DESIGNING A GRADE NINE TRANSITION PROGRAM: AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY

A doctoral thesis presented

by

Paul D. Vieira

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Abstract

The goal of any high school is to make certain that students are college and career ready upon graduation. It is incumbent on schools to make certain that students start their high school careers off smoothly and with minimal issues. The transitional period between grades 8 and 9 is a key time in a student’s educational experience and many times can set the tone for the next four years of school. Students often struggle as they transition from grade 8 to 9 with academic, social, and emotional issues. These issues can negatively impact a student’s success in school, preventing students from succeeding to their fullest potential and increasing their risk of not graduating from high school. The purpose of this exploratory case study was to understand how Success Junior/ Senior High School (a pseudonym), can help students transition to grade 9 through the design and implementation of a grade 9 transition program. Guided by the theoretical framework of stage-environment fit theory, this study sought to answer the following central research question: What strategies, practices, and resources should Success Junior/ Senior High School take to support the academic, social, and emotional needs of students as they transition from grade 8 to grade 9? Findings support the adoption of a freshmen academy model with an embedded advisor/advisee program. Details of the model, implications for practice and future research are discussed.

Key words: freshmen academy, academic, social, emotional needs of students, success, transition
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Chapter I: Introduction

“The direction in which education starts a man will determine his future in life.”

- Plato

Statement of the Problem

As students transition from grade 8 (middle school) to grade 9 (high school) they are faced with academic, social, and emotional issues that, at minimum, can impact their ability to achieve their full potential, and at worse, can lead to high school dropout. For example, if students fall too far behind academically in grade 9, they may not have the time or ability to catch up (Blum, 2005). There are 1.2 million high school dropouts each year in the United States, which averages out to 7,000 students per day (Joseph, 2015). Although this number has decreased in recent years, it is still high (Doll, Eslami, & Walters, 2013). Christie and Zinth (2008) write that “[t]ransitional years in a student's education have the potential to throw them off-course as they attempt to successfully continue their education, especially if they — or their parents — are not well prepared for the expectations that await them (para 12).” Students that successfully transition from grade 8 to grade 9 stand a greater chance of being successful (Christie and Zinth, 2008).

Research shows that when a student’s academic, social, and emotional needs are addressed, especially during the grade 9 transition, they are more apt to be motivated to learn and to achieve success (Jones, 2006; Blum, 2005; Sulkowski, Demaray & Lazarus, 2012). Providing programming to support a successful transition from grade 8 to grade 9 can indeed help students be successful (Braun, Cochrane, Flannery, McIntosh, & Sugai, 2008; King, 2012; and Mizell, 2005). Smith (1997) found that students who had participated in a transition program were more successful in school than those who had not (Smith, 1997). Adbulmalik (2010) found that a
successful transition to the ninth grade and a successful freshman year can be a determining factor in whether or not a student graduates from high school (Adbulmalik, 2010). Transition programs designed to support students in grade 9 can help promote student success (Farzand & Holtcamp, 2014); however, there are many different models available to schools, and finding the most appropriate model differs from context to context (Viadero, 2008; Biermann, 2010; MacIver, 1990; Roybal, 2011).

Success Junior/Senior High School (pseudonym) is located in a suburban town 40 miles south of Boston, Massachusetts. The Town has approximately 12000 residents and the school has 1000 students grades 7-12 (DESE Website). For the first seven years, the school was a 9-12 building. During the last three years, the building became a 7-12 school. Over 10% of the grade 9 cohorts do not graduate with their classmates. Seventy-five percent of those students drop out before June of their senior year. The remaining 25% of the students remain in school for four years but do not graduate in June of their senior year due to insufficient credits. Throughout the years, one of the key struggles identified at the school has been the difficulty students have had making the transition from grade 8 to grade 9. The school has tried over the years to implement programing to help support students as they transition, but for several reasons these programs have not been effective and have not stood the test of time. Therefore, this study sought to use literature, theory and empirical data to inform the nature of a new transition model. In particular, this transition program will be designed to address the academic, social, and emotional issues students face during the transitional period and throughout the first year of high school.

**Justification of research problem**

Schools and communities want their students to be successful in school. Students that do not earn a diploma face significant challenges once they leave school. The implications of
dropping out of high school are tremendous. Compared to high school graduates, students who
drop out of high school are less likely to have a job, earn less, are less likely to have health
insurance, are more likely to depend on public assistance, and are more likely to be incarcerated
(Rouse, 2005; Buckley, Storino, & Saami 2003; Amos, 2009).

A high school dropout earns $10,386 less per year than a person with a high school
diploma and $36,424 less per year than a person with a bachelor’s degree (Breslow, 2012). The
unemployment rate for high school graduates in 2012 was 8.1% but 12% for a high school
dropout (Breslow, 2012). The net fiscal cost to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts generated
by each dropout over a lifetime is $456,354 while, in comparison, the average high school
graduate will contribute $319,042 more in taxes than he/she will receive in state and federal
subsidies (Reville, 2009). Earning a diploma allows students greater opportunities after
graduation. This includes, but is not limited to, employment, college or trade school. Not only do
students with a high school diploma typically earn more over the course of their lifetimes than a
drop out, they are also less likely to use the welfare system (Koonar, 2008; Rouse, 2005; &
Buckley, Storino, & Saami, 2003).

**Deficiencies in the evidence**

Presently, Success Junior/Senior High School does not have a formal grade 9 transition
program; this is a gap in practice at Success Junior/Senior High School. There are also gaps in
the literature. These gaps center around the limited programs that are designed to specifically
address the academic, social and emotional needs of students by considering how to design an
environment that meets the developmental needs for this age.
Relating the discussion to audiences

This study will be helpful to practitioners at Success Junior/Senior High School in understanding how to create programming that can help a greater percentage of students achieve academic success. It may also be of interest to schools in different districts as they also consider creating grade 9 transition programs for their schools. This study also will be of interest to educators seeking to apply stage-environment fit theory in the design of grade 9 transition programs.

Significance of Research Problem

Every President, Governor, Mayor, Public Official and Principal has made it a priority to make certain that students are academically successful in school, with the ultimate goal being to make certain that every student is college and career ready upon graduation. One needs to look no further than State of the Union Addresses, State of the State Addresses, and the daily local media to see how education and student success is a daily topic. Unfortunately, this is not the case with 100% of students. Students struggle during the grade 8 to 9 years with various academic, social, and emotional issues. These issues can lead to a student not starting high school off successfully. A successful transition is paramount to set the foundation for a successful high school career.

Hertzog (2006) believes there are three significant differences between middle school and high school which can cause a student to struggle and be unsuccessful: credit accrual, educational philosophies between the two levels, and school structure. Many high schools are leveled with honors and Advanced Placement classes, whereas middle schools are homogenously grouped. High schools are set up by departments, whereas middle schools are teamed. Classrooms are larger, nosier, overcrowded, and have less of a structure than in middle school.
Students are given more independence and freedom in high school. Students are also exposed to dating, alcohol, drugs, parties, and more mature social situations than in middle school. Social issues such as parties, attending sporting events with upper classmen, and driving in cars are also more prevalent than in middle school (Legg, 2016).

As it has been noted, there are 1.2 million drop outs per year in the United States, which averages out to 7,000 students per day (Joseph, 2015). Although this number has decreased in recent years, it is still high (Doll, Eslami, & Walters, 2013). One way to address this issue and to make certain that all students are successful, is through successfully transitioning students from grade 8 to 9. A successful program will address these issues and give students the tools and foundation they need to be successful in school.

**Research Questions**

The goal of this research was to answer the following research question. What strategies, practices, and resources should Success Junior/Senior High School take to support the academic, social, and emotional needs of Grade 9 students?

**Positionality Statement**

It is necessary as a researcher to take a close look at your own positionality regarding the problem of practice one is researching. By doing so, the researcher is able to reflect and be aware of potential issues and concerns as they look at and analyze data. Having this at the forefront and knowing these issues ahead of time, is critical to obtain quality information (Briscoe, 2005; Carlton Peters, 2008).

As an educator for over 20 years, and especially as an administrator for the last seventeen years, I have been intimately involved with students transitioning from grade 8 to grade 9 and also working with students on the other end of the spectrum by getting students ready to
graduate. This transitional period begins in the spring meeting, with the 8th grade team to talking about students. At these meetings, we learn about the at-risk students and the culture of the class. These meetings are followed up with parent nights, step up days, and welcome back to school events. Time is dedicated to this every year, and it is part of the ebb and flow of the school. Once the school year starts, especially around report card time, I receive calls from parents expressing the concerns they have about their child’s transition to high school. Parents express concerns about grades, amount of homework, a change in culture, and anxiety, to name just a few. The calls are all the same and repeat year after year. I was beginning to see a pattern.

Every year, as an administrative team, we reflect on this transition process. We make notes on what we could do better or differently and prepare for the upcoming year. Some years are more successful than others; however, we are always left with the feeling that we could and need to be doing more for this population of students. Over the years, we have tried different things; however, a formalized transition program was never fully developed.

Another part of my job was working with at-risk juniors and seniors. These are students that either did not successfully transition to high school or are at risk of not graduating as a result of credits and/or attendance. Over the year, time is spent meeting with and working with guidance, students, parents, and teachers to put an individual plan in place for these students. We meet with these students four times a year and adjust the plan to make certain they have every opportunity to graduate. Some students are able to meet the plan and graduate, but there is a percentage that does not do so.

With this information at hand, I began to see a connection between a successful transition from middle school to high school and these at-risk students. Although the information and data was only anecdotal, the majority of the students that we saw at risk during their junior and senior
years were students that were identified as part of that 8th grade transition meeting. Additionally, I began to see that if supports were in place, students that struggled during their freshman year could have been reduced if programs were in place to help these students.

As a result of all of this information, the foundation for this study was established. One thing that had to be done as part of this study was to make certain that each of the experiences that I had and my knowledge on this subject matter did not influence my research. I had to put my biases aside in order to obtain and report out accurate data. The data that is presented as part of this study is free of bias and is the voice of the participants of this study.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theory used for this research was stage-environment fit theory. Stage-environment fit theory helps make sense of those key times in a student’s life that can cause them significant trouble due to a mismatch between what an adolescent may need and what their environment, in this case, school, can provide. Fisher and Learner (2005) define the stage-environment fit theory as:

In the broadest interpretation, stage-environment fit theory (SEF theory) posits that developmentally appropriate or developmentally regressive shifts in the nature of social and learning opportunities in the home and school environments that young people experience as they develop during adolescence may help in explaining individual differences in the quality and course of their academic motivation, educational achievement, and social emotional well-being during these years. To the extent that adolescents’ home or school environments do not change and develop in ways that “fit” with their changing (developmental) capabilities and needs, SEF theory predicts that a “person-environment mismatch” develops over time. This mismatch “shows up” as a
pattern of declining motivation, learning, and well-being over time in affected
individuals. (p. 28)

Eccles and Midgley used stage-environment fit theory to look at the impact that transitions have on students. Over time, a student’s social, emotional, and cognitive needs change, and if the environment that they are in does not change or adapt, then students can begin to experience negative outcomes, such as lack of motivation and engagement (Eccles & Midgley, 1989). Eccles et.al. (1993), looked at why the adolescent years put so many youngsters at risk for failure. They suggest “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. 94).

Eccles work was informed by the work of Erik Erickson, who studied the different developmental stages and noted how, through these stages, people experience different emotions and feelings. Stage 5 of Erikson’s psychosocial stages is called ego identity vs. role confusion. This impacts people from the ages of 12-18 as they transition from childhood to adulthood. This stage is when young adults examine their identities and try to determine who they are and who they will be. This stage is highlighted by uncertainty and change. During this stage, people form their personalities and opinions and can experience feelings of rebellion, uncertainty, and unhappiness (McLeod, 2013).

Eccles et. al. (1993) highlight some of the factors that can contribute to why a student may spiral during this transitional time and the role that schools play during this transition. There are several contributing factors, including what the authors refer to as the general environment influences, which can include size and relationships (in this context size refers to size of a school, a classroom, student/teacher ratio, or an environment.) Relationships include those that
the student experiences with their advisors, teachers, coaches, guidance counselors, and others. Having quality student-teacher relationships, for example, can promote a sense of connectedness, and motivation (Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer, & Wisenbaker, 1979; Fraser & Fisher, 1982; Moos, 1979). Eccles and Midgley (1989) go on to write that the way middle and high schools are set up often do not meet developmental needs of students, resulting in a lack of motivation and decreased engagement (Eccles & Midgely, 1989). However, when the school environment is more closely aligned to needs of students, students experience a higher degree of success (Midgely, Feldaufer, & Eccles, 1989).

Eccles (2004) contributed a chapter in The Handbook of Adolescent Psychology in which she explains and defines the stage-environment fit theory and what occurs for adolescents during this transition period. She points out the difference in the make-up of classrooms for students as one of handful of key changes that they must learn to adapt to as they transition from level to level. She states that a teacher’s beliefs about teaching and learning change as students progress through their schooling. The classroom climate is different, as are the relationship teachers have with students and the way they interact with students. The way teachers manage their classroom, motivate students, and the nature of academic work changes dramatically, in the various ways students have greater expectations placed on them, the work load increases, and the level of work intensifies in Honors classes, to name just a few. This is a change for students as they move from grade 8 to grade 9. Schools must find a way to address these changes in order to help students (Eccles, 2004). Putting a transition program in place is one way to assist students in making this change from middle school to high school and also help them to stay motivated and feel connected to the school (Blum & Libby, 2004).
Eccles continues to what she calls level 2. This is the school building. Generally, the social climate between a middle and high school is significantly different. Many students face academic tracks and curricular differentiation for the first time. Students have the ability to be a part of extracurricular activities, namely clubs and sports. These changes can be difficult for many students who are used to the structure of a middle school. Although these experiences can be positive, some students struggle with the changes for many reasons. Putting supports in place for them is critical. As Eccles states, “there is very strong evidence that each of these school wide characteristics impact adolescent development” (Eccles, 1989, p. 174).

Students struggle sometimes with the size of a high school in comparison to a middle school. Due to the set-up of a high school, students and teachers are less likely to get to know to each other. This can lead to a sense of distrust and detachment. Eccles also points out the importance of forming relationships with teachers. This can be difficult at the high school level and can lead to failure or detachment. She states, “such environments are likely to undermine further motivation and involvement of many students, especially those not doing particularly well academically, those not enrolled in the favored classes, and those who are alienated from the values of the adults in the high school” (Eccles, 1989, p. 172). Eccles went on to cite the work of Midgley (2002). She writes: “As one would expect with the stage-environment fit theory, they found that the motivational declines were associated with the high school rather than the middle school transition” (p. 144).

As Fisher and Learner (2005) pointed out, successfully navigating the transition period is critical in making certain that a student is successful, and that without addressing issues associated with transition, a student can indeed exhibit a lack of motivation (Fisher & Learner, 2005). This notion was further supported by Eccles, Wigfield, Reuman, & MacIver (1987) who
suggest that these transitions have the potential of inducing change in students (Eccles et al. 1987).

In 1991 Eccles and Midgley, in conjunction with Lord, published an article concerning what happens to students as they approach and go through transitions in school. They found that for some children the beginning of the adolescent years start a downward spiral for many students, which can lead to poor behavior, lack of motivation, academic failure, and ultimately dropping out of school. They shared, “Although these declines are not so extreme for most adolescents, there is sufficient evidence of gradual decline in various indicators of academic motivation, self-perceptions, and school-related behaviors over the early adolescent years to make one ask why” (Eccles, Midgley & Lord, 1991, p. 524). They suggest “that it is the fit between the developmental needs of the adolescent and the educational environment that is important.” When both of these are synchronized, students will experience positive growth and be successful. They also believe and found that negative motivation can lead to causing these two trajectories become unsynchronized and lead to failure (Eccles et. al., 1993). They concluded that “optimal development takes place when there is good stage-environment fit between the needs of developing individuals and the opportunities afforded them by their social environments” (Eccles et. al., 1993, p. 95).

Jacquelynne Eccles and Carol Midgley argued that “individuals have changing emotional, cognitive, and social needs, and personal goals as they mature” (Eccles & Midgely, 1993, p. 98). They go on to point out that schools need to change if they are going to maintain a student’s interest and motivation. If this does not occur, students will begin to first “disengage psychologically and then physically from school as the mature” (Eccles 2004). As a student grows and develops so do their needs. Emotionally, they are changing and growing. Cognitively,
they are making the leap from middle to high school. Socially, there is such a difference between grade 8 to 9. This leap includes social changes and expectations. Increase in demands of homework and school work are beginning to build and there is the additional focus on creating a college application portfolio. These changes can place stress on a student and can make the transition difficult.

The developmental change that adolescents encounter at this age is vast. They include, but are not limited to puberty, transitions in schools, developing cognitively, new relationships with peers and families, and adapting to new environments. For some students, these changes can be negative and lead to a downward spiral; for others, they can be a positive and welcome change (Eccles & Eckman, 2007). Eccles and Eckman wrote as part of this study, “some of these negative changes may result from a mismatch between the needs of developing adolescents and the opportunities afforded to them in their various social environments” (Eccles & Eckman, 2007). These environments include but are not limited to: being in a new school; going from being the oldest student in a school to the youngest; the social issues associated with being in high school; and now having school “count” towards graduation. Students who experience a misalignment with their needs and their environment can begin to show signs of regressions; conversely, those that have positive experiences will see greater success.

Eccles and Gutman 2007 further researched the stage-environment fit theory in a study they conducted together. They write:

The developmental stage from early to late adolescence is unique in its multitude of concurrent changes that exist across various contexts. Changes occur as a result of puberty and cognitive development, school transitions, and changing roles with peers and
families. These changes are often accompanied by shifts in adolescents’ trajectories. (p. 522)

Some adolescents react positively to these changes; while others do not (Bongers, Koot, Van der Ende, & Verhulst, 2004; Eccles & Midgely, 1989; Eccles et al., 1993; Hankin et al., 1998).

Several researchers point to Eccles’ theory and question why such changes occur with adolescents and also during key transitional times. Some of these negative changes may result from a mismatch between the needs of developing adolescents and the opportunities afforded to them in their various social environments. According to stage-environment fit theory (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles et al., 1993), the unique transitional nature of adolescence results, in part, from the relation between changes in the developmental needs of adolescents and changes in the social contexts in which they live. Many of the developmental changes during adolescence precipitate strained relations within the family that are likely to undermine adolescents’ mental health and behavioral outcomes (Eccles et al., 1993; Eccles, Lord, & Roeser, 1996). According to a stage-environment fit perspective, adolescents whose environments change in developmentally regressive ways are more likely to experience difficulties. In contrast, adolescents whose social environments respond to their changing needs are more likely to experience positive outcomes. Hickman, et al (2008) write,

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. (p. 4)

Summary
The Stage-Environment Fit Theory looks at the mismatch between the needs of a student and their environment. This transitional period is critical and many times the social and emotional needs of students are not factored in as kids make this transition from middle school to high school. As a result, many students do not transition smoothly, and the lack of a proper transition puts many students at risk for not experiencing academic success. Schools must find a way to foster connectedness early on to help a student transition effectively and experience success.
Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

One of the main goals of any high school is to make sure that students are college and career ready upon graduation. However, the transition from grade 8 to grade 9 many times is the first roadblock a student encounters upon entering high school. Many students face academic, social, and emotional issues they are often not equipped to deal with. For example, Thames (2012) points to five reasons why students may not succeed in high school: poor time management skills and procrastination, the inability to complete tasks, fear of failure and lack of self-confidence, reliance on others to do work, and lack of desire.

One way schools can work on improving student success is to look at the transitional period from middle school to high school (Kerr, 2002; MacIver, 1990). The following review of the literature is divided into three parts: high school dropout; the academic, social, and emotional issues facing high school students; and types of transition programs. These sections will help to highlight the importance of making certain that students transition effectively from grade 8 to grade 9 through the design and implementation of a transition program that creates an age appropriate environment to meet their unique needs.

High School Dropout

The U.S. Department of Education (USDE) (2006) defined the term high school dropout as "16- to 24-year-olds who are not enrolled in school and who have not completed a high school program regardless of when they left school" (Laird, J., Lew, S., DeBell, M., and Chapman, C. 2006, p. 6). The National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011 (NCES) reported that 10.3% of students across the nation between the ages of 16 and 24 are considered high school dropouts. Greene, (2002) and Swanson & Chaplin, (2003) point out that this number may indeed be higher
than reported by the NCES. Young (2008) states “every 9 seconds in this country a teen is making the decision to drop out of school” (Young, 2008, p. 35). The Alliance for Excellent Education (2009) states that “Every school day, more than seven thousand students become dropouts. Annually, that adds up to about 1.3 million students who will not graduate from high school with their peers as scheduled (p. 1).” The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) (2005) states, “about one third of students entering high school do not graduate and face limited job prospects” (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2005, p.1).

High school dropout is a serious public policy problem for the American education system and society as a whole (Fitzpatrick & Yoels, 1992, p. 357). Greene (2002b) writes:

Students who fail to graduate from high school face a very bleak future. Because the basic skills conveyed in high school and higher education are essential for success in today’s economy, students who do not receive these skills are likely to suffer with significantly reduced earnings and employment prospects. (p. 5)

There are several costs associated with dropping out of school that include illiteracy, lack of employability, poor health, increased crime rates, and a higher dependence on social welfare systems (Gordon, 2004).

Students who do not earn a high school diploma experience higher unemployment rates. The unemployment rate for high school graduates in 2012 was 8.1% where as it was at 12% for a high school dropout (Breslow, 2012). Students who do not earn a high school diploma earn less money. A high school dropout earns $10,386 less per year than a person with a high school diploma and $36,424 less per year than a person with a bachelor’s degree (Breslow, 2012). As Young (2008) puts it: “The immense cost of a student dropping out extends far beyond the school walls and cannot be ignored” (Young, 2008, p. 36). The Alliance for Excellent Education
(2009) researched the difference in earning potential between graduates and non-graduates, concluding that if students who dropped out of the Class of 2009 had graduated, the nation’s economy would have benefited from nearly $335 billions of additional income over the course of their lifetimes (www.all4ed.org, 2009). Students who do not earn a high school diploma are at greater risk of incarceration and make up a higher percentage of the nation’s prison and death row inmates (Laird, DeBell, Kienzl, and Chapman, 2007). Transition programs can help reduce high school dropout rates. In schools in which transition programs are fully operational, researchers saw a dropout rate of 8%, while schools without transition programs averaged 24% (Reents, 2002).

**Academic, Social, and Emotional Issues Facing High School Students**

In order to be able to address the dropout issue, it is important to understand why students drop out of high school (Rumberger, 1983; Suh, 2001; Valdivieso, 1986; Vallerand, Fortier, & Guay, 1997; Velez, 1989). There are several factors that can lead to a student dropping out of school, including individual, family, and school issues (Chavez, Belkin, Hornback, & Adams, 1991; National Collaboration for Youth, 1989; Wells, 1990). Key indicators of high school dropout are poor attendance, behavioral problems, and course failure. (Bridgeland et. al., 2009, p.22). Janosz, Blanc, Boulerice, & Tremblay (2000) have categorized students who are at risk for high school dropout as those who “exhibit academic, behavioral, or attitudinal problems.” In their work, they focused on the importance of all stakeholders being able to understand why a student makes the decision to drop out of school. This is one reason why this study has sought out the perspectives of different stakeholders at Success Junior/Senior High School in informing the design of a grade 9 transition program.
**Academic Issues.** One of the biggest predictors of a dropout is poor academic performance, Slavin (1996); Peng, Takai, & Fetters, 1993; Peng, et.al., 1993; Dechamps, 1992); Up to 90% of all high school drop outs have been retained at least one year Rumberger (1993). Rumberger (1993) states that it is “not surprising that students who are not doing well in school should seek to leave an environment providing negative feedback. (p. 6)” In a study of several school districts in Florida, Griffen shared that many students suffer from the “frustration self-esteem model,” which is a phenomenon that students experience when they have not had academic success over a period of time. Students who face frustration academically over time face a greater chance of not being successful and many times make the decision to drop out of school (Griffin, 2002, p.73).

This poor academic performance leads to a student not accumulating enough credits, which in turn affects the student's ability to graduate. A study done by The Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago in 2005 found that total credits accumulated by freshmen at the end of their first year of school can serve as an indicator of whether or not a particular student will graduate from high school. The more credits a student earns, the greater the chance they have of graduating. Houchens (2004) found a relationship between students passing Algebra I and other level II Math courses, English I, and graduation. This study found that students who passed these classes in their freshman year stood a greater chance of graduating high school, while those who failed one or both of these classes had a significantly higher chance of not graduating. This research is further supported by a study by The Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago, which examined credit accumulations and course failures to determine whether students are "on-track" to finish high school. They found that students are on track to graduate if they earn enough credits to
advance to tenth grade while receiving no more than one F in core academic subjects (Stout, et. al, 2009). It has been estimated that as much as 22% of all freshman repeat grade 9 (McCallumore and Sparapani, 2010). Roderick and Camburn (1999) found that schools that offered credit recovery programs gave students hope that even if they failed a course they could still be on track to graduate.

Michael Gard (2014) researched transition programs as a way to improve academic performance (Gard, 2014). He found that some students who participated in the transition program did see an increase in academic performance. This finding was supported by Beth Brodie’s (2014) research, which showed a link between transition programs that fostered student connectedness and academic success (Brodie, 2014). Scales posits that academic success stems from positive relationships between students and the adults in the schools (Scales et al., 2000).

**Social Issues.** One way transition programs have been thought to improve academic success is through promoting connectedness to school (Blum, 2005; National Middle School Association, 2003; Stevenson, 1998; Wentzel, 1998). The Wingspread Report (2004) “linked school connectedness to higher grades, higher test scores, and lower dropout rates. (p. 233)” School connectedness is a “robust predictor” of academic achievement and behavior, regardless of socioeconomic status (Blum & Libbey, 2004b; Klem & Connell, 2004; McNeely & Falci, 2004). Blum and Libby (2004) define school connectedness as a belief by students that adults in school care about their education and them as individuals (Blum & Libby, 2004). In another article, Robert Blum (2005) asserts his belief that a connected school environment increases the likelihood that a student will be successful. He writes:

Students who experience school connectedness like school, feel that they belong, believe teachers care about them and their learning, believe that education matters, have friends
at school, believe that discipline is fair, and have opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities. (p. 12)

Blum & Libbey, 2004 and Blum, McNeely, & Rinehart, 2002 found that students that feel connected to their school exhibit the following traits, a healthier life style, educational motivation, higher classroom engagement, and better attendance.

Peer issues can also lead a student to struggle in school and begin to decline. Lack of meaningful relationships with other students and/or being bullied and picked on in school can cause a student to become disconnected (Stewart, 2008; Nicholas & White 2001). Students need to know how to navigate these issues and situations to be successful. Eleby (2009) found that students who fail to grasp basic social skills face greater disciplinary issues and become disengaged in school. Lane, Pierson, & Giver (2003), found that having a solid social foundation can lead to stronger academic success. Schiller (1999) citing the work of Felner et al. (1981), Roderick & Camburn (1996), Roderick (1993), Swanson & Schneider (1999), Felner et al. (1982), Roderick (1995) and Smith (1997) write that once a student begins to encounter social difficulties they need to be remediated quickly so that they can begin to experience success.

As students transition into high school, many adolescents face a larger, more impersonal and more competitive environment than they did in middle school (Eccles, Midgely, & Adler, 1984). Many times, this is a result of a greater diversity of teachers and peers. There are expanded social experiences for students as they move to high school (Kinney, 2010). Akos and Galassis (2004) shared that as students transition to high school they have the ability to make new friends, have more freedom, and can now attend more events during a school year. Schiller (1999) shared that freshman must learn to “negotiate new physical settings while they integrate
themselves into new social systems and take greater responsibility for their social and academic lives (p. 223).”

In addition to having healthy social relationships with teachers and peers Falbo, Lein, & Amador (2001) found that students are more apt to have a successful transition to high school when their parents are closely involved. Feuerstein (2000) spoke to the importance of parental contact with the school and teachers to help students. Mizelle (1999) found that when 8th grade and 9th grade teachers collaborated students were more successful.

**Emotional Issues.** As students move from middle school to high school many experience a great amount of stress, anxiety, and sense of failure (Somers & Piliawsky, 2004). Students at this time are also dealing with emotional issues. These come from making new friends, struggling with changing in physical changes, puberty, and identifying with new and different social settings. These issues, if not addressed, can lead to a downward spiral for students. Schools need to understand these issues and address them to help students succeed (Doll, J. J., Eslami, Z., & Walters, L. (2013). Dedmond discusses several key emotional issues that students face as they begin their high school career including feeling excited, confused, proud, brave, helpless, worried, afraid, sad, curious, lonely, and overwhelmed. She states that, in order to address this, schools need to help students with the transition. A grade 9 program leads to student buy-in to the educational process, offers relevant themes for academic success, helps students become identified, builds self-esteem, and works on a four-year career plan (Dedmond, 2012).

**Transition Programs**

A transition program from grade 8 to 9 helps to set a foundation for success for students (Farzand & Holtcamp, 2014). There are several types of programs that schools can look into implement as part of a transitional program. Schools must decide which programs and activities
best fit their needs as they move forward in designing a program. Schools, with research and data, must design a program to meet the needs of students, with the understanding that these needs can change from year to year.

**Schools design transition programs for different reasons.** Most school districts in the United States offer some form of grade 9 transition program. Debra Viadero researched over 1,200 school districts across all 50 states and found that 88% of the districts offer some form of a dropout prevention program. There are many reasons why schools design programs to support grade 9 students as they entered the 9th grade. In Biermann’s survey of transition programs, he found that 45% wanted to decrease disciplinary issues; 40% wanted to increase attendance; and 35% wanted to increase a students' GPA; 20% of the school wanted to impact graduation rates; 45% of schools wanted students to build relationships with faculty members; and 25% of the schools had other reasons or goals for the program (Biermann, 2010). The goals of a transition program vary from school to school. Each school must focus on what works for their community and build a program around those goals.

**Evidence that transition programs support freshman success.** Mizelle and Irvin, through their research, found that fewer students were retained in grade nine when a transition program was in place. In a study done by Hertzog and Morgan in 1999, of 56 Georgia and Florida High Schools, they found that schools with extensive transition programs have significantly lower failure and dropout rates than those that do not offer a program. A survey of a national sample of schools that had middle school transition programs to high school experienced greater academic success and graduation rates (Smith, 1997). Biermann, 2010 reviewed 20 different transition programs and studied their impact on grade 9 students and student success. Biermann’s research asked 20 school districts the following questions: If they
had a program and how long it had been in existence; what curriculum each school used; goals of the program; what the program cost; and finally, an open ended question that let responders describe the impact the program had on the school. Biermann’s survey found that the districts interviewed strongly believed that a freshmen transition program was helping them in the transition of incoming freshmen. Pre- and post-program data of districts that had elected to keep it showed significant improvements in their desired outcomes. Administrators and school staff gave a resounding approval of the programs they had in place and most were interested in exploring options to expand their programs (Biermann, 2010).

**Successful transition programs are multifaceted and sustained.** There are various components to successful programs. Many of these depend on what a school district can do based on its population and financial resources. Biermann (2010) cited the work of several researchers when he discussed what went into a successful grade 9 transition program. He looked at the work of MacIver (1990), who listed four key components that a successful program should have. Schools need to address the curriculum issues and questions that students have as they transition. Questions about levels, demands, amount of homework, and expectations all need to be discussed. Students also need to understand the facility. Knowing where the library and cafeteria are can help to alleviate fears. Students also need to be clear about the safety and disciplinary issues that come with being in a high school. With more freedom also comes more responsibility; students need to know this ahead of time. And finally, schools need to share accurate information with parents and shareholders.

Biermann also looked at the various components of different transition programs. The following chart represents common themes amongst the twenty districts, and also indicates how many different types of programs are in each district:
Components of Freshman Transition Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have a program</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition day in August</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half-day transition</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-day transition</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchased curriculum</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring enrollment</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social functions</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School visits in spring</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informational nights</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminar discussions</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor/mentors</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer school</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman only seminars</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisory based seminars</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school aspects</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition counselor</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman center</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restructured building</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career class</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandatory parent meeting</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Biermann, 2010)

Schools must use multiple strategies when creating a program. Roybal (2011) suggests that a multifaceted program is needed in order for students to be successful, but also schools need to be patient when building these programs. Success does not happen in one year, but over time. Smith (1997) along with Herztog and Morgan (1997) found that students that are involved in multidimensional transition programs that have both school and community components are less apt to drop out (McIver, 1990, p. 460) shared: “Research indicates that students who participate in transition programs which 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, 1998). Schools that have the most effective transition programs
were those that included a variety of activities (MacIver, 1990; Hertzog, 2006; and Morgan, 1997).

Successful grade 9 transition programs are sustained efforts which include multiple grades and stakeholders. Mizelle (2005) found that students can be successful if there is a transition program that involves the middle school, the high school, administrators, teachers, parents, and students. These programs must be more than just short-term; they must span grade levels. Osborne (2012), citing the work of Black (2004), shared: 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” (Osborne, 2012). Biermann shares that “one shot” programs are not successful and that attacking the many issues that students face involves more than just students, it also involves parents, teachers, and community members as the foundation of a successful program (Biermann, 2010). Programs need to be consistent with the model in order for them to be successful. “Inconsistencies in the delivery of the advisory program are creating inconsistencies in the way the problem of freshmen transitioning to high school is being addressed” (Welsh, 2012).

**How transition programs support freshman success.** There are several ways that grade 9 transition programs help to support freshmen students. Dedmond points out that a transition program can help create buy in, build self-esteem, and provide counseling for students. A successful freshman year, in which a student passes their classes, attends school, feels connected, and gets involved, helps set the tone for high school and ultimately working towards a diploma (Dedmond, 2012). Establishing a program for these students that is centered around personal and social issues, academic concerns, and college and career readiness can help a student feel connected in school and motivated to be successful. Roybal found that positive indicators of
credit accrual after the implementation of a grade 9 transition program might possibly be linked to a positive shift in the culture and climate of the school occurred through the implementation process. Although the results did not overwhelmingly point to the transition program as the only reason students moved forward, it did have a positive impact and result on students making progress and staying in school (Roybal, 2011).

**Different transition program designs.** There are several formats when looking at a successful transition program. Hammond, in her comprehensive report in 2007, spoke to the fact that educators are faced with deciding which type of program they should implement for their schools. Schools can either select from evidence-based programs that already exist, or elect to develop one of their own. Putting a program in place to address not only at-risk students, but all students, is critical; schools must know what their needs are and then build a program that supports the needs of their students to keep them in school by having them feel motivated and connected (Hammond, 2007).

**Innovative and unique.** Grewe and McCay (2011) found that most schools that were successful took parts from various other programs and built their own innovative and unique program. In their district in West Virginia they found that a program needed to be multi-faceted and not just have a one-pronged approach. It must be well planned and thought out and very systematic in its delivery. It must involve all shareholders in the school and the community, and, finally, it must address the following three areas: academic, social emotional, and behavior of a student (Grewe and McCay, 2011).

**Summer programs.** Zeedyk et.al. (2003) spoke to the importance of having eighth graders visit the high school building frequently to ease in the transition. One way to help transition students to high school is through the design and implementation of a summer
program. For example, Smith reported that a summer program designed and implement in one Title 1 school which focused on academics, building relationships with teacher, and addressing transitional issues led to positive impacts on freshman grades, attendance, and behavior (Smith, 2012).

**Freshman Academy.** Grewe and McCay (2011) did research on different models for transitional programs as students move from grade 8 to grade 9. They suggested that teaming grade 9 students (much as students are teamed in the 8th grade) may be beneficial to them. As they pointed out, students have high anxiety over high school procedures, often because there is an increased emphasis on credits and grades, and increased social pressures. Having a team model in grade 9 may help students ease into high school a little more smoothly (Grewe and McCay, 2011).

**Increased Math and ELA classes.** Greene and McCay (2011) point out that at least 15% of students fail at least two courses, with one of these classes being math and/or ELA. They discuss having students involved in a transitional program that offers students the ability to have support classes in ELA and Math. These are the areas they found that students struggle in, and they suggest that a transitional program should offer some form of additional support in these areas (Grewe and McCay, 2011).

**Advisory models.** Transition programs that use advisory models have been shown to be successful. McClure, L., Yonezawa, S., & Jones, M. conducted a three-year study in an urban setting that showed that advisories positively impact student performance. MacLaury, S., & Gratz, Z. (2002) found that students in advisories are more apt to share their feelings and discuss an issue with an adult. Welsh (2012) writes: “The focus of advisory sessions varies from one school to another but generally revolves around team building, interpersonal relationships,
academic advising, and career planning. (p. 8)” Educational Northwest, a publication out of Portland, Oregon, compiled a list of articles that speak to the importance of advisories. They write, “[a]dvisory programs (or advisories) are frequently implemented by schools as a way to strengthen connectedness between adults and students and foster a personalized and supportive school culture. (p.1)” Johnson (2009) conducted a survey of five schools that implemented advisory programs. He writes that advisories became a logical way for teachers to get to know students better. He asked all the schools what their purpose for advisories was. He wrote:

At all of these schools, advisories are focused on the students. These schools have made a concerted effort to connect the teachers/adults with their students in more than a superficial way. There is a clear commitment in these schools to create a culture that gives students a voice and encourages teachers to listen and counsel. (p. 3)

**Conclusion**

The dropout crisis is a topic that has been studied and researched for years. As Tobergte and Curtis write, "after four presidents, millions of dollars spent, many laws and standards passed, we still have what we had in 1983—a crisis" (Tobergte and Curtis, 2002 p. 771). The review of the literature further supports this. Students are making the decision to drop out of school at an alarmingly high rate and for a variety of reasons. Continued lack of academic success proves to be one of the major reasons why students are making the decision to leave school. Tobergate and Curtis write, “The way education is presented has not changed in more than 50 years., p. 772)” We know that the system is broken and this is causing many of our students to not succeed. However, history continues to repeat itself. It is critical that schools find a way to address this issue. As the research has also shown, freshman year and the transition to high school many times is the first-place high schools can work with students to make certain
students experience success. This smooth transition can help put students on a path to success, allow them to achieve at a higher level, and ultimately end up with a student graduating from high school.
Chapter III- Research Design

It has been noted that many students struggle during the transitional period from grade 8 to grade 9. This can be as a result of a change in expectations, increased demands, a change in physical environment, lack of maturity, or a host of other issues. When students fail to successfully transition, they can begin to experience a host of negative issues which prevent them from succeeding in school. This lack of success can cause a student to spiral downward and not succeed to the fullest of their potential. The purpose of this exploratory case study was to collect empirical data to help inform the strategies, practices, and resources needed for Success Junior/Senior High School to support the academic, social, and emotional needs of grade 9 students as they transition from middle school.

If schools can successfully transition students from grade 8 to grade 9, it will help students have a strong foundation that they can build on in the years to come. As it has also been shown, when students transition effectively, they are more apt to succeed at a much higher level.

Research Paradigm

The paradigm for this research was interpretivist. This kind of paradigm concerns itself with the uniqueness of a particular situation or case (Kelliher, 2005). As Gerring explains “interpretivist derive meaning by looking at the context of an action or event, its connection to a surrounding set of actions, events, and interpretations” (Gerring, 2003, p.3). In using an interpretivist approach, findings are made as a result of an investigation, or for the sake of this research, interviews with shareholders. As a result of these interviews findings are made as a result of dialogue and discussion. As Angen (2000) points out when using this approach, the researcher must take into consideration each question that is asked and to make certain that it is
open ended and leads to dialogue. Information that is shared is based on social settings and relationships with other people. This allows for a unique perspective into the issue.

**Research Design**

Interpretivist paradigms promote the values and methods associated with qualitative research (Kelliher, 2005). Qualitative research uses an inductive approach to help make sense and understand sophisticated processes (Bransford et al., 2000). Additionally, this type of a study is used when looking to gather a holistic understanding of a topic or issue (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998, 2002). Qualitative research is also concerned with how the social elements of a context influence how people construct reality (Merriam, 2002). Qualitative research uses thick descriptions through words and pictures to portray a context.

**Research Tradition**

This study used an exploratory case study design (Yin, 2013). Case studies help to gain an in depth understanding of real life issues, situations, or phenomena (Yin, 2011). The units of analysis in cases studies can be an individual, group, or an organization (Yin, 2011). Case studies focus on the what, how, and the why of contemporary events and can be used to develop pertinent hypotheses and propositions for further inquiry” (Yin, 2011 p. 9). Case studies seek to highlight why certain decisions were made, how and why they were implemented, and the results (Yin, 2011). In the case of this study, the researcher gathered valuable information as to what the school has not been doing to assist students as they transitioned, and obtained information as to what could be done to more effectively help students during this transitional period.
Research Context

The Success School District was used for this study. Success School District is located approximately 40 miles south of Boston, Massachusetts. There are three schools in the District; the elementary school is made up of grade K-2 and has 580 students; The middle school is made up of grades 3-6 and has 700 students; And the Junior/Senior High School is made up of grades 7-12 with 1016 students (DESE website). The District is 93% white, over 10% of the students are on IEPs, the attendance rate of the district is over 95%, the graduation rate is over 90%, and over 85% of graduates go on to some form of post graduate work (DESE website). Success Junior/Senior High School has undergone many changes in recent years. In 2013 a new building was built. The decision was made, when building the new school, to go from a 9-12 school to a 7-12 school. The school went from 650 students to over 1000. This presented several challenges to the community. Although one may think that having middle school students in the building would make for an easy transition from grade 8 to 9, this did not solve all of the issues. The two groups, 7 and 8 and 9 through 12, although under one roof and one principal, still acted very independently with different philosophies. Additionally, the District has had 3 Superintendents in the last 5 years, which has also brought about challenges, along with some very difficult budgetary seasons. With all this said, one must keep on moving forward, making certain that students have what they need to be successful. The transition from grade 8 to 9 is still an issue and one that needs to be resolved at Success Junior/Senior High School.

Participants/Sampling Strategy

Criterion sampling was used to select participants for this study (Creswell, 2007). Criteria for participation required that all individuals, including parents, teachers, and administrators, were a part of the Success Junior/Senior High School community. The administrator selected for
this study was the assistant principal of Success Junior/Senior High School. His experience in dealing with grade 9 students, parents, and teachers offered a unique and important perspective into this study. The study also recruited teachers who had daily interactions with grade 9 students. Parents of grade 9 students from the parent teacher organization (PTO), Music and Sports parent groups, and parents of at risk students were also recruited to participate. As Creswell (2009) pointed out, having a varied and diverse sampling allows for more holistic results.

**Recruitment and Access**

Prior to the collection of data, the researcher met with the Superintendent of Schools and gained permission to conduct the research study. A copy of all forms, letters, and questions were presented to the Superintendent for her review and approval. The Superintendent gave permission for all contact information for potential participants to be shared with the researcher. Once permission was granted, the assistant principal was contacted with a recruitment letter (see Appendix A). Once the letter was received, the researcher made contact and received his consent (see Appendix B) to be part of the project. A recruitment email was sent out to staff members that worked primarily with grade 9 students (see Appendix C). Once the letter was received, the researcher made contact with each and received their consent (see Appendix D) to be part of the project. Finally, an email with a recruitment letter (see Appendix E) was sent out to the different parents. These were parents that had students involved in different aspects of student life and had varied experiences in high school. This was done in order to get multiple perspectives on the transition issue. The researcher kept track of the parents that respond favorably to the request. Once the letter was received, the researcher made contact and received their consent to be part of the project (see Appendix F).
Protection of Human Subjects

Prior to participant recruitment, the researcher obtained permission from Northeastern University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this study. The purpose of this was to make certain that the rights and well-being of the participants involved were not infringed upon. Written approval was received from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) insuring that the safety and well-being of all participants was indeed intact, and that the study would not cause any physical or psychological harm to the participants. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. All participants were given a pseudonym to protect their identities. Only the researcher had access to the actual participant list and their aliases.

Data Collection

This study collected interview data from teachers, administrators, and parents. According to Yin (2009), interviews are guided conversations rather than structured queries. Each interviewee was asked a series of semi-structured, open-ended questions (see Appendix G) that allowed the researcher to better understand strategies, practices, and resources Success Junior/Senior High School should use to support the academic, social, and emotional needs of grade 9 students. Yin (2009) recommends using interview questions that are open ended and assume a conversational tone, but still follow a formal structure. For this reason, the interview protocol was guided by Rubin and Rubin’s conversational approach (Rubin and Rubin, 2011). This method encourages the “art of hearing”. This type of interview question involved three types of questions: (1) main questions, (2) probes, and (3) follow up questions. The time and location of the interviews were based on participants’ convenience. The interviews were approximately 60 minutes in length and covered about 10 questions (see Appendix G).
Data Storage

Interviews were recorded using an iPhone and a digital recorder and were transcribed using a service (www.rev.com). This data along with the consent forms were all stored on a password-protected computer (Riviera, 2010) and paper hard copies of data were stored in a locked file cabinet along with the information on a flash drive (Corti, 2008). At the conclusion and final approval of the dissertation all documents that were collected were destroyed.

Data Analysis

Once the transcripts were received, they were sent to participants for member checking; participants were allowed to make edits to the transcripts. Coding of the transcripts was done through an inductive approach using two rounds of coding followed by thematic analysis. For the first round of analysis, open coding was used followed by a second round of pattern coding (Saldaña, 2013). Open coding many times is considered the first level of coding (Corbin, Strauss, 1990). Pattern coding helped to develop “a sense of categories, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization from your array of first cycle codes.” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 210). Pattern coding allowed for the primary codes to be grouped into smaller and more manageable patterns (Saldaña, 2013).

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) write that trustworthiness is important in establishing the worth of a study. They state that trustworthiness involves four criteria: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility in a study is an indication of the confidence of the data. This study maintained credibility by having a diverse cross section of teachers, administrators, and parents for the interview (Merriam, 1998; Creswell, 2009) who had first-hand experience with the phenomena under study. Credibility was also maintained using semi-
structured interview protocols that were pilot tested and which asked similar converging questions.

Dependability in a study is the quality of the integrated processes of data collection, data analysis, and theory generation. This study maintained dependability by grounding the interview questions in theory and literature.

Confirmability in a study is the degree to which the outcomes could be confirmed or corroborated by other people. This study maintained confirmability by using member checking, thick descriptions and direct quotations of participant responses.

Transferability in a study is the degree to which the results that are found as part of a project can be generalized and transferred to other settings (Creswell, 2009). While the goal of this research was to inform Success Junior/Senior High School, the literature, theory, empirical data might be applicable to other contexts.

Limitations

As Maxwell (2009) pointed out qualitative research often only covers a small number of participants in a singular setting. Yin (2005) suggests keeping the total population of the study to 20-30 participants (Yin 2005). For this study the sampling was smaller than the number suggested by Yin. In this case, less than ten people were involved in this study and the setting was Success Junior/Senior High School. Additionally, the feedback given to the researcher is based off of the impressions and feelings of a small sample size who may or may not have certain biases about the school or their transitions from grade 8 to grade 9. It is the hope of the researcher that there was a broad enough sample size and representation to be able to provide ample data to help create a program. Another limitation of this study was that it relied solely on interview data. Although case study designs allow for multiple forms of data, interview data was
chosen for the primary source because it was the most efficient method for collecting data for this study. A limitation in this approach is that the study was limited in participation to current stakeholders, and did not include perspectives of past administrators, teachers and parents.
Chapter IV: Report of the Findings

Introduction

Success Junior/Senior High School (pseudonym) does not have a formal program to help students transition from grade 8 to 9. The goal of this research was to explore ways in which Success Junior/Senior High School can best support freshmen through the design and implementation of a grade 9 transition program by asking the following central research question: What strategies, practices, and resources should Success High School take to support the academic, social, and emotional needs of Grade 9 students?

Participants

To inform this question, interviews took place with a number of key stakeholders within the school, including a school administrator, three teachers, and two parents. These participants, each with intimate knowledge of the issue, but with different lenses through which to view it, provided a holistic look into the issue of transition.

Administration. The administrator at the school Mr. Brown (pseudonym) has been an assistant principal at Success Junior/Senior High School for the last five years. Prior to that he was a social studies teacher and team leader at an alternative high school in a local community. His primary role for the last four years has been working with students in grade 7, 8, and 9. His knowledge of working with middle school and high school students was key in understanding the needs of this age group. He had the unique perspective of working not only with students, but also with parents and teachers.

Teachers. Ms. Robinson (pseudonym) has been with the schools for 8 years. She started her career off as a paraprofessional and for the last 5 years has been the Special Education Life Skills teacher. As a paraprofessional she was able to work with all types of learners and teachers
across various settings. This insight was valuable when looking at building a program. For the last few years she has worked specifically with special education students and served as the Students Against Drunk Driving (SADD) advisor. She has worked with students and families as they transitioned from grade 7 to 8. She also supports students as they transition from grade 12 to life after school. She has presented several workshops to staff on the importance of transitions. Her Special Education background and her work with a specific student population, especially in regards to dealing with students that struggle emotionally in school, was critical in understanding the needs of students during this period.

Ms. Carlisle (pseudonym) has been an English teacher for the last 11 years. She has worked with the grade 9 Honors students and has taught Advanced Placement (AP) Language for the past 5 years. She sees first-hand the struggles that students face each year going from grade 8 to 9. She has taught at least 50 freshmen students every year for the past 11 years. She also spends a significant amount of time working and talking with parents of students that experience struggles during the year. Her perspective teaching grade 11 students is also very helpful in that she is able to see how they have grown over the two years. She has coached two varsity sports during her career and has been a class advisor. Her infusion into the fabric of the school and students is critical to this study.

Mr. Canzoneri (pseudonym) is also an English teacher who has taught for 11 years. He has taught at least 75 college prep students a year for the last 11 years and is also a varsity coach. He is involved in the school community and lives in town. He works closely with students, guidance, and the special education department to help students. He understands and sees first-hand the struggles that these students face.
Parents. Mrs. Gilmore (pseudonym) has had three children in the school. She has been a resident in town for several years. Two of her daughters have graduated and she has one daughter who is a junior. Each of her three daughters have had a different and unique experience at the school. Mrs. Gilmore is also involved in some after school programs with the school. She works with over 40 students on a regular basis. She is able to listen to their struggles and has a unique perspective into this issue.

Mrs. McEvoy (pseudonym) has two children in school. Both have transitioned from grade 8 to grade 9. Her children are both on Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and have had different struggles in school. She has also been employed in the district for the last 6 years as a paraprofessional and works with teachers and students from grades 6 to 12.

Supporting Academic Issues

There were three themes that emerged as the greatest academic issues faced by students as they transition to grade 9. These were: consequences for poor academic performance, changes in homework expectations, and trouble dealing with greater independence.

Consequences for poor academic performance. As students move into high school the academic performance of students directly impacts their ability to graduate and go on to college. Students are now expected to pass the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) exam for graduation. Students now also need to accumulate credits in order to be able to graduate, and their grade point average (GPA) now has implications for college.

Mrs. Gilmore speaks to the pressure of students now having an official transcript and grades actually counting for something. In the middle school, if a student has a B or a C, there were little to no ramifications for this. However, in high school, class rank and GPA are now key factors. This is a change for students. Students are realizing for the first time that grades matter.
and can have a long-term impact. This is a change in expectations from grade 8 to grade 9. She shared, “From 7th/8th grade when you try to tell them, ‘Relax, this isn't on your transcript, relax’. Then, going to high school, expectations are so different.” This causes anxiety for students.

Mrs. McEvoy states that students do not understand high school credits versus middle school credits and the difference between honors and college preparatory classes. In the middle school, all classes are heterogeneously grouped. At the high school students are homogeneously grouped and are dealing with accumulating credits from grade level to grade level. She shared:

It's that whole credit issue in that grade level, how do we meet that credit bar in that freshman year, and how do we make sure that we can succeed and meet credit demands. In 8th grade, there's no credibility to that; credits do not matter, it's a big jump, and it's the pressure, mind you, on how they're going to be able to succeed and obtain those credits.

Mr. Canzoneri also spoke to the increased pressure that accompanies academic consequences. He shared “[In grade 8]…the pressure of preparing students for an MCAS exam or getting students ready for an advanced placement class is not really there.”

**Changes in homework expectations.** As students transition to high school, they struggle with the expectation that homework needs to be done and if it isn’t, there are consequences. According to Mr. Brown:

I think we see a lot of struggles in the math or science areas. I think our humanities classes are pretty strong, but I think students struggle … You see it with the Integrated Math classes and that sort of thing, that we see a lot of the kids acting out in these classes…The kids get assigned the homework and the expectation is just that they do it. Some of them do, some of them don't.
In addition to expectation that is actually completed on time, students also experience a greater volume and rigor in their homework. Ms. Carlisle points out that the reading load from grade 8 to 9 increases, especially for an honors student. Students need to read not only more books, but they also need to read more volume each night. The increase is difficult for students. She shared,

I teach English so the reading load I think from the 8th grade to the 9th grade is a big gap. They're reading a lot more in 9th grade, not just longer novels, but much more challenging novels and I don't think they know how to manage that.

It was clear in conducting the interviews that the amount and kinds of homework also changes as students enter high school. It is not uncommon to have a parent of an honors level student say, ‘my child had 45 minutes [of homework] in the middle school and now they have 3 hours’. Ms. Robinson shared,

I don't know if there's not enough homework for middle school, but the expectation to suddenly do homework and not have time built into the day where it has been in middle school now changes, in most middle school classes they have the time to do it in school. There's more reading, more written language in high school.

Mr. Brown concurred and shared that there is more of a demand for homework and that in the middle school there is some more “hand holding” if students do not do their homework. Whereas in high school, kids get assigned homework and the expectation is that they just do it. He says, “We should look at homework policies and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses.”

Mr. Canzoneri added that students in the middle school are used to only 15 to 20 minutes of homework. That is doubled and tripled in high school. Some students are able to meet these
demands, but others are not. There needs to be a way to help students as they move and understand these changes.

**Greater independence.** The final academic challenge that students face is the amount of independence that a student has in high school. Teachers in grade 9 expect more independence from students than what they are used to in grade 8. Ms. Robinson shared:

I think the difference is the level of independence. There's an expectation that when kids get to high school that they can independently do certain things, whether it's written language, writing an essay or organization skills or planning, but there are things missing and if they've been missed, who pulls up the slack for that? Who says, "Now you're going to learn that." It's a missing piece.

Mr. Canzoneri sees a connection between being able to work independently and being able to have a sustained attention span. In middle school students were used to academics being presented in much small chunks. With more flexibility with respect to how material is presented. In grade 9 those chunks of time are a bit longer, as are the period lengths. He shared that students struggled with “Being able to write and read, being able to have that sustained concentration to sit down and say, ‘All right, in twenty minutes I'm going to work on a writing passage.’” Mr. Canzoneri went on to say that he gives students non-structured time in class to work and they struggle with that. As he points out, they cannot go 20 minutes “without looking at their phone or social media.”
Supporting Social Issues

The next area that was looked at was the social issues that students face as the transition from grade 8 to 9. Three main themes emerged: finding a social group, maturity, and social media.

**Finding a social group.** Ms. Robinson shared that students often struggle to find a social group when they first enter high school. She said that that is the biggest issue she sees in working with students, and that creating opportunities for 8th graders to feel part of the school or connected prior to the first day of school is key. She stated:

That's really hard because there are always kids that don't fit in and I think there is such a community feel in a lot of places, the kids on teams, athletic teams, and it's nice because they are on those athletic teams together, they can start captain's practices over the summer before 9th grade starts. Then they have a team when they start in high school that they already know people, upperclassmen and their peers, so it's nice because they're already comfortable with that transition. Those kids who don't have that who might not go on to clubs, they just don't have a peer group and hopefully there's a club that appeals to them, but if not, that's a very lonely place to be.

Mr. Brown believes that you need to find a way to connect with students that do not play sports or get involved in clubs. He sees that population of student as one that struggled. He said, “There's also that group of kids that really just don't anything to latch to. I think we need to look at different ways to access that population of students.” Sports and clubs are a good way for kids to feel connected, however a program must find ways to reach all students and connect with all students.
Mrs. Gilmore has a different take on social groups. She points out that the Town is very small and that peer groups have been formed for years. Therefore, it is difficult for kids to break into groups.

Mr. Canzoneri also agreed that students need to find ways to connect and become part of a social group. He sees students developing and creating more peer groups and it is difficult for students to be able to blend into different peer groups. He said:

Just kids being able to accept others ... That the athletes don't necessarily talk to the band kids. Each kid is different, weird because this kid likes playing video games and Jimmy likes playing basketball, so I think just the difference in the personality.

**Maturity.** The next social issue that came up throughout the interviews is that students struggle with maturity. Students enter grade 9 with different levels of maturity. Some are ready to tackle the social and academic issues, while others are not. Mrs. Gilmore shared “I don't know how you could teach them that, but if they could have a better understanding, holy cow! It would make life a lot easier for them”. Mr. Canzoneri, who teaches freshmen, says he sees it from day one in his class. Some students are mature and ready to tackle the workload and responsibilities, while others are not. Ms. Carlisle has an interesting perspective on this, and how lack of maturity impacts the social dynamics of learning. She shared:

If we work in groups they want to work with their friends and not get the work done. I think that's just a maturity level thing. I don't necessarily think that there's anything that could be done in 8th grade to remedy that. I think it's just a 14-year-old’s mentality.

**Social media.** Finally, students struggle with social media. Most teachers and administration use social media as a way to communicate with students and families. It is
difficult to stay away from social media and stay connected to school. Students need to learn the balance the need for social media and the potential downfalls. Ms. Robinson shared:

I think socially, it's a really different generation than when we were growing up and the social pressures on kids now are much different than what we had because of all the social media. You have so many friends and this person's your friend, and that person's your friend via social media that that wanting to fit in, not only person to person, but on the world wide web as well. I think socially our kids have a lot of demands on them and being able to navigate all those waters is difficult.

Mr. Brown, spends a large portion of his day dealing with issues around social media. He says, “A lot of the social stuff we see is the social media piece, kids accessing each other 24/7. That constant back-and-forth between one another and not being able to distance yourself from your group.”

**Supporting Emotional Issues**

The biggest emotional issue identified by participants that students face as the move from grade 8 to grade 9 is anxiety. Anxiety manifests itself in many ways with students. Ms. Robinson shared:

More and more kids out there are anxious and I think that social piece plays a role into that, that they feel anxiety about that, they feel anxiety about fitting in. They have anxiety about things that could be going on at home that we have no idea is happening, so their home life could be causing them anxiety, but they all seem to be getting worse.

Mr. Brown sees anxiety manifest itself with a lot of school phobia. Students become, “fearful of school and situations in school” and began to avoid school. As anxiety builds some students begin to avoid school. Ms. Carlisle also sees anxiety as a major issue. She shared:
I think we see a lot of kids with a lot of anxiety. Again, I think it all goes back to that time management. They don't know how to deal with the workload. They don't know how to deal with the social relationships. I think they get overwhelmed and anxious and then they kind of shut down.

Mrs. Gilmore shared her perspective through the eyes of her three children. She shared:

Kids think that there's this pressure when they're an A student, "Oh my God, I have to, I have to, I have to." It's like, "Chill out." What gives kids anxiety, that I have learned over the years that I've had three, that pressure of always being perfect, all the way from like third grade, "Got to get straight As," and then all of a sudden, you don't. You're just falling, and that might be frustrating, it gives anxiety. From 7th/8th grade when you try to tell them, "Relax, this isn't on your transcript, relax." Then going to high school, expectations are so different.

The anxiety of achieving at a high level is stressful to students. Mrs. McEvoy shared:

I would have to say my oldest had a lot of anxiety emotionally which then turns into physical. Then Zachary being the youngest, the emotional piece was acceptance. Am I going to be accepted by my teachers, am I going to do good enough, am I going to meet the bar of being a high school student rather than just a student, it's that invisible line that he had to cross over.

**Strategies, Practices, and Resources**

There are a number of supports in place currently at Success Junior/Senior school to support the grade 8 to grade 9 transition and participants were asked to share their feedback on those current supports and potential changes that could be made for improvement. These supports include: Freshmen dinner, Working with guidance, Advisory, and Alternative Learning
Pupil Services (ALPS). The freshmen dinner is an annual tradition in mid-September in which freshmen get together after school for a dinner put on by the student senate. Guidance meets several times a year with students for regular check ins and when a student is in crisis or needs assistance. Three years ago, an advisory program was started for all students in grade 7 -12. This program meets twice a month. Finally, ALPS is a program that meets with students once a day. This program helps students with academic support. This is an effective program, but it only addresses academic issues and only services 10-15 grade 9 students.

When each of the participants were asked, what could be done to help mitigate the academic, social and emotional issues described above and to better prepare and support students as they transition from grade 8 to grade 9, two themes arose: to begin the transition and support earlier than the summer of grade 9 and create a Freshmen Academy and Advisor/Advisee program.

**Begin the transition and support earlier than the summer of grade 9.** Many of the people that were interviewed spoke about starting the transition early on in the 8th grade. Starting this transition earlier would be helpful to students and to teachers. Ms. Robinson shared:

I think students [need to start] at a younger age, …[being] taught how to manage their time, organize, plan. I don't think that they have time to teach that now and what we're seeing now if you're in high school, are these kids that are coming up and with the focus being on the content and the curriculum. Those little skills that we have that teachers taught us growing up, those aren't really instructed anymore, so I think they need to be directly instructed from a young age, like elementary age.

Mr. Brown also sees the benefit of starting earlier; he shared:
I think starting the process at the end of the eighth-grade year, working with kids and introducing to the different things at the high school level. Bringing them in over the summer, in a certain point, to again go over schedules and talk about the difference between eighth grade and ninth grade and then continuing with that freshman dinner, the orientation at the beginning of the year, stuff that's currently in place. I think it's starting the process a little bit earlier.

There are many opportunities for this to happen in the 8th grade. This can be done in classes, through guidance, or in an advisory program. Ms. Carlisle shared:

I think it would be good if in 8th grade they start learning some of those study habits, different ways of time management, things like that. I think it's also a good idea to have the 8th and 9th grade teachers communicate to one another about the expectations of 8th grade versus the expectations of 9th grade just so that everyone is on the same page.

This can be done several ways, and it will not only benefit students as they enter grade 9, but it will help them during the 8th grade as well.

Mr. Canzoneri offered a different angle on this. He believes that if parents are aware of expectations and understand the demands on students, then it may help students as they transition from grade 8 to grade 9.

I think it would be a great thing if I could see all the parents before the school year started and maybe ... Once before the school year started, once maybe in the middle of the school year or halfway through the school year, just so that they can put a face to me and I can put a face to them. They can really know me, so I can build rapport with them.

Create a Freshmen Academy and Advisor/Advisee program. Freshmen Academy and Advisor/Advisee programs are different but similar in that they are yearlong programs and
not just one shot deals. In short, a freshman academy is similar to the teaming model in the middle school, in which students stay together and have a core group of teachers. Teachers have common planning time to discuss student issues and concerns. An Advisor/Advisee program is one in which students get an advisor and they meet with them on a daily basis. Different topics are covered and discussed.

Mr. Brown likes the idea of a freshmen academy. He shared:

One of the things we’re looking at is the freshman academy, trying to identify a certain group of teachers that would work with that population so that the transition from eighth to ninth is a little bit more seamless and it’s just not throwing them out.

Because the team model works well in the middle school, building a program that somewhat mirrors a middle school team while also introducing them to high school was perceived as being helpful. As Mr. Brown said, “It would be a group of 25 teachers, one in each subject area, that would teach strictly freshman-level classes. It would populate the kids a little bit more cohesively.”

Ms. Carlisle did not come out specifically and say a Freshmen Academy, but shared that having a system in place to foster collaboration will be helpful to students. She shared:

…. putting a program in place that would help conversations and dialogues between 8th grade and 9th grade teachers and working with kids on how to manage time, how to manage workload and expectations … I’m summarizing … It would be helpful and supportive.

Mr. Canzoneri pointed to several conversations he has had with middle school teachers about the team model and its benefits, including having a smaller population of student to work with and having time to speak to other faculty about the students. This model includes a 45-
minute enrichment block so that teachers can work with students. This block is used for remediation, specialized services, and programming to meet the needs of students. He says, “This type of set up, which sounds like an academy, would be helpful to kids as they transition.”

Ms. Robinson likes the idea of an advisory to help students, but would like it to look different than what is currently in place. She says,

I think that having an advisor, doing an advisorship program is good, but how we've done it isn't enough. By doing it once every two weeks for a half an hour really isn't enough and that maybe ... Especially that freshman, sophomore year, building more time into that for them that they are learning those skills in a smaller group. I think that's a good way to do it.

She believes that having a program in which a student can connect with an adult on a regular basis would be helpful.

Mr. Brown believes that the current advisory in place has helped. He says, “The advisory we have in place has helped a bit, but we need more time.” He says he has seen some of the benefits of the program, but kids need more time to connect and for programing.

Both Mrs. Gilmore and Mrs. McEvoy state that their children enjoyed the time they had in their advisories. Mrs. Gilmore said, “I wish they had that program when my oldest was there, it would have helped her.” Mrs. McEvoy said that her oldest would come home and speak to some of the lessons that were done in this program. She says, “If he had started something like this, when he was younger, the transition would have been easier.” They both saw the benefits of such a program.

Mr. Canzoneri says that he believes having students meet with an adult is beneficial. He says, “any time a student can make a connection with an adult; kids benefit from that...I am a
firm believer in a positive adult influence.” Ms. Carlisle added that having a model that, “… would help conversations and dialogues between 8th grade and 9th grade teachers and working with kids on how to manage time, how to manage workload and expectations … would be helpful.”

**Summary**

As part of this thesis, an administrator, teachers, and parents were interviewed. Their insight into grade 9 students was invaluable to this study. These shareholders have all seen first-hand the difficulties students have had as they transition from grade 8 to grade 9. These faculty members, have also seen what happens to students if they do not have the proper transition due to the fact that they work with upper classman. As part of the discussion, it was evident that they all saw the need to have something in place to help students. They all believed that many of the students that they have seen fail throughout the years could have been helped with a successful transition.

There are several academic, social and emotional challenges students face as they transition from grade 8 to grade 9; creating a freshmen academy with an embedded advisor/advisee program may help the school better meet those challenges. This academy would be set up similar to middle school teams. One period would be an advisory period in which students would meet in small groups. The program would attend to the following practices: convey the expectations and demand for academic work; help students deal with increased independence; create opportunities for students to connect with a social group; help students manage social media; help students to mature; and help students manage anxiety.

It was clear through the interview process that all shareholders believed that a program would help students transition smoothly. They all believed that when this occurs, students stand a better chance of being successful.
Chapter V: Discussion of Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to understand how Success Junior/Senior High School (pseudonym), can help students transition effectively to grade 9 through the design and implementation of a grade 9 transition program. Guided by the theoretical framework of stage-environment fit theory, this study sought to answer the following central research question: What strategies, practices, and resources should Success High School take to support the academic, social, and emotional needs of students as they transition from grade 8 to grade 9? Findings support the adoption of a freshmen academy with an embedded advisor/advisee program that may help the school better meet those challenges.

Revisiting the Problem of Practice

The transitional period from grade 8 to grade 9 can cause many students to struggle for a variety of reasons. During this time, students are faced with several new and different academic, social, and emotional issues that may prevent them from succeeding to the fullest of their potential in school. This can cause them to fall behind in school and at times not have the time or the ability to recover before failure is imminent (Blum, 2005). This is a direct result of the multitude of changes that students face as they move from middle school to high school.

Students that transition effectively from grade 8 to grade 9 stand a greater chance of being successful in high school (Christie and Zinth, 2008). Therefore, it is critical for schools to make certain that programs and safe guards are in place to make sure that this transition is seamless. Research shows that when a student’s academic, social, and emotional needs are addressed, especially during the grade 9 transition, they are more likely to be successful (Jones, 2006; Blum, 2005; Sulkowski, Demaray & Lazarus, 2012). One way to make certain that this
occurs is to provide and create programming to support a successful transition from grade 8 to grade 9. As Braun, Cochrane, Flannery, McIntosh, & Sugai (2008) point out, programming and a smooth transition that address the various areas of concern, can help students make the shift from 8th to 9th grade effectively. Ultimately, this smooth transition can lead to higher student success throughout high school.

Smith (1997) and Abdulmalik (2010) both found that students that participated in a transition program had greater levels of success in high school. Abdulmalik (2010) further pointed out that a positive transition to high school can be a determining factor as to whether or not a student is successful and graduates from high school. Farzand & Holtcamp (2014), found that transitional programs that support grade 9 students lead to student success. Schools must find a way to address this period of time and build programming that meets the needs of students so that they can succeed to the fullest of their potential.

**Review of Research Question and Findings**

This study sought to answer the following question: What strategies, practices, and resources should Success High School take to support the academic, social, and emotional needs of students as they transition from grade 8 to grade 9? As a result of the interviews, it was found that there were three key academic struggles that students face, three social struggles, and one emotional struggle that plague students as they move from grade 8 to grade 9. What follows is a review and discussion of the key findings and the relationship between these findings, the review of the literature and the theoretical framework.

**Presentation and Discussion of Key Findings**

**Academic issues.** High school students have greater academic pressures placed on them then what they were used to in the middle school. These pressures become evident to them at the
start of the 9th grade school year. Teachers and the school discuss with the students almost immediately, the reality that they now need to pass, in order to graduate, the MCAS exam. GPA is now something that counts, and they find out early on that colleges look at GPA and transcripts as one of the determining factors of acceptance. Guidance meets with all freshmen and set up a four-year academic plan and map. All of these are new and greater pressures than a student faced or was exposed to in middle school—and students are exposed to these conversations and realities right from the start of the school year. Unfortunately, there is very little in the way of preparation or transition for students as they begin to tackle these new obstacles. The thinking through middle school is that grades don’t count and some students think it is fine if they do not do their best. Then, the reality of high school sets in for many students and they are now faced with the fact that these things do count and matter; this is an increase in expectations.

Mrs. Gilmore stated that her children were all unprepared for the fact that grades mattered for the first time. They also quickly discovered that there were significant differences between being an A student and a B student and what that means for the college application process. Mrs. McEvoy found that students did not understand the impact of accruing credits and passing classes. In the elementary school and middle school, a student could “fail” a class and still be promoted. Students in high school need to pass four years of English to earn a diploma; failing one year of English will prevent them from graduating. Students that have low grades are less likely to get into the college of their choice, and students that fail classes and do not make them up in summer or night school stand the chance of not graduating as a result of not meeting minimum standards. These are much greater consequences than students ever faced in elementary or middle school. As students transition, they need to be made aware of the
importance of grades and credits in high school. Students and families alike are not mindful of the consequences for poor academic performance. Although teachers discuss it, it does not seem real to them. The reality of poor grades in high school, and their impact, is tremendous.

The second theme in this finding was the differences in expectations between middle school and high school in regards to homework. In high school, the expectation is that students do homework and failure to do so will negatively impact their grade. This is not necessarily the case in middle school. Some homework in high school is assigned as a review or to reinforce what was taught in the classroom. This is similar to middle school. However, in many high school classes, homework is assigned to expand the walls of the classroom. It is seen as a supplement to what was done that day in class. If it is not done by students, then they can and will fall behind. Many high school teachers do not collect or review homework, therefore students become lackadaisical in doing it. However, when it comes time to take a test, that failure to do the homework becomes evident. Mr. Brown noticed that many students in his class did not do homework, and he believed it was due to the fact that they were never held accountable for doing it in previous grades. Mrs. Carlisle points out the increase in the rigor and expectations of assignments. Many times these assignments are not just rote activities. This is a substantive change for students. Mr. Brown also found that there is a lot of “hand holding” when it came to homework in the middle school. In the high school, students either do it or they don’t. And when they don’t, it becomes evident in their grades.

Finally, there is an increase in the expectation of independence of students. Teachers expect students to be more independent in high school. Both Mrs. Robinson and Mr. Canzoneri see this in dealing with freshmen. They stated that students were used to a tremendous amount of “hand holding” in the middle school. Students are constantly reminded of what to do and when
to do it. Safe guards were put in place when students did not do required activities and when they were not successful. One example given was in regards to make up work. In the middle school, when a student misses an assignment, they are constantly reminded to make it up. Many times, the teacher may set up a time during the day or after school for a student to make up this work. In high school, some teachers place the responsibility on the student to see them or they are reminded once to make up the work. If it is not done, in many instances, the grade becomes a zero. This is far different than what students are accustomed to in the middle school.

There needs to be a better bridge between the middle school and the high school when it comes to these areas. The feeling of some people interviewed is that students are thrown into high school. Schools, through a transition program, need to help bridge the difference between the two cultures and ease students into the change.

**Social Issues.** Although it can easily be argued that social issues should not play into transitions and student success, in recent years these issues have become magnified and are prevalent in schools. These external forces can negatively impact a student’s ability to achieve and be successful. Success Public Schools is a small district made up of 2400 students with only three schools (Elementary, Intermediate, and Junior/Senior High School). Many students come to high school with a strong network of friends or some connection to a group. However, according to the interviews, there is also a significant percentage of students that lack that connection to the school and a group. Mrs. Robinson strongly believes that students need to feel connected to the school and belong to a social group. As the life skills teacher, she works with a small sub separate population. One of her goals for students is to have them find a club to become involved in within the school. She has found that her students are happier and maybe even more successful when they are a part of something outside of academics. Mr. Brown sees the success
of students that are connected through sports, music, and clubs. These students start school with an instant group and connection to the school. Students, at the end of the 8th grade, throughout the summer, and at the start of school, are introduced to these activities and older students in the school. This pays dividends as students form a strong connection to the school and helps with the transition. However, this only addresses a percentage of the student body. Mr. Brown believes that something needs to be established for those students that are not a part of these groups in order for them to be able to make a connection with the school. Mrs. Gilmore points out that, since the town is so small, many of these groups have already been established. She believes that something needs to be in place for students that do not have a group. She has seen first-hand, through her children, the benefit of having that connection to the school and group. As Blum and Libbey (2004) stated that students who feel they have a connection to school are not only more likely to effectively transition, but also experience success.

The next social element that was seen as an issue was the general lack of maturity of students as they transitioned to high school. This is an issue that, through time, solves itself as students get older and progress through high school. However, within a grade, especially freshman year, there are various levels of maturity. Mr. Canzoneri points to the different stages of maturity of freshmen. Some freshmen are mature enough to handle the change in expectations that comes from being in high school, while others are not. Some are able to navigate peer groups, situations, social media, etc. and others are not. Mrs. Gilmore sees many students who lack the maturity to tackle high school issues and situations. This is something that will be addressed in a program. Although maturity is not something that can be taught, a system must be put in place to make certain that a student that lacks maturity does not suffer or struggle. This will be done through appropriate programming in the Academy and Advisory.
In recent years, social media has taken on a significant role in the life of a high school student. Students spend a tremendous amount of time on social media, and although there are many benefits to it, there are also many negative side effects. The bullying of students online is easier to do and prevalent in schools. It is easier for students to say something positive or negative about a peer through social media than it is face to face. Students struggle seeing peers post pictures of them at events when they were not invited to these events. The ease of communication and access to information is incredible. Students at this age do not understand the power of social media. They do not know that once you put something online it is there for the world to see and it is forever; that digital footprint does not go away. These issues find a way to creep into school and many times can paralyze a student, or a group of students, from learning. Mrs. Robinson says that students just do not get the power of social media. Mr. Brown says students spend a significant amount of their day using social media and in turn the school spends a lot of time during the day dealing with the issues that come from students using social media. Although it is impossible to solve all the negative issues of social media, students need to repeatedly be made aware of these issues. Having them understand the impact of social media, how and when to use it, and the potential side effects of its use may better help them transition to high school and may also minimize issues throughout the year.

**Emotional Issues.** In recent years, schools have seen the topic of anxiety come to the forefront. Although it has always been an issue in schools, students and schools now have the appropriate vocabulary and are more comfortable in discussing and addressing it. What schools have seen is that students that face issues with anxiety are unable to focus and concentrate in school and on academics. Dedmond (2012) found that anxiety in students is one of the top reasons they are unable to be successful in schools. The issue in addressing anxiety with students
is that it can manifest itself in many different ways. Mrs. Robinson has students that are dealing with external matters, such as issues at home and with family. Not having stability at home and or not knowing what to expect day to day can cause a student to be anxious. Mr. Brown sees students that experience anxiety use school avoidance as a way to escape the issue. Students that feel anxious about grades, friends, peer issues, etc. many times stop coming to school. Mr. Carlisle sees students struggle and become overwhelmed with time management, relationships, and social media. The inability to navigate these issues can lead to anxiety and a student shutting down. Mrs. Gilmore also sees students struggling with the pressure to attain good grades and achieve at a high level. This also causes a student to feel anxious. The side effects of these issues vary from student to student and from situation to situation. Some students end up not coming to school. Others end up spending time in guidance or in the office. Some cannot focus or concentrate in class and others hold it together in school and then have a meltdown at home. All of this negatively impacts a student’s ability to be successful in school and achieve.

Strategies, Practices, and Resources

This section will review the strategies, practices, and resources put forth by the study that are needed to establish a program that meets the academic, social, and emotional needs of students as they transition from grade 8 to grade 9. The best strategy to meet the needs of students will be to create a Freshmen Academy with an Advisor/Advisee program built into it. As was previously stated, a freshman academy is similar to the team model in the middle school, in which students stay together and have a core group of teachers. Teachers have common planning time to discuss student issues and concerns. An Advisor/Advisee program is one in which students are assigned an advisor and meet with them on a regular basis to discuss
identified issues, concerns, and problem areas. Mr. Brown stated that a Freshman Academy would be beneficial to helping students succeed and transition into high school.

The district has seen the success of the team model at the 7th and 8th grade level. With that knowledge at hand, and with what has been observed and learned through being a part of the school and the interviews, it is clear that students could greatly benefit from this type of program. A Freshman Academy would help to maintain that team feeling of the middle school while slowly transitioning students to a high school philosophy. The advisor/advisee portion of the program will be critical to addressing the needs that have been brought up through this process and will also give the school the ability to add additional topics as they arise throughout the year to help students. A one- or two-day topic could involve having students understand the importance of credit accrual as part of the high school process. Although this is currently touched on briefly, having a mechanism by which students and a teacher can spend a significant amount of time discussing this in a series of back-and-forth conversations will only help students as they transition.

The following are some of the practices that came forward as a result of the interviews. As part of the Freshman Academy, teachers would spend time easing students into what is expected of them at the high school level. The transition will not have to be as drastic as it is normally, without such a program. Through the Academy and Advisory a rich discussion can be had surrounding homework expectations and the level of independence that is expected of students. For instance, instead of students just getting a zero for not doing homework, or not receiving a warning about deadlines for makeup work, students and teachers will discuss and understand the expectations of high school make up policies. Discussions in these programs will be greatly fostered and help ease students into high school expectations.
Different activities can be set up through both the Academy and Advisory to help students make connections with groups in schools. The small size of an advisory will also help students make connections to students that they may not have been able to in the past, since they will all be heterogeneously grouped. Additionally, since this advisory is built into the schedule and meets daily, these connections will be strengthened and nurtured. Through advisory, the topic of social media can be discussed in great detail. However, if an issue comes up in the school, advisory also has the benefit of being a mechanism in which students and teachers can discuss it, with guidance and administrative support if needed.

Finally, programming through advisory can be put in place to help students with anxiety. Since advisory is built into the daily schedule (it would be set up as a 30-minute class period every day), different topics can be covered on a frequent basis. Topics to be covered include, but are not limited to, divorce, home issues, siblings, grades, GPA, transcripts, college acceptance, social media, peer relationships, time management, and test taking. These are just some of the issues that came up during the interviews, and as the year progresses the school will have the flexibility to add or subtract topics to the advisory. The school will provide teachers with lessons around these areas to help reduce anxiety and stress levels with students. Although not every topic can be covered, many are known and have been identified, and advisory will be the mechanism that can be used to help students.

In order for this program to be successful, there are several resources that will need to be addressed. First there needs to be financial support for this program. Two Freshmen Academy Teams would need to be created and staffed. Teachers would need professional development to understand the needs of these students and this type of transitional programing. For this Academy to work, grade 9 teachers cannot continue doing what they have traditionally done.
They will need to change their approach and pedagogy. A schedule will need to be created that fits into the other 5 grades of the school and that will allow for this type of program to exist; it will be a school within a school. And finally, there will need to be resources and time made available to staff to write the curriculum for advisory. These will all need to be mapped out prior to starting and implementing a program.

Discussion of Findings in Relationship to the Literature

As Slavin (1996) points out, one of the biggest predictors of high school dropout is poor academic performance. This struggle often begins in grade 9.

Academic issues. There are several academic issues that have been discussed regarding why students struggle during this transitional period from grade 8 to grade 9. Three main issues were highlighted in this study; however, there are many more that could be discussed and uncovered with more time and analysis (Thames, 2012). For many students, there are new and different expectations and a greater level of independence expected of them (Peng, Takai, and Fetters, 1993). Teachers found that students struggle significantly with the increase in expectations from middle school to high school. These expectations stem from the amount of homework assigned on a regular basis, along with the type of homework that students are getting. Since classes are no longer heterogeneously grouped, expectations and rigor are now increased. Students are also now juggling school work and extracurricular activities for the first time. These are all new changes for students with much greater demands.

Strout and Christenson (2009) found that, when a student does not perform well academically their freshmen year, they stand a greater chance of not graduating, while McCallumore and Sparapani (2010) found that ninth grade students have the lowest grade point average of any of the four high school grades and 22% of all freshman repeat grade 9. This can
stem from a variety of factors, including, but not limited, an ineffective transition, increased academic needs, lack of maturity, and the inability to deal with greater independence. This needs to be addressed in an Academy and through Advisory. As Gard (2014) found, students that participated in a transition program experienced greater academic success their freshmen year. The literature is clear as to what happens to many students that do not have access to this sort of a program.

**Supporting social issues.** Students struggle from grade 8 to grade 9 with a host of social issues. And while academic issues have been fairly consistent over time, social issues change more frequently and vary from grade to grade and school to school. Students need to have a solid peer group to feel connected in school. A student that feels connected to a group or club is more likely to be successful. Robert Blum (2005) believes that a connected school environment increases the likelihood that a student will be successful. This level of connectedness is critical to student success, as stated by Libby (2004). When a student feels connected, they are more likely to seek out an adult for help and support (Stewart, 2008). Peer issues are also a source of concern for students as they climb the ladder in school. Stewart (2008) believes that lack of meaningful relationships can lead to a student not feeling connected or part of a school. While Nicholas and White (2001) believe that having a strong peer group is critical to helping students feel connected and being successful.

Maturity of students was also a consistent theme when meeting with shareholders. This was also evident in the review of the literature. Eleby (2009) found that some students do not succeed academically as a result of poor social skills, which can about through a low level of maturity. Lane, Pierson, & Giver (2003) also found through their research that students struggle with having strong social and academic skills while in high school. This can be attributed to their
lack of maturity. The familiarity of the team model, coupled with teachers having common planning time and advisory, can help this with this maturity. With the team model, staff will be able to select which students are on which teams and in which classes. This can help set students up for success instead of failure. Through common planning time, strategies to deal with certain students or certain profiles of students can be discussed and action plans created. The mechanism will be established to help these students. Giving students the opportunity to be successful and building a strong foundation is paramount to their success (Lane, Pierson, & Giver, 2003).

Social media is ever changing in schools. It can impact a student’s ability to focus in school, their self-esteem, and can cause a spike in anxiety (Ehmake, 2016). When teenagers are not involved in structured activities, they are spending a significant amount of time on social media, texting, on Snapchat, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Kik, etc. Although sometime on social media is normal, the amount that some teens spend engaged with social media can be damaging (Ehmake, 2016). “When friendship is conducted online and through texts, kids are doing this in a context stripped of many of the most personal—and sometimes intimidating—aspects of communication. It’s easier to keep your guard up when you’re texting, so less is at stake (Ehmake, 2016, p. 2). This inability to interact with peers and have meaningful dialogues impacts students.

Udorie (2015), found that social media is harmful to students and their mental health. Students want to constantly stay connected and online to see what is happening and do not want to miss out on anything (Udorie, 2015). This causes anxiety and can lead to a loss of sleep from staying up late at night to see what is happening. Many of these issues that are happening at night on social media spill over into school and impact a student’s ability to focus.
Regardless of the social issue that comes up, schools need to be equipped to handle all of them. Once a student begins to encounter social difficulties, they need to be remediated quickly so that they can begin to experience success. These social issues can vary from student to student and from year to year; however, if gone unaddressed, they can lead to several negative issues, including but not limited to failure and withdrawal from school (Felner et al., 1981; Roderick & Camburn, 1996; Roderick, 199; Swanson & Schneider, 1999; Felner et al., 1982; Roderick, 1995; and Smith, 1997).

**Supporting emotional issues.** The biggest emotional issue identified by participants, is that students face and deal with a great deal of anxiety. There are key times in the life of a student that can cause them to struggle in school. Somers and Piliawsky (2004) found that students experience a decline in academic achievement as they progress through adolescence and during key transitional periods in their life. There are triggers that can cause a decline in achievement and success such as anxiety. Many students are dealing with external issues that can cause anxiety. These can be issues at home, problems with a sibling, fighting with a loved one, hunger, or homelessness, to name a few. When this occurs, students can become anxious and distracted in school (Somers and Piliawsky, 2004). As was seen through the course of this study and the accompanying interviews, there are multiple things that can cause a student to experience anxiety. Some things a school can plan for, others it cannot. A solid program can be implemented through advisory to help students deal with what are known causes of stress and anxiety and through feeling connected in school.

Students at this time are also dealing with a host of new issues as they move from grade 8 to grade 9. These come from making new friends, struggling with physical changes, puberty, and identifying with new and different social settings (Doll, J. J., Eslami, Z., & Walters, L. (2013).
These have all been identified through the interviews with shareholders. The small size and team feel of an Academy will help address many of these issues by slowly transitioning students from the comforts of middle school to the reality of high school. This slow and smooth transition will help to ease students and lower their anxiety levels. Additionally, the benefit of a daily advisory, with lessons, a structure, and time set aside to talk about and discuss these issues that can cause a student anxiety will be beneficial. Finally, common planning time will allow for teachers to discuss these issues and students with the team to determine patterns and come up with solutions to help the student.

Connectedness in schools means many things. Students that feel connected feel safe physically and emotionally in schools. This can help lower the level of anxiety that students face. Shulkind (2007) found that connectedness is a key component to ensuring student success. When students feel connected they are more likely to have lower levels of stress and anxiety. When they are connected, they are also more apt to reach out to staff for help when they are feeling stressed, anxious, or have a problem (Dedmond, 2012). The team feel of an Academy and the small size of an advisory will help create this.

Jen Thames (2012) writes that students need to be able to advocate for themselves. This is a difficult skill set for a 14-year-old student to acquire and feel comfortable using. A student who is emotionally ready and able to advocate for themselves is more apt to experience success. Students must be able to do this with teachers, guidance counselors, administrators, and parents. When dealing with anxiety, students must be able to reach out to staff for help; some are able to do this while others are not. An Academy will help to create a team-oriented and nurturing environment, while an advisory will create a mechanism for many of these issues to be discussed. Through time, many of the issues will be covered. However, it is the goal of these two
programs to create a mechanism for students to be able to advocate for themselves when they are feeling anxious.

Rebecca Dedmond, in her 10 Step Plan, discusses several key points related to why transitions are critical to a successful high school career. Her research finds that freshman report feeling excited, confused, proud, brave, helpless, worried, afraid, sad, curious, lonely, and overwhelmed upon entering high school. A grade 9 program leads to student buy-in to the educational process, offers relevant themes for academic success, helps students become identified, builds self-esteem, and aids students in working on a four-year career plan (Dedmond, 2012). The causes of anxiety have been clearly spelled out. An academy and an advisory will help address these issues.

**Strategy.** The best strategy to meet the needs of students as they transition from grade 8 to grade 9 will be to create a Freshmen Academy with an Advisor/Advisee program built into it. The Academy will be set using guidelines outlined here.

Because there are approximately 200 freshmen every year, the class will be divided into two teams, with each team having 100 students. Students will be self-contained in their team for the following classes: ELA, Math, Science, Social Studies, and Foreign Language. This will be beneficial because, since five teachers share the same students, they will have the opportunity to get to know each of the students on a more personal level. Teachers will also have common planning time. As a result of this, teachers can spend time discussing student issues and concerns as they arise. Students will be mainstreamed with all high school students for Physical Education, Art, Elective classes, and lunch. Advisory will include all 200 students and they will be heterogeneously divided equally by the amount of teachers in the Academy. This advisory class will meet daily and should attend to the following practices: convey the expectations and
demand for academic work; help students deal with increased independence; create opportunities for students to connect with a social group; help students manage social media; help students to mature; and help students manage anxiety. Core classes and electives will meet for approximately 55 minutes, and advisory will meet for approximately 30 minutes. This daily schedule and routine will help build bonds, address issues, and ease the transition from grade 8 to grade 9, and then finally to grade 10. Smith, (1997) along with Herztog and Morgan, (1997) found that students that are involved in multidimensional transition programs are more apt to be successful. The multi-pronged approach to an Academy and Advisory Program should help accomplish this. Roybal (2011) suggests that a multifaceted program is needed in order for students to be successful, but also that schools must need to be patient when building these programs.

A Freshman Academy will help to promote a team concept, maintain consistency, and help students transition more effectively to high school—all of which will help students feel safe and connected to school. Blum & Libbey (2004b), Klem & Connell (2004), and McNeely & Falci (2004) all found that, when a student feels safe and connected in school, academic achievement improves. A Freshman Academy will help promote positive relationships between students and the adults in the schools while also helping them transition to high school in an environment that they are used to from middle school (Scales et al., 2000). The team model, that school within a school feel, will help students and allow for an easier transition to high school.

Within this model, teachers would have common planning time. This would allow daily time for them to meet and discuss student issues and to look at data. This time could be teacher-driven, but it can also be administratively-driven. Teachers that have common planning time and
share the same group of students will also positively benefit students. The rich discussion about students is beneficial to all (Legters, Adams, and Williams, 2012).

Grewe and McCay (2011) found that teaming grade 9 students much like students are teamed in the 8th grade is valuable. In high school, students have high anxiety over new procedures, there is an increased emphasis on credits and grades, and there are increased social pressures. A Freshman Academy, will help students ease into high school a little more smoothly by replicating what they already know in grade 8. The transition can then take time over the year and not happen instantly when students walk into a grade 9 classroom (Roybal, 2011).

MacIver (1990), who reviewed transition programs, stated that in order for a program to be successful it must have several key components. In addition to an Academy, the program needs to have an advisory component. Through this advisory, the school can address the curriculum issues, questions students have about high school transition, levels, demands, amount of homework, and expectations. Students also need to be clear about the safety and discipline required in a high school; with more freedom also comes more responsibility. A daily advisory program will help address many of these concerns (Johnson, 2009). As it was seen through this study’s interviews, there are many things that impact a student’s ability to be successful. Addressing these academic, social, and emotional concerns through an advisory program will benefit students.

Mizelle and Irvin (2000), also found through their research that schools that had the most effective transition programs were those that included a variety of activities. These activities would take place in advisory to meet the needs of students at different times during the year. These activities would include but not be limited to what was discussed in the interviews, and would also be followed up through discussions with students, staff, parents, and administrators.
There is an ebb and flow to the school year which is predictable at times. Topics covered will align with this. However, the uniqueness of this program will also allow the school to be able to insert topics, lessons, and discussions as situations call for.

Advisories take on many roles and cover many topics. Welsh (2012) found that, although advisories vary from school to school, the central themes revolve around team building, interpersonal relationships, academic advising, and career planning. When positive relationships are established, there is a greater chance students will feel connected to their school (Johnson, 2009). This will help students navigate expectations, social issues, and anxiety.

MacLaury, S., & Gratz, Z. (2002) also found that students in advisories are more apt to share their feelings and discuss an issue with an adult. This is one of the key components of this program. Through the curriculum that will be established in advisory, students will have the opportunity to not only address the nuts and bolts of high school, like credits, MCAS, finals, GPA, etc., but they will also be able to use this time to talk about what fears, apprehensions, and concerns they have in school. Doing so with an adult they can trust is critical.

**Practices.** There are two prongs to this transitional program; the first is the Freshman Academy and the second is the advisory block built into the schedule. The ability to create a school within a school will only benefit students. Having only 100 students per team and having the same five core teachers will help students feel connected in school and will also ease them into the rigors of high school. The literature is clear in showing that when students are part of a program, they are more likely to be successful in schools. A Freshmen Academy will help to create this. As Roybal (2011), Cauley & Jovanovich (2006), and Hertzog and Morgan (1999) all found in their work, that students involved in a transitional program are more successful in school and more likely to graduate than those not exposed to a program.
The Freshman Academy should also assist in minimizing the amount of “new things” a student needs to get accustomed to when coming to high school. At Success Junior/Senior High School, students are very accustomed to the building, since it is a 7-12 school and they will be in it continuously for five years. However, the expectations inside the classroom are far different between the two. Neild (2009) points out that when distraction and multiple changes are minimized students succeed at a higher level. All of this can lead to a student feeling anxious. The feel of a middle school team, coupled with the topics covered in advisory, will help students with this anxiety (Benner and Graham, 2009).

The introduction to grade 9 and high school is anxiety filled and stress provoking. Isakson and Jarvis (1999) found that a student’s anxiety level increases at the start of freshman year and declines throughout the year. The practice of having a team concept that students are used to will help to minimize this level of stress and anxiety.

Advisory will be scheduled into the daily rotation for students. As part of this block, students will have the ability to build a personal relationship with a teacher in a non-academic class. This level of connectedness is important to helping students. There will be a set curriculum that teachers will follow that will help students adjust to high school. These topics have been previously discussed. However, teachers and students will have the ability to veer off the set curriculum and discuss events as they come up in school and/or society. For instance, the 2016 Presidential Election may not have been established as part of the curriculum. However, after the election, this may have been a dialogue in advisory that could have occurred. McClure, L., Yonezawa, S., & Jones, M. (2010) all found that when a school creates a personalized environment, students are more likely to feel safe and connected, which ultimately leads to student success.
Advisory will identify topics that are known to cause a student to be anxious. This in turn should lead to reduced anxiety levels. There are known triggers that can cause angst amongst students, such as the newness of the building, midterm exams, expectations at dances or events, and increase in academic rigor. Addressing these will only benefit students and increase achievement (Isakson and Jarvis, 1999).

**Resources.** There are several resources that will need to be in place in order for the transition program to be effective. The first thing that will need to be done is to make certain that there is adequate staffing to establish two teams. Each team will need to have a dedicated ELA, Math, Science, Social Studies, and Foreign Language teacher. Some of this staffing can come internally from the current staff at Success Junior/Senior High School, but members will need to be hired and budgeted for. Creating and having teachers dedicated to the team is critical for the success of the program (Wasley et.al., 2000). The typical budget cycle for a school system begins in November and runs through March. This allows time for principals to present their staffing needs, and then for the Superintendent and School Committee to review the budget and advocate for resources. In order to have a program in place for the Fall of 2020, a budget will need to be submitted in November 2019; therefore, a conversation needs to start happening by January 2019 to make certain that funds are correctly allocated for this program. The budget discussion and implications are a two-school year process.

The next thing that will need to occur is to make certain that staff has been exposed to appropriate amounts of professional development to create these teams and run advisory. Professional development is critical to help staff move forward, learn, and develop (Joyce, B., & Showers, B.,1988). The shift from being a high school teacher to a 9th grade team teacher will be something that requires time and effort. Currently, high school teachers are assigned up to 3
preparations per school year and teach 5 classes. Therefore, it is possible for an English teacher to have two sections of grade 9 English, one section of grade 10, and two sections of grade 11. As part of a team they will only teach grade 9 students. This change will require a shift in a teacher’s thinking and pedagogy. In order for the program to be successful, they cannot teach in the Academy the same way they taught in high school. They will need to blend middle school culture with high school culture. This will require a certain amount of professional development. Additionally, there will need to be professional development done around how to effectively run an advisory. Many times, teachers are not comfortable running a class like this, which can push teachers out of their comfort zone. Professional development is the mechanism that will need to be used to help teachers make this shift. When teachers receive quality professional development it strengthens their ability in the classroom and ultimately leads to student success (Miles et.al., 2004). The school must provide ample professional development for teachers to make this program, and students, successful.

The next phase of this program is to make certain that common planning time is built into the school day. Common planning time is different than a preparation period. According to the collective bargaining agreement at Success Junior/Senior High School, teachers have one preparation period per day. This period is unassigned and the school cannot dictate what a teacher may do during this period of time. With common planning time, teachers would meet daily as a team to discuss student issues or concerns, plan upcoming events, schedule meetings with guidance or administration, and meet with students. Legters, Adams, and Williams (2012) state, “Common planning time provides time, opportunity, and expectations that teachers will place student needs and progress at the center of their work and assume collective responsibility for student learning. (p. 2)” Additionally, administration can dictate what happens during this
time. Therefore, if the need arises for meetings, projects, data analysis, etc., this period of time can be used for this to occur.

There needs to be resources in place for curriculum development. The curriculum for grade 9 students has been established and mandated by the Department of Education. However, the advisory curriculum will need to be created and written. This is something that will need to occur the prior to the program being started and assessed every year. All of this can be done during common planning time. As previously stated, there is some curriculum that will be boilerplate and others that will be added as the need arises throughout the year. A solid curriculum is considered by many to be the heart of a school. It must be planned, purposeful, progressive, and systematic (Bilbao, 2008). A team will be put together to write and evaluate this curriculum.

Finally, financial resources must be allocated through the local budget for all of this to occur. There needs to be funding for staff, curriculum development, and professional development. The school will need to determine what the financial implications will be for the budget, add that to the bottom line, and advocate for that budget to the community. This is something that will take careful time and planning to effectively execute.

**Discussion of Findings in Relationship to the Theoretical Framework**

The theory that was used for this research is the stage-environment fit theory. The stage-environment fit theory identifies those key times in a student’s life that can cause them significant trouble due to a mismatch between what an adolescent may need and what their environment, in this case school, can provide them. This study was conducted to help develop, implement, and set in place a transitional program in grade 9 that seeks to address a student’s
academic, social, and emotional needs in school in order to help them succeed to the fullest of their potential.

**What is the Stage-Environment fit theory (SEF).** Eccles and Midgley were the first to define the stage-environment fit theory in order to look at the impact that transitions have on students. Their research stemmed from their desire to see what impact school transitions had on adolescents. They found that over time a student’s social, emotional, and cognitive needs change, and that if the environment that they are in does not change or adapt, then students can begin to experience negative outcomes, such as lack of motivation and engagement (Eccles & Midgely, 1989).

The transition from 8th grade to 9th grade is a critical one. Studies, research, and interviews have all shown that students struggle during this period of time. The reasons are vast and vary from year to year and student to student, but schools see these struggles annually. The changes in academic expectations are significant for students. And for whatever reason, there is very little to bridge the gap between 8th and 9th grade for these students. The social issues that students deal with seem to magnify in high school. And anxiety begins to manifest itself in new and different ways. As Eccles and Midgley found, when these changes are not addressed, a student can begin to experience negative outcomes. A transitional program that addresses these anxieties can help to mitigate these negative outcomes.

**Environment.** There is a significant change in the environment from 8th to 9th grade. Although it is only one grade level, the changes are noteworthy. Students struggle with the change in expectations, demands of high school, and level of independence that is common place at the secondary level. Students in high school are no longer teamed, have classes with upper classmates, see the change in class and homework expectations and rigor, need to make new
friends, have greater social demands placed on them, are dealing with a bigger building, and are forming new relationships with not only teachers but guidance, coaches, advisors, etc., and deal with the reality that now things count in high school (Eccles and Midgley, 1993). This is all a substantive change in a student’s environment. With an Academy and Advisory model, students will spend 75% of their day in an environment that they are accustomed to. They would be slowly integrated into a new environment by having 25% of their day integrated with all students. Furthermore, through advisory and the team concept of the classroom, students will begin to slowly and systematically be introduced to the high school environment through lessons and class expectations. Eccles et.al. (1993) found that there is a mismatch between the needs of students and the opportunities they have access to in their new environments. Minimizing that mismatch will benefit students.

Eccles and Midgley (1989) found that the way middle and high schools are set up do not currently meet developmental needs of students. However, when the needs of students are more closely aligned to their school environment, students experience a higher degree of success (Midgely, Feldaufer, & Eccles, 1989).

*Transitional period.* Eccles seeks to look at and identify what it is about transitions that put adolescents at risk. She points out the difference in the makeup of classrooms, that a teacher’s beliefs about teaching and learning change, and the classroom climate is different, as are the relationship teachers have with students and the way they interact with students. The way teachers manage their classroom, motivate students, and the nature of academic work changes dramatically (Eccles, 2004). This is due to the transition from middle school to high school. She states, “As one would expect with the stage-environment fit theory, motivational declines were associated with the high school rather than the middle school transition” (p. 144).
A freshmen academy that more closely mirrors what students are used to in the middle school will greatly assist students as they start grade 9. Teachers will be able to more effectively get across to students what is expected in high school. The school year will start off with a system that more closely mirrors what they are used to in grade 8. As the year progresses, expectations and demands will gradually increase. As of now the change in expectations and demands is too great from one grade level to the next. This dramatic change, along with everything else that a new high school student faces, is too great for many students to handle.

**Social and emotional needs.** One of the major issues that students struggle with during this transitional period is the social and emotional demands that are associated with high school. It was found that “the fit between the developmental needs of the adolescent and the educational environment is important.” When both of these are synchronized, students will experience positive growth and be successful (Eccles et. al., 1993, p. 96). The curriculum of the advisory coupled with the Academy will help create an environment that will allow for students to be successful.

It was also found that learning is maximized when all spheres are aligned and working in harmony (Eccles et. al., 1993). Schools must find a way to address the changes in the environment, deal with the transition, and also address the social and emotional needs of students. When this is done, maximum learning can occur because distraction is minimized. As a student grows and develops so do their needs. Emotionally, they are changing and growing. Cognitively, they are making the leap from middle school to high school. Socially, there is such a difference between grade 8 to 9. This leap includes social changes and expectations. These changes can place stress on a student and can make the transition difficult (Eccles & Midgely, 1993).
It was clear through the research and the interviews that there are several social and emotional needs that students face as they move from grade 8 to grade 9. Currently, there is very little in place to assist students with these issues. Student may go to guidance if a major issue arises. If a teacher sees an issue, they may speak to a student privately or refer them for services. But there is no formal structure in place to help all students. An advisory program will help solve this issue. This advisory program will have a curriculum that addresses the academic, social, and emotional needs of students as identified in this study. Additionally, it will have the flexibility to meet the needs of students as they come up during the school year. As team teachers in the freshmen academy see issues come up, they will be able to address this with advisory teachers and have these issues addressed as part of this program. Instead of these issues going unresolved, or simply reviewed with students individually, there is now a forum and mechanism to address them.

**Implications for Practice**

There are a few areas that will need to be addressed to put this program into place. The first is that there will need to be enough staffing to create two freshmen teams. The school will need to allocate funding to hire new staff to create these teams. Secondly, teachers will need to be recruited from within or hired to teach on these teams. Most high school teachers enjoy the ability to teach all four grade levels; this would change in this program. Common planning time will need to be a priority for these teams. The school will need to make certain it can create a schedule that offers these teachers these opportunities. In addition, teachers will need time over the school year and summer for professional development to create curriculum to meet the needs of these students. They will also need release time to visit current schools with freshman academies and 8th grade schools to talk to staff and learn. There will also need to be education
for parents and the community on the importance of this work. Many middle school students and their families are ready for the increased demands of high school and may see this program as the watering down secondary education, not properly preparing students for high school academics, Advanced Placement Classes, and college readiness. This will have to be addressed through programming.

Many times, common planning time is used for discussing student work and issues. It can also be used for looking at data and addressing areas of concern that come up throughout the year. This time, as previously stated, can also be driven by the administration to work on identified areas of concern. In short, this common planning time, is set aside for teacher to work collaboratively with all shareholders to help students succeed. One area that was not addressed in this study, and did not come up in the interviews, was to use this time to look at curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices. This framework is similar to a professional learning community that schools have established across the nation. As Eaker, et. al. (2002) write a PLC is framework that allows for teachers to build and strengthen their ability to work on high preforming teams that improve student learning. This encompasses many aspects including but not limited to improving student achievement through looking at data, discussions, and improved instructional practices. As they state these PLCS are focused on a “working interdependently to achieve common goals; and a focus on results as evidenced by a commitment to continuous improvement.” This includes looking at pedagogy as a way to improve student outcomes. This collaborative time, in looking at all aspects of what makes a student successful, is critical to the success of the program.

In terms of the advisory program, teachers would need to be identified to teach these classes. Current freshmen academy teachers would teach these classes, but additional staff may
be needed to lower class size. Scheduling of this could be problematic. Students and parents may want to take an additional elective in high school instead of this class. The school will need to educate families on the importance of this class. Teachers will need time to write and create the curriculum for this class. There will need to be a formal mechanism put into place for advisory teachers, academy teachers, guidance, and administration to meet to evaluate the effectiveness of the program and also address the needs of students. In order to meet all these needs, a discussion with the teachers’ association should occur to see if there are any contractual implications that teachers face.

**Limitations**

There were a few key limitations to this project. The researcher was employed at Success Junior/Senior High School through June 2016. The IRB for this project was not received until July 2017. Emails were sent out over the summer to the various groups. As a result of several teachers not checking their emails during the summer, only three teachers responded and were interviewed. Additionally, due to the fact that the researcher did not return to Success Junior/Senior High School after June 30, 2016, access to parents and students was difficult to obtain. Therefore, only two parents and no students were interviewed. As a result of changing jobs, access to participants was limited and difficult.

Additional limitations of the study include the fact that only interview data was used. This was the sole source of data. Looking at discipline data, attendance records, MCAS scores, AP scores, etc. will be beneficial moving forward and building this program. Finally, only current parents and teachers were interviewed for this study. It will be helpful to include both graduates and non-graduates to the study to get their perspective now that they have time away from the school to reflect. It will also be helpful to interview retired teachers and parents of
former students. Time away from the school can be helpful in having a clear picture of the situation. These additional resources and pieces of information will be useful in building and strengthening the program.

Although this study was done on a small school, with just 2 teams, it does have transferability to larger schools. The set-up of teams, whether two or four or five is the same. The curriculum and the set-up of how these teams function is also the same. Advisory would also run in a similar fashion, but the curriculum may be different as a result of the needs of the school and students. This study has established a blueprint for all schools, regardless of size, to follow. Some tweaks and slight modifications may need to occur, but the set-up of teams that address the academic, social, and emotional needs of students with a built-in advisory can occur in a school of any size.

**Areas for Future Research**

The school and teachers will need to research current Freshmen Academies and Advisory Programs. The curriculum that is associated with these two programs will also need to be looked at and researched. A mechanism will need to be put in place that can also measure the effectiveness of the program. As students change from year to year, issues also change. There needs to be a structure put in place to not only look at the effectiveness and model of the Academy and Advisory program, but also what changes need to be made to meet the needs of students from year to year.

The school will also need to look at how it will build a bridge between grade 8 and grade 9 teachers. The change in expectations does not need to be so vast and great. Creating some form of a vertical team so that middle school and high school teachers can communicate about students and expectations will not only benefit students, but also help to strengthen the model.
Conclusion

As an undergraduate student at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, I remember where I was when I decided to change my major from Political Science to Spanish and become a teacher. It was in Professor Nina Scott’s Literature class and we were reading Romulo Gallegos’ work *Dona Barbara*. It was in that class that I found the joy and happiness that teachers experience when they help students succeed. My philosophy as an educator, whether in the classroom or as an administrator at various levels, has always been that all students can be successful in school at a high level, and that it is my responsibility to create a conducive learning environment so that they can succeed at that level. I did this as a teacher, an assistant principal, principal, and now as an assistant superintendent. This took on various forms throughout the last twenty-three years depending on my role and the district I was a part of. This body of work, which I have spent the last five years working on, ties in perfectly with my values, beliefs, and philosophy. This is not just a topic to cover and research, but yet another example of creating that environment so that students can succeed at a high level.

With that said, in order to best meet the needs of students as they transition from grade 8 to grade 9, Success Junior/Senior High School should adopt a freshmen academy model with an embedded advisor/advisee program. This program should attend to the following practices: convey the expectations and demand for academic work; help students deal with increased independence; create opportunities for students to connect with a social group; help students manage social media; help students to mature; help students manage anxiety; and effectively help students transition to high school. In order for this to successfully occur the school needs to spend time effectively implementing the program and educating all shareholders on the
importance of this program, while also being mindful of the human and financial capital required to start such a program.

Although no longer at Success Junior/Senior High School, this work can be applied to my current school system. The topic of successful transitions from grade 8 to grade 9 is not just one that is specific to one school or community, but to any school or community. Advisories, and building relationships with students is something that also needs to occur in any school and with all teachers and students. These concepts are transferable to my new school and community.

All schools want to see students succeed at the highest level, be college and career ready upon graduation, close achievement gaps, be good citizens and human beings, and ultimately be productive members of society. Effectively transitioning students into high school will help to ensure that this will happen. This Freshmen Academy, along with an Advisory Program that specifically target a student’s academic, social, and emotional needs, will help students effectively transition from grade 8 to 9 and put more students on the path to greater success.
Appendix A:

August, 2016

Hello,
The purpose of this email is to inform you that for the last seven years I have been a student at Northeastern University and I am in the final stages of completing my doctoral work. I am conducting research on how best to implement a grade 8 to grade 9 transition program that supports a student’s academic, social, and emotional needs. I am writing this email to ask if you would like to take about one hour to be interviewed as part of this project. Your experience as an administrator will be valuable to the project and me. Participation is completely voluntary and your answers will be confidential and destroyed upon completion of the project.

If you would like to volunteer to participate, please email me at my student email address, Vieira.p@husky.neu.edu. I will not contact you again regarding this research.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me (vieira.p@husky.neu.edu) or Dr. Kelly Conn (k.conn@northeastern.edu).

Thank you for your time.

Paul Vieira
Appendix B:

Administrator and Teacher Consent form: The Importance of Transitional Programs to Help Students Succeed in High School

Northeastern University, Doctor of Education
Name of Investigator(s): Principal Investigator, Kelly Conn, Student researcher, Paul Vieira
Title of Project: The Importance of Transitional Programs to Help Students Succeed in High School

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. 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.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You are being recruited because you are an administrator or teacher at EBJSHS.

Why is this research study being done?

The goal of this research is to explore ways in which Success Junior/Senior High School (Pseudonym) can help students be successful as they transition from grade 8 to grade 9. This study will ask administrators, teachers, parents and student: What is currently being done at the school that is working to support this transition? How can the school better meet the needs of students? What can the school differently in the future?

What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to answer a series of questions based on your personal experience as either an administrator or teacher at EBJSHS to help guide the researcher in developing a program that will meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of students as they transition from grade 8 to grade 9.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?

This interview will take place at a time and location of your convenience. It will last approximately one hour and you will be asked approximately 15 questions.
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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?</strong></td>
<td>There is no foreseeable risk or discomfort to you during this interview.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Will I benefit by being in this research?</strong></td>
<td>There are no direct benefits for you. However, potential benefits to others include sharing findings from this study with key stakeholders of the school that can be used to design a program to support students as they transition from grade 8 to grade 9 that will meet the social, emotional, and educational needs of students. This program may help students feel better connected in schools and assist them as they transition. Additionally, it may help students experience success and help them graduate.</td>
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<td><strong>Who will see the information about me?</strong></td>
<td>Your answers will only be seen by the researcher and will be destroyed once the study is completed.</td>
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<td><strong>If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?</strong></td>
<td>You can decide not to participate in this study and can withdraw at any time.</td>
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<td>There is no foreseeable risk or discomfort to you during this interview.</td>
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<td><strong>Can I stop my participation in this study?</strong></td>
<td>If you feel uncomfortable at any time, the interview will be stopped immediately.</td>
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<td><strong>Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?</strong></td>
<td>If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Kelly Conn at <a href="mailto:k.conn@northeastern.edu">k.conn@northeastern.edu</a>. Or myself, Paul Vieira as I am the only person conducting the study at <a href="mailto:vieira.p@husky.neu.edu">vieira.p@husky.neu.edu</a></td>
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If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 490 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**

You will not be paid for this study.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**

It will not cost you anything to be part of this study.

**Is there anything else I need to know?**

You must be at least 18 years old to participate.

**I agree to take part in this research.**

______________________________________________

Signature of person agreeing to take part

______________________________________________

Printed name of person above

______________________________________________

Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent

______________________________________________

Printed name of person above
Hello,

The purpose of this email is to inform you that for the last seven years I have been a student at Northeastern University and I am in the final stages of completing my doctoral work. I am conducting research on how best to implement a grade 8 to grade 9 transition program that supports a student’s academic, social, and emotional needs. I am writing this email to ask if you would like to take about one hour to be interviewed as part of this project. Your experience as a teacher working with grade 9 students will be valuable to the project and me. Participation is completely voluntary and your answers will be anonymous and destroyed upon completion of the project. If you would like to volunteer to participate, please email me at my student email (vieira.p@husky.neu.edu) or Dr. Kelly Conn, my advisor (k.conn@northeastern.edu).

If you do not want to participate, please disregard this notice. I will not contact you again regarding this research.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me (vieira.p@husky.neu.edu) or my advisor, Dr. Kelly Conn (k.conn@northeastern.edu).

Thank you for your time.

Paul Vieira
Appendix D:

Administrator and Teacher Consent form: The Importance of Transitional Programs to Help Students Succeed in High School

Northeastern University, Doctor of Education
Name of Investigator(s): Principal Investigator, Kelly Conn, Student researcher, Paul Vieira

Title of Project: The Importance of Transitional Programs to Help Students Succeed in High School

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. 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.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You are being recruited because you are an administrator or teacher at EBJSHS.

Why is this research study being done?

The goal of this research is to explore ways in which Success Junior/Senior High School (Pseudonym) can help students be successful as they transition from grade 8 to grade 9. This study will ask administrators, teachers, parents and student: What is currently being done at the school that is working to support this transition? How can the school better meet the needs of students? What can the school differently in the future?

What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to answer a series of questions based on your personal experience as either an administrator or teacher at EBJSHS to help guide the researcher in developing a program that will meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of students as they transition from grade 8 to grade 9.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?

This interview will take place at a time and location of your convenience. It will last approximately one hour and you will be asked approximately 15 questions.
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| **Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?** |
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 490 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**

You will not be paid for this study.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**

It will not cost you anything to be part of this study.

**Is there anything else I need to know?**

You must be at least 18 years old to participate.

**I agree to take part in this research.**

____________________________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part

________________________
Date

________________________
Printed name of person above

____________________________________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent

________________________
Date

________________________
Printed name of person above
Appendix E:

August, 2016

Hello,

The purpose of this email is to inform you that for the last seven years I have been a student at Northeastern University and I am in the final stages of completing my doctoral work. I am conducting research on how best to implement a grade 8 to grade 9 transition program that supports a student’s academic, social, and emotional needs. I am writing this email to ask if you would like to take about one hour to be interviewed as part of this project. As a parent of students that have transitioned from grade 8 to 9, your experience will be valuable to the project and me. Participation is completely voluntary and your answers will be confidential and destroyed upon completion of the project.

If you would like to volunteer to participate, please email me at my student email address, Vieira.p@husky.neu.edu. If you do not want to participate, please disregard this notice. I will not contact you again regarding this research.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me (vieira.p@husky.neu.edu) or Dr. Kelly Conn, my advisor (k.conn@northeastern.edu).

Thank you for your time.

Paul Vieira
Appendix F:

Parent Consent form: The Importance of Transitional Programs to Help Students Succeed in High School

Northeastern University, Doctor of Education

Name of Investigator(s): Principal Investigator, Kelly Conn, Student researcher, Paul Vieira

Title of Project: The Importance of Transitional Programs to Help Students Succeed in High School

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you, as a parent, to take part in a research study. 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.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You are being recruited because you are a parent at EBJSHS.

Why is this research study being done?

The goal of this research is to explore ways in which Success Junior/Senior High School (Pseudonym) can help students be successful as they transition from grade 8 to grade 9. This study will ask administrators, teachers, parents and student: What is currently being done at the school that is working to support this transition? How can the school better meet the needs of students? What can the school differently in the future?

What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to answer a series of questions based on your personal experience as a parent of a child at EBJSHS to help guide the researcher in developing a program that will meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of students as they transition from grade 8 to grade 9.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
This interview will take place at a time and location of your convenience. It will last approximately one hour and you will be asked approximately 15 questions.

**Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?**

There is no foreseeable risk or discomfort to you during this interview.

**Will I benefit by being in this research?**

There are no direct benefits for you. However, potential benefits to others include sharing findings from this study with key stakeholders of the school that can be used to design a program to support students as they transition from grade 8 to grade 9 that will meet the social, emotional, and educational needs of students. This program may help students feel better connected in schools and assist them as they transition. Additionally, it may help students experience success and help them graduate.

**Who will see the information about me?**

Your answers will only be seen by the researcher and will be destroyed once everything is completed.

**If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?**

You can decide not to participate in this study and can withdraw at any time.

**What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?**

There is no foreseeable risk or discomfort to you during this interview.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**

If you feel uncomfortable at any time, the interview will be stopped immediately.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Kelly Conn at k.conn@northeastern.edu. Or myself, Paul Vieira as I am the only person conducting the survey at vieira.p@husky.neu.edu
Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 490 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Will I be paid for my participation?

You will not be paid for this study.

Will it cost me anything to participate?

It will not cost you anything to be part of this study.

Is there anything else I need to know?

You must be at least 18 years old to participate.

I agree to take part in this research.

______________________________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part               Date

______________________________________________
Printed name of person above

______________________________________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent               Date

______________________________________________
Printed name of person above
Appendix G:

What is the process Success High School should take in the development, implementation, and evaluation of a Grade 9 transition program that seeks to meet the academic, social and emotional needs of students?

Questions for Administration/Teachers

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is your role here at EBJSHS? How long have you been in that role?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What was your experience prior to becoming an administrator?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is your fondest memory of your days in high school?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What was your biggest challenge in high school as a student?</td>
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</table>

Based on your experience working with grade 8 and 9 students, what are the biggest issues you have seen when students transition to high school?

How can these challenges be mitigated?

What supports are in place currently to help students as they transition to high school? What has worked? What has not worked?

Based on your experiences what supports would be most helpful to students in the district?

Based on your experiences what could we do a better job at as students transition to grade 9?

What do you see as the biggest academic needs of students as they transition?

What do you see as the biggest social needs of students as they transition?

What do you see as the biggest emotional needs of students as they transition?

Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

What is the process Success High School should take in the development, implementation, and evaluation of a Grade 9 transition program that seeks to meet the academic, social and emotional needs of students?
### Questions for Parents

<table>
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<th>Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How long have you lived in Town?</td>
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<td>How many children have you had in the district? How may have transitioned from grade 8 to 9?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is your fondest memory of your days in high school?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What was your biggest challenge in high school as a student?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What supports are in place currently to help students as they transition to high school? What has worked? What has not worked?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on your experiences what supports would be most helpful to students in the district?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How could the school have better supported these challenges?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What was the biggest academic challenge your children faced as they transition?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was the biggest social needs of your children as they transition?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What were the biggest emotional needs that your children faced as they transition?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there anything else you would like to share with me?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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