anticipate some of their concerns” (Lally,
During these visits, the guidance department talks about course offerings and the support that they can offer. Coaches and club advisors also visit to encourage students to get involved.

During the eighth-grade visit to the high school, the students are exposed to some of the academic programs, clubs and activities that are available to them at TMHS. “They visit an activity fair in the library where they can talk to team captains and club presidents, see a demonstration of the robot that the robotics club designed and created, and get their blood pressure taken by students involved in our Introduction to Health Careers course” (Lally, 2012)

The guidance department along with the administration meets with the parents of eighth-grade students in the fall. A breakfast meeting, as well as an evening meeting, is held. The information presented at both of these sessions is the same. The types of course offerings, the career pathways, and the extra-curricular activities are discussed. A large part of this program is a question and answer session. Although parents have different concerns than their students do, many of the misconceptions are the same. They are concerned that there are no support systems at the high school to help their younger children navigate the more mature social environment of the high school. The question/answer session serves two purposes. One is to dispel the parents’ misconceptions, and the other is to make the parents aware of the academic (course offerings) and social (clubs, sports, and support services) opportunities that are available to their children.
Like the parent meetings for eighth-grade students, there is also a parent breakfast for ninth grade parents held in early October. “Oftentimes, once students enter the high school, parents do not feel as if they can help them academically. We want to make sure that parents know what supports are available for them and for their students” (Lally, 2012). Creating opportunities to interact with parents has assisted TMHS in keeping the lines of communication open and letting parents know whom they can contact if they or their child has a question or concern. Other than the difficulties in creating programming changes without any additional funding or staff, there were very few difficulties or issues that were encountered.

**Research Question 2**

*Does participation in freshman transition activities relate to student achievement as measured by the number of courses failed and the students’ performance on the MCAS Biology?*

To inform this question an evaluation of archival data was performed to determine whether a statistically significantly difference existed in the number of course failures and MCAS biology test results were compared between students who participated in freshman transition activities and those students who did not. The MCAS biology test was looked at, as it is the standardized test that all students at TMHS take during their freshman year.

Data from the school district’s SIS for students with YOG of 2010, 2011, 2013, and 2014 was exported for analysis. The class of 2012 was the first year of the program and it has been omitted from this study because the transition program had not been
implemented fully during that year. This resulted in 982 students who attended TMHS in their ninth grade year. This data was exported from the SIS to a comma-separated values (CSV) file. This file was imported into Microsoft Excel and then imported into a Microsoft Access database. This was done to facilitate the data analysis process. The data in the SIS was stored in multiple relational tables; therefore, in order to understand the relationships among the tables, Microsoft Access was used to create the researcher’s relational database. The following table summarizes the student data that was evaluated:

Table 2

*Number of Ninth Grade Students per Year of Graduation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Graduation</th>
<th>Freshman Year</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All MCAS Biology Data for YOG for 2010, 2011, 2013, and 2014 was also exported from the SIS into a CSV file and then into Microsoft Excel and then into Microsoft Access. There were some students who took the MCAS biology test more than once. In order to look at the students’ freshman year performance, the data that was imported into Access consisted only of test results that were taken during the student’s freshman year. The additional test results were omitted from the dataset.
Students’ ninth grade final grades were exported from the SIS as a CSV file and imported into Microsoft Excel then into Microsoft Access. Due to the variety of courses that a student takes, only core courses in English, History, Math, Science, and Foreign Language were looked at. For example, not all students take band or wellness; therefore, those courses were not included in this study. Once the data was imported into Access, a field was added to the table to indicate whether the student passed or failed the course. A code of “Fail” was added to the new field if the student received a grade of less than 65 and a code of “Pass” if the grade was greater than or equal to 65. The researcher did not use actual numerical data because the literature speaks in terms of failure (Chapman & Sawyer, 2001; Hickman et al, 2008; and Eccles, 2001); the degree to which a student passes or fails a course has not been shown to be relevant. Once, the grades were coded, a query was performed to calculate the total number of courses failed during the student’s freshman year. The resulting table consisted of a unique student identifier and the total number of courses failed.

Once the data was in an appropriate format in Microsoft Access, a query was performed to create one table linking each of the data points. A new table was created consisting of a unique student identifier, the student’s YOG, MCAS biology score, and number of failed courses. This table was then exported to Microsoft Excel so that it could be imported into SPSS Version 7.5 for evaluation. Once the data was imported into SPSS, the mean, median, and standard deviation for each of the four data types were calculated for each year of graduation. The data is summarized on the following table:
Table 3

Summary Statistics by Year of Graduation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Graduation</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of Suspensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Graduation</th>
<th>MCAS Biology Test Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, the same data was looked at in terms of whether the students participated in the freshman transition program or not. Years of graduation 2010 and 2011 were combined because those students did not participate in the transition program and 2013 and 2014 were combined because those students did participate in the program. The following table summarizes that data:
Table 4

*Summary Statistics by Participation in the Transition Program*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation in the Transition Program</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Course Failures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCAS Biology Test Scores</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next step in evaluating the archival data was to compare the means of both groups. In order to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between the students who participated in the transition program and those who did not, a t-test was considered. In order to perform a t-test, the data must approximate a normal distribution. Histograms of the data were generated.
The failure data did not appear to be normally distributed and the MCAS biology data looked as if it might be normally distributed although one can see some areas where the data do not accurately fit the curve (i.e., at score 220, 250, and 260). Therefore, in
order to better determine whether the data are normally distributed, a Kolmogorov-
Smirnov test for normality was performed on the two data sets. The null hypothesis is
that the data are normally distributed. The following table summarizes the results.

Table 5

*Results of Normality Testing, One Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z-score</th>
<th>Significance (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Failures</td>
<td>982</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>&lt;0.000**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCAS Biology Score</td>
<td>935</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>&lt;0.000**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** The assumption of normality can be rejected at the p=0.01 level.

Since the results of the normality testing indicate that the assumption of normality
can be rejected at the \( p=0.01 \) level, the researcher deemed that a \( t \)-test was not appropriate
for either data set. As such, a non-parametric or distribution-free test, one that is valid
even when the data do not approximate a certain distribution, was chosen to determine if
there is a statistically significant difference between data collected from students who
participated in the transition program and those who did not. The Mann-Whitney U-test
(also known as the Wilcoxon Rank-Sum or the Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test) was
performed for the number of failures and the MCAS Biology test scores. The null
hypothesis is that there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups at
the \( p=0.01 \) level. The conditions under which the Mann-Whitney test is valid are that the
data are from random samples, observations are independent, and samples are
independent. These conditions are true for the archival data collected. The following table summarizes the results of the Mann-Whitney test.

Table 6

Results of Mann-Whitney U-Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation in the Transition Program</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
<th>Sum of Ranks</th>
<th>Mann-Whitney U-Statistic</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Failures</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>267654</td>
<td>115318</td>
<td>0.226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>482</td>
<td>214999</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MCAS Biology</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>216567</td>
<td>88803</td>
<td>&lt;0.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>513</td>
<td>221013</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Null hypothesis can be rejected at the p=0.01 level.

The results of the Mann-Whitney U-test show that the null hypothesis can be rejected at the p=0.01 level between students who participated in the transition program and those who did not for the MCAS Biology test scores. Students who participated in the transition program had higher MCAS Biology Test scores during their freshman year. There was no statistically significant difference for the number of courses failed.

**Research Question 3**

Does participation in freshman transition activities relate to social acclimation as measured by attendance rates and the number of days suspended during TMHS students’ freshman year?
In order to inform this question, an evaluation of archival data was performed to determine whether a statistically significantly difference exists between number of days suspended and the number of days absent for students who participated in freshman transition activities and those students who did not. Data was exported from the school district’s SIS for students whose YOG is 2010, 2011, 2013, and 2014 which resulted in 982 students who attended TMHS in their ninth grade year. This data was exported from the SIS to a comma-separated values (CSV) file, which was imported into Microsoft Excel and then imported into a Microsoft Access database. This was done to facilitate the data analysis process. The data in the SIS was stored in multiple relational tables; therefore, in order to understand the relationships among the tables, Microsoft Access was used to create the researcher’s relational database. The following table summarizes the student data that was evaluated:
Table 7

*Number of Ninth Grade Students per Year of Graduation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Graduation</th>
<th>Freshman Year</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Daily attendance information for students whose YOG is 2010, 2011, 2013, and 2014 was exported from the SIS as a CSV file and imported into Microsoft Excel. In order for this case study to include the students’ freshman year attendance, the attendance data was matched up with the student data and the data was imported into a Microsoft Access relational database. Once the data was imported into Access, a query was performed to determine the total number of days absent for each student. The resulting Access table contained a unique student identifier and the total number of days absent for each student.

All freshman suspension data was then exported from the SIS into Microsoft Access using the same methodology as was done for daily attendance. The total number of days suspended was calculated for each student using a Microsoft Access query. The
resulting Access table contained a unique student identifier and the total number of days suspended for each student.

Once the data was in an appropriate format in Microsoft Access, a query was performed to create one table linking each of the data points. A new table was created consisting of a unique student identifier, the student’s YOG, number of days absent and number of suspensions. This table was then exported to Microsoft Excel so that it could be imported into SPSS Version 7.5 for evaluation. Once the data was imported into SPSS, the mean, median, and standard deviation for each of the four data types were calculated for each year of graduation. The data is summarized on the following table:

Table 8

*Summary Statistics by Year of Graduation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Graduation</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.25</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10.92</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition, the same data was looked at in terms of whether the students participated in the freshman transition program or not. Years of graduation 2010 and 2011 were combined because those students did not participate in the transition program and 2013 and 2014 were combined because those students did participate in the program. The following table summarizes that data:

Table 9

*Summary Statistics by Participation in the Transition Program*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation in the Transition Program</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Absences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next step in evaluating the archival data was to compare the means of both groups. In order to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between the students who participated in the transition program and those who did not, a *t*-test was considered. In order to perform a *t*-test, the data must approximate a normal distribution. Histograms of the data were generated.
Figure 3. Histogram of Absence Data

Figure 4. Histogram of the Number of Suspensions
The data did not appear to be normally distributed; however, to be consistent, a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for normality was performed on the two data sets. The null hypothesis is that the data are normally distributed. The following table summarizes the results.

Table 10

*Results of Normality Testing, One Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z-score</th>
<th>Significance (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Absences</td>
<td>982</td>
<td>8.20</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>7.55</td>
<td>&lt;0.000**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Suspensions</td>
<td>982</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>&lt;0.000**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** The assumption of normality can be rejected at the p=0.01 level.

Since the results of the normality testing indicate that the assumption of normality can be rejected at the $p=0.01$ level, the researcher deemed that a $t$-test was not appropriate for either data set. As such, a non-parametric or distribution-free test, one that is valid even when the data do not approximate a certain distribution, was chosen to determine if there is a statistically significant difference between data collected from students who participated in the transition program and those who did not. The Mann-Whitney U-test (also known as the Wilcoxon Rank-Sum or the Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test) was performed for the number of failures and the MCAS Biology test scores. The null
hypothesis is that there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups at the $p=0.01$ level. The conditions under which the Mann-Whitney test is valid are that the data are from random samples, observations are independent, and samples are independent. These conditions are true for the archival data collected. The following table summarizes the results of the Mann-Whitney test.

Table 11

*Results of Mann-Whitney U-Test*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Participation in the Transition Program</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
<th>Sum of Ranks</th>
<th>Mann-Whitney U-Statistic</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Absences</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>492</td>
<td>263726</td>
<td>119247</td>
<td>0.949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>218928</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Suspensions</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>283043</td>
<td>99929</td>
<td>&lt;0.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>199610</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Null hypothesis can be rejected at the $p=0.01$ level.

The results of the Mann-Whitney U-test showed that the null hypothesis can be rejected at the $p=0.01$ level between students who participated in the transition program and those who did not for the number of suspensions. Students who participated in the transition program had fewer suspensions during their freshman year. There was no statistically significant difference for the number of absences.
Research Question 4

*How do students who participated in the transition program interpret their freshman year experience and are there any modifications in the current program that they view as important?*

This question was answered through a survey created by Brita Buhrman (2010) which the researcher modified and used with Dr. Buhrman’s permission (see Appendix B). Buhrman (2010) created this survey using Fink (2006) as a guide and established content validity by asking a team of experts to evaluate the survey with a survey rubric as well as by performing a pilot survey. The survey gathered information about students’ opinions and perceptions of their ninth-grade experience.

The survey was administered to a stratified-random sample of tenth grade students. This sample of students included all academic levels of students who are not in a substantially separate special education classroom. In order to get a random sample of students, the sample consisted of students in the first numerical section of each level (Honors, CP-1 and CP-2) of sophomore math. The actual students chosen to participate in the survey were random because the scheduling software randomly assigns students to sections; therefore, selecting the first section ensured that it is random.

Prior to the administering the survey, the researcher visited the three classrooms to explain the study and to distribute the consent form (Appendix D). Students could return the consent forms to their classroom teacher or to one of the secretaries in the main office. In addition, they could place the forms in the researcher’s faculty mailbox. Both
an outline of the study and the opt-out consent form were posted on the school’s website along with the telephone number and e-mail address of the researcher. However, the researcher did not receive any correspondence. Every student in each of the three courses received opt-out consent forms and zero were returned. In total, 56 students were eligible to complete the survey.

Of the 56 students whose parents did not object to their child’s participating in this study, four students were absent and zero students chose not to participate in the survey. As a result, 52 students completed the survey; however, two students did not attend TMHS as freshmen. In total, 50 students completed surveys that were tabulated. The survey began with general questions asking the student’s gender, year of graduation, number of courses failed in the ninth grade, and whether the student attended TMHS in the ninth grade. Students who did not attend TMHS during their freshman year were excluded from this study. The introductory questions were followed up with 10 statements to which the student expressed his/her agreement using a 5-point differential scale ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5). The data was tabulated and the answers to the open-ended questions were coded. For the eight statements for which the students had to rate their level of agreement, the responses were given a numerical equivalent on a scale of one to five. Strongly Agree was given a one and Strongly Disagree was given a five. A copy of this survey is included in Appendix A. The results of this analysis are shown in Appendix E and are described below.

The following table summarizes the data collected as part of the student survey.
Table 12

Summary of Data Collected in Student Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom</th>
<th>Course Level</th>
<th>Total Number in Course</th>
<th>Total Number Surveyed</th>
<th>Number who Attended TMHS in Grade 9</th>
<th>Male (Percent)</th>
<th>Female (Percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>CP 1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9(56%)</td>
<td>7(44%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>CP 2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9(50%)</td>
<td>7(44%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Honors</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8(44%)</td>
<td>10(56%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td></td>
<td>56</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>26(52%)</td>
<td>24(48%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey Question 1: How many courses did you fail in the ninth grade?

As indicated in Table E-1 in Appendix E, 12% of the students surveyed represented that they failed one or more courses as a freshman. This data is consistent with the archival data in that the vast majority of students do not fail any courses.

Survey Question 2: I try my best in school.

Eighty percent of the students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they try their best in school compared to 10% who disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement. When the responses were given a numerical equivalent,
the average calculated was a 2.0 that corresponds to the “agree” response. Comparing the three classes, The Honors and CP-1 are closer to the “strongly agree” response than the average and the CP-2 class is closer to the “not sure” response.

*Survey Question 3: I plan to graduate from TMHS.*

Ninety-six percent of the students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they plan to graduate from TMHS to 0% who disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement. When the responses were given a numerical equivalent, the average calculated was a 1.1 that corresponds to just above the “strongly agree” response. Comparing the three classes, the CP-1 class is equivalent to the “strongly agree” category, the CP-2 class is closer to the “agree” response than the average and the Honors class is equivalent to the average.

*Survey Question 4: I was prepared to enter the high school as a ninth grader.*

Eighty-eight percent of the students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they were prepared to enter the high school as a ninth grader compared to 4% who disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement. When the responses were given a numerical equivalent, the average calculated was a 1.6 that corresponds to somewhere between the “strongly agree” and “agree” responses. Comparing the three classes, the CP-1 class is equivalent to the average, the CP-2 class is slightly above the
average and closer to the “agree” category and the Honors class is closer to the “strongly agree” response than the average.

Survey Question 5: I had a positive ninth-grade experience.

Eighty-eight percent of the students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they had a positive ninth-grade experience compared to 8% who disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement. When the responses were given a numerical equivalent, the average calculated was a 1.7 that corresponds to the somewhere between the “strongly agree” and “agree” responses and is closer to the “agree” response.

Comparing the three classes, the CP-1 class is lower than the average and closer to the “strongly agree” response than the average, the CP-2 class is slightly above the average and closer to the “agree” category and the Honors class is equivalent to the average.

Survey Question 6: In the ninth grade my teachers helped and supported me.

Eighty-two percent of the students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that their ninth grade teachers helped and supported them compared to 10% who disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement. When the responses were given a numerical equivalent, the average calculated was a 2.0 that corresponds to the “agree” response. Comparing the three classes, the CP-1 class A is lower than the average and closer to the “strongly agree” response than the average, the CP-2 class is above the
average and closer to the “not sure” category and the Honors class is below the average closer to the “strongly agree” response than the average.

*Survey Question 7: In the ninth grade my guidance counselor helped and supported me.*

Fifty percent of the students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that their guidance counselor helped and supported them compared to 22% who disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement. When the responses were given a numerical equivalent, the average calculated was a 2.6 that corresponds to between the “agree” and “not sure” responses. Comparing the three classes, the CP-1 class is above than the average and closer to the “not sure” response than the average, the CP-2 class is below average and between the “strongly agree” and “agree” responses and the Honors class is above the average between the “disagree” and “strongly disagree” responses.

*Survey Question 8: In the ninth grade, I participated in extra-curricular activities.*

Seventy-eight percent of the students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they participated in extra-curricular activities compared to 16% who disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement. When the responses were given a numerical equivalent, the average calculated was a 1.9 that corresponds to slightly below the “agree” response between “agree” and “strongly agree”. Comparing the three classes, the CP-1 class is above the average and between the “agree” and “not sure” responses,
the CP-2 class is also above the average and between the “agree” and “not sure” responses and the Honors class is below the average between the “agree” and “strongly agree” responses.

Survey Question 9: I am satisfied with my grades and my progress.

Seventy-eight percent of the students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they are satisfied with their grades and their progress compared to 8% who disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement. When the responses were given a numerical equivalent, the average calculated was a 2.0 that corresponds to the “agree” response. Comparing the three classes, the CP-1 class is equivalent to the average, the CP-2 class is above the average and between the “agree” and “not sure” responses and the Honors class is below the average between the “agree” and “strongly agree” responses.

Open-Ended Survey Questions

The final section of the survey consisted of four open-ended questions relating to the student’s ninth grade experience. Content analysis was used to analyze the data. Content analysis “is a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text” (Weber, 1990, p. 9) and is used to code open-ended questions in
surveys (Berelson, 1952). Answers to the open-ended questions were identified, coded, and categorized into patterns.

Each open-ended question was reviewed and, if a response was given, the response was grouped into one of three categories: Academic, Social, or Procedural based on a study by Akos and Galassi (2004) that “investigated the perceptions of students, parents, and teachers of the middle and high school transition experience and of programming designed to facilitate those transitions” (p. 220). If a question touched on more than one category, the major category was noted. These three categories are meaningful because in order to ensure that the students’ environment fits their developmental stage, transition programs must provide programming that addresses the students’ concerns. Once the coding was complete, responses were further analyzed for key-words to find common themes. A key-word appearing more than twice was tabulated. The results of this analysis are shown in Appendix F and are described below.

*Open-ended Question 1: What did you enjoy or find helpful during your transition from middle school to high school?*

The key words that students chose to answer this question did not vary much among the three classes. All three classes (Honors, CP-1, and CP-2) indicated that the high school teachers, the freshman orientation day/school visit, the 84-minute block schedule, and an increased sense of freedom helped with their transition. Both of the CP-1 and CP-2 students mentioned the freshman lunch, and the CP-1 and Honors classes mentioned the importance of participating in extra/co-curricular activities. Of the 86% of
students who answered this question, 26% of the responses fell within the academic
category, 35% within the social category, and 40% within the procedural category. For
students in the honors class, 31% indicated responses pertaining to the academic
category, 44% pertaining to the social category, and 22% to the procedural category. For
students in the CP-1 class, 19% indicated responses pertaining to the academic category,
19% pertaining to the social category, and 50% to the procedural category. Twelve
percent did not respond to this question. For students in the CP-2 class, 17% indicated
responses pertaining to the academic category, 28% pertaining to the social category, and
28% to the procedural category. Twenty-eight percent did not respond to this question.

Open-ended Question 2: What did you not enjoy nor find helpful during your transition
from middle school to high school?

The key words that students chose to answer this question did not vary much
among the three classes. The only item that came up in more than one of the classes was
the block schedule. Both the Honors and CP-1 class mentioned the schedule. The CP-1
students also mentioned the age of the building and a desire to have more meetings
scheduled with their guidance counselor. The CP-2 class mentioned standardized tests.
Of the 58% of students who answered this question, 45% of the responses fell within the
academic category, 17% within the social category, and 38% within the procedural
category. For students in the honors class, 19% indicated responses pertaining to the
academic category, 6% pertaining to the social category, and 13% to the procedural
category. Sixty-three percent did not respond to this question. For students in the CP-1
class, 12% indicated responses pertaining to the academic category, 6% pertaining to the social category, and 44% to the procedural category. Thirty-eight percent did not respond to this question. For students in the CP-2 class, 44% indicated responses pertaining to the academic category, 17% pertaining to the social category, and 11% to the procedural category. Twenty-eight percent did not respond to this question.

**Open-ended Question 2: What did you not enjoy nor find helpful during your transition from middle school to high school?**

The key words that students chose to answer this question did not vary much among the three classes. The only item that came up in more than one of the classes was the block schedule. Both the Honors and CP-1 class mentioned the schedule. The CP-1 students also mentioned the age of the building and a desire to have more meetings scheduled with their guidance counselor. The CP-2 class mentioned standardized tests. Of the 58% of students who answered this question, 45% of the responses fell within the academic category, 17% within the social category, and 38% within the procedural category. For students in the honors class, 19% indicated responses pertaining to the academic category, 6% pertaining to the social category, and 13% to the procedural category. Sixty-three percent did not respond to this question. For students in the CP-1 class, 12% indicated responses pertaining to the academic category, 6% pertaining to the social category, and 44% to the procedural category. Thirty-eight percent did not respond to this question. For students in the CP-2 class, 44% indicated responses
pertaining to the academic category, 17% pertaining to the social category, and 11% to the procedural category. Twenty-eight percent did not respond to this question.

Open-ended Question 3: What could teachers, administrators, and/or guidance counselors have done to improve your transition from middle school to high school?

The key words that students chose to answer this question did not vary much among the three classes. The only item that came up in more than one of the classes was the desire to have more individualized meetings with guidance counselors; this came up in the Honors class as well as the CP-2 class. The honors class also mentioned that there could have been a better job explaining the block schedule and how Grade Point Averages are calculated. The CP-2 class mentioned wanting more career counseling and the CP-1 class mentioned desiring more interesting classes and more freshman-only social events (i.e., dances). Of the 68% of students who answered this question, 29% of the responses fell within the academic category, 12% within the social category, and 59% within the procedural category. For students in the honors class, 13% indicated responses pertaining to the academic category, 6% pertaining to the social category, and 63% to the procedural category. Nineteen percent did not respond to this question. For students in the CP-1 class, 12% indicated responses pertaining to the academic category, 6% pertaining to the social category, and 44% to the procedural category. Thirty-eight percent did not respond to this question. For students in the CP-2 class, 33% indicated responses pertaining to the academic category, 11% pertaining to the social category, and 17% to the procedural category. Thirty-nine percent did not respond to this question.
Open-ended Question 4: Do you have any suggestions to improve the experiences of future students?

The key words that students chose to answer this question did not vary much among the three classes. The only item that came up in more than one of the classes was the desire to have more individualized meetings with guidance counselors; this came up in the Honors class as well as the CP-1 class. The CP-1 class also mentioned the desire for a new/updated school building and the CP-2 students mentioned improving career awareness. Of the 54% of students who answered this question, 37% of the responses fell within the academic category, 22% within the social category, and 41% within the procedural category. For students in the honors class, 25% indicated responses pertaining to the academic category, 6% pertaining to the social category, and 19% to the procedural category. Fifty percent did not respond to this question. For students in the CP-1 class, 19% indicated responses pertaining to the academic category, none of the responses pertained to the social category, and 31% pertained to the procedural category. Forty-four percent did not respond to this question. For students in the CP-2 class, 17% indicated responses pertaining to the academic category, 28% pertaining to the social category, and 11% to the procedural category. Forty-four percent did not respond to this question.
Research Question 5

How do faculty and administrators describe the contribution of the individual components of the transition program and are there any modifications in the current program that they view as important?

In order to inform this question, data was collected from a focus group of teachers to discuss aspects of the ninth grade transition program were successful and whether changes should be made. An e-mail was sent to freshman teachers and staff inviting them to participate in the focus group. Eleven staff members (seven freshman teachers, the chair of the Special Education Department, the chair of the Guidance Department, the Freshman Dean, and an assistant principal) indicated their willingness to participate. The researcher distributed a Focus Group Consent Form to each of the participants and determined an acceptable date and time at which to meet. On the day of the meeting, two members were unable to attend, resulting in a total of nine faculty members who participated in the focus group.

The researcher met with a group of nine staff members in order to develop a more in-depth understanding of the freshman transition program, to determine areas of the transition program that need improvement, and to reveal best practices. The nine members of the focus group met in a conference room at the high school. They sat around a conference table. The researcher provided water and snacks for the participants. Once the session started, the door was closed to prevent disruptions. The following table
describes the position and length of time that the participants have been working at TMHS.

Table 13

*Participants of the Focus Group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member Number</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Number of Years at TMHS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Wellness</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Department Chair</td>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Department Chair</td>
<td>Guidance</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Freshman Dean</td>
<td>Guidance</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the participants, the researcher was assisted by a note-taker who maintained notes of the discussion so that the researcher could focus on the moderation of the session. The entire session was recorded digitally using the QuickVoice application on an iPad. The iPad running the QuickVoice application was positioned at the center of
the conference table. Prior to beginning the session, the researcher verified that the device was recording and that the recorded voice was audible.

After the focus group session, the recordings were transcribed and the researcher listened to the digital recording again while reviewing the transcription and took notes. The notes were compared to the notes that were taken during the session to clarify and/or verify certain aspects of the focus group session. In addition, a back-up of the recording was made via the GarageBand application on an Apple iMac computer in the event that the data became corrupted or unreadable.

Content analysis as described above was performed on transcripts and notes to identify any themes that emerged from the discussion of four key questions. Within the four sub-questions, key words and phrases were underlined. These key words and phrases were written down and initial categories were determined.

Once categories were identified, the researcher went back through the data to determine that each category was unique and that there were no overlaps among or between categories in order to have categories that were “internally as homogeneous as possible and externally as heterogeneous as possible” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 347). Like the open-ended questions as part of the Student Survey, the categories were determined to be social, academic, and procedural. Unlike most of the students who had procedural concerns, the faculty was most concerned with the academic and social aspects of the transition program. Each of the four sub-questions was analyzed separately.
Prior to answering the question “What aspect of the transition program has had the most benefit on students?”, member #4 asked “What do you consider part of freshman transition?” Others had this question too and a discussion of each of the transition activities ensued. In discussing each of the transition activities, none of the activities came out as being more beneficial than another. Participants mentioned the visit of the eighth grade students to the high school, the half-day orientation program right before school begins in August, and the “Freshman Success Guide” that guidance distributes to parents and students. Member #8 summed up the feeling of the group that it is “even the simple things like just giving specialized attention to the freshmen” that most benefits the students.

In terms of what aspect of the transition program is most in need of modification, much of the discussion centered on the freshman lunch period, an issue raised by many students in the open-ended portion of their survey. Participant #3 indicated that the freshman lunch is helpful at the beginning of the year but that by the second semester, the students were ready to mix with the rest of the student body. The majority of the group felt that by separating the freshmen for the entire year, it just prolonged their transition process. Member #1 mentioned, “If we keep them separate, where is the transition?” I think that we are just putting it off until they are sophomores then we have similar issues.” Along that same line, there was concern that when the students transition from the freshman dean to the person who will be their guidance counselor for the next three years, it takes time for the counselors to get to know the student. (The students also raised this concern on numerous occasions.) The third issue was that the freshman
assembly takes place too late in the school year. It usually takes place in October but this year it did not happen until November.

There were no activities that were identified as needing to be removed from the program. Other than the changes mentioned previously, it appeared that the specific transition activities currently being employed are valuable. During this discussion, Member #3 indicated, “we need to do a better job connecting with the parents.” Many of the parents who attend the parent meetings are already involved and it is important to reach out in different ways to those parents who are less likely to attend school meetings. This member suggested using the school website and parents’ e-mail addresses to post and distribute information like the “Freshman Success Guide.”

Member #7 indicated that the addition of a study skills and organization skills curriculum would be beneficial to freshmen. They mentioned note-taking and study skills along with time-management. Members #9, and #4 indicated that they and other freshman teachers do incorporate teaching these skills to their freshman students. Member #9 indicated that she “does extra things with the freshmen” like teaching them about their “learning styles, study skills, and credits.” However, it was noted that having a structured, school-wide policy around teaching these important skills would be beneficial to all students. Member #7 indicated that having an academic support class for struggling students. She mentioned pairing up the freshman with an upper classman who will act as a peer tutor. Member #5 expanded this concept to having an Advisor/Advisee block during the day to enable the students to form relationships with adults in the building. The following table summarizes the results of the coding.
### Table 14

*Results of Coding, Faculty Focus Group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Key Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organizational Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peer Tutor*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advisor/Advisee**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guidance*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peer Tutor (relationship building)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advisor/Advisee (relationship building)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lunch*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guidance (relationship building)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Procedural</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freshman Assembly (timing of)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Modification Recommended
** Additional Activity Suggested
Conclusion of Research Findings

The purpose of this chapter was to present the findings of the study based upon the five research questions. The results of the data collected from an interview with the school’s principal, analysis of district archival data, a student survey, and a faculty focus group were presented. In the next chapter, the researcher will tie together the research findings with the theoretical framework and research questions, upon which this study was based, form conclusions, make recommendations for further research, and discuss the significance and limitations of this study.
Discussion of Research Findings

Reform movements in education have shaped the configuration of American schools throughout the twentieth century (Clearinghouse on Early Education and Parenting, 2005). The “Middle School Movement” characterized by the replacement of junior high schools with middle schools has resulted in the relocation of ninth grade students to the high schools in a ninth-through twelfth-grade configuration (Franklin and Glascock 1996). Although well-intentioned, these changes have not always taken into account students’ emotional, social, or academic preparedness. According to Seller (2004), very often it was financial constraints of the district that caused ninth grade students to be moved to the high school rather than the students’ academic or developmental readiness. Many critics believe that these changes have resulted in many ninth grade students feeling lost and forgotten and has resulted in the problems encountered by secondary education (NASSP, 1985; Noguera, 2004; Quint, 2006).

Studies have shown that implementing a ninth-grade transition program is beneficial for both academic and social success (Cook et al., 2008; Herlihy & Kemple, 2004; McGrew, 2001; and Walsh, 2002) and correlates positively with students obtaining a high school diploma (Kerr, 2002; MacIver, 1990). The difficulties freshman students experience is compounded by the fact that developmentally, these students are changing physically and emotionally and experience decreased connection to their education (MacIver, 1990; Eccles et al., 1993). Transition programs afford students the structure and support they need as they navigate between the more nurturing environment of the
middle school and the high school environment where students have more freedom and less structure.

Using the lens of Eccles and Midgley’s (1989) stage-environment fit theory, this study explored the process by TMHS designed and implemented a ninth grade transition program despite significant budget constraints. This formative assessment demonstrates that although participation in the program did not result in significant decreases in the number of absences or courses failed, student who participated in the program had fewer suspensions and increased performance on the state biology exam. These findings taken together with student and faculty feedback about the design and implementation of the program provide the foundation for specific modifications to the existing program.

Research Question 1: Why was the freshman transition program at TMHS developed and how was it implemented?

Interview data from the principal of TMHS indicated that the reasons for implementing the transition program were consistent with numerous research studies that demonstrate that the freshman year is pivotal in determining whether students will be successful in obtaining a high school diploma (Allensworth & Easton, 2005; MacIver, 1990; Mizelle & Irvin, 2002; Shore and Shore, 2009). Eccles & Barber (1999) determine that “extracurricular activities can facilitate adolescents’ development need for social relatedness and can contribute to one’s identity as in important and valued member of the school community (p. 29) and the program stresses that students get involved. Not only was the principal’s rationale for developing and implementing the transition program
grounded in a sound review of the literature, it was consistent with various psychosocial development and social learning theories (Erikson, 1959; Hirschi, 1969; Bandura, 1997; Eccles & Midgley, 1989).

Erikson’s (1959) fifth stage of development shows the importance of high school being a time for students to “explor(e) multiple identities and weigh (the) options of who they are and who they hope to become” (Benner & Graham, 2009, p. 356) and Hirschi (1969)’s social bonding theory were important considerations in the development of TMHS’s transition program. The principal talked about the importance of getting students involved in clubs and activities. By emphasizing that students must become involved in a club, activity or sport, the transition program gives students opportunities to consider different roles, find a peer group, and become involved in their high school experience. According to Hirschi (1969) the more closely a person is tied to his/her surroundings in one way (i.e., sports and clubs), the more likely he/she is to be tied in other ways (i.e., academic).

The transition program implemented at TMHS also took into account Bandura’s (1997) theory of self-efficacy. By helping freshmen students achieve success (academically and socially), the transition program helps to give students a sense that they can be successful. Many students, if they do not feel that they can be successful, will cease trying (Miller, 2011, p. 244). The feelings that students have towards their school have a tremendous effect on his/her academic motivation and success (Eccles, 1991).
Research Question 2: Does participation in freshman transition activities relate to student achievement as measured by the number of courses failed and the students’ performance on the MCAS Biology?

An analysis of archival data demonstrated there was no statistically significant difference between students who participated in the transition program and those who did not for the number of courses failed. However, there was a statistically difference between these two groups in terms of the MCAS Biology test results that the students take during their freshman year. Students who participated in the program scored higher on the MCAS Biology exam than those who did not. The results of the review of archival MCAS biology and course failure data do not support the hypothesis that if students participate in the freshman transition program at TMHS, they will fail fewer courses during their freshman year and they will obtain higher scores on the MCAS Biology exam than students who did not participate in the program. The null hypothesis cannot be rejected at the 95% confidence level.

These findings are consistent with the literature that states that ninth grade is a pivotal time for students (Mizelle & Irving, 2002; Shore & Shore, 2009). Many studies have shown that ninth grade students are more likely to fail a class than students in any other grade and those students who fail one or more classes are more likely to drop out of high school (SREB, 2002; Allensworth and Easton, 2005; Neild et al., 2008). However, the relationship between transition program and student achievement is less clearly articulated in the literature. Many research studies have found that participation in transition programs have an effect on student achievement (Hertzog and Morgan, 1997;
Akos and Galassi, 2004; Herlihy et al., 2005) while others did not (Hahn, 2009; Buhrman, 2010) and others, like this study, experienced mixed results (Quint, 2006; Neild, 2009).

**Research Question 3:** Does participation in freshman transition activities relate to social acclimation as measured by attendance rates and the number of days suspended during TMHS students’ freshman year?

Further evaluation of archival data demonstrated there was no statistically significant difference between students who participated in the transition program and those who did not for the number of days absent. However, there was a statistically difference between these two groups in terms of the number of days that a student was suspended. Students who participated in the transition program experienced fewer suspensions than those who did not participate. The results of the review of archival MCAS suspension and attendance data do not support the hypothesis that if students participate in the freshman transition program at TMHS, they will experience fewer disciplinary referrals and miss fewer days of school than students who did not participate in the program. The null hypothesis cannot be rejected at the 95% confidence level.

It is difficult to isolate the role of attendance from other variables that ensure success. Many times, students who have good attendance are often also more motivated and dedicated to their education (Martins and Walker, 2006). In addition, according to Smith et al. (2008), freshmen may not understand the school’s attendance policy and how
attendance plays into accumulating course credit on which the ability to graduate is based.

**Research Question 4:** How do students who participated in the transition program interpret their freshman year experience and are there any modifications in the current program that they view as important?

Data from the student survey showed that, in general, students described their freshman year experience favorably. For all but one of the statements, students agreed or strongly agreed with the statements given. These statements were asked to better understand the students’ overall satisfaction with their freshman year experience (Buhrman, 2010). Eighty percent (80%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I try my best in school.” Ninety-four (94%) percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I plan to graduate from TMHS.” Eighty-eight (88%) percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I was prepared to enter the high school as a ninth grader.” Eight-eight (88%) percent also agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I had a positive ninth-grade experience.” Eighty-two (82%) percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “In the ninth grade my teachers helped and supported me.” Seventy-eight (78%) percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “In the ninth grade, I participated in extra-curricular activities.” However, only fifty percent (50%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “In the ninth grade, my guidance counselor helped and supported me.”
The open-ended questions of the survey emphasized the students’ responses to the first section of the survey. The most frequently repeated theme of these open-ended questions was the students’ request for more individual meetings with counselors. This topic was brought up in response to three of the four questions (Questions 2, 3 & 4).

Since the students surveyed were sophomores, they would have just met with their counselor for the first time because, during their freshman year, the freshman dean served as the counselor to all of the freshmen. The students’ concerns about meeting more frequently with their guidance counselor during their freshman year could have been a genuine concern or it could have been that they were not aware that the dean was also their freshman counselor. In either case, there needs to be a more seamless progression from the students’ first to second year high school experience. This progression should focus on scheduling more individual meetings with the students’ guidance counselors and making the students aware of the role of the freshman dean and his/her relationship to the guidance counselor who will follow the students for the next three years.

**Research Question 5:** *How do faculty and administrators describe the contribution of the individual components of the transition program and are there any modifications in the current program that they view as important?*

Data from the faculty focus group showed that staff members were committed to improving the environment for students and ensuring that the high school environment
meets the students’ needs. It was evident throughout the focus group that the faculty members understand Eccles et al.’s (1993) statement that “it is the fit between the adolescent and the educational environment that is important” (p. 92). The members of the focus group understood that by helping freshmen students adjust to their new high school environment by making the environment more welcoming, they are giving them a better shot at successfully obtaining a high school diploma.

In terms of implementation, the focus group felt as if the activities were being implemented effectively; however, in terms of the program as a whole, the group felt that there was a disconnect between the individual activities (orientation day, freshman lunch, etc.) and the program as a whole. The majority of the focus group participants had questions about the activities that TMHS considered to be associated with freshman transition. When the group began to discuss the individual activities, everyone was familiar with them. It appears that there lacks a cohesive message that each of the transition activities should build upon each other to form a unified transition program. Communication regarding the program, as a whole, needs to be improved both within the school as well as communication to other stakeholders. For example, four out of the nine participants indicated that communication to and from parents could be better.

In terms of modifying the program, the majority indicated that there should be more of a gradual transition during the freshman year so that by the end of the freshman year, students would be able to function autonomously in the high school. They specifically mentioned the freshman-only lunch as potentially needing to be looked at or changed during the second semester. Like the students, the faculty was also concerned
that when the students transition from the freshman dean to the guidance counselor who will follow them for the rest of their high school experience, it takes time for the counselors to get to know the student. High school is more departmentalized than the teaming approach of the middle school; therefore it is more difficult for students to form close relationships with the adults in the school building. This happens at a time in their development when they need the support and guidance from adults outside of the family (Eccles, 1999). The faculty, like the students, wanted to ensure that a rapport was being built between the student and his/her guidance counselor for all four years. Mizelle (2005) said that the transition to high school “is an extended process that involves middle and high school administrators, teachers, parents, and students.” By improving the interaction among all of the stakeholders, the overall quality of the program would be improved.

**Summary of Findings**

The results of the evaluation of the archival data in this study are inconclusive in determining whether the freshman transition activities at TMHS have had an effect on student achievement and social acclimation. There was no statistically significant evidence to support the position that the transition program at TMHS has had an effect on the reduction of ninth-grade course failures or days absent. However, the archival data along with the results of the student survey and faculty focus group have netted a number of recommendations for the specific program at TMHS as well as for conducting future studies relating to ninth-grade transition.
Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

This was a case study examining one high school in Massachusetts. The study data were comprised of data from an interview with the principal, archival data, a survey of tenth grade students, and a faculty focus group. This study was limited to one high school in one town in one state. It cannot be generalized to other high schools. Furthermore, the study was also limited to the perceptions of the faculty, staff, and students at TMHS. It must also be noted that the researcher is an assistant principal and has an interest in determining if the transition program has effected change and to ascertain whether changes to the current program are warranted.

Recommendations

This case study used a descriptive, single-case study design to describe how and why the ninth-grade transition program at TMHS was designed and implemented as well as the extent to which the program has been successful and how it can be improved. This study compared MCAS Biology scores, daily attendance, number of failures, and number of suspensions of students who participated in the program and those who did not. In addition, the researcher conducted an interview with the principal who implemented the program, conducted a survey of tenth grade students who participated in the program and moderated a faculty focus group. This was done to formatively assess the transition
program that is currently in place at TMHS. The following are recommendations for the TMHS transition program:

1. The administration of the high school must make all stakeholders (staff, students, parents, central office personnel) aware of the transition activities that are currently in place. The researcher recommends that a “Freshman Transition Guide” be produced that outlines the program and addresses the main procedural, academic, and social concerns of freshmen and how they can find support. By doing so, when there arises an issue or question about a freshman student or about the program in general, a common language will exist and, as a result, change can be effected more effectively.

2. As a result of the number of absences and number of failures not showing a significant difference, the communication to both ninth grade students and their parents needs to be more thorough. The researcher recommends that a discussion of the attendance and graduation policy take place at multiple times during the school year with both parents and students. This could be done face-to-face during a scheduled open-house or class meeting, or by way of a notice emailed home in a newsletter and posted on the website.

3. It is recommended that the administration of TMHS convene a team to look at the organization of the guidance department to determine whether it is feasible for a single counselor to have a student for all four years. Perhaps this would help make the environment of the high school better fit the developmental needs of the
ninth grade students by giving them support and guidance from adults outside of the family (Eccles, 1999).

4. It is recommended that the administration of TMSH convene a team to look at the current transition program. Tewksbury is currently in the process of building a new high school. As a result, new and/or different transition models and or intervention activities that were not feasible in the old building may be feasible in the new building. For example, the researcher recommends looking into a separate academy model and the implementation of an advisor/advisee program to name two.

5. It is recommended that the administration continues to monitor the success of freshman students in order to continue to formatively assess the current program.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

1. Based upon the results of this study, it is recommended that further studies to better understand why certain areas of this study (MCAS Biology scores and suspensions) showed a significant change and others (attendance and course failures) did not. It is recommended that a study take place in which students with high incidents of absenteeism and failures along with their parents are interviewed to determine if there are commonalities that could possibly be addressed by schools.
2. There appeared to be a difference of responses among the three levels of courses (CP-1, CP-2, and Honors). It is recommended that further study are performed to determine whether there is a difference and, if so, to understand it.

3. It is recommended that a future study to determine if individual transition activities can be isolated to determine their effect on student achievement would be beneficial. It is recommended that this study take place at a variety of different secondary schools so as to maximize the generalizability of the results.

4. It is also recommended that case studies of other freshman transition program take place at other high schools to determine what their programs look like and identify what is working for them.

5. Another recommendation is to expand this study longitudinally to look at dropout and future success of students.

It is important for high school educators to remember that “ultimately, it is high schools that bear the most immediate responsibility for putting in place the curriculum, school organizational features, and strong teachers who will increase a ninth grader’s chances of making a good transition to high school” (Neild 2009, p. 73).
References


Lally, P. (personal communications, January 2012).


Society for the Study of Behavioral Development, University of Berne. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 422 450)


Appendices

Appendix A - Student Survey

Class of 2015
Student Survey about Ninth-Grade Experience

General Student Information (please circle your response)

Gender:  Male  Female  Year of Graduation:  2015  2014  2013  2012

Did you attend TMHS in the ninth grade?  Yes  No

How many courses did you fail in the ninth grade?  0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8

Please circle your level of agreement with the following statements.

I try my best school.

Strongly Agree  Agree  Not Sure  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

I plan to graduate from TMHS.

Strongly Agree  Agree  Not Sure  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

I was prepared to enter the high school as a ninth grader.

Strongly Agree  Agree  Not Sure  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

I had a positive ninth-grade experience.

Strongly Agree  Agree  Not Sure  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

In the ninth grade, my teachers helped and supported me.

Strongly Agree  Agree  Not Sure  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

In the ninth grade, my guidance counselor helped and supported me.

Strongly Agree  Agree  Not Sure  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

In the ninth grade, I participated in extra-curricular activities.

Strongly Agree  Agree  Not Sure  Disagree  Strongly Disagree
I am satisfied with my grades and my progress.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Please answer the following questions relating to your ninth grade experience.**

What did you enjoy or find helpful during your transition from middle school to high school?

What did you not enjoy nor find helpful during ninth grade?

What could TMHS teachers and administrator have done to improve your transition from middle school to high school?

Do you have any suggestions to improve the experiences of future TMHS students?
Appendix B - Approval to Modify Buhrman Survey
Appendix C - Tables from Principal Survey

Table C-1.
Number of Detentions Given to Ninth-grade Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Detentions</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table C-2.
Percentage of Students Who have Dropped Out of TMHS and Have Failed Multiple Courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All students who failed three or more courses</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>9.18%</td>
<td>5.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>throughout their high school career</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students who failed three or more courses during</td>
<td>13.51%</td>
<td>12.45%</td>
<td>15.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>their freshman year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table indicates that students who fail three or more courses during their freshman year are two to three times more likely to drop out of school than other students who failed courses.
Table C-3.

2007 Freshmen Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Freshmen in 2007</th>
<th>Students who Failed One or More Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students (%)</td>
<td>212 (100%)</td>
<td>47 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Suspensions (%)</td>
<td>20 (9%)</td>
<td>15 (32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students Involved in Extra/Co-Curricular Activities (%)</td>
<td>132 (62%)</td>
<td>11 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Absences (%)</td>
<td>1562 (100%)</td>
<td>719 (46%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Number of Absences per Student</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>15.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third table indicated to the principal that freshmen who failed one or more class during their freshman year were 3.5 times more likely to be suspended than the general population and ⅓ less likely to participate in extra/co-curricular activities. In addition, the 22% of the class that failed a course comprised 46% of all absences. As a result, it was evident to the principal that there was a need to work with the freshmen to give them the tools to make them more successful at the high school.
Appendix D - IRB APPROVAL

Northeastern

Notification of IRB Action

Date: January 26, 2012
IRB #: 11-11-12

Principal Investigator(s):
Kelly Conn
Mary Eileen Taylor Osborne

Department:
College of Professional Studies/Education

Address:
42 BV
Northeastern University

Title of Project:
Ninth Grade Transition: An Evaluation of Tewksbury Memorial High School’s Program

Participating Sites:
Tewksbury memorial High School – approval received

Informed Consent:
One (1) opt-out consent for parent/guardians
One (1) verbal assent script
One (1) signed consent for focus group

DHHS Review Category:
Expedited #7

Monitoring Interval:
12 months

Approval Expiration Date: JANUARY 25, 2013

Investigator’s Responsibilities:

1. Informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any other university approvals that may be necessary.

Coleen Pantalone, Ph.D., Vice Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nancy Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #: 4630
STUDENT SURVEY – OPT-OUT CONSENT FORM

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies
Names of Investigators: Kelly J. Conn, PhD., Mary Eileen Taylor Osborne
Title of Project: Ninth Grade Transition: An Evaluation of Tewksbury Memorial High School’s Program

We would like to invite your child to take part in a research project. The research study entitled “Ninth Grade Transition: An Evaluation of Tewksbury Memorial High School’s Program,” is being conducted by M. Eileen Taylor Osborne as partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Education from Northeastern University. The purpose of this study is to inform whether the freshman transition program implemented at TMHS has helped students academically and socially during their first year of high school by measuring course failures, disciplinary offenses attendance and Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Biology test results.

This study will take place at Tewksbury Memorial High School and will take approximately 20 minutes for your student to take an anonymous survey/questionnaire about his/her ninth grade experience. (A copy of this survey is attached.)

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your child for taking part in this study.

Although neither you nor your child will directly benefit from his/her involvement in the research, there will be a benefit in providing the administration the data necessary to effect changes in the program and to identify best practices of ninth-grade transition thus providing a benefit to not only current and future TMHS students but to other high schools who implement ninth grade transition programs.

Your child’s part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. That means that no one will know if he/she took part in this study and no one, including the researcher, will know what his/her answers are. Any reports or publications based on this study will use only group data and will not identify you or any individual as being part of this project.

The decision for your child to participate in this study is up to you. Your child does not have to participate and your child can refuse to answer any question. Even if he/she begins the study, he/she may withdraw at any time.

Neither you nor your child will be paid for his/hers participation in this study.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to call Eileen Osborne at 978-640-7825 or e-mail her at taylor.e@hmskyyy.edu. She is the person mainly responsible for the research. You may also contact Dr. Kelly Conn at k.conn@nuu.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115, Tel: 617-373-5750, email: hsr@nuc.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Thank you,

Mary Eileen Taylor Osborne

Please sign below if you DO NOT want your child to participate in the study outlined above.

__________________________
Print Student Name

__________________________
Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date:

APPROVED
NU IRB
11-11-12
VALID
11-11-13
THROUGH:
11-11-13
SCRIPT FOR ADMINISTERING
STUDENT SURVEY

- I appreciate your being here to help me conduct a study to help inform whether the freshman transition program implemented at TMHS has helped students during their freshman year.

- This survey will take less than 20 minutes during which you will give some general student information, indicate your level of agreement with a number of statements and answer four opened questions relating to your ninth grade experience.

- There are no wrong or right answers; I am just interested in your freshman year experience.

- I need you to be candid (honest) in your answers. Please do not put your name on the survey. Your answers will not be attributed (linked) to you.

- You do not have to participate in this study. You can refuse to answer any question and even if you have begun the study, you may withdraw at any time. If you decide that you are not interested in completing this, you may spend the time with another activity.

- Before we begin, do you have any questions for me?

- Thank you for completing this survey. Your answers will help us learn what we can do to help students with their transition from middle school to high school.
E-mail

Dear Faculty Member,

As part of my doctoral dissertation, I will be studying the effectiveness of TMHS's Freshman Transition Program. I am putting together a small group of faculty members to discuss the Program's effectiveness and areas of need. Please let me know if you would be willing to participate in this voluntary group. The following is a brief overview of my study and your help would be beneficial in enabling me to help me answer question number four.

Thank you,

Eileen Osborne

The results of this case study will inform whether the freshman transition program implemented at TMHS has helped students academically and socially during their first year of high school by measuring course failures, disciplinary offenses, attendance, and MCAS Biology test results. In addition, the contributions of the program to differences in academic achievement, attendance, and discipline will be explored through qualitative inquiry. By looking at the freshman transition program implemented at TMHS, this study will not only assist the administration in determining if any modifications to the current program are necessary, it will also serve as a roadmap for other school districts to identify best practices and effective transition activities.

The following are the research questions that will be explored and the related hypotheses:

1. Why was the freshman transition program at TMHS developed and how was it implemented? This question is broken down into the following open-ended sub-questions:
   a. What factors that led up to the decision to implement a freshman transition program implemented at TMHS?
   b. What were the constraints and opportunities in program development?
   c. What were the various transition activities that were considered?
   d. Why were the activities that are currently employed at TMHS selected?
   e. What, if any, difficulties or issues were encountered upon implementation of the program? How were these issues dealt with?

2. Does participation in freshman transition activities relate to student achievement as measured by the number of courses failed and the students' performance on the MCAS Biology? This question is broken down into two hypotheses (1) If students participate in the freshman transition program at Tewksbury Memorial High School (TMHS), they will fail fewer courses during their freshman year than students who did not participate in the freshman transition program. and (2) If students participate in the freshman transition program at TMHS, they will obtain higher scores on the MCAS Biology exam than students who did not participate in the freshman transition program.

3. Does participation in freshman transition activities relate to social acclimation as measured by attendance rates and the number of days suspended during TMHS students' freshman year? This question is also broken down into two hypotheses (1) If students participate in the freshman transition program at TMHS, they will experience fewer disciplinary referrals during their freshman year than students who did not participate in the freshman transition program as measured by the number of suspension. (2) If students participate in the freshman transition program at TMHS, they will miss
fewer days of school during their freshman year than students who did not participate in the freshman transition program.

4. How do faculty and administrators describe the freshman transition program and are there any modifications in the current program that they view as important? The sub-questions are as follows:
   a. What aspect of the transition program has had the most benefit for students? Why?
   b. What aspect of the transition program is most in need of modification? In what way?
   c. What activities should be removed from the program? Why?
   d. What additional activities would be beneficial to include in the program?

5. How do students who participated in the transition program describe their freshman year experience?
FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

Names of Investigators: Kelly J. Conn, PhD., Mary Eileen Taylor Osborne
Title of Project: Ninth Grade Transition: An Evaluation of Tewksbury Memorial High School’s Program

We would like to invite you to take part in a research project. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

We are asking you to be in this study because you are a member of the faculty of TMHS and you have expressed interested in helping the researcher gather information on the freshman transition program implemented at TMHS.

The reason for the research is to inform whether the freshman transition program implemented at TMHS has helped students academically and socially during their first year of high school by measuring course failures, disciplinary offenses attendance and Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Biology test results.

If you decide to take part in this study, you will take part in a facilitated discussion of open-ended questions designed to shed light on the quantitative data that was collected and analyzed and to discuss the beneficial as well as the unfavorable aspects of the transition program to help determine best practices related to ninth-grade transition program. You will meet with the researcher and other faculty members immediately after school in the B-ball Faculty Lounge on a date that is mutually agreeable to members of the group. It is estimated that the group will meet for approximately one hour.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study.

You will not directly benefit from your involvement in the research; however, there will be a benefit in providing the administration the data necessary to effect changes in the program and to identify best practices of ninth-grade transition thus providing a benefit to not only current and future TMHS students but to other high schools who implement ninth grade transition programs.

Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information you provide. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way. An electronic record of the discussion will be created. This record will be kept on a password-protected laptop computer. At the completion of the study, the electronic record will be destroyed.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as an employee of the Tewksbury Public Schools.
You will not be compensated for participation in this study.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to call Eileen Osborne at 978-640-7825 or e-mail her at taylor.cci@husky.neu.edu. She is the person mainly responsible for the research. You may also contact Dr. Kelly Conn at k.conn@neu.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regia, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115, Tel: 617,373,7570, email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

I agree to take part in this research.

_________________________________________ Date: __________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part

_________________________________________
Printed name of person above

_________________________________________ Date: __________________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the person above and obtained consent

_________________________________________
Printed name of person above

PLEASE SIGN BOTH COPIES. KEEP ONE AND RETURN THE OTHER TO THE INVESTIGATOR.
Appendix E – Results of Closed-ended Student Survey Data

Table E-1

*Frequency for Survey Question 1: How many courses did you fail in the ninth grade?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Courses Failed</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – 8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table E-2

*Frequency for Survey Question 2: I try my best in school*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree (1)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree (2)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure (3)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree (4)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree (5)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table E-3

_Average of Responses for Survey Question 2: I try my best in school_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Course Level</th>
<th>Average Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>CP-1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>CP-2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Honors</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table E-4

_Frequency for Survey Question 3: I plan to graduate from TMHS._

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree (1)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree (2)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure (3)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree (4)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree (5)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table E-5

*Average of Responses for Survey Question 3: I plan to graduate from TMHS.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Course Level</th>
<th>Average Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>CP-1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>CP-2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Honors</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table E-6

*Frequency for Survey Question 4: I was prepared to enter the high school as a ninth grader.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree (1)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree (2)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure (3)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree (4)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree (5)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table E-7

Average of Responses for Survey Question 4: I was prepared to enter the high school as a ninth grader.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Course Level</th>
<th>Average Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>CP-1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>CP-2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Honors</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table E-8

Frequency for Survey Question 5: I had a positive ninth-grade experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree (1)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree (2)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure (3)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table E-9

*Average of Responses for Survey Question 5: I had a positive ninth-grade experience.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Course Level</th>
<th>Average Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>CP-1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>CP-2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Honors</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table E-10

*Frequency for Survey Question 6: In the ninth grade my teachers helped and supported me.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree (1)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree (2)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure (3)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree (4)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree (5)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table E-11

*Average of Responses for Survey Question 6: In the ninth grade my teachers helped and supported me.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Course Level</th>
<th>Average Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>CP-1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>CP-2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Honors</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>2.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table E-12

*Frequency for Survey Question 7: In the ninth grade my guidance counselor helped and supported me.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree (1)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree (2)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure (3)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree (4)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree (5)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table E-13

Average of Responses for Survey Question 7: *In the ninth grade my guidance counselor helped and supported me.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Course Level</th>
<th>Average Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>CP-1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>CP-2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Honors</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table E-14

Frequency for Survey Question 9: *I am satisfied with my grades and my progress.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree (1)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree (2)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure (3)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree (4)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree (5)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table E-15

Average of Responses for Survey Question 9: I am satisfied with my grades and my progress.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Course Level</th>
<th>Average Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>CP-1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>CP-2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Honors</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table E-16

Frequency for Survey Question 8: In the ninth grade, I participated in extra-curricular activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree (1)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree (2)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure (3)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree (4)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree (5)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table E-17

*Average of Responses for Survey Question 8: In the ninth grade, I participated in extra-curricular activities.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Course Level</th>
<th>Average Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>CP-1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>CP-2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Honors</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F – Results of Open-ended Student Survey Data

Table F-1

*Coding of Open-ended Question 1. What did you enjoy or find helpful during your transition from middle school to high school?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Course Level</th>
<th>Academic</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Procedural</th>
<th>No Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>CP-1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>CP-2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Honors</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key Words Coding of Open-ended Question 1. What did you enjoy or find helpful during your transition from middle school to high school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Course Level</th>
<th>Key Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>CP-1</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Orientation/School Visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Schedule (84-Minute classes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Freshman Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased Freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Extra/Co-Curricular Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>CP-2</td>
<td>Schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Freshman Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Honors</td>
<td>Extra/Co-Curricular Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Open-ended Question 2. What did you not enjoy nor find helpful during your transition from middle school to high school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Course Level</th>
<th>Academic</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Procedural</th>
<th>No Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>CP-1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>CP-2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Honors</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key Words Coding of Open-ended Question 2. What did you not enjoy nor find helpful during your transition from middle school to high school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Course Level</th>
<th>Key Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>CP-1</td>
<td>Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Guidance (more meetings)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>CP-2</td>
<td>Standardized Tests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Honors</td>
<td>Schedule</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Open-ended Question 3. What could teachers, administrators, and/or guidance counselors have done to improve your transition from middle school to high school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Course Level</th>
<th>Academic</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Procedural</th>
<th>No Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>CP-1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>CP-2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Honors</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table F-6

*Key Words Coding of Open-ended Question 3. What could teachers, administrators, and/or guidance counselors have done to improve your transition from middle school to high school?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Course Level</th>
<th>Key Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>CP-1</td>
<td>Teachers (more interesting lessons)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>More Freshman-only Social Events (i.e., dance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>CP-2</td>
<td>Career Counseling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>More Individualized meetings with counselors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Honors</td>
<td>More individualized meetings with counselors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Better job explaining GPA/scheduling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table F-7

*Open-ended Question 4. Do you have any suggestions to improve the experiences of future students?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Course Level</th>
<th>Academic</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Procedural</th>
<th>No Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>CP-1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>CP-2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Honors</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table F-8

*Key Words Coding of Open- Question 4. Do you have any suggestions to improve the experiences of future students?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Course Level</th>
<th>Key Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>CP-1</td>
<td>New/Updated Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>More Meetings w/ Guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Improve Career Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>CP-2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Honors</td>
<td>More Meetings w/ Guidance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>