WORKING TO REDUCE NINTH GRADE FAILURE RATES IN URBAN SCHOOL SETTINGS: A MULTI-CASE STUDY OF NINTH GRADE TRANSITION PROGRAMS IN FOUR URBAN HIGH SCHOOLS IN VIRGINIA

A Dissertation Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

by
Lynnell Theard Gibson

September 2006
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Approved September 2006 by

James H. Stronge, Ph.D.
Chair of Dissertation Committee

Michael F. DiPaola, Ed.D.

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Chapter 1

THE PROBLEM

Introduction of the Problem

The focus of the ninth grade year as a crucial year for high school students is a current issue that raises national concern (Herlihy, Kemple, & Smith, 2005). Currently, rural and suburban school districts have been successful in implementing and in sustaining practices that encourage successful transition programs. However, in urban school settings, educators have been perplexed by the varying degrees of success with these same strategies. Kerr and Letgers (2002) reported that many ninth graders have a difficult time adjusting to the demands of high school, resulting in lower grades, more disciplinary problems, higher failure rates, and feelings that they do not belong to the high school community. Furthermore, disadvantaged students face even greater challenges as they make the transition to high school and may lack the motivation, interest, and support needed to become successfully integrated into the new school environment (Kerr, 2002). As urban school districts work to enhance student achievement and promotion rates, they are faced with challenges that make identifying effective practices difficult.

Even though these school districts share the commonality of being called urban schools, their student populations and varying needs make pinpointing specific strategies difficult. Bremer, Cosio, Johnson, Lehr, and Thompson (2004) noted that even though several components appear to be key to intervention success, these components require continued research and systematic implementation to determine the extent to which empirical data accumulates supporting them as essential intervention components.
“Enabling students to make a successful transition into high school should be one of the highest priorities of urban high schools” (Furstenberg, Nield-Curran, & Stoner-Eby, 2003, p. 5). If urban school districts succeeded in reducing ninth grade failure rates, transitions into high school would positively impact student achievement and be aligned to the tenets of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001). The NCLB Act called for school districts to consistently demonstrate that all students, regardless of ethnicity or socio-economic status, acquire adequate yearly progress by participating in and passing state mandated tests and by graduating from high school within a reasonable frame of time. Additionally, Goals 2000 called for schools to rate a 90 percent school completion rate by the year 2000 (Wirt & Others, 2002). Bremer and others (2004) cited a need to identify data-based interventions for reducing dropping out of high school. Furstenberg, Nield-Curran, and Stoner-Eby (2003) found that even though ninth grade was the modal year for dropping out, the decision to leave school was not triggered by entering the ninth grade. Rather, the timing and patterning of large nonselective neighborhood schools, lack of academic preparation, absenteeism, retention in prior grades, and the general disorganization of the high school environment contributed to the decision to leave school.

As public schools throughout the United States continue to implement programs specifically geared to meet the needs of ninth graders, they do so in an environment that has not been able to generalize effective strategies across urban populations. Information and data published to date have yielded mixed results (Herlihy, Kemple, & Smith, 2005). Thus, urban educators are confronted with inconclusive data that makes them question what interventions work in transitioning disadvantaged students into high school.
The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) stipulated that high schools must include graduation rates in their Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) objectives and that states must comply with the understanding of graduation rates. Graduation rates are defined as the percentage of students who graduate from high school with a regular diploma in the standard number of years (NCLB). Currently, four years of high school are the standard for public schools in the United States. However, Jiang and Wheelock (2005) noted that the nation’s graduation rate over the last 30 years has steadily declined as an increasing percentage of adolescents are not graduating from high school in four or even five years. As schools work to demonstrate continuous student improvement, they are identifying and addressing areas where lack of student progress will adversely affect accreditation ratings. The implementation of freshman transition programs is one reform effort that is being used to enhance student achievement and improve overall school completion.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was the theory of systems thinking. According to Aronson (1996-8), systems thinking focuses on how the thing being studied interacts with other constituents of the system. In this sense, the ninth grade year of schooling is a part of an individual’s formative education, but it is also a part of an organized entity within a school system. Changes that may need to occur during this transition year need to be conceptualized in the context of the total instructional program (Conley, 1993). The ninth grade year is embedded within a program that should bring students to the point of high school completion. Swanson (2005) described high school outcomes as a simple path that can lead to either dropping out or graduating (see Figure 1).
What happens to students in the ninth grade is currently influenced by federal, state, and local mandates. NCLB and state accreditation guidelines have set the stage for complicated systems of organizational change within the context of schools. In order to examine what urban schools are doing to enhance the success of ninth graders, it is necessary to understand how what happens in schools can be examined through the lenses of system-wide thinking, open systems thinking, and process systems thinking (Senge, 2000).

**System-wide thinking.** Senge defined system-wide thinking as efforts to enact change through an organization where the entire entity is working to improve. This is generally more effective than working in isolation. This facet of the framework will be captured in the descriptions of staff working together on the district and school building levels.

**Open-systems thinking.** Open-systems thinking involves seeking to understand a system through its inputs, throughputs, outputs, and boundaries. This should be important in capturing each school’s decisions regarding interventions and decisions for plans of action within the context of its learning institution (Senge, 2000).

**Process systems thinking.** Process systems thinking is accomplished by realigning communication structures to effect change in patterns of behavior within the
organization. This type of thinking is the foundation upon which real, long-term change is built (Senge, 2000).

In terms of this study, programs of interventions and support used to reduce ninth grade failure were identified in order to increase the effectiveness of the transition of students into high school. Since ninth grade is a component of the four-year high school program, urban educators must determine which practices best serve the needs of their student populations.

Statement of the Problem

This study focused on the successes and challenges urban school administrators and teachers experienced in planning, implementing, and sustaining successful ninth grade transition programs. Each school’s story has been told in a qualitative manner in order to gain insight in terms of how each program was developed to meet the needs of its school population.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to add to the body knowledge of what is known about ninth grade transition through the:

- Identification of common and unique elements in the implementation designs of transition programs in four selected high schools.
- Examination of the planning components that supported the initial design and implementation of transition programs in four selected high schools.
- Analysis of the factors that either inhibited or facilitated sustainability of transition programs in four selected high schools.
Research Questions

1. How did each of the four selected high schools plan the components that support the initial designs of its 9th grade transition program?

2. What elements make up the designs of the four selected 9th grade transition programs?

3. What factors inhibited the planning, implementation, and sustainability of transition programs in the four 9th grade transition programs?

4. What factors facilitated the planning, implementation, and sustainability of 9th grade transition programs in the four selected high schools?

5. What criteria does each of the four selected high schools use to determine the success of its transition program?

Significance of the Study

Bergenson (2003) noted that no single program or practice has been determined to significantly reduce dropout rates. Even though being retained in the ninth grade is a good predictor that a student will dropout out of school, being promoted to the tenth grade does not decrease the likelihood that the student will stay in school until graduation. What keeps students in school through graduation has not been formulated, and that is why this study is significant.

Information gathered through this study can impact education by informing practitioners who seek solutions in reducing ninth grade failure rates in their school settings. Since each school designed a program to meet the needs of its particular population, other school districts could also examine the needs of each of its high schools
as a system-wide effort where building principals are allowed to develop a program specifically tailored for their students.

**Definitions of Terms**

*Annual dropout.* Annual dropout is the percentage of students who are enrolled in May or June who do not return to school in September.

*Attrition rate.* The attrition rate is the percentage of ninth graders not enrolled in grade twelve four years later (Bottoms, 2002).

*Disadvantaged students.* Gillock, Kombus, Reyes, and Sanchez (2000) defined disadvantaged students as those from urban, low-income, and/or minority backgrounds.

*Effectiveness.* Effectiveness refers to the strategies and/or ideas that result in improved student achievement and promotion.

*School improvement.* School improvement is a strategic process for reforming schools and increasing student learning (Bergenson, 2003).

*Longitudinal/cohort dropout.* Longitudinal/cohort dropout is defined as someone who enters ninth grade and, during the next four or five years, does not complete high school and is no longer enrolled (Bottoms, 2002).

*Sustainability.* Sustainability is being able to maintain accomplishments so that the accomplishments become the norm, rather than a feat.

**Limitations of the Study**

The findings of this study may not be widely generalizable because each school determined its course of action based on needs it identified in its student population; however, the findings can shed light on strategies that are successful and sustainable in urban high schools and give insight to school administrators and teachers who are
seeking answers to this problem. Schools whose demographics resemble one of the four high schools included in the study may use portions of the case studies to plan and implement their own transition programs.

**Major Assumptions**

Listed below are major assumptions underlying this study.

1. Each of the four high schools selected for inclusion in the study has a 9th grade transition program.
2. Ninth grade transition programs can be sustained.
3. Each high school developed a plan for a 9th grade transition program.
4. Each high school has unique elements within its plan.
5. The 9th grade transition programs share common traits.
6. Each program experiences successes and challenges.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

School districts across the country have implemented reform efforts to strengthen and to improve their instructional programs in order to reduce dropout rates, to increase graduation rates, and to maintain accreditation as determined by both state and federal mandates. One area that has gained attention over the last 10 years is the lack of student success during the ninth grade year. This is a transition year that drastically affects high school graduation and dropout rates. Furstenberg, Nield and Stoner-Eby (2003) reported that in Philadelphia, 57 percent of ninth graders not promoted to tenth grade had dropped out by the end of four years. In other districts as many as half of the students dropped out of high school before graduating (Balfanz & Legters, 2001). Furstenberg, Nield and Stoner-Eby (2003) noted that students who dropped out often experienced earlier crises, such as severe academic difficulty in ninth grade. Irvin and Mizelle (2000) pointed out that the transitioning to high school could be difficult for adolescents because high school tended to be a larger environment that was more impersonal, more competitive, and more grade-oriented than middle school. With promotion rates averaging approximately 50 percent, school leaders began to focus on identifying practices that resulted in improved student achievement in the ninth grade year.

As transition programs emerged across the country, educators and researchers captured the successes and challenges urban districts experienced as they addressed the discipline, social, and academic needs of students before, during, and after their ninth grade year of high school. This chapter will highlight the literature and major findings that have evolved around ninth grade transition by examining the following: (a) the
history of the ninth grade year; (b) the definition of ninth grade transition; (c) the need for
ninth grade transition programs; (d) the types of students selected for ninth grade
transition programs; (e) the efforts to reduce ninth grade failure rates; (f) reports from
ninth grade transition studies; and (g) reports from programs that focus on the ninth grade
year.

Historical Overview of How Ninth Grade Has Been Organized

*Junior High Schools.* In 1905, (Spring, 2005), New York established seventh and
eighth grade intermediate schools and began adding ninth grade in 1915. The curriculum
for these grade levels was focused on vocational training, socialization, and “unifying the
school life of the pupil” (p. 263). This marked the emergence of the junior high school as
an opportunity

- to adapt the instruction to the two sexes and the requirements of high schools and
  vocational schools;
- to offer different courses of study;
- and to classify pupils according to ability. (p. 261)

*Middle Schools.* As the middle school model became more defined, the ninth
grade was placed in the high school so that room could be made for sixth graders who
were moved into the middle schools from the elementary schools. According to
Lounsbury (1996), middle schools with grades 5 through 8 or 6 through 8 were
established as an alternative to the junior high school. In 1989, Wells noted that the two
most popular middle-school configurations were grades sixth through eighth middle
schools and grades seven through nine junior high schools.
Ninth Grade Only Campuses. Fager and Paglin (1997) studied grade configurations and found that there was no perfect answer to the placement of the ninth grade year. They described a school in Oregon City, Oregon, where a ninth grade school was established. They highlighted both advantages and disadvantages to such a program. The advantages noted by Fager and Paglin (1997) included fewer discipline infractions, fewer fights, and the opportunity for teachers to focus on freshman behavior. The disadvantages included the offering of fewer electives and extra-curricular activities. Students had to travel to the high school to participate in assemblies, dances, and sports, and student maturity was lacking. Benton (2001) described the efforts of North Texas to focus on improving ninth grade promotion rates by opening ninth grade only schools. The state of Texas planned to construct school sites specifically for ninth graders. As of 2001, Dallas had opened 6 ninth grade only campuses (Benton, 2001).

According to Benton (2001), in 1999 there were 74 ninth grade only schools in the United States, and Texas had at least sixteen. Benton (2001) also noted that the major reason that districts decided to open ninth grade only campuses though was to ease overcrowding in their high schools.

What Is Ninth Grade Transition?

Ninth grade transition is a process that is experienced by students entering high school for the first time. Schilling, Schinke, and Snow (1988) defined transition as “the movement from one state of certainty to another with a period of uncertainty in between” (p. 2). The change process that occurs for students entering ninth grade includes dealing with a new school year, a new set of teachers, a new building, and new routines both in and out of the classroom. Daggett (2005) described the movement from eighth to ninth
grade as a time when students participate in initiatives that ensure their success in high school. These initiatives included the activities below.

- Eighth grade students are provided copies of the high school student newspaper.
- Teachers from ninth grade visit eighth grade classrooms on a regular basis.
- Parent’s night for eighth graders is held at the high school.
- Eighth graders visit the high school on at least two different occasions.
- Eighth grade teachers loop to the ninth grade with the students.
- The best teachers are assigned to the ninth grade.
- School staff implement a menu of intervention programs that will spring into action if a student has difficulty.
- School staff compile and maintain data throughout the ninth grade year.
- Teachers focus on literacy at all times.
- Ninth grade students receive student mentors from the junior and senior classes.
- Extended instruction and busing are provided for students who are struggling.

What are Freshman Transition Programs?

Mizelle (1999) described freshman transition programs as several diverse and clearly articulated support activities that begin during the students’ last year of middle school and continue throughout students’ first year of high school. Activities included in the transition period should address students’ academic, social, and behavioral needs. Kerr (2002) suggested that schools implement the following practices to positively impact students’ first year experiences in high school.

- Student-centered instructional practices
- Extended class periods
• Special curriculum or classes for ninth graders to help them learn study skills or social skills needed to succeed in high school
• Advisory groups which meet regularly throughout the school year
• Extra subject periods or double doses of core academic classes
• Interdisciplinary teams of ninth grade teachers who share the same students
• Summer program for incoming ninth graders for enrichment purposes
• Smaller learning communities that keep ninth graders separate from the rest of the student body
• Social support and opportunities for interactions with their peers
• Dialogue between middle and high school personnel to learn about one another’s curriculum
• Elimination of ability tracking in academic subjects

**Why Is There a Need for Ninth Grade Transition Programs?**

Ninth grade transition programs can play an important role in reducing dropout rates and increasing graduation rates. Researchers identified ninth grade as the most critical point to intervene and to prevent students from losing motivation, failing, and dropping out of school (Reents, 2002). The tenets of NCLB stipulated that schools graduate students within a reasonable time-frame. Bottoms (2002) defined the high school career as four or five years. Kerr (2002) noted that research on school reform and restructuring often failed to address the unique characteristics of ninth graders. Bergenson (2003) categorized the strategies for dropout prevention and recovery into two areas: comprehensive school reform and targeted programs for the prevention and recovery of dropouts. Transition programs for ninth graders fit into both of these categories.
Academic failure in the ninth grade was highly linked to the probability that students would drop out of school (Kerr, 2002). Bergenson (2003) also found that the experience of the ninth grade year contributed substantially to the probability of dropping out. Each year older a student was upon entering high school increased the odds of dropping out by 109 percent. The individual and social rewards of completing high school were paramount, and completion of the ninth grade year in just one attempt was a vital step towards that goal (Balfanz, Jordan, & Legters, 2004).

At each level of schooling, students are faced with transition periods where they progress from one grade to the next. Gillock, Kobus, Reyes, and Sanchez (2000) stressed that each one of these transitions initiates periods in students’ lives where they are expected to meet higher standards and to succeed at more rigorous work. Daggett (2005) defined five transition periods in students’ schooling as moves from pre-kindergarten to kindergarten, kindergarten to first grade, elementary to middle school, middle school to high school, and from high school to higher education. Of all the transition periods, the entrance into high school has proven to be the most problematic. Ninth grade is the year where student failure and the subsequent likelihood of dropping out of school are prevalent (Furstenberg, Nield, & Stoner-Eby, 2003). Hertzog and Morgan (Bergenson, 2003) identified the time eighth graders leave middle school in early June and enter ninth grade in late August as a period where students experience a decrease in their perceptions of physical appearance, job competence, romantic appeal, behavioral conduct, and global self-worth. Castellano, Stone, and Stringfield (2002) stated that lack of academic progress had its origins in middle and elementary school, and that is where many learners begin to disengage.
When students begin their high school years with the academic and emotional stressors described above, the need for programs to support them academically and socially become a priority. Orfield, Sanni, and Schwartz (2001) pointed out that ninth grade is the grade that needs to be targeted because this is when students are most vulnerable to dropping out. Furstenberg, Nield, and Stoner-Eby (2003) described predictors of ninth grade failure and predictors of dropping out of school. The similarities of the predictors indicate that the failure rate in the ninth grade year is as serious as the dropout problem and significantly contributes to decreases in longitudinal graduation rates.

Table 1
Comparison of Predictors of Ninth Grade Failure and Predictors of Dropping Out

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>Ninth Grade Failure</th>
<th>Dropping Out</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Older students</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children in single parent families</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents have relatively little education</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeated a grade</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low grades</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low test scores</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrequent attendance</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of in-school behavior problems</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited family resources</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of teachers’ expertise</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Balfanz and Legters (2001) found that ninth grade is the grade where “promoting power” is the weakest because no more than 50 percent of students who entered ninth grade met graduation requirements in four years. Thus, students entering ninth grade need academic and emotional support that will enhance their school experience and
increase the predictability that they will be promoted and ultimately graduate from high school.

**Types of Students Selected for Transition Programs**

As ninth grade transition programs have become commonplace in urban school districts, researchers have begun to study and evaluate the effectiveness of such programs. Empirical studies on freshman transition revealed that students selected for these programs had similar discipline, social, and academic problems that adversely affect their performance in their ninth grade year. The Talent Development High School Model (TDHS), Project Transition (PT), and the Chicago Public Schools District-wide Reform Effort (CPS) developed programs that included systems of interventions specifically to focus on the entire ninth grade class because the majority of students entering the ninth grade in their schools were performing below grade level in reading and math and tended to have a history of overall poor school performance. Student profiles in TDHS seemed to typify minority students attending low-performing schools in urban cities. Math and reading skills of students in TDHS were below grade level, and less than 40 percent of these students were on schedule to graduate. Herlihy, Kemple, and Smith (2005) and Balfanz, Jordan, and Legters (2004) found that the schools in Baltimore and Philadelphia where the TDHS model was implemented were low-performing schools with high proportions of dropouts, large numbers of students who were not academically successful, and long histories of failed efforts to make substantial reforms.

Cytron, Miller, Pastor, and Quint (2003) profiled students in Project Transition (PT) in Milwaukee and Kansas City. PT was to be implemented for all incoming ninth grade students. Participating schools had high percentages of students of color and high
percentages of students who received free and reduced lunch. Students also had histories of low grade point averages, high percentages of dropouts, poor attendance, and strong senses of anonymity.

Cytrynbaum and Hess (2000) reported that freshman academies in Chicago’s public high schools were placed in schools that were either on probation or in the process of undergoing reconstitution. Anonymity was a problem, and less than 15 percent of students were on grade level in reading and math. These schools also had high populations of African-American students. Nearly half of the students who entered high school never graduated, and many of the students took courses that were not credit-bearing or applicable to graduation. Additionally, teachers in Chicago’s high schools lacked basic content knowledge to teach, possessed content knowledge but did not know how to connect to students, or had low expectations of students.

Table 2

Summary of Types of Students Selected for Transition Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>TDHS</th>
<th>PT</th>
<th>CPS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low grade point average</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor attendance</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past discipline problems</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below grade level in reading</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below grade level in math</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recipient of free and reduced lunch</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not on course for graduation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of personal connection to school</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High percentage of minority enrollment</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled in non-credit bearing courses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ninth Grade Transition Programs as a Means for Reducing Failure

Over the last 20 years, school districts have initiated freshman transition programs that focused on supporting students during their ninth grade year. Some of the programs have been for students who were identified as at-risk for leaving school before graduation while other programs have been for all incoming ninth graders (Bottoms, 2002). Transition programs grouped teachers on teams, and the teachers worked to find solutions to social, academic, and discipline problems (Edmunds, 2003). Social and academic activities began as early as the beginning of eighth grade and continued through the end of the ninth grade year (Hertzgog & Morgan, 2002). Even though transition programs have become prominent throughout urban school districts across the country, the results supporting their effectiveness have been mixed.

Efforts to Reduce Ninth Grade Failure Rates

For almost half of African-American youth in urban school districts, transitioning to high school proved to be an extremely negative experience that marked a premature end to their education (Gillock, Kobus, Reyes, & Sanchez, 2000). These researchers also stated that a major cause for such high dropout rates was due to the schools’ inattention to the social support needs of their students (Gillock, Kobus, Reyes, & Sanchez, 2000). Because ninth grade proved to be a crucial year in overall high school success, many public schools began adapting intervention programs specifically designed to meet the needs of ninth graders. This section will focus on the literature of reports and program descriptions of ninth grade transition efforts in urban school settings across the United States.
Transition as a Means for Reducing Failure: Findings from Reports on Ninth Grade Transition Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At-Risk (CRESPAR).

Balfanz, Jordan, and Letgers (2004) used multiple regression analysis of standardized tests and survey data from high poverty high schools in two large urban districts to evaluate the initial impacts of the Talent Development High Schools’ (TDHS) ninth grade instructional program in reading and mathematics. Initial results revealed that TDHS students significantly outperformed students in control schools in mathematics and reading achievement gains, controlling for their prior achievement, attendance, age, and gender. TDHS students also passed Algebra I at higher rates, and supplemental surveys showed a higher percentage of students in the TDHS reported learning new skills, strategies, and concepts. TDHS teachers reported using the following strategies.

- Provided more varied activities during extended periods
- Utilized cooperative learning strategies
- Engaged students in group projects
- Had students present multiple solutions or methods for finding solutions
- Related academic work to real work experiences and examples
- Provided catch-up courses for students
- Enrolled students in double doses of Math and English
- Created courses specifically geared to address deficiencies

Even though the implementation challenges and lack of district-wide support affected the study, the researchers reported that the TDHS students still outperformed students from the control schools.
Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). The SREB (Bottoms, 2002) highlighted outstanding practices found in its network of middle and high schools’ transition programs. Of the 15 schools described, only two were urban schools with high minority African-American populations. Even though there was a third school that had a majority African-American population and a rate of 62 percent free-reduced lunch participation, this was a rural school that was historically African-American. The suggested practices listed below were extracted from 15 transition programs that existed throughout the region’s network of middle and high schools.

- Continuous planning with teacher involvement
- Working together to bridge communication gaps between schools about what students need to know and be able to do
- Setting high expectations for students who are performing below grade level
- Engaging students in challenging and meaningful assignments
- Providing extra time and help to meet academic expectations
- Telling students and the community the truth about the level of effort the school and the student will have to make to meet grade-level standards
- Building flexible scheduling into the school structure
- Integrating the curriculum through use of interdisciplinary approaches to instruction

The Education Alliance (EA.) Lachat and Smith (2004) presented case study evidence that investigated the process and effects of high school restructuring in five low-performing, urban high schools. These schools implemented reform efforts based on smaller and more personalized learning environments, standards-based instruction, and
data-driven decision making to support continuous improvement. Lachat and Smith (2004) reported on the schools’ uses of data to drive school reform by focusing on attendance and academic performance. Results from this study allowed teachers to develop social interventions to address attendance issues and academic interventions to address students’ instructional needs. Collaboration by school personnel was also essential in improving the school through the use of data. One of the high schools implemented a program for ninth grade repeaters. Practices implemented that were consistent for all three schools included the following.

- Daily common planning time for teachers
- Structured ninth grade teams

_Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE)._ Orfield, Sanni, and Schwartz (2001) found federally reported data on dropouts to be inaccurate, especially the minority dropout rate. There was an under-representation of minority students in data sampling which led to large-scale bias and underestimates in minority dropout levels. Stressing the importance of interventions that keep students in schools, they identified the following three components.

- A core curriculum of high standards combined with opportunities for students to recover from failure without risk of retention
- A smaller organizational structure such as self-contained academies within a school
- Teacher supports such as professional development by department and scheduled planning time
They also emphasized the need to develop and use the following factors:

- performance-based assessment systems
- sound organization of school structure
- clearly articulated curriculum
- focused instruction, assessment, and professional development

Table 3

Summary of Practices Reported by CRESPAR, SREB, EA, and HGSE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggested Practices</th>
<th>CRESPAR</th>
<th>SREB</th>
<th>EA</th>
<th>HGSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Block/flexible scheduling</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher teams</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teams of veteran teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teams of novice teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of data to monitor achievement</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Special transition course for freshmen</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Parental involvement</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Projects and fieldtrips</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Double doses of math</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Double doses of reading</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Catch-up courses</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiated new grading practices</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected all ninth graders</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected students identified as at-risk</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Common planning for teachers</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Preparation for ninth grade</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer program before ninth grade</td>
<td></td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrated curriculum</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Philosophy that all students can learn</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Separate ninth grade facility/area</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic interventions</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Vertical teaming with middle school</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-high school activities</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Working together to bridge communication gaps</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging students in meaningful, challenging assignments</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allot special funding for program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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</table>
Findings from Transition Programs as a Means of Reducing Failure

_Transition Programs Baltimore County Public Schools_. In Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS), the Department of Research, Evaluation, and Accountability (2002) described its ninth grade program as a city-wide effort that operated in seven comprehensive high schools, two city-wide technical high schools, and two magnet schools. The transition program implemented in BCPS included some of the major components that result in successful programs. However, the program structure and targeted student body raised issues that cause ninth grade students to feel that failure was their most viable option. Students in BCPS followed a block schedule and were grouped in a self-contained setting for four 90-minute class periods. Building principals could choose to alter the school day to focus on remediation and interpersonal relations, as well as academics. Students in these programs did not earn high school credits as part of their school day. Students who desired high school credit could attend special after school sessions that might be taught by the same teachers who taught them in the transition programs during the regular school day. Students could meet promotion status at the end of the first semester of the school year and enroll in credit-bearing classes for the second semester. This program seemed to have been a serious waste of students’ time, especially since the goal of ninth grade transition programs was to work with students to have them meet requirements for promotion to the tenth grade. Other concerns raised by the evaluation of this program involved attendance. Attendance for transition students was 78.1 percent while attendance for all other ninth graders in the schools district was 86.5 percent.
Staffing and opportunities for teachers to work together were provided to teachers in BCPS. However, funding promised to the program never materialized, and while remedial reading classes were offered to students, this was the one course that students failed more than any other. Even though the program’s goals were to prepare students for success in high school, this program actually delayed students’ entrance into high school and required them to spend additional time after school earning high school credits in subjects in which they were struggling academically.

*Talent Development Model for High School Reform in Baltimore and Philadelphia.* As a result of the efforts of a Johns Hopkins professor, James McPartland (Edmunds, 2003), the Talent Development High School model became an exemplar for focusing on improving promotion rates among the nation’s ninth graders, especially those enrolled in high-poverty, high-minority schools. This model began with structuring the school day into a block schedule that allowed students to receive double-doses of math and English to focus on remediating their academic needs. The TDHS model also focused on the idea of small learning communities where students were placed in groups of no more than 150. As teachers worked in teams and consulted with each other, walls of isolation were replaced with systems of support for both teachers and students. Remediation was offered to students after school, and students were allowed to make up failing grades from previous semesters by attending an alternative setting outside the regular school day. This transition model positively impacted school climate in schools where it was implemented.

The components of the program consisted of

- making school work relevant
• providing opportunities for academic success
• providing a caring and supportive learning community
• providing help with student problems (p. 10)

In 1994, Patterson High School in Baltimore, Maryland instituted the Talent Development Model. Prior to implementation, 80 percent of all ninth graders failed the ninth grade, and only about 33 percent of the student population graduated from high school. The implementation of the Talent Development Model resulted in focusing on improving student attendance, school climate, and promotion rates. Additional components, such as staff development and focused instruction could not be in the forefront because of the lack of order in the school (McPartland & others, 1996). Ninth graders were separated from the rest of the student body, and those who were behind in school were offered extra courses during the school day and after school with the promise of early promotion to tenth grade if they passed the courses.

Additionally, when students entered subsequent grades they were placed in small learning communities that had a career focus. Data collection from Patterson indicated that vast improvements occurred as a result of the Talent Development Model. School climate surveys indicated that teachers believed that work conditions had also improved and that attendance issues had decreased. Even though the faculty cited improvements on a large scale, they still noted that the ninth grade year continued to be a challenge for both students and teachers.

Students’ Perspectives on TDHS. Corbett and Wilson (2000) documented students’ perspectives on the Talent Development High School Model and noted that students felt instructional benefits from 90-minute classes. They also cited that students
placed a great deal of trust in their teachers, and that this could prove to be dangerous. Building positive relationships with teachers and receiving a variety of instructional activities were also important to students. Ninth graders were pleased with the structure of the school day, the layout of “separate facilities” for ninth graders, and with the relationships they were able to develop with their teachers.

Reliability of the TDHS Model. In efforts to document the reliability of the Talent Development Model, Herlihy and Kemple (2004) evaluated Talent Development’s efforts in a northeastern, urban school district where five of the district’s high schools had implemented the plan. The Talent Development Model in this school district did offer support to repeat ninth graders, but the main focus of the program was first-time ninth graders. While Talent Development yielded substantial gains in promotion rates of first-time ninth graders, it only saw modest improvement in attendance. Other evidence from the study indicated that student improvement was continuous, as the schools that had used the model for three years had higher gains in promotions and were able to sustain their levels of improvement.

Other significant factors noted by Herlihy and Kemple (2004) included a troubling pattern that indicated that students who repeated ninth grade were likely to fail that grade a second time. Furthermore, there was no evidence that suggested passing ninth grade the first time would increase the likelihood that students in urban, high-poverty schools would graduate from high school in four years. Herlihy and Kemple (2004) pointed out the need to continue supporting students’ social needs by keeping them in small learning groups described by the Talent Development Model as career academies for tenth through twelfth graders.
Even though Herlihy and Kemple (2004) highlighted gains in student achievement through use of the model, they also cited problems common to urban school settings. Anonymity, low student expectations, poor preparation for high school, limited capacity to implement comprehensive reform, and general isolation and lack of involvement with parents and the community were areas for which the Talent Development Model needed to develop additional interventions and strategies.

**Impact of Instructional Interventions of TDHS Model.** In April 2004, Balfanz, Jordan and Legters studied the impact of the Talent Development Instructional Interventions Model on ninth graders in high-poverty schools. The researchers found that students in TDHS in Baltimore and in Philadelphia outperformed students in non-selective schools in both subject areas. This was important because ninth graders typically needed remediation in reading and math and tended to struggle academically because of deficiencies in these areas. Systems of interventions were important in “catching up” students so that they could perform at or above grade level. Thus, TDHS began piloting “catch up” courses for tenth and eleventh graders in math and reading.

In a follow-up study, Herlihy, Kemple, and Smith (2005) found that the graduation rate for a typical ninth-grade class of 500 students improved by eight percentage points. Attendance gains also impacted subject area promotions, but the researchers cautioned that the model still had a great deal to accomplish before it could be considered to be an effective, generalizable model for improving ninth-grade promotion rates.

**Continued Development of TDHS Model.** The TDHS Model continued to strive to evolve by strengthening its upper-grade components, particularly by extending
curricular and instructional reforms to tenth and eleventh grades. Professional development needs of staff had to be adequately addressed, and turnover among school staffs and leadership was problematic. While double-dosing of key subjects required restructuring of blocks within the school day, teachers tended to lack training for delivering instruction in 90-minute blocks. The Twilight Academy, another aspect of the program that was developed to help students catch up, was only implemented in one of the five high schools. Even though TDHS had limited success in transforming the upper grades into career academies, the model proved effective in yielding successful results in the ninth grade success academies. District initiatives handed down by the school board further complicated the TDHS model.

Another concern that THDS did not adequately address was the needs of repeat ninth graders. Support for this group of students was never consistently implemented. None of the TDHS programs were able to group these students in distinct groups. As the state of Pennsylvania began to align its curriculum and school programs with the tenets of No Child Left Behind, the TDHS model began to lose the district’s support. By the summer of 2004, the district’s support and focus had become NCLB and state-mandated testing benchmarks. As TDHS data were analyzed, the following improvements remained consistent. THDS practices improved the attendance and total number of credits earned by first-time ninth graders. The program increased the number of first-time ninth graders who earned an algebra credit. The number of first-time ninth graders who were promoted to tenth grade also increased, but the results of promotion rates for repeat ninth graders were mixed. While there were slight improvements in math, there was no systematic change in reading scores. Consistent leadership and adherence to the model had
significant impacts on student success rates. The schools that were first to implement the model had the most gains in improved student achievement, attendance, promotion, and graduation rates. However, since the district had to align its goals to NCLB, there was no longer a prioritized focus on documenting the effectiveness of interventions that had proved promising or successful within the TDHS model.

*More Reform Practices in Maryland.* Kerr and Letgers (2001) focused on small learning communities, de-tracking, and interdisciplinary teaming as reforms that create more personalized environments at the high school level. They conducted a study in Maryland and found that the practices that would make high schools in Maryland more inviting and adaptable for ninth graders had not been fully implemented by 90 percent of the schools. The researchers also found that schools with high poverty and high minority populations were more likely to use practices to help ninth graders transition to high school. The authors suggested that high poverty, high minority schools had a stronger tendency than “advantaged” schools to create a more personalized school community for incoming ninth graders. Even though Kerr and Letgers (2001) expressed that de-tracking led to the teaching of a more common curriculum, this may not be true. Advantaged schools in Maryland did not offer double doses of math and English courses; however, high poverty, high minority schools offered double doses of these courses, as well as summer enrichment. There was no evidence presented that these additional instructional settings resulted in students being enrolled in grade level, honors, or advanced placement classes. Kerr and Letgers (2001) drew a direct relationship to high test scores and socio-economic status. Disadvantaged schools had students who did not perform as well as students who attended advantaged schools. Dropout rates, attendance data, and
promotion rates followed the same patterns. Information presented by Kerr and Letgers (2001) tended to be contradictory in some places. They indicated that the school-within-a-school model may be detrimental the Baltimore’s high poverty, high minority schools. However, they concluded with the idea that this concept may yield improved promotion rates.

*The School District of Greenville County.* Educators in Greenville, South Carolina (2002) recommended a transition program that offered well-planned articulated activities between its middle and high schools during students’ eighth grade year. These activities included the following.

- high school tours
- small group sessions with counselors
- sessions with high school teachers
- summer camp for rising ninth graders
- pen pal clubs

Ideas for relationship building between students and the staff were consistent with Mizelle’s (1999) suggestions to nurture and to respond appropriately to the needs of adolescents transitioning from middle to high school. Mizelle emphasized the need to keep parents involved in their children’s school activities during the middle years so that parents would be confident that their involvement made a difference in their children’s academic success. Hertzgog and Morgan (2002) further expressed the need for middle level educators to create mutual relationships with the high school in order to streamline students’ transition to high school. Other components of Greenville’s plan mirrored the TDHS model.
Stevens Point School District. Similar to Baltimore County Public Schools, Griebler, Hassler, Haugen, Kempe, McGinnity, and Nebel (2001) formulated a ninth grade transition program in the Stevens Point School District of Wisconsin for students who were credit deficient. The aim of the program was to address students who had been socially promoted. The committee formulated the plans for the ninth grade program under the premise that small schools improved student achievement. The planning committee recommended that students attend a ninth grade center located at an alternate site within the city limits. Students required to attend the program would be removed from their regular school setting and required to attend summer school if their deficiencies indicated that they needed additional support. Overall, the program structure included the following.

- Students selected did not meet prerequisites to begin ninth grade on grade level.
- The program would be housed at a separate ninth grade facility.
- All core subjects were offered.
- Individualized programs of instruction would address students’ specific needs.
- Enrollment at the ninth grade campus was mandatory until students met enrollment requirements for the general student population.
- Individualized remediation in reading and math was provided.
- Attendance policies were strictly enforced.
- A mentoring program was available for all students.
- Parental involvement was maximized through mandatory meetings at certain times of the year.
• Program effectiveness would be determined by the number of students earning sufficient credits to move to the tenth grade within a one-year time frame.

The program description indicated that there would be heavy reliance on computer-based instruction. The authors also stated that remedial work would not be the focus, but descriptions of the instructional program and detailed explanations of attendance policies and the manner in which subjects would be covered during advising suggested a serious focus on behavior management and isolation from the more general student population.

*Virginia’s Reform Efforts.* In the state of Virginia, the concept of ninth grade transition programs became a major focus over the last seven years. In 1998, Bourdeaux, Duke, Epps, and Wilcox compiled a review of transition programs across the state and determined that the programs’ lacked clear foci and that school leaders could not determine if the programs should be implemented for all ninth graders or for just those ninth graders who had been identified as at-risk. Further, the programs in this study focused more on modifying student discipline problems rather than on improving the academic progress of ninth graders.

Programs in Virginia were individually designed, and no two programs were exactly alike. Five of the nine programs were designed for all ninth graders while the other four were specifically developed for students identified as at-risk. Characteristics common to Virginia’s schools included the following.

• Restructuring the school day into block periods of 90 minutes per class
• Utilizing teacher advisories to “connect” with students
• Teams of teachers to cover math, science, English, social studies, and physical education

• Special teams for students with attendance problems

• Interdisciplinary instruction

• Credit-bearing freshman seminar class to enhance study skills and citizenship

Summary

Reports and program descriptions from educational entities about transition programs in urban settings over the last 10 years indicated that successful transition models used a wide range of strategies to reduce the ninth grade failure rate. Both the reports and program descriptions stressed the need for transition programs to have clearly articulated plans and goals. Hertzog and Morgan (1999) pointed out that effective programs had coordinated plans with their feeder middle schools and practiced at least nine or more transition activities to make transition a process, not an event. These activities included the following.

• Ninth grade counselor visits to the middle school for curriculum and registration

• Parents’ night

• High school co-curricular program explained to eighth grade students by high school personnel

• High school curricular program and homework expectations explained to eighth grade students by high school personnel

• Building tour of high school

• Ninth grade registration activities directed by high school personnel conducted by eighth grade personnel
• A "Big Sister/Brother" Program that begins in eighth grade and continues through ninth grade
• A spring social event for current and incoming high school students
• Writing programs where eighth-graders correspond with high school students

School leaders should work to insure the inclusion of the above types of articulation activities. Urban school leaders must re-examine their practices and philosophies and make adjustments to ensure that the components of the transition process positively impact ninth graders entrance into high school. Table 4 summarizes practices used in transition programs previously described.
Table 4

Summary of Practices in Transition Programs

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Block/flexible scheduling</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Teacher teams</td>
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<td>Teams of veteran teachers</td>
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<td>Use of data to monitor achievement</td>
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<td>Special transition course for freshmen</td>
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<td>Parental involvement</td>
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<td>Projects and fieldtrips</td>
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<td>Double doses of math</td>
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<td>Double doses of reading</td>
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<td>Catch-up courses</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Initiated new grading practices</td>
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<td>Selected all ninth graders</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Selected only first time ninth graders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Selected students identified as at-risk</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Computer based instruction</td>
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<td>Common planning for teachers</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preparation for ninth grade</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer program before ninth grade</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrated curriculum</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy that all students can learn</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate ninth grade facility/area</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic interventions</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vertical teaming with middle school</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-high school activities</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working together to bridge communication gaps</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging students in meaningful and challenging assignments</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allot special funding for program</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The literature indicated that school leaders also experienced challenges throughout the implementation of their transition programs. Table 5 provides a summary
of these challenges which included (a) novice teaching staff, (b) class size, (c) financial constraints, (d) parent involvement, (e) ability grouping, (f) attendance and dropout prevention, and (g) high turnover rates of personnel.

Table 5

Summary of Challenges Experienced in Transition Programs in Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS), Maryland and Pennsylvania (M &D), South Carolina (SC), Wisconsin (WS), and Virginia (VA)

<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Novice teaching staff</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial constraints</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of parent involvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ability grouping</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance issues</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropout prevention</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High turnover of personnel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of buy-in for program</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of discipline</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeat ninth graders</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The literature on reports and programs in the ninth grade year revealed that students were deeply affected by their experiences in high school, and while results on interventions were promising, more examinations needed to occur so that effective practices in urban schools can be identified and refined.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to describe the efforts of four high schools within an urban school district in working to transition ninth graders into the high school setting. As a mixed-design study, this study examined each school’s experiences in planning, implementing, and sustaining a ninth grade transition program.

This section will present a discussion of (a) the research questions, (b) the qualitative research method, (c) the quantitative analysis of the survey, (d) the case-study method, (e) the content analysis, (f) the variables of interest, (g) the sample and generalizability of the study, (h) the instrumentation, (i) the data collection procedures, (j) the data analysis procedures, (k) the ethical safeguards, and (l) the time-line and resources.

The Research Questions

This study focused on the following research questions.

1. How did each of the four selected high schools plan the components that support the initial designs of its 9th grade transition program?

2. What elements make up the designs of the four selected 9th grade transition programs?

3. What factors inhibited the planning, implementation, and sustainability of transition programs in the four 9th grade transition programs?

4. What factors facilitated the planning, implementation, and sustainability of 9th grade transition programs in the four selected high schools?
5. What criteria does each of the four selected high schools use to determine the success of its transition program?

**Qualitative Research Method**

Rallis and Rossman (2003) described qualitative research as a broad approach to the study of social phenomena where the researchers are oriented toward the natural world. In conducting studies, qualitative researchers employ multiple methods. These multiple methods are formally known as interviewing, observing, gathering documents, and examining material culture (Rallis & Rossman, 2003). Qualitative researchers also focused on context. Rallis and Rossman (2003) defined context as the natural setting in which people work, study, play, eat, and live. They pointed out that there are both internal and external contexts that provide information for the researcher. Internal context would include the students, their teachers, the furniture and materials in the classroom. External context would include the administration, other classes, students and teachers, and anything that impacts what the teachers and students do inside the classroom. Rallis and Rossman distinguished context in qualitative research from randomization of sampling and standardization. They referred to context in order to look at social worlds holistically as “interactive, complex systems rather than as discrete variables that can be measured and manipulated statistically” (p. 9).

The qualitative researcher systematically reflects on how she affects the ongoing flow of everyday life and is affected by it (Rallis & Rossman, 2003). The researcher’s worldview shapes the entire project, and the researcher values her personal biography as a relevant lens through which she sees the world. However, Rallis and Rossman pointed out that qualitative researchers must try not to impose a rigid apriori framework on the
social world because they want to learn what constructs are important to the study participants. While qualitative research does not begin with formal hypotheses, researchers do begin with a conceptual framework and guiding questions (Rallis & Rossman, 2003). Therefore, Rallis and Rossman stressed that it is important to understand that qualitative research is emergent in nature and tends to rest on induction, deduction, reflection, inspiration, and critical thinking.

Even though Rallis and Rossman (2003) described qualitative research as fundamentally interpretive, they also emphasized that this interpretive, holistic, and contextual research is also systematic research. The researcher followed a well-defined process regarding data collection and meaning.

Quantitative Analysis of the Survey

Survey results were reported in narrative form and grouped according to the research questions. The survey results were coded according to themes framed by the research questions. Holsti (1969) pointed out that the most important requirement of coding categories is that they must adequately reflect the investigator’s research questions.

In order to maintain internal validity, the research questions were used to prefigure and categorize the survey questions. Rossman and Rallis (2003) explained that the prefiguring technique allows the researcher to maintain consistency from one case to the next as data is collected and analyzed. Weber (1990) noted that internal validity could be obtained by comparing content-analytic data with the meaning constructed and relayed from sources such as documents, people, and communications.
Case-Study Method

The case study method as defined by Rallis and Rossman (2003) can be used when the researcher seeks to describe or explain events, processes, and perspectives as they unfold in their real life contexts. Case studies are context-dependent and are not generalizable because no two cases are exactly alike. However, theory or reasoning by analogy allows for the application of lessons learned that may be applied to settings that are similar to the settings of the case study (Rallis & Rossman, 2003). The researcher needs to keep in mind that the richness of the case study is in its detailed descriptions, complexities, and use of multiple sources to obtain perspectives (Rallis & Rossman, 2003).

All five research questions were answered through the collection of quantitative qualitative data. Quantitative data was generated through a survey. Qualitative data for these questions were generated through interviews, observations, and document analyses. Data collection instruments were categorized and framed to address the research questions.

Content Analysis

Rossman and Rallis (2003) described content analysis as a systematic examination of forms of communication to objectively document patterns. Weber (1990) reiterated that content analysis was a research method that used a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text. For the purpose of this study, content analysis was used holistically to examine raw data gathered from interviews, observations, and material culture. Information gathered in the content analyses was used to directly answer the research questions from the descriptions of the content of each school’s ninth grade
transition program. Holsti (1969) noted that using content analysis in this way freed the researcher from problems of validity because the content data serve as a direct answer to the research question rather than as indicators from which characteristics must be inferred. Weber (1990) stressed the need for the researcher to assess reliability in terms of stability.

Information received from the participants was grouped and thematically coded according to categories defined within the research questions. Berelson in Budd, Thorp, and Donahew (1967) designated the coding unit as a word, theme, and/or paragraph. They cited the following guidelines for the researcher to understand when using these coding units.

*Word.* Word counting may be the easiest form of content analysis, but it does not provide the analyst with as much information as some other methods.

*Themes.* Thematic analysis is linked to direction categories. A theme could be a sentence, part of a sentence, or a single word. Themes should be counted in order to note recurring themes.

*Paragraph.* Often used as a coding unit, the paragraph can cause problems when it contains more than one subject or more than one direction.

Material collected for content analysis was collected through focused interviews, observations, and material culture. The researcher examined the data collected in the interviews, observations, and material culture for evidence that related to specific research questions. Emerging themes, commonalities, and critical differences were drawn holistically from identifying and comparing each school’s data in reference to the
research questions. The researcher did not use pre-existing definitions or predetermined frequency counts to establish an apriori framework of analyses.

**Interviews.** Interviews were transcribed and summarized. Interviewees were asked to verify that their ideas were accurately communicated. Rossman and Rallis (2003) referred to this process as member checking, and stated that it improves the trustworthiness and credibility of the study. Once interviews were member checked and summarized, information collected was categorized. Budd, Thorp, and Donahew (1967) noted that categories must be appropriate, exhaustive and mutually exclusive. They emphasized that appropriate categories fit the needs of the study so that they answer the questions originally asked. In order for the categories to be exhaustive, they must be relative to the problem being studied. Budd, Thorp, and Donahue (1967) defined mutually exclusive as being able to clearly identify what type of material is and is not to be included. The framework provided by the research questions guided the researcher in maintaining and redirecting focus during the interviews.

**Observations.** Data collected during observations was holistically analyzed within the framework of the research questions and was holistic. The researcher scripted the observations of team meetings at three of the four high schools. A transcription of the events that transpired during the observation was submitted to the teacher who facilitated the meeting. This teacher was asked to confirm and/or correct, reflect on, and share further insight to ensure that the events recorded during the observation period were accurately recorded. This ensured that the observations were credible and authentic. Erlandson, et.al (1993) described the prolonged engagement and member checking as
ontological authenticity where the participants and researchers develop trusting relationships.

*Material Culture.* As the member checking processes for raw data from interviews, observations, and material culture were completed, the researcher coded and categorized the data within the framework of the topics explored by the research questions. Sepstrup (Rosengran, 1981) noted that content analysis of media can be based on findings from previous research that is used to formulate assumptions within a study. Through examining multiple sources of printed literature from each of the four high schools, the researcher explored each school’s perspective within the framework of the research questions. Rossman and Rallis (2003) described using multiple sources of data at multiple points in time as triangulation. Triangulation enhances the credibility and rigor of a study. Prolonged engagement was another way the researcher can gain more than a snapshot view of the phenomena being studied and ensure that the study was credible.

**Variables of Interest**

**Research Questions 1 and 2: Planning and Design**

Variables of interest for Research Questions 1 and 2 included the summary of practices from the review of the literature in Table 4 on page 36. These practices are listed in Table 6.
Table 6

Practices from Ninth Grade Transition Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practices from Ninth Grade Transition Programs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Block/flexible scheduling</td>
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<td>Selected students identified as at-risk</td>
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<td>Teacher teams</td>
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<td>Computer based instruction</td>
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<td>Teams of veteran teachers</td>
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<td>Common planning for teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teams of novice teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preparation for ninth grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of data to monitor achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer program before ninth grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special transition course for freshmen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy that all students can learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects and fieldtrips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate ninth grade facility/area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double doses of math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double doses of reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vertical teaming with middle school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catch-up courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-high school activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiated new grading practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working together to bridge communication gaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected all ninth graders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging students in meaningful, challenging assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected only first time ninth graders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allot special funding for program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected students identified as at-risk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors

Variables of interest for Research Question 3 centered on the challenges experienced in ninth grade transition programs that were described in the review of the literature in Table 5 on page 37. These challenges are listed in Table 7.

Table 7

Challenges Experienced in Ninth Grade Transition Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges Experienced in Ninth Grade Transition Programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Novice teaching staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropout prevention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial constraints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High turnover of personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of parent involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of buy-in for program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability grouping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeat ninth graders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question 4: Facilitating Factors

Research Question 4 was examined by capturing each school’s story of how its efforts were facilitated and supported by various stakeholders. These ideas were applied to findings in the review of the literature from the Talent Development High School Model, the Southern Regional Educational Board, the Education Alliance, and the Harvard Graduate School of Education. A comprehensive listing is found in Table 3 on page 23 of the review of the literature. Factors identified as facilitative efforts are listed in Table 8.

Table 8
Facilitative/Suggested Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggested Practices</th>
<th>Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Block/flexible scheduling</td>
<td>Selected only first time ninth graders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher teams</td>
<td>Selected students identified as at-risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teams of veteran teachers</td>
<td>Common planning for teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of data to monitor achievement</td>
<td>Preparation for ninth grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special transition course for freshmen</td>
<td>Summer program before ninth grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental involvement</td>
<td>Integrated curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects and fieldtrips</td>
<td>Philosophy that all students can learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double doses of math</td>
<td>Separate ninth grade facility/area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double doses of reading</td>
<td>Academic interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catch-up courses</td>
<td>Vertical teaming with middle school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiated new grading practices</td>
<td>Pre-high school activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected all ninth graders</td>
<td>Working together to bridge communication gaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging students in meaningful,</td>
<td>Allot special funding for program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>challenging assignments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 5: Criteria Used to Determine Success/Failure

Program success in the review of the literature was closely tied to reducing failure rates in the ninth grade. Research Question 5 was qualitatively explored, as each school described how it defined success.
The Sample

The sample for this study was purposeful and consisted of four high schools in an urban school district in the state of Virginia. Each high school’s demographics were provided to capture the context of the school culture. The sample was purposeful in that the development of freshman transition programs within this school district was a relevant initiative that was being implemented to increase student achievement and overall graduation rates. Participants consisted of English, mathematics, science, social studies, special education, and physical education teachers who taught ninth graders who were identified as part of its school’s ninth grade transition program. The population was comprised of teachers for each subject area and two program coordinators who were classroom teachers and a part of the ninth grade transition programs in their schools. A total of 75 teachers participated in this study. These participants consisted of the teachers who made up the transition teams in each school. Once the proposal was approved by the College of William and Mary, it was submitted to the school district’s office of Research Testing and Statistics and approved.

Generalizability

The results of this study are not highly generalizable; however, the findings from each case study may be useful to other urban school settings whose cultures and contexts are similar. Adding to the body of knowledge on ninth grade transition, these case studies can enlighten researchers and educators who work in schools similar to the ones being studied by giving them a detailed description of how ninth grade transition initiatives impacted students in settings that are similar to their school contexts.
Bias

The researcher previously worked with the ninth grade transition program at one of the selected high schools and to some degree did function as a participant researcher. Additionally, the researcher was employed by the school district in which the study was conducted. Even though the researcher was a researcher/participant, the researcher still had to secure access to the participants at all four schools and gain their trust. The researcher acknowledged that because she had previously worked very closely with one of the school’s transition programs, bias about the study did exist. However, the researcher maintained objectivity in reporting findings and in comparatively analyzing the programs by having the transcripts of the interviews, observations, and material culture member checked by the participants.

Instrumentation

The instruments used to answer all research questions were the Ninth Grade Transition Teacher Survey, the Ninth Grade Transition Focused Interview Questions, the Observation Guide, and the Material Culture Guide. Each guide is found in Appendices A through E. Appendix B was used to collect demographic information for each school. Research Questions 1 through 5 qualitatively explored each school’s context as meaning was constructed through descriptions of each of these areas. Questions from the survey and focused interview were developed based on the findings presented in the review of the literature. The design of the survey questions was adapted from the Norfolk Public Schools Interim Evaluation of the Freshman Success Program: 2004-05. The survey and interview questions were reviewed by three secondary educators who had participated in developing program initiatives for ninth grade transition.
Survey Questions. Questions for the survey were developed from ninth grade transition practices identified in the review of the literature. Survey questions were categorized to address the research questions, and are shown in Table 9.

Table 9
Categorization of Survey Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 1: Design of Initial Program</th>
<th>1,2,3,4,22</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 2: Elements of Current Program</td>
<td>6,10,12,17,21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors</td>
<td>5,7,15,19,20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 4: Facilitating Factors</td>
<td>13,14,16,23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 5: Criteria Used to Determine Success</td>
<td>8,9,11,18,24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reviewers examined the tools and provided suggestions for improvement and close alignment to the purpose of this study. Those who critiqued the instruments submitted the following suggestions for improvement to the survey.

- Reword questions 16 and 19 to ensure clarity.
- Examine questions 13 and 20 as they could be classified into at least 2 categories and explain why the designated categories were selected.

In examining questions 13 and 20, they were classified in their respective categories because of the information presented in the review of the literature. Question 13 explored teachers’ attitudes toward students, and this was identified as a facilitating factor. Question 20 explored teacher quality and experience and addressed factors that presented challenges to ninth grade transition programs. This is the reason they were placed in research questions three and four respectively rather than in research question five.

Interview Questions. The researcher conducted focused interviews with selected teachers from each of the selected schools. Interview questions are found in Appendix B. Each interview consisted of at least one teacher from each school and/or a teacher
designated as a coordinator for the transition program in that respective school. For the purpose of this study, the interview questions were framed from the research questions, and the survey questions applied to research Questions 1 through 5 as depicted in Table 10. One meeting per school was observed, and the participants selected the meeting that the researcher would observe.

Table 10
Framework of Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planning</th>
<th>Research Question 1: Design of Initial Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Design and Strategies</td>
<td>Research Question 2: Elements of Current Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning, Implementation, Sustainability</td>
<td>Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning, Implementation, Sustainability</td>
<td>Research Question 4: Facilitating Factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successes</td>
<td>Research Question 5: Criteria Used to Determine Success</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Application of Focused Interview Questions to Research Questions

The following suggestions were submitted for improving the interview questions.

- Add questions for interviewees to share academic strategies that might be or have already been modified or newly adopted.

- Consider requesting demographic information regarding the number and percentage of special and gifted education students enrolled in ninth grade programs.

- Consider requesting demographic information regarding the number of honors students enrolled in ninth grade transition programs.
Consider that to truly learn how ninth grade transition impacts a building, survey the tenth grade teachers because they would have an indication of the impact the ninth grade teachers have had on the students (work ethic, goal setting) since they are teaching the students one year after they have finished a transition program. The only suggestion that did not result in changes to the instruments is the very last suggestion, as it was not the focus of the study.

Observations. Each school was asked to participate in an observation that was transcribed and summarized by the researcher and submitted to the school for member checking to ensure accuracy in descriptions. The researcher observed ninth grade transition meetings that involved teachers and administrators. The researcher used the survey questions, focused interview questions, and placed them under the overarching research questions as frames of reference to conduct a content analysis of the observations. An observation guide is provided in Appendix D.

After observations were member checked by the observation participants, descriptions were coded and content analysis was used to categorize the content. The researcher focused on identifying emerging themes as they applied to Research Questions 1 through 5. An observation guide (Appendix D) was developed to keep the researcher focused on the research questions. Emerging themes from the interviews were framed around the research questions and listed on the observation guides so that the researcher could remain focused on the questions presented in the research study.

Material Culture. Material culture was requested from each school and included printed media used in planning, implementing, and sustaining each school’s ninth grade transition program. These sources include agendas from meetings, program descriptions,
letters to students or parents, ninth grade transition action plans, and communications among staff involved in the ninth grade transition program. Examination of these documents was guided by the research questions and the review of the literature. A material culture guide is provided in Appendix E. As the material culture was explored, emerging themes from the interviews, and observations were used to classify evidence from artifacts. Classification was guided by the framing of the research questions.

**Data Collection Procedures**

The researcher established contact with the school to arrange a time to explain the study to the program coordinator/administrator and to deliver the teacher survey to the participants. The survey was completed between mid-April and early May, and dates were secured to conduct the focused interviews, observations, and receive material culture from the school. Interviews were completed by the end of June and member checked by the second week in July. Observations were scheduled anytime between the middle of April and the end of June. In each school setting, the researcher sought to observe interactive sessions that involved as many staff participants as possible. The observations ranged from 30 to 90 minutes. Interviews and observations were scripted by the researcher. Notes compiled from the interviews and observations were confirmed by participants to ensure that what had been transcribed was really that school’s perspective of what had occurred. Corrections were entered and re-checked by each school by the end of June. Material culture was explored in context with the research questions guiding the study and member checked by participants to ensure that data generated depicted their perspectives. Member checking of the material culture was completed by the end of July. All data collection was completed by the end of September.
For Research Questions 1 through 5, information collected from the survey, interviews, observations, and material culture was presented based on the ninth grade transition practices, suggestions, and challenges presented in the review of the literature.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was deductive in that survey and interview questions were developed based on findings from the review of the literature. Additionally, the observations and material culture were holistically analyzed within the same framework. Data analysis was conducted through content analysis which has been previously explained. For Research Question 1: Design of Initial Ninth Grade Transition Program, the researcher analyzed data through examining each school’s planning experiences and program design. Analysis of Research Question 2: Elements of Current Ninth Grade Transition Program focused on each school’s program design and implementation experiences. For Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors, each school’s inhibiting factors were described. In analyzing Research Question 4: Facilitating Factors, each school’s facilitating factors were the focal point. For Research Question 5: Criteria Used to Determine Success, each school’s determination of success was described.

Ethical Safeguards

The intent of this study was to capture the efforts of four high schools within an urban setting as each school worked to increase ninth grade promotion rates within the contexts of each school’s community. All participants included in the study were school personnel. Surveys and interviews did not identify staff members, and this was communicated to participants at the very beginning of the study. Sources of information shared in interviews and meetings will not be divulged. Because this was a descriptive
case study, each school has been identified through a pseudonym, but participants will remain anonymous. The Proposal to Conduct a Study was submitted to the Office of Research Testing and Statistics and approved in April. Furthermore, all procedures stipulated by the College of William and Mary were followed. This proposal was submitted to the Human Subjects Committee at the College of William and Mary for approval, and ethical standards were employed. Approval to conduct the study was granted and posted to begin on April 7, 2006.

**Timeline and Resources**

This study required one researcher, and there were no costs to the school district or the College of William and Mary. Once the school district approved the proposal, the researcher became responsible for establishing communication with each building principal and points of contact in each building to facilitate the completion of a survey, interviews, observations, and material culture. The proposal was approved by the school district in early April and surveys, interviews, and observations were completed from April through July of 2006. Qualitative data was member-checked by the end of July 2006. Quantitative data collection was completed by the end of September 2006. Materials needed to conduct the study consisted of copies of the survey and interview questions, pen and paper for recording interviews and observations, and paper for compiling the information. At the conclusion of the study, each participating school received a $100.00 honorarium to be used in its ninth grade transition program.
Chapter 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers’ efforts in transitioning students to ninth grade in four urban high schools. Surveys, interviews, observations, and analysis of material culture were used to capture each school’s experience in planning, implementing, and sustaining a ninth grade transition program. Each school is presented as a separate case with the findings organized within the framework of the research questions as they were examined through the surveys, interviews, observations, and material culture. In order to protect each school’s anonymity and the participants, each school is personified as a collective decision maker and will be referred to as School A, School B, School C, and School D. In a few instances, individual participants’ responses will be shared but only within the context of the school’s experience.

Findings for School A

Background of School A

When it began planning for its first year of ninth grade transition, School A started with a committee of two students, six teachers, and an administrator. Its original design included a cluster with first time ninth graders who would be isolated on one hall away from the rest of the student body. Teachers would have common planning time, and students would participate in summer orientation. The program was implemented at the beginning of the 2004-2005 school year and was currently in its second year when this case study occurred.

School A had a total enrollment of approximately 1,200 students, and almost 500 of the students were ninth graders. Students who participated in the ninth grade transition
program were first time ninth graders. During its second year of implementation, a total of ten teachers worked with the ninth grade transition program, and all first time ninth graders were placed in an academy that was separated from repeat ninth graders and the upperclassmen.

Survey findings are presented by survey statement and grouped within the research questions. Findings from the interviews and material culture are presented within each case study as thematic categories that emerged as recurrent or important perspectives of respondents who participated in the survey or interview. School A did not participate in an observation. Thus, data generated for School A are the result of the survey, an interview of two of the ninth grade transition teachers, and a review of the school’s material culture. Material culture presented for review included the school’s ninth grade transition plan and the school’s review of the year for 2005.

**Survey Findings for School A**

The ninth grade transition program consisted of a team of 10 teachers, eight of whom completed the survey. The response rate for the survey was 80%. The survey statements were linked to the research questions. A Likert scale was used to rate responses as strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D), strongly disagree (SD), or not applicable (NA).

**School A Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation**

Survey Questions 1,2,3,4 and 22 were used to gather information for Research Question 1: *How did each of the four selected high schools plan the components that support the initial designs of its transition program?*
Twelve and one-half percent of teachers agreed that teachers had a voice in planning the ninth grade transition program. Seventy-five percent of teachers disagreed with this statement, and 12.5% strongly disagreed.

Twenty-five percent of teachers agreed that dropout prevention measures were incorporated into the program. Thirty-seven and one-half percent of teachers disagreed, and 12.5% strongly disagreed that dropout prevention measures were incorporated into the program. Twenty-five percent of teachers responded that this statement was not applicable to their program.

Twelve and one-half percent of teachers’ responses indicated agreement that ninth graders had shown improvement as a result of parent involvement. Sixty-two percent of respondents disagreed, and 12.5% of respondents strongly disagreed with the statement that ninth graders had shown improvement as a result of parent involvement. Twelve and one-half percent of respondents indicated that this statement was not applicable to the program.

One of the respondents, (12.5%) did not respond to Statement four. Twenty-five percent of respondents agreed that pre-high school activities addressed students’ academic and social needs. Twelve and one-half percent of teachers disagreed with this statement while 25% strongly disagreed, and 25% indicated that this was not applicable to their program.

Teachers’ responses to whether ninth graders benefited from participating in a ninth grade transition program ranged from strongly agree to not applicable. Twelve and one-half percent of respondents strongly agreed that ninth graders benefited from a transition program, and 12.5% agreed. Twenty-five percent disagreed, and 12.5%
strongly disagreed. Thirty-seven and a half percent indicated that this statement was not applicable to their school program. Teachers’ responses are listed in Table 11.

Table 11
Planning and Implementation of Program in School A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Statement</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers have a voice in planning and in implementing my school’s program.</td>
<td>n 0</td>
<td>n 1</td>
<td>n 6</td>
<td>n 1</td>
<td>n 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective dropout prevention measures are incorporated into the transition program.</td>
<td>n 0</td>
<td>n 2</td>
<td>n 3</td>
<td>n 1</td>
<td>n 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninth graders have shown improvement as a result of parent involvement.</td>
<td>n 0</td>
<td>n 1</td>
<td>n 5</td>
<td>n 1</td>
<td>n 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-high school activities address students’ academic and social needs.</td>
<td>n 0</td>
<td>n 2</td>
<td>n 1</td>
<td>n 2</td>
<td>n 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninth graders have benefited from participating in a ninth grade transition.</td>
<td>n 1</td>
<td>n 1</td>
<td>n 2</td>
<td>n 1</td>
<td>n 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School A Research Question 2: Program Design

Survey statements 6,10,12,17, and 21 were linked to Research Question 2: *What elements make up the designs of the four selected transition programs?*

Twenty-five percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 62.5% of respondents agreed that student progress was consistently monitored through use of data. Twelve and one-half percent of respondents disagreed with this statement.

While 37.5% of respondents strongly agreed, and 50% of respondents agreed that study skills and remediation opportunities were offered to ninth graders who needed additional academic support, 12.5% of respondents disagreed with this statement.
One hundred percent of respondents indicated that students who experienced difficulties received needed academic support with 12.5% responding that they strongly agreed, and 87.5% showing that they agreed.

Twelve and one-half percent of teachers indicated that they strongly agreed, and 62.5% agreed that failing students were able to catch up and stay on course for graduation. Twenty-five percent of teachers indicated they disagreed.

Twelve and one-half percent of teachers strongly agreed that a structured study hall enhanced the ninth grade transition program while 87.5% of teachers indicated that this statement was not applicable to their program. Table 12 lists teachers’ responses.

Table 12
Program Design in School A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Statement</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th></th>
<th>D</th>
<th></th>
<th>SD</th>
<th></th>
<th>NA</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student progress is consistently monitored through use of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>data.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study skills and remediation opportunities are offered to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ninth graders who need additional academic support.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students who experience academic difficulties receive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>needed support.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failing students are able to “catch up” and stay on course</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for promotion.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The structured study hall enhances the transition program.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
School A Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors

Survey statements 5, 7, 15, 19, and 20 were linked to Research Question 3: What factors inhibited the planning, implementation, and sustainability of transition programs in the four selected high schools?

Eighty-seven and one-half percent of respondents indicated that they disagreed, and 12.5% of respondents strongly disagreed. Thirty-seven and one-half of respondents agreed that the transition program was adequately funded, and 50% of respondents indicated that this statement did not apply to their program. While 50% of respondents agreed that special funding was allotted for the transition program, 50% of respondents indicated that this statement was not applicable to their program. Twenty-five percent of the respondents strongly agreed, and 12.5% agreed that class size is reasonable in respect to the subject and needs of students. Fifty percent disagreed, and 12.5% strongly disagreed. Twenty-five percent of respondents agreed that teachers who work with the ninth graders are the most experienced teachers in the school. Thirty-seven and one-half percent of respondents disagreed, and 12.5% strongly disagreed. Twelve and one-half percent indicated that this statement was not applicable to the program. Responses are listed in Table 13.
Table 13

Inhibiting Factors in School A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Statement</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th></th>
<th>D</th>
<th></th>
<th>SD</th>
<th></th>
<th>NA</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students are grouped according to their ability.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ninth grade transition program is adequately funded.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special funding is allotted for the transition program.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class size is reasonable in respect to the subject and needs of students.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers who work with ninth graders are the most experienced teachers in the school.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School A Research Question 4: Facilitating Factors

Survey statements 13, 14, 16, and 23 addressed Research Question 4: What factors facilitated the planning, implementation, and sustainability of transition programs in the four selected high schools?

Twenty-five percent of respondents strongly agreed that teachers believe all students can learn while 50% of respondents agreed. Twelve and one-half percent of respondents indicated that they disagreed, and 12.5% indicated that this statement was not applicable. Twelve and one-half percent of teachers strongly agreed that activities planned throughout the year enhanced students’ connection to the high school community, and 50% of respondents agreed. Twelve and one-half percent disagreed, and 12.5% indicated that this statement was not applicable. Responses to vertical teaming/planning that occurred with middle school staff yielded responses that indicated
37.5% of teachers disagreed, and 12.5% of teacher strongly disagreed. Fifty percent of teachers indicated that this statement was not applicable. Twelve and one-half percent of teachers strongly agreed, and 50% agreed that the faculty supported the ninth grade transition program. Twelve and one-half percent indicated that this was not applicable. Responses are listed in Table 14.

Table 14

Facilitating Factors in School A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Statement</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers believe that all students can learn at high levels.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities are planned throughout the school year to enhance the student’s connection to the high school community.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vertical teaming/planning that occurs with middle school staff has improved the ninth grade transition program.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The faculty at my school support the ninth grade transition program.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School A Research Question 5: Criteria Used to Determine Success/Failure

Survey statements 8,9,11,18, and 24 were linked to Research Question 5: *What criteria does each of the four selected high schools use to determine the success of its transition programs?*

Teachers indicated that they agreed that projects and fieldtrips enhanced students’ ninth grade experience at a rate of 37.5%. Twelve and one-half percent of teachers disagreed, and 12.5% strongly disagreed. Thirty-seven and one-half percent responded
that this statement was not applicable. Twelve and one-half percent of teachers strongly agreed that double doses of academic subjects resulted in improved student achievement. Sixty-two and one-half of respondents disagreed, and 12.5% indicated that it was not applicable. Twelve and one-half percent of teachers strongly agreed that all stakeholders work together to bridge communication gaps. Another 12.5% agreed also. Sixty-two and one-half of the respondents disagreed with this statement while 12.5% indicated that it was not applicable. Twelve and one-half percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 12.5% agreed that parent involvement resulted in improved student achievement. Sixty-two and one-half percent disagreed, and 12.5% strongly disagreed. Twelve and one-half percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 12.5% agreed that the ninth grade transition program in this school had resulted in improved promotion rates. Thirty-seven and one-half percent disagreed, and 37.5% indicated that this statement was not applicable. Responses are listed in Table 15.
Table 15

Criteria Used to Determine Success/Failure in School A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Statement</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Projects and fieldtrips enhance students’ ninth grade experience.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double doses of academic subjects have resulted in improved student achievement.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All stakeholders work together to bridge communication gaps.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent involvement has resulted in improved student achievement.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ninth grade transition program in this school has resulted in improved promotion rates.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School A Findings from Interview and Material Culture

Emerging themes from the interview and the material culture are presented within the context of each research question. School A did not participate in an observation.

School A Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation

In planning the components that supported initial design of its ninth grade transition program, School A developed a program that was driven by objectives and a mission statement. The objective of School A’s ninth grade transition was to increase academics in the ninth grade Standards of Learning classes by engaging students in an individualized, educational, and rigorous curriculum.

School A’s mission was to assist students in
• making a successful transition from middle school to high school.
• raising their levels of achievement in core subjects.
• developing and practicing productive behaviors.

The planning committee for School A’s program consisted of six teachers, one administrator, and two students. Teachers worked with an administrator throughout the process, while students worked with the teachers and an administrator and also planned separately with an administrator. A teacher was assigned the role of team leader and coordinated the activities and meetings for the team. The transition program was for first-time ninth graders, and students were placed on one hall separate from the rest of the student body. The plan indicated that teachers would have common planning time, but common planning time was not a component implemented in the program’s design. During its first and second years, School A provided summer orientation for its incoming ninth graders.

School A Research Question 2: Program Design

School A’s ninth grade transition program was designed to address students’ academic and social needs. Academic strategies were developed to provide general support to students and to provide specific support needed to succeed in each subject area.

School A Strategies for Addressing Academic Needs

Teachers at School A utilized the first month of school to observe students’ performance to determine students’ academic needs. Teachers also reviewed Standards of Learning tests and the Gates-McGinitie reading test from students’ middle school years to diagnose students’ needs. From their observations and reviews, teachers noted that
students needed to improve their study skills, critical thinking skills, organization skills, listening skills, and reading comprehension skills. In order to address students’ needs, teachers worked with students in small groups, offered after school remediation, and worked individually with students. Students also received instructional assistance in the school’s Saturday program and in peer tutoring during the school week. Teachers utilized distribution of study guides, collaborative planning, and differentiated instruction to address students’ academic needs.

School A Academic Needs by Subject Area

Additionally, students’ academic needs were addressed in each subject area. Each core subject teacher developed a plan to assist students who were struggling.

Mathematics. In mathematics classes, the remediation depended on what mathematics courses students had completed in middle school. Most of the students were in one-year algebra I while some students were in two-year algebra I to have more time to learn basic mathematics.

English. In English, there was a reading program and a supplementary class for those with reading comprehension difficulties. School A planned to double block English for regular and possibly honors students in the coming school year.

Science. The science department used interactive notebooks in its science classes. Biology was offered to most ninth graders because in the past, ninth graders had not done well in earth science. Thus, honors earth science was only offered to a small number of ninth graders. For the next school year, School A planned to enroll its ninth graders in environmental science classes so that a non-Standards of Learning tested course (SOL) would be used to prepare students for SOL tested courses in future years. School A’s staff
involved in working with the ninth graders expressed that completing environmental science as ninth graders would positively impact graduation rates and reduce drop out rates because students would be able to earn a credit in an upper level science course required for graduation. School staff also expressed that students entering the SOL tested science courses later in high school would be more motivated to earn passing grades.

History. Teachers worked with administrators to rearrange the sequence in which students acquired the needed credits in history and social sciences. In the past, students were enrolled in an SOL tested course, but a plan was being considered to have ninth graders take government or law/economics before enrolling in an SOL tested course.

Electives. Ninth graders’ electives were scheduled for the end of the day, and School A intended to continue to offer electives to its ninth graders during the latter portion of the day.

Physical Education. School A had no plans to change physical education offerings for its ninth graders.

School A Social Needs

School A determined that its ninth graders needed to be segregated from the rest of the student body. School staff expressed that ninth graders had a tendency to adopt negative behaviors when they interacted with the rest of the student body. The ninth graders had mixed lunch shifts this year, but they would have ninth grade only lunch shifts in subsequent years. Other strategies implemented to address the social needs of ninth graders included seminars, mentor programs, and a student assistance program.
School A Strategies to Address Social Needs

Seminars. School A recognized the need for ninth grade seminars on how to succeed in school. Staff expressed that students needed to learn about developing habits for school success. Ninth graders attended a motivational assembly during the school year. Additionally, staff members monitored and compared discipline infractions from year to year and made adjustments accordingly. School A staff expressed that the first year of the program was better structured because most of the students in the program were first time ninth graders.

Mentor Programs. School A included ninth graders in its mentorship programs. The school had at least five active mentorship programs.

Student Assistance Program. Teachers also referred students to the Student Assistance Program which was designed to provide students with help in dealing with positive lifestyle choices and substance abuse. Counselors employed by the city met with students who were referred or voluntarily sought assistance.

School A Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors

School A staff indicated that lack of time, lack of total school support, and lack of incentives were inhibiting factors in planning, implementing, and sustaining its ninth grade transition program.

Lack of Time. School A noted that the second year was more difficult than the first year because there was not enough opportunity for communication. The eight-block schedule did not accommodate team planning for ninth grade transition teachers. Teachers had two unencumbered planning blocks, but they were not willing to utilize their unencumbered time to work with ninth grade transition. Additionally, staff members
expressed that the administrator’s duties did not allow the time needed to work with the
ninth grade transition team.

The transition team leader did not teach ninth grade, and that made it difficult for
the team to work together. A new team leader was assigned for the coming school year so
that a ninth grade teacher would be working with the students and teachers in the
program. Thus, the staff planned for the program to return to the structure of the first
year.

*Lack of Total School Support.* School A staff noted that a lack of total school
support inhibited the program’s development, implementation, and sustainability. The
following comment was shared by one of the respondents.

Even though department chairs picked teachers they thought would be best suited
for ninth grade transition, some teachers did not want to be in the program. They
lacked motivation in working with ninth graders and had no connections with
ninth graders. Although they may have been assigned ninth grade, they did not
necessarily want to teach ninth graders. Generally, it was difficult to find teachers
who wanted to teach ninth grade.

*Lack of Incentives.* The school staff at School A indicated that there were no
incentives for teachers to want to teach the ninth grade. School A expressed that there
should be a stipend for each team teacher and for the teacher leader.

**School A Research Question 4: Facilitating Factors**

For School A, factors that facilitated the planning implementation, and
sustainability of their ninth grade transition program included funding, program structure,
teacher relationships and counselor use.
Funding. School A supported its efforts in ninth grade transition through an honors grant and a smaller learning community grant.

Structure of Program. School staff expressed that the academy concept positively impacted the program because each academy had its own teachers, guidance counselors, and administrator. Their direct focus was on assisting in developing relationships with students to reduce discipline infractions and to implement instructional programs that improved student success.

Teacher Relationships. Relationships among teachers in the program were identified as a facilitating factor because school staff expressed that teachers liked to communicate with each other. The teachers were positive and shared strategies and information to make the school and program run better.

Counselor Use. School A assigned one guidance counselor to all first-time ninth graders and indicated that this enabled students to feel comfortable with the counselor. The counselor was able to identify students’ strengths and weaknesses, and there was more coherence with scheduling because the counselor had a better idea of the incoming class’s needs.

School A Research Question 5: Criteria Used to Determine Success/Failure

School A used data to determine its program’s success/failure. Students’ grades, attendance, and discipline were monitored throughout the year. For each subject area, students’ pass and fail rates were tracked by subject area, and discipline infractions were reviewed each year. SOL progress charts from year-to-year tracked ninth graders’ performance in SOL tested courses.
Extracurricular activities. Not many ninth grade students participated in extracurricular activities, but this was an indicator that School A used to determine its program’s success. The staff noted that although many students did not participate in extracurricular activities, many students did stay after school for tutoring.

Summary of Findings for School A

The ninth grade transition program at School A was defined by a set of goals and objectives. An administrator and a team of teachers were assigned to work with the school’s ninth grade transition program. School A was in its second year of having implemented a ninth grade transition program. Students enrolled in the program were first-time ninth graders. The transition program was housed separately from the general student body, and one guidance counselor served students in the ninth grade transition program. The response rate for the survey was 80%. Eight out of 10 teachers participated in the survey. School A also participated in an interview and submitted material culture.

School A Summary of Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation

A summary of School A’s findings from the survey, interview, and material culture present contrasting portrayals of the school’s planning and implementation efforts. The material culture and interview respondents at School A indicated that teachers were involved in the planning and implementation stages of its transition program; however, 87.5% (7) of survey respondents disagreed. Additionally, while the interview and material culture data depicted teachers as the leaders and key staff members in carrying out the plans for the transition program, survey responses presented data that illustrated dissenting perspectives. None of the respondents strongly agreed with any of the statements in the survey that were linked to research question one. Only 25%
(2) of the respondents agreed that the program had effective dropout measures and pre-high school activities that addressed students’ academic and social needs. Data generated from the interview and material culture indicated that students participated in one pre-high school activity and that students were separated from the general student body. Only 12.5% (1) of the respondents strongly agreed with any of the statements, and only 25% (2) of the respondents agreed that the ninth grade transition program had benefited ninth graders. Even though the original plan indicated that teachers in the transition program would have common planning time, the program as it operated did not include common planning time for team teachers. Overall, findings from School A indicated that there were contrasting perspectives of how the planning of the school’s ninth grade transition program transpired.

School A Summary of Research Question 2: Program Design

Data generated from the survey, interview, and material culture revealed that respondents from School A were much more positive in responses regarding the program’s design. On the survey, 87.5% to 100% (8) of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that students’ progress was consistently monitored and that students received academic support that resulted in increased promotion rates. The statement regarding structured study halls yielded a “not applicable” response rate that indicated that School A did not offer structured study halls in its ninth grade transition program. Interviews and material culture indicated that students received additional support and instruction in their academic subjects. Academic support addressed mathematics, English, science, history, and electives. Students participated in social support activities that enabled them to develop habits for school success. Activities that addressed students’
social needs included assemblies, seminars, mentor programs, and a student assistance program.

School A Summary of Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors

Inhibiting factors generated from the data collection for School A revealed that survey respondents identified class size, staff selection, and ability grouping as inhibiting factors. One hundred percent (8) of respondents viewed ability grouping as an inhibiting factor. Sixty-two and one-half percent (5) of the respondents indicated that class size was an inhibiting factor. Staff selection was also identified as an inhibiting factor. While only 25% (2) of the respondents indicated that the staff selected to work with ninth graders was the most experienced in the school, 50% (4) of the respondents disagreed. Interestingly, 50% (4) of the survey respondents indicated that special funding was allotted for the program, and only 12.5% (1) disagreed that the program was adequately funded. Data generated from the interview and material culture indicated that lack of funding inhibited the program because teachers and the team leader should have received monetary incentives for working as ninth grade transition teachers. Data generated from the interview and material culture also identified lack of time and lack of total school support as inhibiting factors. Respondents expressed that teachers did not receive planning time to work in the transition program and were unwilling to use their unencumbered planning to spend on ninth grade transition. Respondents also indicated that the administrator assigned to supervise ninth grade transition did have enough time to work with the program either. School A also noted that the ninth grade transition program did not have total school support. Teachers did not want to teach ninth graders.
School A Summary of Research Question 4: Facilitating Factors

Data from the survey, interview, and material culture generated varying findings. Belief in students’ ability to learn, faculty support, funding, program structure, teacher relationships, and counselor use were identified as facilitating factors at School A. Survey data noted that 75% (6) of the respondents agreed that all students can learn. Data generated from the interview and material culture indicated that the ninth grade transition program was financially supplemented by two grants. The academy approach fostered positive relationships between students and teachers. Teachers’ relationships with each other were positive because the teachers shared strategies and information to make the school and program run smoothly. Having one counselor assigned only to ninth grade transition provided the transition team with someone who could concentrate solely on the needs of ninth graders.

School A Summary of Research Question 5: Criteria Used to Determine Success/Failure

School A used students’ promotion and failure rates in their academic subjects, along with Standards of Learning pass rates, to determine its ninth grade transition program’s success. While 37.5% (3) of the respondents agreed that fieldtrips and projects enhanced students’ ninth grade experience, only 12.5% (1) agreed that double doses of academic courses resulted in improved student achievement. Additionally, 62.5% (5) of participants responded negatively to the statements regarding bridging communication gaps and involving parents, and only 25% (2) of the respondents agreed that the ninth grade transition program had resulted in improved promotion rates. Overall, although the criteria School A used to determine its success/failure would identify how many students met promotion requirements, data generated from the survey indicated that School A did
not agree that it was meeting its criteria for success in serving ninth graders through a transition program.

Findings for School B

Background of School B

School B was in its third year of having a ninth grade transition program, and its program focused on first time ninth graders. In planning its program, School B formed a committee that included teachers from each department in the school and two administrators. The committee spent a school year researching and planning its ninth grade transition program. Committee members attended conferences, visited schools across the state and nation, and read current literature on ninth grade transition initiatives. Information gathered during the planning and research stage was used to design and to implement the school’s ninth grade transition program.

Out of 2,000 students, approximately 600 were ninth graders. Five hundred were first-time ninth graders, and the first-time ninth graders were heterogeneously placed in four separate teams within the school’s academy system. Each team consisted of five teachers: an English teacher, a math teacher, a science teacher, a history teacher, and a physical education teacher. Each team had a team leader and a separate administrator in charge of each team.

Findings from the survey are presented by survey statement and grouped within the context of the research questions. Findings from the survey, interview, observation, and material culture are presented within each case study as thematic categories that emerged as recurrent or important perspectives of respondents who participated in the data collection process. Data generated for School B is the result of the survey, an
interview of two ninth grade transition teachers, an observation of a ninth grade transition meeting, and a review of the school’s material culture. Material culture presented for review included the school’s accountability plan, a teacher intervention checklist, a counseling sheet, a parent letter, a behavioral intervention form, a meeting agenda, a listing of professional development activities, and a program description.

**School B Survey Findings**

The ninth grade transition program consisted of a team of 20 teachers, 16 of whom completed the survey. The response rate for the survey was 80%. The survey statements were linked to the research questions.

**School B Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation**

Survey Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 22 were used to gather information for Research Question 1: *How did each of the four selected high schools plan the components that support the initial designs of its transition program?*

Thirty-one percent of teachers strongly agreed, and 56% of teachers agreed that teachers had a voice in planning and in implementing the school’s program. Thirteen percent disagreed. One respondent, (6%), did not respond to Statement 2. While nineteen percent of respondents expressed that effective dropout prevention measures were incorporated in the transition program, 56% agreed and 19% disagreed. Nineteen percent of teachers strongly agreed that ninth graders have shown improvement as a result of parent involvement. Sixty-two percent agreed while 13% disagreed, and 6% strongly disagreed. Six percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 44% agreed that pre-high school activities addressed students’ academic and social needs. Nineteen percent disagreed, and 6% strongly disagreed. Twenty-five percent indicated that this was not
applicable. Thirteen percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 69% of respondents agreed that ninth graders benefited from participating in a ninth grade transition program. Six percent of respondents disagreed, and 6% strongly disagreed. Additionally, 6% of respondents indicated that this statement was not applicable. Teachers’ responses are listed in Table 16.

Table 16
Planning and Implementation in School B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Statement</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers have a voice in planning and in implementing my school’s program.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective dropout prevention measures are incorporated into the transition program.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninth graders have shown improvement as a result of parent involvement.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-high school activities address students’ academic and social needs.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninth graders have benefited from participating in a ninth grade transition.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School B Research Question 2: Program Design

Survey statements 6,10,12,17, and 21 were linked to Research Question 2: What elements make up the designs of the four selected transition programs?

Thirty-eight percent of teachers strongly agreed, and 56% percent agreed that student progress was consistently monitored through use of data. Six percent of teachers
disagreed. Fifty percent of teachers strongly agreed, and 50% agreed that study skills and remediation opportunities were offered to ninth graders who needed additional academic support. Thirteen percent of teachers strongly agreed, and 87% agreed that students who experienced academic support received needed support. Thirteen percent of teachers strongly agreed, and 75% agreed that failing students were able to “catch up” and stay on course for promotion. Six percent of teachers strongly agreed, and 44% agreed that structured study halls enhanced the ninth grade transition program. Thirty-eight percent disagreed, and 6% strongly disagreed. Six percent of respondents indicated that this statement was not applicable. Responses are listed in Table 17.

Table 17

Program Design in School B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Statement</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student progress is consistently monitored through use of data.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study skills and remediation opportunities are offered to ninth graders who need additional academic support.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students who experience academic difficulties receive needed support.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failing students are able to “catch up” and stay on course for promotion.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The structured study hall enhances the transition program.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
School B Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors

Survey statements 5, 7, 15, 19, and 20 addressed Research Question 3: What factors inhibited the planning, implementation, and sustainability of transition programs in the four selected high schools?

Thirty-eight percent of respondents agreed that students were grouped according to their ability while 50% of respondents disagreed. Six percent strongly disagreed, and 6% responded that this statement was not applicable. In response to the statement regarding the transition program being adequately funded, 63% of respondents agreed while 25% strongly disagreed. Thirteen percent indicated that this was not applicable. Thirteen percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 69% agreed that special funding was allotted for the transition program. Six percent of the respondents disagreed, and another 6% strongly disagreed. Thirteen percent indicated that this statement was not applicable. Six percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 50% agreed that class size was reasonable in respect to the subject and students’ needs. Twenty-five percent disagreed, and 19% strongly disagreed that class size was reasonable in respect to the subject and needs of students. Six percent of the respondents agreed that teachers who worked with the ninth graders were the most experienced teachers in the school. Forty-four percent disagreed, and 50% strongly disagreed. Responses are listed in Table 18.
Table 18

Inhibiting Factors in School B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Statement</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are grouped according to their ability.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ninth grade transition program is adequately funded.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special funding is allotted for the transition program.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class size is reasonable in respect to the subject and needs of students.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers who work with ninth graders are the most experienced teachers in the school.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School B Research Question 4: Facilitating Factors

Survey statements 13, 14, 16, and 23 addressed Research Question 4: What factors facilitated the planning, implementation, and sustainability of transition programs in the four selected high schools?

Six percent of teachers strongly agreed, and 75% agreed that teachers believed all students can learn. Nineteen percent disagreed. Six percent of the respondents did not respond the Statement 14. Thirteen percent of teachers strongly agreed, and 50% agreed that activities were planned throughout the year to enhance the students’ connection to the high school community. Thirteen percent of respondent disagreed, and 6% strongly disagreed. Six percent of respondent strongly agreed, and 31% agreed that vertical teaming/planning with middle school staff enhanced the ninth grade transition program. Twenty-five percent of teachers disagreed, and 13% strongly disagreed. Twenty-five
percent indicated that this statement was not applicable. Fifty-six percent of respondents agreed that the faculty at their school supported the ninth grade transition program.

Thirty-one percent disagreed, and 13% strongly disagreed. Responses are listed in Table 19.

Table 19

Facilitating Factors in School B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Statement</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers believe that all students can learn at high levels.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities are planned throughout the school year to enhance the student’s connection to the high school community.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vertical teaming/planning that occurs with middle school staff has improved the ninth grade transition program.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The faculty at my school support the ninth grade transition program.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School B Research Question 5: Criteria Used to Determine Success/Failure

Survey statements 8, 9, 11, 18, and 24 identified teachers’ responses which can be linked to Research Question 5: What criteria does each of the four selected high schools use to determine the success of its transition program?

Thirty-one percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 44% agreed that projects and fieldtrips enhanced students’ ninth grade experience. Nineteen percent disagreed, and 6% indicated that was not applicable. Twelve percent of teachers strongly agreed, and 38% agreed that double doses of academic subjects resulted in improved academic achievement. Six percent agreed, and 6% strongly disagreed. Thirty-eight percent
responded that this was not applicable. Six percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 69% agreed that all stakeholders worked together to bridge communication gaps.

Nineteen percent of the respondents disagreed. Twenty-five percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 63% agreed that parent involvement resulted in improved student achievement. Six percent disagreed, and 6% strongly disagreed. Thirty-one percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 63% agreed that the ninth grade transition program resulted in improved promotion rates. Six percent of the respondents indicated that this statement was not applicable. Responses are listed in Table 20.

Table 20
Criteria Used to Determine Success/Failure in School B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Statement</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Projects and fieldtrips enhance students’ ninth grade experience.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double doses of academic subjects have resulted in improved student achievement.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All stakeholders work together to bridge communication gaps.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent involvement has resulted in improved student achievement.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ninth grade transition program in this school has resulted in improved promotion rates.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Responses are listed in Table 20.
School B Findings from Interview, Observation, and Material Culture

Emerging themes from the survey, interview, observation, and material culture are presented within the context of the research questions.

School B Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation

The initial design of School B’s ninth grade transition program included a four teacher team for math, science, history, and English. Teachers shared a common planning time for ninth grade transition issues. The mission of the program was to offer students the support and resources needed to help them succeed academically and socially.

The program’s goals were as follows.

- Ninety percent of all transition students would be promoted to tenth grade without having to go to summer school.
- Ninety percent of all transition students would earn at least three verified credits in their freshman year.

In its pilot year, School B selected 125 first time ninth graders who were between 14 and no more than 16 years old by the time the school year began. Students could be below grade level in reading and ready to enroll in one-year or two-year Algebra I. The team sought students who had organizational difficulties, motivational problems, and were not honors students. Students selected could not have serious discipline problems, and they had to have a history of regular school attendance.

The planning committee worked with two of its feeder middle schools and looked for students who were not discipline problems but had academic and other problems. Middle school teachers were asked to identify rising ninth graders who would have problems in ninth grade. In preparation for the pilot year, the high school teachers went
into one of the middle schools and worked with a team of middle school teachers. When the program began, it was led by an administrator who worked with a team of four teachers. One of the four teachers served as the team leader.

For its second year of ninth grade transition, all first time ninth graders became a part of School B’s transition program. Each transition team consisted of an administrator and six teachers: a math, science, English, history, physical education, and freshman success teacher.

When School B began its third year with a ninth grade transition program, its pre-high school activities included a Welcome to High School night in early June and a summer orientation in late summer before the school year began. Each team met with its students in academy meetings at the beginning of the school year, and the teacher teams had returned to a five-teacher team that consisted of a math, science, English, history, physical education teacher. Each team still had its own administrator. The freshman success class had become a part of the team’s instructional load, and all first time ninth graders were enrolled in a freshman success class.

**School B Research Question 2: Program Design**

School B’s program design addressed students’ academic and social needs through various systems of interventions. The teams of teachers at School B met at least once each week to discuss students’ progress, to plan activities to celebrate students’ accomplishments, and to offer needed support to students who were experiencing difficulties that negatively impacted their academic progress. School B staff developed general and subject specific strategies for supporting students.
School B Strategies for Addressing Academic Needs

To address students’ academic needs, School B developed a series of support mechanisms entitled, Systems of Interventions. Interventions included quarterly progress reports, a counselor watch program, a freshman seminar class, a math lab, remediation, and credit recovery contracts.

**Progress Reports.** This intervention required the administrators and the team of teachers to review and to report on student progress every four and one-half weeks. Data collected presented a review of the students’ attendance, grades, discipline infractions, participation in extracurricular activities, conferences scheduled through guidance and the teams, and the percentage of students meeting promotion requirements. Each team used information gathered from each report to address students’ needs and to assist students in meeting promotion requirements.

**Counselor Watch.** Students placed in the counselor watch program were required to meet weekly with their guidance counselors until their grades improved and they were no longer in danger of failing. Once grades improved, the counselor still monitored students’ progress and met with students periodically throughout the school year.

**Freshman Seminar Class.** All ninth graders spent block eight in a structured learning environment where they were allowed to complete assignments from their team teachers. This was used for remediation and for completing missed work. Students could report to their math teachers during this period for additional instruction and/or assistance as needed. All subject area teachers could also send assignments for students to complete.
Math Lab. All ninth graders who entered ninth grade with no high school math credits were enrolled in one-year Algebra I. Students could report to the math lab during their lunch bells or after school.

Remediation. Teachers allowed students to stay after school to make up missed work or to receive additional instruction on topics currently being covered in class.

Credit Recovery Contracts. Students who failed first semester of an SOL tested course could earn a grade change if they passed the second semester and the Standards of Learning test given at the end of the school year.

School B Academic Strategies by Subject Area

Each subject area implemented plans to address its ninth grade transition students. Each department in School B used common assessments for unit tests and semester exams. Teachers within subject areas had common planning to support collaboration. Ninth grade transition teachers participated in departmental planning and goal setting in addition to their ninth grade transition efforts.

Mathematics. By the second semester of its third year, School B had moved to ensuring that math teachers were a part of the transition teams and that students received math instruction and remediation from their team’s teacher. Students placed in one-year Algebra I were offered support through the math lab and during their freshman seminar classes. If students sought assistance in the math lab, they were able to work with the math teacher who was on math lab duty at that time. During the students eighth block, students reported directly to their math teacher for assistance. Students could raise their test grades by completing test corrections. Students who were unsuccessful in one-year Algebra I were placed in two-year Algebra I by the end of first semester.
Prior to beginning ninth grade, all incoming ninth graders were invited to enroll in one-year Algebra I or geometry as part of the school’s math acceleration program. Student who elected to participate would complete Algebra I or geometry in summer school and begin high school in geometry or Algebra II.

*English.* Students could re-take tests for higher grades. Teachers posted the names of students who did not submit work on the board, and these names remained posted until all work was submitted. Teachers also used peer tutoring sessions to work with students who were struggling.

*Science.* Teachers developed and used activities that emphasized visual and active learning. Students could re-take tests for higher grades. The ninth grade science teachers used after school remediation to assist students.

*History.* Teachers re-taught lessons to reinforce learning and used students as mentors and tutors within the classroom setting. Upperclassmen also tutored in the eighth block freshman seminar classes.

*Physical Education.* Teachers allowed students to make up assignments during the eighth block freshman seminar class.

*Electives.* Transition teachers met with elective teachers to discuss students’ progress. Students who did not pass the first semester of the elective classes were removed from second semester classes.

**School B Strategies to Address Social Needs**

School B indicated students’ needed attention, guidance on health, hygiene, dress, and appearance. In working with students, the staff at School B also noted that the students had unmet monetary and hunger needs. The students also needed to develop an
understanding of the importance of education and having goals. School B expressed the need to develop positive relationships with the students. One of the staff members commented, “You have to let them know you in order to get them to connect. Students tell us what they need from their actions. Student conferences reveal a lot.”

To address the needs of its ninth graders, School B implemented a school partnership, a mentoring program, a student-voice group, and recognition activities.

*School Partnership.* School B developed a partnership with a local university. This program allowed students the opportunity to visit a university campus to learn about college life.

*Mentor Programs.* Additionally, School B formed an organization for African American males that was supported by a local men’s civic group. Young men selected to participate in this program were required to demonstrate excellence in academics and character.

*Student Group.* In order to give students ownership within the school culture, the School B established a student group where students voiced their concerns and planned school events.

*Recognition Activities.* Each month students met with the principal to be recognized for outstanding or improved academics, attendance, and/or attitude. This assembly was sponsored by the Parent-Teacher-Association, and at least 100 students and their parents were invited each month.

At the end of each grading period, each transition team hosted an assembly to recognize students for honor roll and outstanding attendance. Each team hosted an end-
of-the-year activity to recognize those students who had met promotion requirements and behavioral expectations.

School B Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors

School B cited lack of total school support and teacher turnover as factors that inhibited the implementation and sustainability of the transition program.

Lack of Total School Support. Transition team teachers looked to the school’s administration to support teachers’ efforts in the ninth grade transition program. Staff members from School B expressed that there was a void without leadership from administration. School B also indicated that teachers needed the administrators to work with them to figure out solutions to problems that involved the students. There was concern that the administrators’ different management styles created conflicts because the administration attempted to micro-manage the teams’ efforts. Some of the administrators required too many meetings for teams.

School B’s staff indicated that they had to combat disrespect from colleagues who did not realize the amount of work involved in working with ninth graders or who believed that transition teachers were only capable of teaching ninth graders. One staff member commented, “Some of our colleagues treat us as if this is all we can do.”

Teacher Turnover. School B staff expressed that teacher turnover inhibited progress at School B. Staff members explained that some teams had teachers who did not want to deal with the program at all. On one of the teams, the history department’s teacher had exited the program each year, and it appeared that one of the teams would face another turnover at the year’s end. School staff expressed,
You have to go back over and try to build a relationship with your team. You start all over again and retrain people. If the team is already running well, it is easier to bring people in and have them become a part of the team; however, many teachers in the building are totally against the team. It was hard to do things one way and have others not want to be a part of the team.

**School B Research Question 4: Facilitating Factors**

Factors that facilitated the planning, implementation, and sustainability of School B’s transition program included funding, professional development, the structure of the program, teacher relationships, and counselor use.

**Funding.** Team leaders received a stipend for working with the transition teams. Each team also received funds to pay for supplies and activities with the students. School B expressed that this type of support positively impacted managing and sustaining the program.

**Professional Development.** Each year, representatives from each transition team attended a national conference where they evaluated the school’s program and planned for the coming school year. Representatives from each of the four teams worked with the principal in shaping and refining ninth grade transition to meet the needs of students.

**Structure of Program.** The ninth grade transition teams were a part of the school’s academy concept and was located within a certain part of the school building. Staff members expressed that the transition team’s teachers, guidance counselors, and administrator focused on developing relationships with students to reduce discipline infractions and to implement instructional programs that improved student success.
Teacher Relationships. School staff expressed that teacher relationships were important in maintaining team cohesiveness. One staff member commented that his/her team had always had great cohesiveness, and this helped teachers to work together in terms of turning in information. Teachers who had positive relationships with each other also enjoyed success with students. Staff also expressed that the positive relationships they had with their colleagues helped them to see the big picture and not have problems in working with the students.

Counselor Use. Teachers referred students to the guidance counselors so that students could be counseled on academic and social concerns. Teachers used an intervention form to explain how they had attempted to assist the student prior to making a referral. Students were referred for failing class tests, lack of homework, lack of class participation, and behavior concerns. Counselors used a counseling sheet in working with students to help review concerns. Students had to answer a series of questions where they described the negative impact of the error/problem and how it conflicted with the school’s values. Counselors discussed the correct way to resolve the error/problem, and students had to sign and date each counseling session.

School B Research Question 5: Criteria Used to Determine Success/Failure

School B collected and reviewed data every four and one-half weeks to determine which students needed additional assistance. Students’ grades, attendance, discipline, and participation in school activities were discussed by team teachers and with the building principal. Students in School B completed a student survey to provide feedback for teachers about the ninth grade transition program.
Summary of Findings for School B

School B had program goals and objectives that were clearly defined, and School B was in its third year of having implemented a ninth grade transition program. The program had an identified structure of teachers and administrators who were assigned to work with students placed in the ninth grade transition program. All ninth graders in School B were placed in the school’s ninth grade transition program. There were four ninth grade teams, and each team was placed within each of the school’s four academies. School B had a survey response rate of 80%. Sixteen of the 20 teachers participated in the survey. School B participated in an interview, an observation, and submitted material culture.

School B Summary of Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation

For the most part, School B’s survey responses for research question one were positive. Eighty-nine percent (14) of respondents agreed that teachers had a voice in planning and in implementing the transition program. Seventy-five percent (12) agreed that the program had effective dropout prevention measures, and 81% (13) agreed that ninth graders had shown improvement as a result of parent involvement. While provision of pre-high school activities received a 50% (8) positive response rate, 82% (13) of the respondents agreed that ninth graders benefited from the program. Data generated from the interview, observation, and material culture indicated that a planning committee which consisted of teachers and administrators designed the program. School B staff planned with a team of middle school teachers and piloted its program in its initial year. The planning committee visited schools throughout the state and nation to see how ninth grade transition programs worked.
School B changed the number of teachers on its team each year. During its first year, its teacher teams consisted of four teachers: math, science, history, and English. For the second year, the teams consisted of six teachers: math, science, history, English, physical education, and freshman success. The freshman success teacher only worked with students who had been identified as needing additional academic and/or social support. During its third year, each team consisted of five teachers: math, science, history, English, and physical education. Each of the team teachers taught a freshman success seminar class, and all ninth graders were placed in freshman success seminar classes. Each team still had its own administrator and team lead teacher.

School B Summary of Research Question 2: Program Design

In terms of the program design, School B’s survey responses yielded an 88% (14) to a 100% (16) majority of positive responses in all areas except one. Monitoring student progress, providing needed support to those experiencing academic difficulty, and providing students with multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery and/or catch up all rated positive responses. However, respondents did not identify positively with structured study halls. Only 50% (8) of the respondents agreed that the structured study hall enhanced the transition program. Forty-two percent (7) disagreed, and six percent (1) indicated that the statement was not applicable.

Data generated from the interview, the observation, and material culture indicated that School B utilized a system of interventions to address students’ academic and social needs. Teams of teachers met at least once each week to discuss students’ progress and plan activities to support and/or celebrate students’ efforts. Team B developed general interventions as well as subject specific interventions. General interventions included a
review and report on progress every four and one-half weeks, a counselor watch program, a
freshman seminar class, access to a math lab, after school remediation, and credit recovery contracts. Subject area interventions were also provided in mathematics, English, science, history, physical education, and electives.

School B identified that students had unmet monetary and hunger needs. Students also needed to develop an understanding of the importance of education and having goals. School B sought to establish positive relationships with students through a mentoring program, a student-voice group, and recognition activities.

School B Summary of Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors

In identifying inhibiting factors, data generated for School B yielded both positive and negative findings. Fifty-six percent (9) of the respondents noted that students were not grouped according to ability while 38% (6) of the respondents indicated that students were grouped according to their ability. Respondents’ answers regarding funding were positive for the most part. Sixty-three percent (10) of the respondents agreed that the program was adequately funded, and 82% (13) acknowledged that special funding was allocated for the program. While 56% (9) of the respondents agreed that class size was reasonable, 44% (7) of the respondents disagreed. Most notable though is that 94% (15) of the respondents indicated that most of the teachers who work with ninth graders were not the most experienced teachers in the school.

Data generated from the interview, observation, and material culture indicated that School B did not have total school support for its transition program and that teacher turnover on the transition teams adversely affected the program. School staff expressed
that colleagues did not respect them, and administrators attempted to micro-manage the teams’ efforts.

School B Summary of Research Question 4: Facilitating Factors

School B provided mixed responses to survey questions regarding facilitating factors. While only 19% (3) of respondents indicated that they disagreed that all students could learn at high levels, 81% (13) of the respondents agreed that students could achieve at high levels. Sixty-three percent (10) of the respondents believed that activities were planned throughout the year to enhance students’ connections to high school. Only 39% (6) of the respondents agreed that vertical teaming/planning occurred with the middle school. Thirty-nine percent (6) disagreed, and 25% (4) indicated that vertical teaming was not applicable. Survey results indicated mixed findings as to whether the staff supported the program. Fifty-six percent (9) of the respondents agreed; however, 44% (7) of the respondents disagreed. Facilitating factors identified from the interview, observation, and material culture revealed that School B’s supplemental funding, professional development, program structure, and teacher relationships among the teams positively impacted the school’s ninth grade transition program.

School B Summary of Research Question 5: Criteria Used to Determine Success/Failure

Most of the survey responses for School B were positive. Seventy-five percent (12) of the respondents agreed that projects and fieldtrips enhanced the ninth grade transition program. Fifty percent (8) of the respondents indicated that double doses of academic courses resulted in improved student achievement while 38% (6) indicated that the school did not have ninth grade courses that included double doses. Twelve percent (2) of the respondents indicated that they did not agree that double doses of courses
resulted in improved student achievement. While respondents indicated that 78% (12) and 88% (14) of them agreed that communication gaps and parent involvement resulted in improved student achievement, 94% (15) of the respondents indicated that they agreed that the ninth grade transition program had resulted in improved promotion rates.

According to data gathered from the interview, observation, and material culture, School B used students’ promotion rates to determine the success of its program. Data collected every four and one-half weeks was used to determine how to assist students and ensure that students would meet promotion criteria. Students’ grades, attendance, discipline, and participation in school activities were discussed by teachers and with the building principal. Students also completed a survey to provide teachers with feedback on the program.

Findings for School C

Emerging themes from School C’s survey, interview, observation, and material culture are presented within the context of the research questions.

Background of School C

School C was in its first year with a ninth grade transition program, and it involved all ninth graders. There were 37 teachers who made up the ninth grade transition team, and seven of these teachers were special education teachers. The program began in late October of 2005 to address the ninth grade students. Teachers participated in a two-day retreat where they explored the needs of students enrolled in ninth grade. Ideas were framed around specific strands or topics. Teachers explored the following questions.

- What type of student do we have?
- Why are the students failing?
• What are the strategies we need to do to get students to pass?

School C had a total enrollment of approximately 1,200 students, and 582 of the students were ninth graders. Following the fall retreat in 2005, the 37 teachers worked with the ninth grade transition coordinator, who was also a classroom teacher, to implement a transition program.

Findings from the survey are presented by survey statement and grouped within the research questions. Findings from the interview, observation, and material culture are presented as thematic categories that emerged as recurrent or important as data was generated for the case study. Data generated for School C resulted from an interview with a ninth grade transition teacher, from an observation of a ninth grade transition teacher meeting, and from material culture. Material culture presented for review included the school’s ninth grade transition action plan, a Ninth Grade Success/Transition Program Checklist, agendas from meetings, a School-wide Individual Plan of Growth, and a Student Assistance Program Referral Form.

School C Survey Findings

The ninth grade transition program consisted of a team of 37 teachers, 30 of whom completed the survey. The response rate for the survey was 81%. The survey statements were linked to the research questions.

School C Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation

Survey Statements 1,2,3,4, and 22 were linked to Research Question 1: How did each of the four selected high schools plan the components that support the initial designs of its transition program?
Seven percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 80% agreed that teachers had a voice in planning the school’s program. Seven percent disagreed, and 3% strongly disagreed. Three percent (1) of the respondents did not respond to Statement 2. Seven percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 53% agreed that effective dropout prevention measures were incorporated into the transition program. Twenty-three percent disagreed, and 10% strongly disagreed. Seven percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 27% agreed that ninth graders had shown improvement as a result of parent involvement. Thirty percent disagreed, and 13% strongly disagreed. Twenty percent of the respondents indicated that this statement was not applicable to the program. Seven percent of the respondents did not respond to Statement 4. Three percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 13% agreed that pre-high school activities addressed students’ academic and social needs. Forty percent disagreed, and 20% strongly disagreed. Ten percent responded that this statement was not applicable. Three percent of the respondents did not respond to Statement 22. Seven percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 27% agreed that ninth graders benefited from participating in a ninth grade transition program. Thirty percent disagreed, and 20% strongly disagreed. Thirteen percent indicated that this statement was not applicable to the program. Teachers’ responses are listed in Table 21.
Table 21

Planning and Implementation of Program in School C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Statement</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers have a voice in planning and in implementing my school’s program.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective dropout prevention measures are incorporated into the transition program.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninth graders have shown improvement as a result of parent involvement.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-high school activities address students’ academic and social needs.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninth graders have benefited from participating in a ninth grade transition.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School C Research Question 2: Program Design

Survey statements 6,10,12,17, and 21 were linked to Research Question 2: *What elements make up the designs of the four selected transition programs?*

Survey responses revealed the following. Thirty-three percent of teachers strongly agreed, and 47% agreed that student progress was consistently monitored through use of data. Thirteen percent disagreed, and three percent strongly disagreed. Fifty percent of teachers strongly agreed, and 43% agreed that study skills and remediation opportunities were offered to ninth graders who needed additional academic support. Three percent of teachers disagreed. Twenty-seven percent of teachers strongly agreed, and 47% agreed that students who experienced academic difficulties received needed support. Thirteen percent of teachers disagreed, and ten percent strongly disagreed. Three percent of
teachers indicated that this statement was not applicable to the program. Ten percent of teachers strongly agreed, and 57% agreed that failing students were able to “catch up” and stay on course for promotion. Thirteen percent disagreed, and ten percent strongly disagreed. Ten percent of teachers indicated that this was not applicable to the program. Three percent (1) of the respondents did not respond to Statement 21. Three percent of teachers strongly agreed, and 20% agreed that the structured study hall enhanced the transition program. Twenty-three percent disagreed, and 43% strongly disagreed. Seven percent responded that this statement was not applicable to the program. Table 22 lists teachers’ responses.

Table 22

Program Design in School C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Statement</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student progress is consistently monitored through use of data.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study skills and remediation opportunities are offered to ninth graders who need additional academic support.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students who experience academic difficulties receive needed support.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failing students are able to “catch up” and stay on course for promotion.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The structured study hall enhances the transition program.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 22 lists teachers’ responses.
School C Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors

Survey statements 5, 7, 15, 19, and 20 were linked to Research Question 3: What factors inhibited the planning, implementation, and sustainability of transition programs in the four selected high schools?

Three percent of the respondents did not respond to Statement 5. Seventeen percent of teachers agreed that students were grouped according to their ability. Fifty percent disagreed, and 20% strongly disagreed. Ten percent of the respondents indicated that this statement was not applicable to the program. Three percent of the respondents did not respond to Statement 7. Seven percent of the respondents strongly agreed, and 10% agreed that the ninth grade transition program was adequately funded. Fifty percent disagreed, and 10% strongly disagreed. Thirteen percent indicated that the statement was not applicable. Seven percent of the respondents did not respond to Statement 15. Ten percent of the respondents strongly agreed, and 40% agreed that special funding was allotted for the transition program. Ten percent disagreed, and 13% strongly disagreed. Seven percent indicated that this was not applicable. Seven percent of teachers strongly agreed, and 37% agreed that class size was reasonable in respect to the subject and needs of students. Forty percent disagreed, and 10% strongly disagreed. Seven percent of the respondents did not respond to Statement 20. Three percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 27% agreed that teachers who worked with ninth graders were the most experienced teachers in the school. Thirty-three percent disagreed, and 20 percent strongly disagreed. Seven participants responded that this statement was not applicable. Responses are listed in Table 23.
Table 23

Inhibiting Factors in School C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Statement</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students are grouped according to their ability.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ninth grade transition program is adequately funded.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special funding is allotted for the transition program.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class size is reasonable in respect to the subject and needs of students.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers who work with ninth graders are the most experienced teachers in the school.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 4: Facilitating Factors in School C

Survey statements 13,14,16, and 23 were linked to Research Question 4: What factors facilitated the planning, implementation, and sustainability of transition programs in the four selected high schools?

Seventeen percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 50% agreed that teachers believed that all students could learn at high levels. Twenty-three percent disagreed, and three percent strongly disagreed. Three percent of respondents indicated that this statement did not apply to the program. Seven percent of the respondents did not respond to Statement 14. Seven percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 37% agreed that activities were planned throughout the school year to enhance the student’s connection to the high school community. Thirty percent disagreed, and 13% strongly disagreed. Three percent indicated that the statement was not applicable. Three percent of the respondents did not respond to Statement 16. Seven percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 10%
percent of respondents agreed that vertical teaming/planning that occurred with middle school staff had improved the ninth grade transition program. Twenty-three percent disagreed, and 20% strongly disagreed. Thirty-three percent indicated that the statement did not apply. Thirteen percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 63% of respondents agreed that the faculty at the school supported the ninth grade transition program.

Seventeen percent disagreed, and 3% indicated that the statement was not applicable.

Responses are listed in Table 24.

Table 24

Facilitating Factors in School C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Statement</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers believe that all students can learn at high levels.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities are planned throughout the school year to enhance the student’s connection to the high school community.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vertical teaming/planning that occurs with middle school staff has improved the ninth grade transition program.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The faculty at my school support the ninth grade transition program.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School C Research Question 5: Criteria Used to Determine Success/Failure

Survey statements 8, 9, 11, 18, and 24 were linked to Research Question 5: *What criteria does each of the four selected high schools use to determine the success of its transition program?*

Three percent of the respondents did not respond to Statement 8. Ten percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 23% agreed that projects and fieldtrips enhanced
students’ ninth grade experience. Twenty-three percent disagreed, and 7% strongly disagreed. Thirty percent responded that this statement did not apply to the program. Three percent of the respondents did not respond to Statement 9. Seven percent of the respondents strongly agreed, and ten percent agreed that double doses of academic subjects resulted in improved student achievement. Twenty percent disagreed, and 13% strongly disagreed. Forty-three percent indicated that this statement was not applicable to the program. Thirteen percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 43% agreed that all stakeholders worked together to bridge communication gaps. Thirty-three percent disagreed, and 7% percent strongly disagreed. Thirteen percent indicated that the statement was not applicable to the program. Three percent of the respondents did not respond to Statement 18. Ten percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 27% agreed that parent involvement has resulted in improved student achievement. Twenty-seven percent disagreed, and 17% strongly disagreed. Thirteen percent responded that the statement was not applicable. Seven percent of the respondents did not respond to Statement 24. Three percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 30% agreed that the ninth grade transition program in this school resulted in improved promotion rates. Twenty-seven percent disagreed, and 7% strongly disagreed. Twenty-three percent of the respondents indicated that the statement was not applicable to the program. Responses are listed in Table 25.
Table 25

Criteria Used to Determine Success/Failure in School C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Statement</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>D</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>SD</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>NA</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Projects and fieldtrips enhance students’ ninth grade experience.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double doses of academic subjects have resulted in improved student achievement.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All stakeholders work together to bridge communication gaps.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent involvement has resulted in improved student achievement.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ninth grade transition program in this school has resulted in improved promotion rates.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School C Findings from Interview, Observation, and Material Culture

School C participated in an interview, an observation, and submitted material culture. Emerging themes from the interview, observation, and material culture are presented within the context of each research question.

School C Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation

School C developed an action plan listed that goals for academics, attendance, and behavior. School C’s action plan also addressed the need for incentives and problems offering incentives posed for both students and teachers. School C’s mission was to address

- concurrent failure in core classes.
- reading deficiencies and incomplete assignments.
- general disinterest and poor test performance.
- ninth grade failure rates.
Stakeholders included teachers and administrators who worked through the planning process. There was no input from students. Teachers led the development and implementation processes.

**School C Research Question 2: Program Design**

School C identified students’ academic and social needs and developed strategies to support students. Additionally, School C focused on how student attendance and lack of motivation affected students’ overall school performance. The staff at School C paired its English and history teachers and its math and science teachers to work together to identify strategies that would decrease failure rates.

**School C Academic Needs**

Teachers noted that students needed to improve their grades in all of their classes. Students needed instruction to enhance their reading comprehension skills. Students also needed to be motivated to complete class work and to perform adequately on tests.

School C staff expressed that students needed to develop an interest in school. Additionally, School C staff indicated that staff needed to adapt new methodologies for presenting content and for motivating students to learn.

**School C Strategies for Addressing Academic Needs**

The ninth grade transition team at School C provided students with interactive notebooks, guided reading activities, and review strategies to reinforce learning. Teachers also utilized alternative forms of assessments, such as open book examinations and student created examinations. Teachers and guidance counselors worked together to address reducing ninth grade failures by counseling students and formulating goals for
students to work toward. Ninth grade teachers used the following strategies to reinforce learning.

*Interactive Notebooks.* Students were allowed to work in pairs or small groups. Teachers gave students notes, and students worked together to organize and to complete the notes.

*Foldables.* This was a note-taking strategy where students put information in sections on paper and folded them to practice and to learn the content.

*Seven Words or Less.* Students were required to write a seven word or less definition in working with vocabulary.

*Get it Said in Thirty.* Students wrote a written explanation for a concept in 30 words or less.

*Alternative Assessments.* Teachers provided students with multiple opportunities to pass by allowing them to demonstrate mastery through creating posters on certain concepts/themes. Students earned grades through group competitions on a weekly basis, and group grading resulted in students being more productive.

*Ninth Grade Success/Transition Program Checklist.* Teachers completed this form in order to document interventions used to assist ninth grade students. Contacts included phone calls to parent, referrals to guidance counselor, referrals to the student assistance counselor, after school tutoring, plans of growth, multiple opportunities to pass, teacher-to-teacher conferencing, and use of e-mail to access work to be completed for study hall. This form was signed by parents, the student, the teacher, and an administrator.
**School wide Individual Plan of Growth Form.** Teachers used this form for each subject area. Teachers completed a checklist and a growth plan for any student who was failing. The form required teachers to list the reasons for failure and the plans established to eliminate future failure.

**School C Academic Interventions by Subject Areas**

At School C, the English, history, math, and science departments utilized the strategies above to address student failure in the ninth grade. Teachers who had more than 26 failures were required to meet with the principal to explain what they were going to do to decrease their failure rates. Strategies unique to each department were not specified.

**School C Attendance**

In addition to addressing academic problems in its ninth grade transition program, School C described attendance issues that adversely affected ninth grade promotion rates. To address attendance problems in the ninth grade transition program, the staff contacted parents by phone or home visit once a student missed three days. After five days of absence students were reported to the truancy officers, and after seven days, students were referred to a truancy judge.

**School C Social Needs**

School C determined that its ninth graders needed places to socialize. The staff also expressed that students needed to realize school was important. Students needed to learn how to acknowledge their worth and value. The school staff noted that students needed to believe that the staff had positive attitudes toward them.
School C Strategies to Address Social Needs

The School C staff invited guest speakers from local universities to speak to students about values and history. The school sponsored pep rallies for all students and special meetings with ninth graders. School C staff was also concerned about students’ diminished focus on academics because of social distractions that resulted in the devaluation of the educational process. Teachers tended to engage in non-motivating instructional strategies which added to the disruption of the educational process. To address students’ social needs, School C utilized its student assistance program, focused on improving classroom management, monitored instruction, hosted a parent day, and provided incentives to students as a means of motivating them to succeed.

Student Assistance Program Referral Form. Teachers used this form to refer students having difficulties to the student assistance counselor. The student assistance counselor was a separate counselor from the school guidance counselor. The referral form requested student’s name, grade, age, referral date, person referring student, a description of the concern, and a list of actions staff member previously implemented to assist the student.

Classroom Management. The staff focused on improved classroom management and best practice skills by requiring students to be involved in instruction. Students actively participated in instructional activities by introducing lessons through use of PowerPoint presentations.

Monitoring Instruction. Classroom observations focused on monitoring levels of student engagement and use of technology. School staff believed that improved
classroom instruction would result in a decrease in classroom disturbances, a decrease in discipline referrals, and an increase in academic achievement

*Parent to School Day.* The staff planned to host a parent to school day where parents followed their students’ schedules.

*Incentives.* Incentives included coupons to local retailers, tickets to theme parks, and outings linked to academic performance. Eligibility for incentives would be given as a result of improvements on interim assessments and end of year academic performance. The staff recognized scholars during pep rallies, distributed mascot tokens to reward students, and allowed students to share “peer success stories”.

School C also noted issues with incentives. The School C staff indicated that students expected instant gratification and that teachers faced the challenge of finding reasonable methods to motivate students to work in the short term to achieve for the long term. Students did not work hard because there was a disconnect between class work and tangible rewards. There was also a stigma of social acceptance for good students.

**School C Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors**

School C faced its share of challenges in its first year of ninth grade transition. In addition to citing lack of time and lack of total school support as inhibiting factors, School C also cited issues with administration and student motivation.

**Lack of Time.** Teachers did not have common planning blocks, and the school staff indicated that this inhibited the planning of the program because there was no time to actually meet. None of the teachers turned down the assignment to be a part of the transition team, but the only time for people to work together was after school.
Lack of Total School Support. School C indicated that the numbers of students who needed the program and the documentation requirements were overwhelming. Teachers could spend all of their time getting information but never working with students. The school staff expressed that lack of total school support inhibited the progress and sustainability of the ninth grade transition program. There was constant turnover and lack of commitment of staff.

Administration. School C staff indicated that the planning and development of its program was led by teachers and that administrators did not have a major role in working with the ninth grade transition program. Staff members expressed that “if we did not come through on our own, we really did not have anything.”

Student Motivation. Teachers listed challenges they faced in working with ninth graders and expressed that student motivation was a major issue. Staff indicated that 36% percent of ninth graders were failing. Even though students did not do homework, failing to complete homework was not the reason students were failing. Students refused to maintain notebooks, study for tests, retake quizzes and/or tests, or complete assignments. Even though teachers were supposed to offer multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery, staff members reported that multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery were not being offered to students. Teachers questioned what additional actions they could take when they had not received work and assignments from students and they could not get the students to produce work.
School C Research Question 4: Facilitating Factors

School C staff identified professional development and teacher relationships as factors that facilitated the planning, implementation, and sustainability of its ninth grade transition program.

Professional Development. Teachers at School C observed effective practices among teams of teachers when they visited ninth grade transition programs at schools in Virginia, North Carolina, and New York. At certain intervals throughout the school year, the entire team met to review its progress and to review its plan to reduce the ninth grade failure rate. These sessions allowed teachers to share success stories and to voice their concerns.

Teacher Relationships. School C cited the professionalism of teachers wanting to make the program work to reduce ninth grade failure rates as a facilitative factor. Throughout the planning and implementation of the program, teachers got along with each other, and no one was working at the expense of others. Teachers participated in team teaching to address the needs of the special education students and operated on the belief that all students could learn. They worked to try to find ways to make the school year a successful one for ninth graders.

School C Research Question 5: Criteria Used to Determine Success/Failure

School C used data to monitor student progress throughout the school year and to determine its program’s success/failure. Department chairs kept data for each interim through examining students’ grades. The transition coordinator and guidance counselors maintained a log for students experiencing difficulties in academics, attendance, and/or discipline. Standards of learning test results were tracked each year as were pass rates for
each core subject area. School C determined its success through yielding decreases in failing grades and dropout rates and increases in SOL pass rates and promotion rates.

Additionally, School C believed they were making a difference overall in interacting with other teachers. School staff expressed that sharing ideas had been helpful, and there was no fear or competition among teachers.

**Summary of Findings for School C**

School C’s ninth grade transition program had clearly defined goals and a mission statement. Teachers and administrators worked together through the planning process. Teachers implemented and monitored the progress of the program. School C was in its first year with a ninth grade transition program, and all ninth graders were included in the program. Thirty of the 37 teachers in the program participated in the survey. The response rate for the survey was 81%. School C also participated in an interview, an observation, and submitted material culture.

**School C Summary of Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation**

Participants’ responses on the survey yielded both negative and positive results in terms of the school’s planning and implementation of a ninth grade transition program. Eighty-seven percent (26) of the respondents agreed that teachers had a voice in planning and in implementing the program while 10% (3) of the respondents disagreed. Sixty percent (18) of the respondents indicated that the program incorporated effective dropout prevention measures even though 33% (10) disagreed. Conversely, 35% (10) of the respondents indicated that parent involvement had resulted in improved ninth grade performance, and only 16% (5) of the respondents indicated agreement that pre-high school activities addressed students’ academic and social needs. Additionally, only 34%
(10) of the respondents agreed that ninth graders benefited from participating in a ninth grade transition program while 50% (15) of the respondents indicated that they did not agree that a ninth grade transition program was beneficial for students. Data gathered from the interview, observation, and material culture indicated students had no input in planning and implementing the program. Teachers and administrators planned the program.

School C Summary of Research Question 2: Program Design

In responding to the statements regarding program design, all statements except one received positive responses. Eighty percent (24) of the respondents agreed that student progress was consistently monitored, and 93% (28) agreed that students were offered remediation opportunities. While 74% (22) of the respondents agreed that students experiencing academic difficulty received needed support, 67% (20) also agreed that failing students were able to “catch up” and stay on course for promotion. Interestingly, 66% (20) of the respondents indicated that structured study halls did not enhance the transition program. Only 23% (7) agreed that structured study halls were an enhancement.

Data generated from the interview, observation, and material culture indicated that School C had identified strategies to address students’ academic and social needs. School C focused on attendance and lack of student motivation and paired teachers across subject areas to collaboratively develop strategies that would enhance student achievement. Academic needs identified by School C included the need to improve grades in all classes, to improve reading comprehension skills, and to improve motivation to complete school work. School C utilized interactive notebooks, guided reading, and
review strategies to reinforce learning. Teachers used alternative assessments and worked with guidance counselors to assist students. School C noted that lack of attendance adversely affected students’ ability to earn passing grades and tried to follow through on referring students to truancy court.

Social needs identified by School C included recognizing that students needed a place to socialize. Students also needed to understand that school was important and that the teachers in the school had positive attitudes toward them. School staff expressed that students needed to develop a sense of their worth and value. To assist students in addressing their social needs, School C made use of its student assistance program, focused on improving classroom management and instruction, planned to host a parent day, and provided rewards to students as incentives to improve. Even though School C provided incentives to students, the school staff was concerned that extrinsic incentives caused more harm than good.

**School C Summary of Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors**

Survey responses from School C indicated both negative and positive findings. On a positive note, 70% (21) of the respondents noted that students were not grouped according to their ability. However, 60% (18) of the respondents noted that the program was not adequately funded, and 50% (15) indicated that special funding was allotted for the program. Other negative responses included a 50% (15) response rate in terms of class size being reasonable and a 53% (16) response rate that indicated that the most experienced teachers in the school were not a part of the transition program.

Data generated from the interview, observation, and material culture indicated that School C faced many challenges during its first year with a ninth grade transition
program. Inhibiting factors included lack of time for teachers to meet and work together, lack of total school support, issues with administration, and lack of student motivation. School staff noted that the number of students who needed the program was overwhelming and that teachers could not depend on administrative support.

**School C Summary of Research Question 4: Facilitating Factors**

Only 67% (20) of respondents at School C agreed that all students can learn at high levels. Forty-four percent (13) of the respondents agreed that activities planned throughout the year connected students to the high school community. A sparse 17% (5) indicated that vertical teaming/planning occurred with middle school staff. The only positive response in facilitating factors was that 76% (23) of the participants agreed that the faculty at the school supported the ninth grade transition program. However, data gathered from the interview, observation, and material culture contradicted this response.

School C indicated professional development and teacher relationships as factors that facilitated the planning, implementation, and sustainability of its transition program. Staff members were able to visit other schools and observe ninth grade transition programs in the state and across the nation. The team met at certain intervals throughout the year to review its efforts and plan ahead. School C also cited that teachers’ relationships positively impacted the program because teachers working in the program wanted to make the program work. Teachers had positive relationships with each other and worked in teams to address the needs of its special education students.

**School C Summary of Research Question 5: Criteria Used to Determine Success/Failure**

Survey responses for research question five yielded slightly mixture of slightly positive and negative results. While 33% (10) of the respondents agreed that projects and
fieldtrips enhanced the ninth grade experience 30% (9) of the respondents disagreed.

Only 17% (5) of the respondents agreed that double doses of academic courses improved student achievement, and 33% (10) disagreed. In terms of bridging communication gaps, while 56% (17) agreed that gaps had been narrowed, 40% (12) disagreed. Additionally, 37% (11) of the respondents agreed that parent involvement had resulted in improved student achievement, but 44% (13) of the respondents disagreed. Notably, only 33% (10) of the respondents agreed that the transition program had resulted in improved promotion rates, and 34% (10) of the respondents disagreed.

Interview, observation, and material culture data indicated that the school monitored student progress throughout the year. Department chairs documented pass/fail rates for each student at the end of each interim. The transition coordinator and guidance counselors maintained logs on students who experienced academic, attendance, and/or discipline difficulties. Even though the survey responses indicated that the staff was at odds in determining whether or not the program was positively impacting ninth grade promotion rates, the school staff expressed that it believed it was making a difference in interacting with other teachers.

Findings for School D

Emerging themes from the survey, interview, observation, and material culture are presented within the context of the research questions for School D.

Background for School D

School D was in its first year with a ninth grade program and was piloting its efforts with approximately 115 first time ninth grade students. By the end of its first year, the total number of students still enrolled in the program was 96. The ninth grade
transition team consisted of eight teachers, and one of the eight teachers served as the program’s coordinator in addition to teaching full-time. There were approximately 1,600 students enrolled in School D, and 716 of the students were ninth graders. Five hundred eleven of the 716 students were first time ninth graders. Fifty-six percent of the student population received free or reduced lunch. The special education population was 14%, and the percentage of students enrolled in honors courses was 15%.

Findings from the survey are presented by survey statement and are linked to the research questions. Findings from the interview, observation, and material culture are presented within each case study as thematic categories that emerged as recurrent or important perspectives of respondents who participated in the interview and/or observation of from the ideas presented in the material culture. Material culture presented for review from School D included an invitation to a student recognition activity, a survey evaluating the pilot program, a program fact sheet, a syllabus for the Teen Leadership Class, a letter to parents, a course option handout, agendas from meetings, a Teen Leadership Manual, a success academy pamphlet, a data handout, and a teacher application to work with the program.

School D Survey Findings

The ninth grade transition program consisted of a team of 8 teachers, 7 of whom completed the survey. The response rate for the survey was 86%. The survey statements were linked to the research questions.
School D Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation

Survey Statements 1, 2, 3, 4, and 22 were linked to Research Question 1: How did each of the four selected high schools plan the components that support the initial designs of its transition program?

Fourteen percent of the respondents did not answer Statement 1, and 86% of the respondents agreed that teachers had a voice in planning and in implementing the school’s program. Fourteen percent of the respondents did not answer Statement 2, and 72% of the respondents agreed that effective dropout prevention measures were incorporated into the transition program. Fourteen percent of the respondents disagreed. Eighty-six percent of respondents agreed that ninth graders had shown improvement as a result of parent involvement. Fourteen percent of respondents disagreed. Fourteen percent of respondents agreed that pre-high school activities addressed students’ academic and social needs, and 14% disagreed. Seventy-two percent responded that the statement was not applicable to the program. Forty-three percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 57% agreed that ninth graders benefited from participating in a ninth grade transition. Responses are listed in Table 26.
Table 26
Planning and Implementation in School D

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Statement</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th></th>
<th>D</th>
<th></th>
<th>SD</th>
<th></th>
<th>NA</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers have a voice in planning and in implementing my school’s program.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective dropout prevention measures are incorporated into the transition program.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninth graders have shown improvement as a result of parent involvement.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-high school activities address students’ academic and social needs.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninth graders have benefited from participating in a ninth grade transition.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School D Research Question 2: Program Design

Survey statements 6, 10, 12, 17, and 21 were linked to Research Question 2:

*What elements make up the designs of the four selected transition programs?*

Fifty-seven percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 43% agreed that student progress was consistently monitored through use of data. Twenty-nine percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 57% agreed that study skills and remediation opportunities were offered to ninth graders who need additional academic support. Fourteen percent of respondents disagreed. Fourteen percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 72% agreed that students who experienced academic difficulties received needed support. Fourteen percent of respondents disagreed. Fourteen percent of the respondents did not answer Statement 17. Forty-three percent of respondents agreed that failing students were able to “catch up” and stay on course for promotion. Fourteen
percent disagreed, and 14% strongly disagreed. Fourteen percent indicated that the statement was not applicable. Fourteen percent of respondents agreed that the structured study hall enhanced the transition program. Twenty-nine percent disagreed, and 57% responded that this statement did not apply to the program.

Table 27

Program Design in School D

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Statement</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student progress is consistently monitored through use of data.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study skills and remediation opportunities are offered to ninth graders who need additional academic support.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students who experience academic difficulties receive needed support.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failing students are able to “catch up” and stay on course for promotion.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The structured study hall enhances the transition program.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School D Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors

Survey statements 5, 7, 15, 19, and 20 were linked to Research Question 3: What factors inhibited the planning, implementation, and sustainability of transition programs in the four selected high schools?

Fourteen percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 14% agreed that students were grouped according to their ability. Seventy-two percent disagreed. Forty-three percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 43% agreed that the ninth grade transition program was adequately funded. Fourteen percent responded that the statement was not
applicable to the program. Forty-three percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 57% agreed that special funding was allotted for the transition program. Twenty-nine percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 57% agreed that class size was reasonable in respect to the subject and needs of students. Fourteen percent disagreed. Fourteen percent of respondents agreed that teachers who worked with ninth graders were the most experienced teachers in the school. Fifty-seven percent disagreed, and 29% strongly disagreed. Responses are listed in Table 28.

Table 28

Inhibiting Factors in School D

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Statement</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students are grouped according to their ability.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ninth grade transition program is adequately funded.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special funding is allotted for the transition program.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class size is reasonable in respect to the subject and needs of students.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers who work with ninth graders are the most experienced teachers in the school.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School D Research Question 4: Facilitating Factors

Survey statements 13,14,16, and 23 were linked to Research Question 4: What factors facilitated the planning, implementation, and sustainability of transition programs in the four selected high schools?

Forty-three percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 57% agreed that teachers believed that all students can learn at high levels. Twenty-nine percent of respondents
strongly agreed, and 57% agreed that activities were planned throughout the school year to enhance the student’s connection to the high school community. Fourteen percent disagreed, and 14% indicated that this was not applicable. Fourteen percent of respondents agreed that vertical teaming/planning that occurred with middle school staff improved the ninth grade transition program. Fourteen percent disagreed, and 29% strongly disagreed. Forty-three percent of the respondents indicated that the statement was not applicable. This would indicate that this vertical teaming/planning did not occur. Forty-three percent of the respondents strongly agreed, and 43% agreed that the faculty at the school supported the ninth grade transition program. Fourteen percent indicated that the statement was not applicable. Responses are listed in Table 29.

Table 29

Facilitating Factors in School D

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Statement</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers believe that all students can learn at high levels.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Activities are planned throughout the school year to enhance the student’s connection to the high school community. | 2  | 29%| 4 | 57%| 1  | 14%
| Vertical teaming/planning that occurs with middle school staff has improved the ninth grade transition program. | 0  | 0% | 1 | 14%| 2  | 29% | 3  | 43%
| The faculty at my school support the ninth grade transition program.           | 3  | 43%| 3 | 43%| 0  | 0%  | 0  | 0%  | 1  | 14%|
School D Research Question 5: Criteria Used to Determine Success/Failure

Survey statements 8, 9, 11, 18, and 24 were linked to Research Question 5: *What criteria does each of the four selected high schools use to determine the success of its transition program?*

Fourteen percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 57% agreed that projects and fieldtrips enhanced students’ ninth grade experience. Fourteen percent disagreed, and 14% responded that the statement was not applicable. Twenty-eight percent of respondents agreed that double doses of academic subjects resulted in improved student achievement. Seventy-two percent responded that the statement was not applicable. Eighty-six percent of respondents agreed that all stakeholders work together to bridge communication gaps. Fourteen percent of the respondents disagreed. Eighty-six percent of the respondents agreed that parent involvement resulted in improved student achievement. Fourteen percent disagreed. Fourteen percent of the respondents strongly agreed, and 86% agreed that the ninth grade transition program resulted in improved promotion rates. Responses are listed in Table 30.
Table 30

Criteria Used to Determine Success/Failure in School D

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Statement</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Projects and fieldtrips enhance students’ ninth grade experience.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double doses of academic subjects have resulted in improved student achievement.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All stakeholders work together to bridge communication gaps.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent involvement has resulted in improved student achievement.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ninth grade transition program in this school has resulted in improved</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>promotion rates.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School D Findings from Interview, Observation, and Material Culture

School D participated in an interview, observation, and submitted material culture. Emerging themes from the interview, observation, and material culture are presented within the context of the research questions.

School D Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation

In its initial year of freshman transition, School D piloted a program that was supported by a grant. School staff described the first year as the guinea pig year and noted that the budget and grant management were not organized well. The program coordinator was also a full-time classroom teacher.

The objectives of School D’s program were to help first-time freshmen

- have a productive and successful first year of high school.
- develop leadership potential.
• take core classes with teachers trained in building positive relationships with others.

• take an elective leadership class to develop leadership and business skills.

The goals of the program were to increase attendance rates and to reduce student discipline problems. Teachers who planned the program were not involved in the program once it was implemented. Teachers who were selected to participate in the program received training that focused on building positive relationships with students. Teachers selected for the transition program received a general description of the program, and they knew that they would not be teaching honors students. Neither parents nor students were involved in initial planning. An administrator was assigned to work with the coordinator-teacher.

A teen leadership course for students was a part of the program. The school year ended with plans to expand the pilot cohort to two cohorts for the 2006-2007 school year.

School D Research Question 2: Program Design

School D developed a system of strategies to address students’ academic and social needs. School staff identified general and subject specific strategies.

School D Strategies for Addressing Academic Needs

Teachers assisted students in homework study groups from November through February to help students pass first and second semesters. Remediation sessions were also offered for SOL testing. All students were invited to remediation two days before testing. The ninth grade transition cohort at School D adopted a No-Zero Policy where students could not receive zeroes. The staff noted that this was a way in which teachers gave second chances to students.
School D Academic Strategies by Subject Areas

Math. School D found that math was one of weakest areas for students. All students were placed in one-year Algebra I and tested at end of the first interim. If they were failing, they were moved to a slower paced math, two-year Algebra I. Math had one of the highest failure rates. Students signed contracts if they remained in one-year Algebra I but had failed the first semester. If they passed second semester with a C or higher and passed the Algebra I SOL test, their teachers would change their first semester grades. Students who moved to two-year Algebra received the same contract. If they earned a C or higher second semester, they would pass for the year. School D received a grant from a local university to pay for a team leadership teacher, and students from the university offered tutoring services for students who struggled in math.

English. English was not a problem area for School D. Seventy-five percent of students in the cohort passed English. The only failures were the result of poor work ethic.

Science. Teachers at School D identified students’ academic weaknesses and made instructional decisions to address students’ needs. School staff found science to be a major weakness for students. Students were placed in environmental science instead of earth science in order to increase the number of freshmen earning science credit. Environmental science was not an SOL tested subject, and it was easier for students. Ninety percent of cohort students passed. Those who failed were not successful because of poor attendance. School D staff also found that the course was offered too early in the morning for some of the students.
Foreign Language. Foreign language was not included as a part of the program. It proved to be one of the lowest performing areas. Scheduling students into morning classes was an issue, as students did not report to the classes.

History. World Studies was the only verified credit offered to students who participated in the ninth grade transition program. This was a Standards of Learning (SOL) tested course. Teachers emphasized to students the importance of passing this course in order to meet criteria for promotion to the tenth grade, as students had to earn at least one verified credit in the ninth grade.

Physical Education. School D found that students were unwilling to change their clothes in the morning and chose not dressing out rather than changing their clothes. This resulted in high failure rates in physical education. Some students could not afford physical education uniforms. Students did not seem to understand how physical education affected their grade point averages.

Other Electives. The cohort at School D did not include electives as part of its program. Elective teachers did not receive training on building positive relationships with students.

School D Social Needs

School D staff described its ninth graders as very needy and needing to develop resiliency. Staff indicated that students “really needed someone to be there for them during their bad times.”

The staff also noted that all of the students in the cohort, regardless of how well they were performing academically, had a time in the year where they needed to vent. It was at these times when teachers were able to build positive relationships with students.
Students would just come in if they needed a team teacher anytime during the day. The students became attached to some of the teachers on the team, mainly those who were caring and gave second chances. Students did not become attached to all of the teachers on the team.

Teachers had very personal stories of how they helped students through traumatic experiences in the students’ lives and/or school day. The staff provided students with activities after school. Students participated in homework groups, and there were incentive parties and community service projects that kept students involved in school. Teachers believed that anything they could do with students outside the classroom was very good for the students, and students enjoyed seeing different sides of their teachers.

The school staff also examined how it grouped its cohort and determined that some of the students became too familiar with each other. This created management issues for teachers. In many of the classes, students were together all day, and some students were too dominant. The teachers had to focus too much on classroom management.

School D Strategies to Address Social Needs

*Mentor Programs.* School D implemented mentor programs to address its students’ social needs.

*African American Students.* School D also sought to meet the needs of African Americans and African American males specifically. The staff sought African American (AA) males to serve as mentors for male students. The school staff expressed that there was a lack of male teachers on the staff in general. Additionally, School D made future
plans to work with AA mentorship programs with local universities on a monthly basis to increase their students’ motivation to succeed.

*Leadership Course.* School D offered a leadership course that was taught by the transition team’s teacher-coordinator. There were four leadership classes, and each class participated in a different community service project. Students logged in 550 hours on the four different projects, and 100% of the students participated. The curriculum for the course required students to examine their attitudes, self-concept, values, standards, and principles. Students also learned about managing finances, interacting with others, and taking responsibility for their thoughts and actions. In addition to examining relationships, students learned about developing vision as leaders, being proactive, and persevering to reach goals. The text required students to set and to write goals, to develop speeches for each lesson, to keep a journal, to participate in discussions, to answer questions, to demonstrate reading comprehension, to think beyond the text, and to make decisions for the future.

**School D Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors**

While School D included lack of time and lack of total school support as factors that inhibited the planning, implementation, and sustaining of its ninth grade transition program, it also noted that there were inhibiting issues with communication and administration.

*Lack of Time.* Scheduling for the ninth grade transition program at School D was described as not protected. The staff expressed that the program should have been considered a separate smaller learning community, but it was not. Teachers on the ninth grade transition teams did not have common planning periods.
Lack of Total School Support. Staff at School D expressed that there was not sufficient support for the program. There was a need for department chairs to work with the program. Teachers were not comfortable with following program guidelines for fear of retaliation from department chairs. The whole point of the program was to find out what worked and what did not work; however, teachers were not willing to offer additional opportunities for success because of departmental policies that had to be followed.

Communication. School D noted that its program was not communicated to the entire school community. The transition program was not introduced and sold to the entire staff. The staff did not know what the program was or that the students selected for the program were the at-risk students. There was miscommunication about the program and how the contracts for history and math courses worked.

Administration. School D cited the need for administrative leeway to allow teachers to be able to provide students more opportunities for success. Administrators needed to establish a good set of principles for teachers to follow in working in the program and to delineate the difference between the coordinator’s role and the administrator’s role. The school’s administration needed to allow time to plan, time to collect data, and time to run the program. There was a need for a full-time coordinator and an assistant principal in the school to be in charge of the freshman transition program.

School D Research Question 4: Facilitating Factors

School D noted that facilitating factors were professional development and use of data.
**Professional Development.** In planning its program, School D attended conferences, visited other schools, and received training from other schools that had transition programs. School D also conducted personal studies and developed an understanding of the need for freshman transition programs. The staff expressed that professional development was a key part in understanding any program and in making it work. School D hoped to find professional development for teachers in the program so that teachers would know how to counsel students through personal problems. More teachers were going to receive training on building positive relationships with students to ensure students would have teachers in the future who knew how to build relationships with adolescents.

**Use of Data.** School D used data that indicated that the promotion rate for ninth graders was too low. This realization motivated school staff to focus on improving ninth grade promotion rates. SOL achievement charts were used to track student progress from year to year.

**School D Research Question 5: Criteria Used to Determine Success/Failure**

Data used to determine its success/failure included interim and semester grades, student attendance, discipline infractions, SOL test pass rates, pass rates for each core subject area, and promotion rates. School D also evaluated student-teacher relationships, students’ involvement in extracurricular activities, and students’ interactions with each other in determining the program’s success/failure.

**Summary of Findings for School D**

School D was in its first year of piloting a ninth grade transition program. The program was supported by a grant, and school staff noted that the program was not well
organized. The program was defined by goals and objectives. Even though the program was planned by teachers, the teachers who planned the program were not the teachers who were a part of the transition team. Teachers assigned to the transition program received special training that focused on building positive relationships with students. The first-year program included approximately 115 students and eight teachers. One of the eight teachers also served as the program’s coordinator. The survey response rate was 86%, as seven of the eight team members participated in the survey. School D also participated in an interview, an observation, and submitted material culture.

**School D Summary of Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation**

Responses from School D’s survey for research question one were positive for all of the statements except one. While positive responses were dominant, only one statement yielded a strongly agree response. The majority, 86% (6), of the respondents agreed that teachers had a voice in planning and in implementing the ninth grade transition program. While 72% (5) of the respondents agreed that effective dropout prevention measures were incorporated into the program, 14% (1) disagreed. Eighty-six percent (6) of the respondents also agreed that ninth graders had shown improvement as a result of parent involvement. Interestingly, a 72% (5) not applicable response regarding pre-high school activities indicated that School D did not host any pre-high school activities during its pilot year. One hundred percent (7) of the respondents agreed that ninth graders benefited from a ninth grade transition program. This was the only area in which respondents chose strongly agree.

School D began its first year with eight teachers which included two mathematics teachers, one English teacher, two science teachers, two history teachers, and a teen
leadership teacher. Teachers taught only core classes, and they knew from the program’s beginning that they would not be teaching honors’ students. The teacher-coordinator was responsible for the program. An administrator was assigned to work with the program.

**School D Summary of Research Question 2: Program Design**

Most of the survey responses for program design were positive even though some of the respondents disagreed with the statements. One hundred percent (7) of respondents agreed that student progress was consistently monitored through use of data while 86% (6) of respondents agreed that students received opportunities for remediation. While 86% (6) of the respondents agreed that students received needed academic support, only 43% (3) of the respondents agreed that students were able to catch up and stay on course for promotion. The negative response of 14% (1) agreement and 57% (5) not applicable indicated that School D did not have a structured study hall in its transition program.

School D staff identified a system of strategies to address students’ academic and social needs. General strategies for academics included teacher assisted homework study groups, remediation sessions, and a no-zero policy. Subject specific strategies developed for math included placement in one-year or two-year Algebra I and grade change contracts for math and history. A local university also provided tutoring to math students. Science specific strategies included enrolling ninth grade transition students in environmental science rather than in an SOL tested course. All students in the transition cohort were enrolled in only one SOL tested course, and that was world history. Teachers emphasized the importance of passing the course and the SOL test since this would be the students only verified credit.
Socially, students’ needs at School D were described as very needy and in need of developing resiliency. School staff also noted that every student, regardless of academic performance, needed the team of teachers’ support. Teachers focused on building positive relationships with students through working with them on community service projects, homework assignments, and after school activities. The transition program also provided students with mentor programs and a leadership course.

**School D Summary of Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors**

Overall, survey responses for School D were positive and inhibiting factors were not prevalent. Survey responses indicated that ability grouping, funding, class size, and staff selection were not inhibiting factors. Only 28% (2) of respondents indicated that ability grouping inhibited the program’s planning, implementation, and sustainability. Eighty-six percent (6) of the respondents agreed that the transition program was adequately funded, and 100% (7) agreed that special funding was allotted for the program. Eighty-six percent (6) of the respondents agreed that class size was reasonable. However, 86% (6) of the respondents indicated that the most experienced teachers were not the teachers who worked with ninth graders.

Data collected from the interview, observation, and material culture revealed that lack of time, lack of total school support, issues with communication, and lack of administrative support inhibited the program’s progress. School D expressed that the school needed a full-time coordinator to oversee its program.

**School D Summary of Research Question 4: Facilitating Factors**

School D’s responses in the survey indicated that there was only one statement that yielded negative results. All other responses strongly agreed or agreed to the
statements. One hundred (7) percent of respondents agreed that teachers believed all students can learn. Eighty-six (6) percent of the respondents indicated that activities are planned throughout the year to enhance students’ connection to the high school community. Only 14% (1) of the respondents agreed that vertical teaming/planning occurred with middle school staff, and 43% (3) of the respondents disagreed. Another 43% (3) indicated that this statement did not apply to the program. While 86% (6) of the respondents also agreed that the faculty supported the transition program, 14% (1) of the respondents found this statement to be not applicable.

The interview, observation, and material culture revealed that School D utilized professional development and use of data to enhance its planning, implementation, and sustainability. School D attended conferences, visited other schools, and received training from other schools that were involved in transition programs. School D relied heavily upon professional development for building positive relationships with students.

Furthermore, School D used data to determine that a transition program was needed and that the staff needed to be motivated to implement a program.

School D Summary of Research Question 5: Criteria Used to Determine Success/Failure

Survey responses yielded positive findings in four out of five of the survey statements. Seventy-two percent (5) of respondents agreed that projects and fieldtrips enhanced students’ ninth grade experience. Only 28% (2) of respondents agreed that double doses of academic subjects resulted in improved student achievement, and 72% (5) of the respondents indicated that this response was not applicable. Eighty-six percent (6) of respondents agreed that stakeholders worked together to bridge communication gaps and that parent involvement resulted in improved student achievement. There was
unanimous agreement of 100% (7) that the ninth grade transition program at School D resulted in improved promotion rates.

Data generated from the interview, observation, and material culture indicated that School D examined students’ interim and semester grades, student attendance, discipline infractions, SOL pass rates, pass rates for academic subjects, and promotion rates to determine its’ program’s success/failure. School D also evaluated teachers’ relationships with students through a student survey that was administered at the end of the school year.

**Comparative Analysis of the Four Cases**

In comparing the findings of all four cases, similarities, differences, and unique elements were noted. All four schools began their transition programs with a planning process that resulted in a program design that more or less evolved as the year or years progressed. Just as schools had to work within the framework of an evolving design, they also had to address inhibiting and/or facilitating factors that affected their programs. All of the schools used the same criteria to determine their schools’ success/failure. A comparative analysis of the schools’ efforts are presented within the context of each research question below.

**Comparative Analysis of the Four Cases for Planning and Implementation**

Each school’s ninth grade transition program was clearly defined by a set of goals, objectives, or a mission that focused on improved student achievement and increased promotion rates. Findings regarding teacher voice in the planning stages of the program indicated that Schools A’s and D’s teachers had mixed views on the level of teacher involvement, and teachers from Schools B and C had strong input in their
programs’ plans. Even though all four cases had teacher teams, the sizes and make up of the teams varied from school to school. School A had one team of 10 teachers, and School B had four teams that consisted of five teachers on each team. School C had one large transition team of 37 teachers from all academic subjects and seven special education teachers. School D had one team of eight teachers. While Schools A, B, and D focused only on its first time ninth grade students, School C included all of its ninth graders. School A was in its second year of ninth grade transition, and School B was in its third year. Schools C and D were in their first year, and while School C initiated a massive effort in addressing all of its ninth graders, School D began its program with a pilot of approximately 115 students. In each of the schools, respondents expressed that the programs had effective dropout prevention measures. However, all of the schools, except School A, indicated that students dropped out of school, and attendance was an issue at Schools B, C, and D. In School B, teachers expressed that attendance had become a major concern during the program’s third year. Respondents in School C identified lack of attendance as an inhibiting factor. School D noted that its program began with 115 students and ended the year with 96 students. Thus, for some reason, 19 students were no longer enrolled.

The degree of parent involvement varied from positive to negative in reviewing the data generated by the four cases. School A did not identify parent involvement as a factor that supported its transition program, and while the other schools did respond that parent involvement resulted in improved student achievement, evidence of parent involvement from the schools only included parent phone and personal conferences, parent participation in recognition activities, and a plans for a parent day that would be
hosted by School C. Although respondents from all four schools responded positively to the statement regarding pre-high school activities, aside from welcome to high school night, new student orientation, and an accelerated math program, none of the schools identified activities in which ninth graders participated before beginning their ninth grade year. Schools A and C yielded negative responses regarding whether or not students benefited from a ninth grade transition program. School B and D were very positive in agreeing that ninth graders benefited from a transition program. Another unique element found in the planning and implementation component was noted in School B’s allowance for teachers to have common planning time. Even though School A had originally planned for common planning, it was not able to get the teachers to use their unencumbered planning time to plan for ninth grade transition. Schools C and D did not provide common planning time in its programs’ implementations. See Table 31 for a summary of commonalities, differences, and unique features in schools’ planning and implementation.

Table 31
Comparative Analysis of the Four Cases for Planning and Implementation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Elements</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
<th>School D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clearly defined set of goals, objectives, mission</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher voice in planning and implementation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher teams</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected all ninth graders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected only first time ninth graders</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate ninth grade facility/area</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective dropout prevention measures</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental involvement</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-high school activities</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninth graders benefit from transition programs</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common planning for teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparative Analysis of the Four Cases for Program Design

All four schools used data to monitor student progress and offered remediation after school. While Schools B and D offered a special course for ninth graders, School B’s program was a structured study hall, and School D’s program was a leadership course. Interestingly, all four of the schools responded negatively to the idea of having a structured study hall for ninth graders. Schools B, C, and D offered catch up opportunities to students through student contracts that allowed students to receive grade changes for the first semester if they passed second semester and passed the SOL end of course test. While all three schools initiated new grading policies, School C and School D initiated practices that were unique to their school. School C offered students alternative assessments through open book examinations and paired-testing situations, and School D instituted a no-zero policy where students could not receive zeroes for missed assignments. School B and School D utilized academic interventions through the school counselor and/or team of teachers to support students who experienced academic difficulties.

While all four schools focused on building positive relationships with students, each school established its own methods for connecting to students. Schools A and B implemented mentoring programs. Schools A and C referred students to their schools’ student assistance program while School B established a student-voice group to allow students to participate in promoting a positive school culture. School D initiated four separate community service projects and after school activities that gave them time with students outside the regular classroom setting. In addressing its needs to build positive relationships with students, School C focused on improving classroom management and
utilizing specific instructional strategies to engage students in learning. Schools B, C, and D initiated activities to involve parents in their schools, and Schools B and C stressed the importance of school to its students. Schools B and C also referred students with attendance issues to truancy court. See Table 32 for a summary of comparisons.

Table 32
Summary of Comparative Analysis of the Four Cases for Program Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Elements</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
<th>School D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of data to monitor achievement</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special transition course for freshmen</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catch-up opportunities</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiated new grading practices</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic interventions</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After school remediation sessions</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After school activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive relationships with students</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-voice group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition programs</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring programs</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community service projects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student assistance program</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom management focus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent involvement</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stressing the importance of school</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truancy court</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparative Analysis of the Four Cases for Inhibiting Factors

Inhibiting factors that were common to all four schools were lack of total support for the ninth grade transition program and novice teachers being assigned to work in the transition program. Schools A, B, and C noted that class size was an inhibiting factor. For Schools A and C, funding was an issue, but for different reasons. School A wanted
transition teachers to receive stipends for working with the program, and School C indicated that the program was not adequately funded in its survey responses. While Schools A and B found ability grouping to be inhibiting factors, Schools C and D indicated that attendance issues were areas of concern. School B was the only school to note that high turnover of personnel negatively impacted its program’s efforts. School C was the only school to indicate that lack of discipline was an inhibitor. Communication issues were cited as an inhibitor by School D. Schools A, C, and D reported that lack of time adversely affected their schools’ efforts in working with ninth grade transition. Lack of administrative support was cited by Schools A, C, and D. Table 33 lists a summary of the comparisons of the four schools.

Table 33

Summary of Comparative Analysis of the Four Cases for Inhibiting Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Elements</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
<th>School D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Novice teaching staff</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class size</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial constraints</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability grouping</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High turnover of personnel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of buy-in for program</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of discipline</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of administrative support</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparative Analysis of the Four Cases for Facilitating Factors

Respondents from Schools A, B, and D indicated that they believed all students could learn at high levels. Even though the majority of respondents at School C indicated
that they held this philosophy, 44% of the respondents on the survey did not agree with this statement. School B was the only program that offered a summer program to rising ninth graders prior to beginning ninth grade. Professional development was cited as a facilitating factor for Schools B, C, and D. For Schools A and B, program structure, counselor utilization, and funding were facilitating factors. It is interesting to note that these were the only two schools that had academy systems. For Schools A, B, and C, teacher relationships positively impacted the program’s efforts. Even though School B was in its third year of ninth grade transition, it was the only school that indicated that it did not have the faculty support it expected. Schools A, C, and D indicated that the support received from their faculties made them feel supported, but they also indicated that there was lack of total school buy-in for the programs in data generated from research question three. Interestingly, School D was the only school to cite use of data and activities planned throughout the year to enhance students’ connection to high school as facilitating factors. This was also the only school that sponsored four community service projects and after school activities with its ninth grade transition students. See Table 34 for a summary of comparisons.
Table 34

Summary of Comparative Analysis of the Four Cases for Facilitating Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Elements</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
<th>School D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belief that all students can achieve at high levels</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer program before ninth grade</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program structure</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher relationships</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty support</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor use</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities planned throughout year to enhance connection to high school</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of data</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparative Analysis of the Four Cases for Criteria Used to Determine Success/Failure

All four schools indicated that the criteria used to determine their programs success/failure were ninth grade promotion rates, Standards of Learning pass rates, and pass rates in academic subjects. Schools B, C, and D also used student attendance and student discipline data to determine program success/failure. School B looked for increased parent involvement, increased student participation in extracurricular activities, and positive student feedback to determine its program’s success. School C noted that improved teacher-to-teacher relationships were an indicator of program success while School D noted that increased communication and improved teacher-to-student relationships were indicators that its ninth grade transition program was successful. See Table 35 for a summary of comparisons.
Table 35

Summary of Comparative Analysis of the Four Cases for Criteria Used to Determine Success/Failure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Elements</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
<th>School D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promotion rates</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards of learning test pass rates</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pass rates for academic subjects</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects and fieldtrips</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working together to bridge communication gaps</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental involvement</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in school activities</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student feedback</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ relationships with each other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ relationships with students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the findings of the study as they were aligned to the body of literature in the field of education. Following a review of the purpose of the study and a summary of findings research-question-by-research question, this chapter will present a discussion of the results as they are framed around key themes, commonalities, and critical differences. Findings of the study will be compared to suggested practices identified in the review of the literature. Implications for future research and practice and recommendations for further study will also be presented.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to add to the body knowledge of what is known about ninth grade transition. The researcher identified similar and contrasting characteristics of transition programs in four selected high schools. This study described the planning components that supported the initial design and implementation of transition programs in four selected high schools and identified factors that either inhibited or facilitated sustainability of the respective transition programs. Criteria used to determine the success/failure of each program are also described.

Summary of Findings

In order to identify commonalities and unique elements from each of the four cases, the following aggregate findings for each research question are listed below. The first paragraph in each section summarizes the survey findings for all four schools. While 75 teachers were a part of their schools’ transition teams, a total of 61 respondents participated in the survey for a response rate of 81%. The second paragraph summarizes
findings from the schools’ interviews, observations, and material culture. Summary tables for all four schools will conclude this section.

Summary of Findings for Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation

In examining survey findings from all four cases, responses were more positive than negative. Seventy-seven (47) percent of the respondents agreed that teachers had a voice in planning and in implementing their schools’ transition programs, and 54% (37) agreed that their programs had effective dropout prevention measures. However, only 47% (29) of the respondents agreed that their ninth graders had shown improvement as a result of parent involvement, and only 26% (16) agreed that pre-high school activities addressed students’ social and academic needs. Fifty-two percent (32) of the respondents agreed that students had benefited from a ninth grade transition program.

All four schools had clearly defined goals, objectives, and/or missions and some type of teacher teams. Each of the four schools also indicated that effective dropout measures had been incorporated into their programs. While only School B had common planning time for its teachers, School C was the only school that included both first time and repeat ninth graders. Schools B, C, and D indicated that their programs involved parents. Only schools A and B identified pre-high school activities, and Schools B and D definitively expressed that ninth graders benefited from participating in a ninth grade transition program.

Summary of Findings for Research Question 2: Program Design

Participants gave very positive responses to their programs’ designs. Ninety-one percent (57) of the respondents indicated that student progress was consistently monitored through use of data, and 85% (53) of the respondents indicated that study
skills and remediation opportunities were offered to ninth graders who needed additional academic support. Additionally, 92% (53) and 71% (43) of the respondents respectively agreed that students who experienced academic difficulties received needed support, and failing students were able to catch up and meet promotion requirements. The statement regarding the structured study hall was the only area within the program design that received negative responses. Only 22% (13) of the respondents agreed that structured study halls enhanced the transition program.

While all four schools used data to monitor student progress, focused on building positive relationships with students, and instituted after school remediation programs, their approaches and strategies varied. Schools B, C, and D established “catch up” opportunities, new grading practices, and parent involvement. Schools B and D offered special transition courses for freshmen and academic interventions. Recognition and mentoring programs were also established, and School D even coordinated community service projects within its transition programs. School C worked to address shortcomings in both the students and the teachers, and Schools B and C identified the need for students to understand the importance of school and of acquiring an education.

Summary of Findings for Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors

Survey responses regarding inhibiting factors were mixed when examined as an aggregate group. Although 22% (13) of the participants agreed that ability grouping was not an inhibiting factor, 39% (24) of them agreed that funding was adequate, and 64% (39) indicated that special funding had been allotted for the programs. Forty-seven percent (29) of the respondents indicated that class size was reasonable in respect to the
subject and students’ needs, and only 22% (13) agreed that the most experienced teachers were assigned to their ninth grade transition programs.

Interviews, observations, and material culture revealed that the transition programs at the four schools did not receive veteran teachers’ or full faculty support. Funding appeared to be an issue at Schools A and C but not at Schools B and D. School B identified high employee turnover as an inhibiting factor, and Schools C and D indicated that attendance was an issue. School C also identified discipline as an inhibiting factor, but School D identified its frustration with communication among staff as an inhibiting factor. Schools A, C, and D reported that lack of time and administrative support hindered their efforts.

Summary of Findings for Research Question 4: Facilitating Factors

The belief that all students can achieve at high levels was held by 73% (47) of the respondents, and 68% (43) of the respondents indicated that the staff at their schools supported the ninth grade transitions programs. Vertical teaming/planning was not evident in any of the schools’ efforts, and this was evident in the survey responses. Interestingly, respondents’ answers regarding class size were close for both positive and negative responses. Forty-seven percent (29) of the respondents agreed that class size was reasonable in respect to the subject and the needs of students, and 45% (28) disagreed.

Participants’ indications regarding facilitating factors varied from school to school. A strong philosophy in believing that students can learn, positive relationships among teacher, faculty support, and the need for professional development were elements that most of the schools indicated facilitated their programs’ development and sustainability. Half of the schools identified the availability of funds for the program, use
of the school counselor, program structure, and year’s activities as elements that enhanced their efforts. School D was the only school that cited use of data as a facilitating factor.

Summary of Findings for Research Question 5: Criteria Used to Determine Success/Failure

In reviewing the survey results for all four schools, interestingly, 70% (40) of the respondents indicated that parent involvement had resulted in student improvement, and 61% (37) indicated that all stakeholders worked together to bridge communication gaps. Forty-nine percent of the respondents indicated that projects and fieldtrips enhanced students’ ninth grade experience. Fifty-six percent (34) indicated that the ninth grade transition program resulted in improved promotion rates. Notably, only 25% (16) of respondents agreed that double doses of academic courses resulted in improved student achievement while 22% (14) disagreed, and 48% (29) indicated that this was not applicable.

All four schools used quantitative and qualitative data to determine their programs’ success. Quantitative data consisted of ninth grade promotion rates, Standards of Learning pass rates, and academic subjects’ pass rates. Three of the four schools reviewed attendance and discipline infractions to determine their programs’ success. School B gauged its students’ involvement in extracurricular activities, parent participation, and student-teacher relationships. School C looked for improved teacher-to-teacher relationships as a marker for success. See Tables 36 for a summary of survey results for all four cases and Table 37 for a summary of common elements for all four cases.
Table 36
Summary of Survey Results for All Four Cases (Asterisks indicate number of respondents who did not answer.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTIONS</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th></th>
<th>D</th>
<th></th>
<th>SD</th>
<th></th>
<th>NA</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1* teacher voice in planning</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2*** dropout prevention</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>3 student improvement from parental involvement</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4*** pre-high school activities</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
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<tr>
<td>22 student benefit from program</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 monitoring of student progress</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 remediation given as needed</td>
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<td>44</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12 students received needed support</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17* catch up opportunities offered</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>21* structured study hall enhances program</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5* ability grouping</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
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<td>7* adequate funding</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15** special funding</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>20** description of teachers in program</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 belief all students can learn</td>
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<td>55</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>14*** activities to increase connectivity</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16*vertical teaming</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 faculty support</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>35</td>
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<td>8* projects/activities enhance program</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<td>9* double doses of subjects</td>
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<td>24**improved promotion rates</td>
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Table 37
Summary of Common Elements for All Four Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Elements</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
<th>School D</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clearly defined set of goals, objectives, mission</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Teacher voice in planning and implementation</td>
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<td>Teacher teams</td>
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<tr>
<td>Selected all ninth graders</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Selected only first time ninth graders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Separate ninth grade facility/area</td>
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<td>Effective dropout prevention measures</td>
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<td>Parental involvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-high school activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ninth graders benefit from transition programs</td>
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<td>Common planning for teachers</td>
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<td>Use of data to monitor achievement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special transition course for freshmen</td>
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<tr>
<td>Catch-up opportunities</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Initiated new grading practices</td>
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<td>Academic interventions</td>
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<td>After school remediation sessions</td>
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<td>After school activities</td>
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<td>Positive relationships with students</td>
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<td>Student-voice group</td>
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<td>Instructional strategies</td>
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<td>Classroom management focus</td>
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<td>Parent involvement</td>
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<td>Stressing the importance of school</td>
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<td>Truancy court</td>
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Table 37 Continued

Summary of Common Elements for All Four Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Elements</th>
<th>School A</th>
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<th>School C</th>
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<td>Ability grouping</td>
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<td>Attendance issues</td>
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<td>High turnover of personnel</td>
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<td>Lack of buy-in for program</td>
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<td>Lack of discipline</td>
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<td>Lack of time</td>
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<td>Communication issues</td>
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<td>Lack of administrative support</td>
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<td>Belief that all students can achieve at high levels</td>
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<td>Working together to bridge communication gaps</td>
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**Discussion of Results**

This section will identify key themes, commonalities, and critical differences from all four schools and compare the schools’ efforts to current practices in ninth grade transition for each research question. As each research question is reviewed, key themes, commonalities, and critical differences will be discussed within the conceptual framework of systems thinking and within the framework of practices identified in the literature review. To review briefly, Aronson (1996-8) defined systems thinking as a way of understanding how the phenomenon being studied interacts with other constituents of the system. The ninth grade year is part of what is presently a four-year program of high school study. Practices identified in the review of the literature framed the research questions for this study and were based on the premise that urban school leaders have been faced with mixed results in terms of what works and what does not work in transitioning urban youth into high school (Herlihy, Kemple, & Smith, 2005).

**Key Themes**

**Research Question 1: Planning and Implementing**

The first key theme that emerged from research question one included each school’s focus on improving ninth grade promotion rates. Each school developed ways to successfully maneuver students through the ninth grade year. Because each school had to improve ninth grade promotion rates and high school completion rates which were mandated by NCLB, a second theme, the development of goals and objectives, emerged as an avenue for schools to fit ninth grade transition into the larger vision of their school programs.
A third theme that emerged from the planning and implementation stages in the schools was the need to tailor students’ course offerings in a way that would positively impact student achievement and accreditation standings. As a result, schools in this study adjusted students’ course loads to enable students to meet promotion requirements and to ensure that the school’s overall accreditation ratings were not negatively impacted. While all four schools adjusted Algebra I enrollment by the end of first semester, School D also offered only one type of history to its ninth graders and did not offer an SOL tested science course until after students in its transition program had successfully completed environmental science. Interestingly, the tendency to offer courses that required verified credits to students once they had completed ninth grade was a practice that all of the schools planned to adapt in coming school years.

**Key Themes**

**Research Question 2: Program and Design**

Key themes that emerged from research question two were participants’ reactions to structured study halls and their reactions to how relationships among teachers and students developed in ninth grade transition programs. The majority of participants responded negatively to structured study halls and did not believe that these classes enhanced ninth grade transition programs. Respondents from all four schools offered remediation and additional opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery of course content in order to improve promotion rates; however, all four schools appeared to prefer that students seek additional assistance outside the school day rather than during the school day in a structured study hall setting. On the other hand, participants believed that positive relationships among teachers and students evolved as a result of ninth grade
transition programs, and all four school indicated that positive relationships among staff and students were important to their programs’ designs. Each school identified activities utilized to build positive relationships with students, but rarely were planned activities scheduled prior to the school year beginning or throughout the year to consistently work on connecting students to the high school community. Kerr (2001 and 2002) identified 11 suggested practices for schools to implement to positively impact students’ first year of high school. Of these 11 suggestions, the four schools in the case study implemented the following suggestions.

- Interdisciplinary teams of ninth grade teachers who share the same students
- Summer program for incoming ninth graders for enrichment purposes
- Smaller learning communities that keep ninth graders separate from the rest of the student body

Interestingly, Daggett (2005) also suggested a core of activities that could be used to transition rising ninth graders into the high school community. Of his 11 suggestions, the four schools implemented the following.

- School staff implement a menu of intervention programs that will spring into action if a student has difficulty
- Parent’s night for eighth graders is held at the high school
- School staff compile and maintain data throughout the ninth grade year
- Extended instruction and busing are provided for students who are struggling
Key Themes

Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors

Lack of support and communication emerged as themes that inhibited the planning, implementation, and sustainability of each school’s ninth grade transition program. Respondents described traditional high school cultures that interfered with the goals of ninth grade transition initiatives. Participants pointed out that teachers selected to work with ninth graders tended to be novice teachers, and school-wide faculty support for ninth grade transition was lacking. Teachers who worked with ninth graders were not treated with the same respect as teachers who taught other grades. Additionally, respondents indicated that communication about the programs’ goals were not clearly understood by the entire school staffs. While administrators and ninth grade transition teachers understood the purpose of ninth grade transition program, there was not a sense of shared understandings about the purpose and goals of ninth grade transition with the rest of the school staff.

In comparing the above findings to the review of the literature, the above inhibiting factors were consistent with what other urban centers encountered in working with ninth grade transition programs. Financial constraints of varying natures, high turnover of personnel, lack of program buy-in, and lack of discipline also presented challenges to other urban schools who had implemented ninth grade transition programs.

Key Themes

Research Question 4: Facilitating Factors

The philosophy that all students could achieve at high levels was a belief that was shared by the majority of respondents who worked with ninth graders in all four
schools. As a key theme that was strongly reiterated in three of the four schools, teachers who worked with the ninth graders did believe that the students could achieve and meet promotion requirements. One school expressed that teachers were overwhelmed by the number of ninth graders who needed instructional support because the students lacked reading comprehension skills and motivation to learn.

Another key theme that was a facilitating factor for each school was the professional development opportunities offered to the respondents. Participants were able to visit other schools and meet with teachers who were involved in working with ninth grade transition programs. Participants were able to read and discuss literature on current practices in developing ninth grade transition programs. Most of all, participants were given the freedom to develop their own ideas for their individual schools’ transition programs and work with their colleagues to build and refine their efforts.

Facilitative practices from each of the four high schools were similar to suggested practices from the review of the literature. Balfanz, Jordan, and Reyes (2004), Bottoms (2002), Lachat and Smith (2004), and Orfield, Sanni, and Schwartz (2001) all suggested that schools employ the following strategies in facilitating their ninth grade transition programs.

- Teachers teams
- Use of data to monitor achievement
- Catch up courses
- Philosophy that all students can learn
- Academic interventions
- Working together to bridge communication gaps
Key Themes

Research Question 5: Criteria Used to Determine Success

In examining the criteria used to determine success, each school relied on district, state, and national benchmarks to determine success/failure. Promotion rates, pass rates on Standards of Learning tests, and participation and pass rates on standardized tests were used to determine each program’s success. Additionally, schools used student participation in extracurricular activities, the number of students being recognized for academic progress, the number of students being referred to the office, and parent involvement as means for determining program success. All of these methods are a part of the larger operation of the schools’ systems of operation.

Commonalities

Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation

All four schools participated in some degree of planning that involved the school’s administration and a group of teachers. In three of the four schools, the planning and implementation of the programs were led by teachers. In one of the schools, the process was led by the school’s administration, and teachers were selected to lead teams once the plans for the program were decided. Even though the structure of each school’s ninth grade transition team varied tremendously, each school did identify a team of teachers and groups of students to include in its programs. Each school developed a set of goals and objectives for its ninth grade transition program. This was consistent with the findings of current practices from the review of the literature which emphasized the need for schools to have clearly articulated goals and objectives.
Commonalities

Research Question 2: Program and Design

Each school’s program and design included multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery of content. In addition to the traditional classroom course outline and grading guidelines, each school offered a system of interventions that included after school remediation, make up work, and opportunities for positive relationship building between teachers and students. Building positive relationships with students was approached differently by each school. Ways to build positive relationships included student-voice groups, mentoring programs, recognition programs, community service projects, counseling, parent involvement, and improving teaching and management of student behavior. Each of the four schools also addressed attendance issues through using dropout interventions. Support of these efforts can be found in studies from Kerr (2002) who linked school failure to the probability that students would drop out of school. Additionally, Bergenson (2003) found that schools needed to implement specific interventions that targeted dropout prevention.

Commonalities

Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors

The major commonalities that inhibited the schools’ efforts included funding, novice teaching staffs, lack of school-wide support, lack of administrative support, and lack of time. Only one school expressed that administrative support was adequate. While these responses were common, they were presented in different contexts based on each school’s stage of program development. For example, while funding was cited as an issue in two different schools, respondents from one school did not indicate that funding was
inadequate, but that the funds for ninth grade transition should be paid to teachers who worked in the ninth grade transition programs. All of the schools, except one, indicated that veteran teachers were not interested in working with ninth grade transition programs. As a result, teachers selected for the program tended to be novice teachers, and the rest of the staff did not respect those who were selected to work with ninth graders. Respondents indicated that administrative support was lacking because administrators had too many responsibilities that took priority over ninth grade transition.

**Commonalities**

**Research Question 4: Facilitating Factors**

Respondents indicated that faculty support, professional development, and teacher relationships were factors that facilitated their efforts in working with ninth graders. Interestingly, just as lack of faculty support was cited as an inhibiting factor, adequate faculty support was found to facilitate the planning, implementation, and sustainability of ninth grade transition programs. Professional development and teacher relationships were also facilitative for those involved with ninth grade transition.

**Commonalities**

**Research Question 5: Criteria Used to Determine Success**

All four schools were involved in ultimately increasing school completion rates by having students who began ninth grade complete requirements for high school graduation within four years. In order to meet the tenets of *NCLB*, schools had to develop plans that ensured students meet district, state, and national promotion and school completion requirements. Thus, all four schools shared these requirements and tended to
add the following factors as indicators of success: improved attendance, improved parent involvement, and decreased discipline infractions.

**Critical Differences**

**Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation**

Critical differences that emerged from research question one included the number of years the schools had been involved in ninth grade transition programs. How the programs began and the tendency to be overwhelmed or lack structure also pointed out critical differences. The kinds of ninth graders included in the program, the willingness of teachers to use unencumbered planning time for ninth grade transition, the degree of separation of ninth graders from the rest of the student body, and special courses offered to students involved in ninth grade transition were also unique to the schools’ programs.

Of the four schools, School B was in its third year of ninth grade transition, and School A was in its second year. Schools C and D were in their initial year of implementation. School B had begun with a pilot program and had expanded to include all first time ninth graders during its second year. Of the two schools in their initial year of implementation, School D was piloting a program, and the School C had placed all of its ninth grade population with one group of teachers. School A struggled to keep its program afloat because of time limitations and lack of teacher collaboration.

Interestingly, none of the four schools indicated that they had consulted each other even though three of the four schools indicated that they had visited other schools in the state and country during the planning phases of their schools’ programs. While each school had a plan for how its program was structured, only School B seemed to have
a structure that the respondents felt was working. This particular school was also the only school where teachers used their unencumbered planning time to work together with ninth grade transition. Respondents at the other three schools kept their unencumbered planning time protected departmentally or individually. Respondents indicated that if transition teachers met, it was only after school and infrequently.

School A had a ninth grade transition academy that housed all ninth graders in one area of the building, and School B had four separate groups of ninth graders that were housed in four different areas of its campus even though the campus was contained in only one building. The other two high schools did not separate its ninth graders from the rest of the student body. School B and D offered unique courses to students involved in ninth grade transition, but these courses were very different in nature. School D offered a leadership course to its ninth graders while School B enrolled all of its first-time freshmen in a freshman seminar course where students could complete missed assignments, receive remedial instruction, or do homework. This type of structured study hall was not well received by teachers.

**Critical Differences**

**Research Question 2: Program and Design**

Critical differences that emerged from the programs’ designs included the activities implemented to support students through their ninth grade year. School B and School D cited the use of after school activities as a means of intervening to keep students on course for promotion. School D used community service projects to get students involved in school outside the regular curriculum. School B allowed students to express their views about school improvement through a student-voice group. Only
School C focused its efforts on improving teachers’ skills in instruction and behavior management as a means for enhancing ninth grade promotion.

Critical Differences

Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors

For School D, communication was problematic throughout the school year. Respondents expressed that the teachers’ relationship with administration was challenging because the administrators in the building had too many responsibilities and could not effectively allow time to work with the ninth grade transition program.

Critical Differences

Research Question 4: Facilitating Factors

Only School B hosted summer programs before beginning high school as a facilitating factor. However, even this school did not have an organized program for all rising ninth graders. While this practice is one that was suggested by the current literature, the schools in this study had not consistently included a variety of worthwhile pre-high school activities in their ninth grade transition programs. School B had an accelerated math program for students who wanted to complete Algebra I or geometry before beginning high school, and School A and School B had fall orientation as one of pre-high school activities. However, there were no extended programs that began the transition process and continued it with activities scheduled throughout the school year.
Critical Differences

Research Question 5: Criteria Used to Determine Success/Failure

In determining criteria used to determine success, schools defined unique factors that were important within the context of their individual schools. Schools B and D listed parent involvement and student feedback as factors used to determine program success/failure. School D identified working together to bridge communication gaps as a criteria used to determine success while another school expressed that improved teacher-to-teacher relationships was a factor that indicated success. While all of the schools indicated that they were focusing on building positive relationships with students, only School B identified improved relationships with students as criteria for success.

Comparison of Findings for Each School to Literature Review

The review of the literature emphasized the need for transition programs to have well defined goals and objectives for reducing ninth grade failure rates. All four schools in this study had clearly articulated goals and objectives for working to reduce ninth grade failure rates. Another common factor across all four cases was the presence of block scheduling. Each school followed an alternating block schedule that allowed for four 90 minute blocks of classes each day. Balfanz, Jordan, and Reyes (2004), Bottoms, (2002), Lachat and Smith (2004), and Orfield and others (2001) identified the suggested practices which were listed in Table 3 (page 23) and Table 8 (page 47) for ninth grade transition programs. Suggested practices are repeated in Table 38 and will be compared to efforts in each of the four case studies. Comparisons will be presented within the context of the research questions.
Table 38

Suggested Practices from the Literature Review for Ninth Grade Transition Programs

| Suggested Practices from the Literature Review for Ninth Grade Transition Programs |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Block/flexible scheduling       | Selected only first time ninth graders |
| Teacher teams                   | Selected students identified as at-risk |
| Teams of veteran teachers       | Computer based instruction |
| Use of data to monitor achievement | Common planning for teachers |
| Special transition course for freshmen | Preparation for ninth grade |
| Parental involvement            | Summer program before ninth grade |
| Projects and fieldtrips         | Integrated curriculum |
| Double doses of math            | Philosophy that all students can learn |
| Double doses of reading         | Separate ninth grade facility/area |
| Catch-up courses                | Academic interventions |
| Initiated new grading practices | Vertical teaming with middle school |
| Selected all ninth graders      | Pre-high school activities |
| Engaging students in meaningful, challenging assignments | Working together to bridge communication gaps |
|                                 | Allot special funding for program |

Comparison of Findings for Each School to Literature Review

Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation

In addition to having well defined program goals and objectives and block scheduling, there were other 11 suggested practices that were linked to research question one. These practices were (1) clearly defined set of goals, (2) teacher voice in planning and implementation, (3) teacher teams, (4) include all ninth graders, (5) include only first-time ninth graders, (6) separate ninth grade facility/area, (7) effective dropout prevention measures, (8) parental involvement (9) pre-high school activities, (10) common planning time for teachers, and (11) students selected identified as at-risk.

School A

In planning and implementing its ninth grade transition program, School A adapted seven of these suggested practices. School A had block scheduling, a clearly
defined set of goals, a teacher team, and only first-time ninth graders were included in its program. The program was housed separately from the rest of the school, and School A offered one pre-high activity. School A indicated that its team leader for the coming school year would change, but there was no indication that additional pre-high school activities would be included in the transition program.

School B

School B was in its third year of implementation and had adapted nine of the practices. The practices that School B adapted consisted of block scheduling, a clearly defined set of goals, teacher voice in planning and implementation, teacher teams, including only first-time ninth graders, dropout prevention measures, parental involvement, pre-high school activities, and common planning time for teachers.

School C

School C was in its first year of implementation and adapted seven of the practices. Practices adapted included block scheduling, a clearly defined set of goals, teacher voice in planning and implementation, teacher teams, inclusion of all ninth graders, effective dropout prevention measures, and parental involvement.

School D

School D’s first year was a pilot program, and six of the suggested practices were included in its planning and implementation. Those practices were a clearly defined set of goals, teacher teams, inclusion of only first-time ninth graders, effective dropout prevention measures, and parental involvement. School D was the only school that specifically chose to identify students determined to be at-risk.
Summary of Comparison of Findings to Literature Review for Planning and Implementation

While each school had adapted quite a few of the suggested practices, Schools C and D were only in their initial year of implementation. Even though School A was in its second year and B was in its third year, neither school had been able to develop these practices enough to confidently replicate them in what Bremer, Cosio, Johnson, Lehr, and Thompson (2004) referred to as continued, systematic implementation that would result in the accumulation of empirical data supporting them as essential intervention components. Practices that were common to all of the programs were block scheduling, clearly defined goals, teacher teams, and effective dropout prevention measures. Perhaps the schools could begin a dialogue on these commonalities and develop ways to further strengthen these components of their programs. Additionally, they could share the suggested practices that are uniquely adapted so that each of the schools could gain insight into how the adapted practices work within the context of each school. Table 39 lists a summary of the comparisons of suggested practices linked to research question one.
Table 39

Summary of Comparisons of Findings to Suggested Practices from the Literature Review for Planning and Implementation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practices Implemented from Review of the Literature</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
<th>School D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Block/Flexible scheduling</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clearly defined goals and objectives</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher voice in planning and implementation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher teams</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected all ninth graders</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected only first time ninth graders</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate ninth grade facility/area</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective dropout prevention</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental involvement</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-high school activities</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common planning for teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected students identified as at-risk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 2: Program Design

Suggested practices that were linked to research question two from the review of the literature included (1) use of data to monitor achievement, (2) a special transition course for freshmen, (3) catch-up courses, (4) initiating new grading practices, and (5) academic interventions. These practices focused on academic achievement. Mizelle (1999) also offered suggestions for nurturing and responding to students’ needs as they transitioned from middle school to high school. Suggested practices in the literature review focused on what Daggett (2005) described as a menu of interventions that would spring into action if a student had difficulty. Such interventions included monitoring student behavior, mentoring programs, and activities that connected students to the high school community.
**School A**

Suggested practices from the review of the literature that were a part of School A’s program design to address students academic needs were the use of data to monitor achievement and after school remediation sessions. To address students’ social needs School A developed its menu of interventions and sponsored mentoring programs, a student assistance program, and worked to build positive relationships with students.

**School B**

In comparing its efforts to the review of the literature, School B addressed its students’ academic needs by using data to monitor achievement, offering catch-up opportunities, initiating new grading practices, providing academic interventions, and offering after school remediation. To address its students’ social needs, School B offered a special transition course for freshmen. School B also worked to develop positive relationships with students through mentoring programs, recognition programs, student-voice organization, and parent involvement. School B also referred students to truancy court in its efforts to stress the importance of school.

**School C**

School C also included suggested practices from the literature review in its program. Those practices included use of data to monitor student achievement, catch-up opportunities, new grading practices, and after school remediation sessions. School C offered students alternative forms of assessments as a means of demonstrating mastery of course objectives. School C was the only school in the study that included in its program efforts to address teachers who needed to improve their classroom management and
instruction. Similar to School B, School C also referred students to truancy court and worked to stress the importance of school.

**School D**

Elements at School D which were similar to suggested practices from the review of the literature included use of data to monitor achievement, a special transition course for freshmen, catch-up opportunities, new grading practices, academic interventions, and after school remediation. School D adopted a no-zero policy where students could not receive zeroes for missed assignments. School D also offered its ninth grade transition students a non-Standards of Learning (SOL) science course that was required for graduation and linked to promotion requirements to the tenth grade. In addressing its school’s social needs, School D focused on parent involvement and community service as means for building positive relationships with students. School D was the only school that sought to build positive relationships with the students through community service projects. A summary of comparisons is listed in Table 40.

**Table 40**

**Summary of Comparison of Findings for Suggested Practices from the Literature Review for Program Design**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practices Implemented from Review of the Literature</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
<th>School D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of data to monitor achievement</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special transition course for freshmen</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catch-up courses</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New grading practices</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic interventions</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurturing activities to connect students to high school</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors

Two suggested practices from the review of the literature tended to stand out as inhibiting factors for all four schools. A lack of veteran teachers involved in the transition programs and funding allotments stood out as elements that all or most of the schools found problematic. All four schools reported that those involved in the transition programs were not veteran teachers even though the review of the literature indicated that veteran teachers should be chosen to work with ninth grade transition programs. In addition, even though faculty support was noted as a suggested practice by the review of the literature, the schools in this study gave conflicting reports as to whether or not they experienced support from the faculty. A summary of comparisons is listed in Table 41.

Table 41
Summary of Comparison of Findings for Suggested Practices from the Literature Review for Inhibiting Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practices Implemented from Review of the Literature</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
<th>School D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Novice Teachers</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding Allotments</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Support</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 4: Facilitating Factors

Suggested practices linked to research question four include preparation for ninth grade, integrated curriculum, philosophy that all students can learn, and vertical teaming with middle schools. Schools A, B, and D expressed belief in the philosophy that all students could achieve at high levels, and only one school offered a summer program prior to beginning ninth grade. School B offered an accelerated math program to its rising
ninth graders. Surprisingly, responses on vertical planning were mixed, and some of the respondents indicated that vertical planning had occurred. However, there was no evidence that any of the schools had participated in vertical planning with their feeder middle schools, except for the descriptions given by School B’s during its pilot year. A summary of comparisons is listed in Table 42.

Table 42

Summary of Comparison of Findings for Suggested Practices from the Literature Review for Facilitating Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practices Implemented from Review of the Literature</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
<th>School D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belief that all students can achieve at high levels</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer program before ninth grade</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 5: Criteria Used to Determine Success

Suggested practices linked to research question five included (1) use of data to monitor achievement, (2) use of projects and fieldtrips, (3) bridging communication gaps, and (4) engaging students in meaningful, challenging assignments. Of these suggested practices, School A used data to determine its program’s success/failure. In gauging its success/failure, School A monitored students’ academic progress, attendance, promotion rates, and SOL pass rates. School B and C also monitored students’ academic progress, attendance, promotion rates, and SOL pass rates, but it also tracked parental involvement, student participation in school activities, and student feedback. School C used information about teachers’ collegial relationships to determine its success/failure. Of all the schools, School D was the only school to include projects and fieldtrips and bridging
communication gaps as practices for determining success/failure. School C was the only school that examined teachers’ classroom management and instructional skills as an effort to improve student achievement. A summary of comparisons is listed in Table 43.

Table 43

Summary of Comparison of Findings for Suggested Practices from the Literature Review for Criteria Used to Determine Success/Failure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practices Implemented from Review of the Literature</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
<th>School D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of data to monitor achievement</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects and fieldtrips</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridging communication gaps</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging students in meaningful challenging assignments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary of Comparison of Findings Literature Review

Findings from the Talent Development High School Model indicated that the longer a school was involved in ninth grade transition, the more the school yielded improvement in academic achievement, attendance, and promotion for its first time ninth graders (Balfanz, Jordan, & Letgers, 2004). Herlihy and Kemple (2004) also stated that schools that had used the Talent Development High School model for three years had higher gains in promotions and were able to sustain their levels of improvement. Of the four schools in this study, only School B had reached its third year of implementation. School A was in its second year, and Schools C and D were in their first year of implementation. Additionally, just as McPartland and others (1996) found the ninth grade year to be a challenge to both students and teachers, all four of the schools in this study faced this obstacle. In comparing the efforts of each school in the study to programs in
the review of the literature, the findings and cautions are similar to those from other ninth grade transition programs. Results for the four schools in this study yielded little or no improvements in ninth grade promotion rates. A listing of each school’s promotion rates for the last five years is provided in Table 44.

Table 44

Five-Year Comparison of Promotion Rates for All Four Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td>46.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>68.2%</td>
<td>59.8%</td>
<td>67.9%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>61.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td>48.7%</td>
<td>42.8%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>47.3%</td>
<td>49.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School D</td>
<td>48.5%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>51.8%</td>
<td>48.7%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Limitations of the Study

Use of the survey presented limitations for this study. While 19% of transition teachers did not participate in the survey, 81% of teachers involved in the ninth grade transition program did participate in the survey. If 100% percent of teachers involved in the ninth grade transition program had completed the survey, the results may have been different. Additionally, respondents’ did not answer all of the questions in some instances. Additionally, responses for the “not applicable” category could be interpreted to mean that the factor in question was not a part of the schools’ transition programs or that the respondent did not understand the statement. Bias is another limitation of this study, as the researcher was involved in one of the transition programs prior to beginning the study.

Implications for Research and Practice

The purpose of this study was to add to the body of knowledge of what urban school districts have done to improve ninth grade promotion rates and ultimately high
school completion rates. Each of the four schools in this study began programs to address the current dilemma facing high schools across America. Their efforts to reduce ninth grade failure rates reveal that urban school districts face tremendous challenges that must be overcome in order to meet district, state, and federal mandates regarding continuous school improvement and student achievement. Rather than focusing on instructional strategies that enhanced learning, each school’s ninth grade transition program addressed structural elements such as block scheduling, clearly defined goals and objectives, teacher teams, separate facilities, drop-out prevention, parental involvement, pre-high school activities, and common planning time for teachers. As each school continues to address the needs of ninth graders, it should consider identifying instructional strategies that enhance learning and student engagement. Teachers in this study found professional development to be a facilitating factor; thus, district-wide collaborative planning could be used to build teacher capacity in enhancing student achievement.

**Implications for Research and Practice for Planning and Implementation**

Data generated from this study can be used to address ways to support instructional personnel involved in working with ninth graders. It can also be used to understand that school personnel expect administrators to perform as visionaries in supporting the planning and implementation of school initiatives. Teachers want to have ownership in working with school initiatives, but they expect school administrators to openly support their efforts in school reform and to guide the whole organization in accepting and in respecting the efforts of those involved in successfully transitioning ninth graders into the high school community.
Implications for Research and Practice for Program Design

This study can be used to gain insight into the efforts of various structural strategies implemented across a single school district. Each school developed its own interventions for addressing students’ academic and social needs.

Implications for Research and Practice for Inhibiting Factors

The purpose of this study was to add to the body of knowledge regarding the challenges educators face in working with ninth grade transition programs. Factors that inhibited educators’ progress were consistent with inhibiting factors identified in the literature review. Perhaps educators can examine these inhibiting factors and resolve to eliminate those that can be eliminated through focusing on the goals of the organization. Faculty support of the school’s goals on every grade level is essential if the school is going to effect change and increase student achievement. To continue to ignore the high rates of ninth grade failure and carry on the school program as if everyone who begins ninth grade will graduate from high school in four years is not sound educational practice. School administrators must motivate all staff to take responsibility for the success of all students at each stage of the students’ education.

Implications for Research and Practice for Facilitating Factors

A strong belief that all students can achieve at high levels is essential to positively impacting student achievement. Teachers and school administrators have to share a common goal of educating all students in order for reform initiatives like ninth grade transition to result in increased promotion rates. Schools must develop programs that are balanced structurally and instructionally. These programs should include pre-high school activities and ongoing activities that connect students to their high school community
throughout the school year. Each school’s goal included building positive relationships with teachers and with students. However, each school needed to link its activities planned throughout the year to that goal along with student surveys to gauge whether their efforts result in students believing that their peer relationships as well as their relationships with their teachers have been positively impacted.

**Implications for Research and Practice for Criteria Used to Determine Success/Failure**

Schools throughout the country are working to meet district, state, and national mandates for school accreditation. Annual yearly progress, as stipulated in *NCLB* (2001), indicates that schools must demonstrate that students are meeting graduation requirements and completing high school within four years of beginning ninth grade. Results from this study, can enable other school districts to examine the challenges schools confronted in reducing ninth grade failure rates.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

1. One recommendation for further study could be a continued examination of each school’s yearly efforts, progress, and challenges in working with ninth grade transition.

2. Another recommendation for further study could be an analysis of each school’s commitment to effecting change in instructional practices in ninth grade transition programs.

3. Another suggestion is to conduct a study that would examine the effects of collaboration among the four schools in identifying and in implementing instructional practices that positively impact ninth grade promotion rates.
4. Administrative support is essential to any program’s success. A study can be conducted on the roles administrators play in effecting school change.

5. Additionally, a study on teachers as leaders in increasing ninth grade promotion rates could also evolve from this study.

6. A follow up study can be conducted to determine if tailoring course offerings so that ninth graders are not enrolled in SOL tested courses until after they have earned other high school credits required for graduation positively impacts high school completion rates.

Postscript

*NCLB* (2001) mandates that schools meet specific rates of graduation and high school completion. If schools are going to meet federal guidelines, the failure rate in ninth grade must decrease tremendously. Currently, 40% of ninth graders fail ninth grade each year. Past research indicated that by the time a cohort group of ninth graders reached twelfth grade, at least 50% of the original group that began the four years of study had disappeared from the class set to graduate (Balfanz & Letgers, 2001). If the United States of America is to see continuous school improvement as a result of effective school reform, the ninth grade year of high school must become a successful transition that results in high school graduation within four years of beginning high school.
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http://www.nmsa.org/services/transition.htm


http://www.aasa.org/publications/saarticledetail.cfm?ItemNumber=2668&snItemNumber=....


Appendix A

Ninth Grade Transition Teacher Survey

Please answer each question below by circling the number which represents your level of agreement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Teachers have a voice in planning and in implementing my school’s program. SA A D SD NA
2. Effective dropout prevention measures are incorporated into the transition program. SA A D SD NA
3. Ninth graders have shown improvement as a result of parent involvement. SA A D SD NA
4. Pre-high school activities address students’ academic and social needs. SA A D SD NA
5. Students are grouped according to their ability. SA A D SD NA
6. Student progress is consistently monitored through use of data. SA A D SD NA
7. The ninth grade transition program is adequately funded. SA A D SD NA
8. Projects and fieldtrips enhance students’ ninth grade experience. SA A D SD NA
9. Double doses of academic subjects have resulted in improved student achievement. SA A D SD NA
10. Study skills and remediation opportunities are offered to ninth graders who need additional academic support. SA A D SD NA
11. All stakeholders work together to bridge communication gaps. SA A D SD NA
12. Students who experience academic difficulties receive needed support. SA A D SD NA
13. Teachers believe that all students can learn at high levels. SA A D SD NA
14. Activities are planned throughout the school year to enhance the student’s connection to the high school community. SA A D SD NA
15. Special funding is allotted for the transition program. SA A D SD NA
16. Vertical teaming/planning that occurs with middle school staff has improved the ninth grade transition program. SA A D SD NA
17. Failing students are able to “catch up” and stay on course for promotion. SA A D SD NA
18. Parent involvement has resulted in improved student achievement. SA A D SD NA
19. Class size is reasonable in respect to the subject and needs of students. SA A D SD NA
20. Teachers who work with ninth graders are the most experienced teachers in the school. SA A D SD NA
21. The structured study hall enhances the transition program. SA A D SD NA
22. Ninth graders have benefited from participating in a ninth grade transition program. SA A D SD NA
23. The faculty at my school support the ninth grade transition program. SA A D SD NA
24. The ninth grade transition program in this school has resulted in improved promotion rates. SA A D SD NA
Appendix B

General Demographics of Each School

*General Information* – This information will be collected from the school’s administrator/coordinator.

1. Please describe your school and its student population. This should include the following.
   a. Total enrollment
   b. Number of ninth graders
   c. Number of first time ninth graders
   d. Socioeconomic, Gender, and Ethnic make up of student population
   e. Socioeconomic, Gender, and Ethnic make up of students who make up the ninth grade transition program
   f. Surrounding Community in which the school is located
   g. Total number and percentage of special education students
   h. Total number and percentage of honors students
   i. Total number and percentage of gifted education students
Appendix C

Ninth Grade Transition Focused Interview Questions

Research Question 1

6. How did your high school plan the components that support the initial designs of its transition program?

What was your school’s initial plan for designing a ninth grade transition program?

What roles did teachers, administrator, students, parents, etc. have in developing your program?

Discuss the dynamics of team cohesiveness and how teacher turnover may or may not affect program design.

Survey Questions
1 – teacher voice in planning and implementing the design
2 – drop out prevention measures
3 – student improvement from parental involvement
4 – pre-high school activities
22 – students benefit from program

Survey Questions
6 – monitoring of student progress
10 – study skills, remediation given as needed
12 – students receive needed support
17 – catch up opportunities offered
21 – structured study hall enhances program

Research Question 2

7. What elements make up the designs of the transition program?

Academic Strategies

What are your students’ academic needs?

What strategies did your school adapt to address the academic needs of your ninth grade students?
How did you determine which strategies your school would use to address the academic needs of your ninth graders?

How did you plan for implementing these academic strategies?

What strategies have you used to address the academic needs of students in the following subjects?

Math

English

Science

Physical Education

History

Electives

Share academic strategies that might be or have already been modified or newly adopted.

**Social Strategies**

What are your students’ social needs?

How did you determine which social strategies would meet the needs of your students?

To what extent have you been able to monitor the social development of students in your school’s transition program?

To what extent will social strategies be modified or newly adopted?

**Research Question 3**

8. What factors inhibited the planning, implementation, and sustainability of the ninth grade transition program in your school?

a. Inhibiting Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 – ability grouping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 – adequate funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 – special funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 – class size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 – description of teachers who work with program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
i. Planning

ii. Implementing

iii. Sustaining

Research 4

9. What factors facilitated the planning, implementation, and sustainability of transition programs in the five selected high schools?

   a. Planning

   b. Implementing

   c. Sustaining

Survey Questions

13 - belief that all students can learn
14 – activities planned to increase connectivity
16 – vertical teaming
23 – faculty support

Research Question 5

10. What criteria does your school use to determine the success of its transition program?

Survey Questions

8 – projects and activities enhance ninth grade experience
9 – double doses of subjects
11 – stakeholders work together
18 – parent involvement
24 – improved promotion rates

Closing Question

Is there any other information that you would like to provide that would be helpful in capturing your efforts with ninth grade transition?
## Appendix D

### Observation Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Survey Questions</th>
<th>Emerging Themes from Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Question 1:</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Design of Initial Program</strong></td>
<td>1 – teacher voice in planning and implementing the design&lt;br&gt;2 – drop out prevention measures&lt;br&gt;3 – student improvement from parental involvement&lt;br&gt;4 – pre-high school activities&lt;br&gt;22 – student benefit from program</td>
<td>&lt;br&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Question 2:</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Elements of Current Program</strong></td>
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## Appendix E

Material Culture Guide

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VITA

Lynnell Theard Gibson

Birthplace: New Orleans, Louisiana

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