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Student, Parent, and Teacher Contributions to the Creation of an Effective Middle to High School Transition Program

Abstract

The transition from high school and middle school can be a very difficult time for students. They are experiencing physical, social and emotional changes while at the same time changing school settings. The transition to high school is often accompanied by a decrease in academic performance, increase in discipline referrals, and an increased difficulty with peer relationships. Transition programs have been created to help ease student transition to high school. In order for transition programs to be effective they need to involve parents. Transition programs focus primarily on the student, and in many cases ignore the role of the parent. The results of the survey show that parents need additional transition services made available to them in order to properly support their child during the transition to high school. The two main types of services that they would find beneficial include services that increase the amount of communication they have with teachers, administrators, students, and other parents. Examples of possible services include weekly updates from teachers on student progress and access to assignments online. They also want services that help educate them, and make them more knowledgeable about what their child will be experiencing as they enter high school. These services might include parent education seminars and student shadowing.

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Student, Parent, and Teacher Contributions to the Creation of an Effective Middle to High
School Transition Program

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Abstract

The transition from high school and middle school can be a very difficult time for students. They are experiencing physical, social and emotional changes while at the same time changing school settings. The transition to high school is often accompanied by a decrease in academic performance, increase in discipline referrals, and an increased difficulty with peer relationships. Transition programs have been created to help ease student transition to high school. In order for transition programs to be effective they need to involve parents. Transition programs focus primarily on the student, and in many cases ignore the role of the parent. The results of the survey show that parents need additional transition services made available to them in order to properly support their child during the transition to high school. The two main types of services that they would find beneficial include services that increase the amount of communication they have with teachers, administrators, students, and other parents. Examples of possible services include weekly updates from teachers on student progress and access to assignments online. They also want services that help educate them, and make them more knowledgeable about what their child will be experiencing as they enter high school. These services might include parent education seminars and student shadowing.

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Student, Parent, and Teacher Contributions to the Creation of an Effective Middle to High
School Transition Program

Transition Programs are strategies and initiatives that schools adopt in order to assist students in making the transfer from one academic setting to another. Schools often implement transition programs to aid students in the movement from elementary school to middle school, middle school to high school, and/or high school to the work force or post secondary school. All of these time periods can help students continue their growth as learners, or if not aided properly in the transition, they can prove detrimental to a student's future success in and/or outside the classroom.

My research has focused on the transition of students from middle school to high school. This transition has proved to be especially challenging for students (Smith, 1997). They are transitioning between schools but also are in a transition physically, emotionally, socially and intellectually. The period known as adolescence is a transition of the human body from childhood to adulthood. A more detailed definition outlines some of the more specific characteristics of most adolescents, "a young persons whose reproductive system has matured, who is economically dependent upon adults, whose chief source of gratification is his peers, who has open interest in the opposite sex, and for whom status and roles as defined from children and adults in his culture are confused" (Smith, 1997, p. 144). Adolescents are literally caught between being a child and being an adult. Physically, students are going through the process of puberty. They must cope with the changes that the process brings including rapid growth leading to awkward and uncoordinated physical movements, fatigue due to hormonal imbalances, development of secondary sex characteristics, and a development of their own sexuality. Physical development affects student's emotional and social development. Hormone imbalances

can lead to a wide mood range and shifts. They often lack high self-esteem and are sensitive to outside criticism, especially from peers. Adolescents are looking to become increasingly independent from parents, while at the same time becoming more dependent on peer relationships. Peers opinions and acceptance play an increasingly important role in students lives. Peer rejection can have dramatic negative effects on student self worth (Potter, Schlisky, Stevenson & Drawdy, 2001, p.54). While adolescence is a time when peer relationships are growing more important, it is also a time when individuals are beginning to develop a greater understanding of themselves, what they like, what they don't like, and their own personal beliefs and morals. This process, however, is directly related to students' peer relationships; as often times a group helps establish individual preferences, beliefs, and morals (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009). Intellectually, students are experiencing a dramatic increase in brain development. They are increasingly able to engage in higher order thinking such as abstract thinking, synthesizing, and evaluating. Schools must take into account adolescent development when creating a middle to high school transition program to ensure effectiveness. Adolescents deal with complex social relationships, physical development, emotional instability, development of a sense of self, and intellectual development every day. Schools can either try and incorporate these factors into the transition process and use them to increase success or fail to do so and lose students along the way (Potter et al., 2001).

Amongst these great personal changes, students must also make the transition from a smaller, more individualized, student centered middle school to a larger, more impersonal, rigorous, teacher centered high school. For some, this transition is relatively easy and natural, however, others struggle to adjust to their new environment. Difficulty adjusting to high school can lead to decreased academic success, increased difficulty in peer relationships, increased

discipline referrals and in some cases students dropping out of high school. In order to prevent these negative outcomes students, parents, teachers, and administrators must work together to create a transition program that will effectively move students from one academic setting to another.

Negative Effects of Transitions

Transition from middle to high school can prove to be a challenging time for some students. Some of the negative effects of transition that have been researched include decreased amounts of motivation, decreased academic performance, decreased self-esteem, increased discipline problems, and increased amounts of stress (Akos & Galassi, 2004). In some instances, a negative transition experience, and the resulting consequences contribute to a student's desire to drop out of high school.

Researchers have created a list of characteristics that when evaluated as a whole can help predict the probability that a student may drop out (McIntosh, Flannery, Sugai, Braun, & Cochran, 2008). Those characteristics include “academic failure, problem behavior, attendance rates, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, first language, learning disabilities, age and gender, socioeconomic status, school engagement, school mobility, teacher-student relationships, school and class size, family structure and parental educational support, and stressful life events” (McIntosh et al., 2008, p. 244). Two of the characteristics listed have an especially high correlation to drop out rates. Academic failure and problem behavior are strong indicators in reference to student likelihood to dropout. They are also two areas most noticeably affected during student transition from middle to high school. McIntosh et al. (2008) conducted an experiment to test academic achievement and behavior problems during eighth and ninth grade. The study was based on two main questions. First, was there a correlation between behavior

problems in eighth grade and academic performance in ninth grade, and second was there a correlation between academic performance in eighth grade and behavior problems in ninth grade. Using the number of times a student received a discipline referral, student grade point average, and student scores on the eighth-grade Oregon State Assessment reading test, the researchers worked to answer these questions. Researchers found a statistically significant correlation between both the number of discipline referrals in eighth grade and student grade point average in ninth grade, and student eighth grade performance of the Oregon State Assessment and the number of discipline referrals a student received in ninth grade. However, researchers did note that the correlation between eighth grade behavior problems to ninth grade academic performance was more significant than academic performance in eighth grade and behavior problems in ninth. These results show that behavior can have a greater negative impact on student achievement than student achievement has on behavior.

While academic performance and problem behavior are the two main characteristics in determining student risk for dropping out, all the other factors previously mentioned can play a role. With each additional risk, a students' likelihood to drop out is multiplied (McIntosh et al., 2008). Dropping out is usually not a decision made by the student in reaction to one single event. They will not drop out simple because they are male or because they are Hispanic, but they may drop out because they are a tenth grade Hispanic male, from a large urban district whose performing low academically because his first language is Spanish and all of his classes are in English, and whose mother just lost her job so in order to help take care of his family he must go to work. In order to prevent drop outs, schools need to begin creating dropout prevention programs prior to the school year in which students turn sixteen years old; the legal period for which New York State students can drop out with parents consent. Transition programs

beginning in seventh and eighth grade can also be used to help prevent student drop out by helping students make an easier transition to high school, while preventing decreased academic performance, increased behavior problems, decreased motivation, and other negative factors that can lead a student to drop out (Weidenthal & Kochhar-Bryant, 2007).

Most dropout statistics are typically reported about students from ages sixteen to twenty-four. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2007), the national drop out rate for individuals ages sixteen to twenty-four has decreased from 14.1 percent in 1980 to 8.7 percent in 2007. However, some researchers (Hayes, Nelson, Tabin, Pearson, & Worthy, 2002) criticize these numbers as being unrealistically low and critique how the National Center for Educational Statistics collect it's data. For example, the National Center for Educational Statistics only takes into account students age sixteen to twenty-four. While sixteen is the legal dropout age in New York, many students dropout before this age. According to Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) "more students fail ninth grade than any other grade of school" and "among fourteen and fifteen-year-olds who struggle with basic reading and mathematics skills, 20 percent dropout within two years" (p. 15). Cohen and Smerdon (2009) agree that the greatest dropout rates of students are during the first two years. If these failing and struggling students left school prior to the completion of the grade in which they turned 16, they would not be accounted for by the National Center for Educational Statistics. The stats also do not take into account students who are lost in the shuffle between middle to high school, transferring between schools, and dropping out and coming back. In order to get a different look at drop out rates, Hayes et al. (2002) conducted an experiment to see how many students in one school passed eighth grade and then graduated on time. They also looked at grade retention because it is a considerable indicator for future student dropout. According to Hertzog and Morgan (1998), if a

student is retained once it decreases the likelihood that they will graduate to fifty percent, and if a student is retained twice that number drops to twenty five percent. The results of Hayes et al. (2002) study showed that of the 451 students that were scheduled to start high school together only 192 actually graduated on time. The other 259 students were accounted for as such; seven graduated ahead of time, five graduated within a few weeks of the actual graduation day, sixty-five transferred schools, twenty-one were retained but still in school at the time of graduation, and three were unaccounted for. Of those who transferred, seventeen graduated from another school, thirteen were currently enrolled, nine transferred to post-secondary education, and thirty-six transferred out of district, to home schooling, or private school. Thirty-two students who were supposed to start ninth grade never did, and 126 students withdrew from high school; none of which had completed a GED program. After looking at all the data, the best possible graduation rate, saying that all students who were currently enrolled would attain a diploma was calculated to be around sixty-four percent. This percentage is considerably lower than the National Statistics, and it makes readers question the reality of the situation. Are more students dropping out then we think? How are we losing students? What can we do to fix this problem? What, if any, percentage of dropouts is acceptable?

This study confirmed that the greatest dropout rates occurred during the first two years of high school. The researchers promote the use of a school transition programs as a way to help reduce the number of dropouts. The study took its dropout numbers and broke them down by the number of withdraws by school year. According to the study sixteen percent of students dropped out during their freshman year, fourteen percent during their sophomore year, nine percent during their junior year, and seven percent during their senior year. The first three months of each year also showed increased rates of students dropping out. These facts reinforce the idea

that ninth and tenth grade are critical times for students. Students are transitioning between schools and facing new challenges and obstacles. The researchers promote a “collaborative response across schools to support students in making a successful transition from middle to high school” in order to decrease the higher dropout rates present in ninth and tenth grade (Hayes et al., 2002, p. 92).

We have evaluated why and when students drop off the education bandwagon, the next step is to look at the long-term consequences of student’s decision to dropout. Many students are cognitively incapable of understanding the long-term effects that their decision to dropout will have upon their future. The effects can be devastating. Individuals who have dropped out tend to have higher rates of unemployment: seventy-eight and a half percent in 1998 for males twenty-five to twenty-eight compared to eighty-seven percent for individuals with a high school diploma or GED (Hayes et al., 2002, p. 86). Those that are employed are often found in low paying jobs (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009; Hayes et al., 2002; McIntosh et al., 2008) often earning less than 13,000 dollars a year in 1992 according to the U.S. Census Bureau (as cited in Smith, 1997, p. 144). They also are subject to increased rates of incarceration, substance abuse, health issues, and are more likely to be dependent on assistance programs such as welfare. The decision to dropout can have far-reaching consequences on student’s lives and on society. While some may overcome these obstacles, many more will become part of a cycle of poverty.

How to Prevent Student Failure Using Transition Services

The most effective transition programs target students, their parents, and their school staff. Transition services differ from school to school. Smith (1997) conducted research on the amount of transition services available to students and compared it to student success. Her study was based on data gathered from over a thousand different schools. In each school, she chose

approximately thirty eighth grade students who completed a survey and a cognitive test. Students results were compared with the amount of transition services the schools provided. She broke schools down into three categories: schools with no transition services, schools with partial transition services, and schools with full transition services. She defined full programs as programs that were directed at helping students, parents, and staff. Partial programs, however, targeted only one or two of these groups. In other schools, no services were provided. The test also looked at the effect of more parent involvement, student differences, and other school differences when evaluating data. The results of the study showed that once schools account for student background, full transition programs alone are effective in reducing the likelihood that students will drop out. Partial programs showed no real impact on student retention. Smith estimates that by installing a full transition program in which parents, teacher, and students are involved a school can decrease the likelihood that a student will dropout by twenty percent (p.148). It is key for schools to put the time and effort into creating systems that work to involve parents, students, and staff in the transition process. They all play a role in how the student adjusts to their new educational setting. Parents and teachers need to know how to support the students during this critical change in schools, teachers, peers, expectations, values, morals, etc.

What is being done in schools?

Many services have been created to help students, parents, and staff during the transition process. Below are some ideas of services that schools are currently using to help each group during the middle to high school transition.

Students.

Increased Rigor in Middle School to prepare for high school.

Many high school teachers believe that students fail during ninth grade because there is such a drastic difference between middle and high school academic expectations. Many students struggle with the increased academic rigor that high school brings. In order to bridge the middle to high school gap, Cooney, Moore, and Bottoms (2002) believe that first school must increase the academic rigor within middle schools. Teachers must set higher expectations for students, and provide them with the reading, writing, speaking, listening, studying, organization, and note taking skills they need in order to be successful at the next level. Eighth grade teachers cannot be expected to prepare students to meet this higher expectation within one year, the process should begin when students enter middle school, or even earlier, and continue into the high school. One way that schools are increasing expectations is by placing more students into Advanced Placement (AP) classrooms. In order for more students to be placed within these AP classrooms, teachers need to provide more supports for students so they can reach the higher academic goals set for them. What Cooney and Bottoms (2002) found is that even though students are facing higher expectations when given proper support students who would never before have been in an AP classroom are not only in an AP class but are succeeding in an AP class. Giving the right opportunities and supports, students can meet higher standards and expectations and in turn be more successful in the high school setting.

Class and Individual meetings with school counselor.

One of the most common transition activities for students is for students to meet with their high school counselors. Looking at student interest, students can work with the counselor to look over their requirements and options for the next four years including the necessary credits they must fulfill, Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) programs, Advanced Placement and Baccalaureate classes, and student electives. Students should leave these meetings

with a class schedule and a tentative plan for the next four years (McElory, 2000; Hertzgog & Morgan, 1997). School Counselors can introduce some of this information to a whole class, including high school requirements, but they should also provide one on one consultation with students to create an individualized learning plan.

Career Counseling Presentations.

Career Counseling presentations are given by middle and high school counselors. The counselors meet with eighth grade students to discuss trends in the work force, areas of need, areas of student interest, and the importance of picking the right classes, electives, or special programs that will help students be successful after high school. The counselors might also choose to conduct a presentation for eighth grade parents. These presentations provide parents with the opportunity to see what types of classes and programs are available to students; what types of classes they think will meet student interest and how the right class selections can help students succeed in their future workplace (McElory, 2000).

Students visit high school.

Many students are concerned about navigating their new school (Akos & Galassi, 2004, p. 215). A very common practice is to have incoming high school students visit the school prior to classes beginning (McElory, 2000; Mizelle, 2005; Hertzgog & Morgan, 1997). This can be done during eighth grade and can be conducted as a class field trip. It may also be helpful for students to revisit the school in the summer. This provides students with an opportunity to learn the layout of the building. They can even be required to walk their schedule for the following year, so they are prepared for their first day of school.

Spring Orientation.

During the spring of their eighth grade year, students meet with the current ninth grade students, counselors, and administrators to answer any questions or concerns about entering the high school (Mizelle, 2005). This can be followed by a guided tour if desired. This same process can be repeated at the beginning of the school year to reintroduce students with teachers, counselors, administrators, and answer any lingering questions or concerns. Schools may want to consider having students attend their spring orientation in small groups. These will allow students to have less peer distractions. It may also allow students a chance to ask questions they would feel uncomfortable asking in front of a larger group.

Bridges Program.

The Bridges Program provides an opportunity for eighth graders to learn about high school life from the student perspective. Ninth graders are chosen by teachers and administrators to go into middle school classrooms to talk with eighth graders about their experiences in high school (McElory, 2000; Hertzog & Morgan, 1997). Some of the topics up for discussion may be extracurricular activities, increasing academic difficulty, and how and where to get help when they need it. These meetings should also allow time for eighth grade students to voice any questions and/or concerns about high school and receive an answer from a student point of view. This program can be very helpful in reducing student apprehensiveness about high school. They see what challenges other students faced and how they dealt with them. They may be the same challenges that students are concerned with and knowing other students have made it through and succeeded during their first year of high school may give them the courage to face their own challenges.

Middle and High School Pen Pals.

Like the Bridges Program, the purpose of the middle and high school pen pals is to provide students with a peer point of view on the middle to high school transition. Eighth graders are paired with a ninth grader, and ninth graders share their own personal experiences, thoughts, opinions, questions, and concerns with the eighth graders and vice versa (Mizelle, 2005; Hertzog & Morgan, 1997).

Student Shadowing.

Student shadowing allows eighth graders to spend a day in the life of a high school student. During the spring of their eighth grade year, students shadow chosen ninth grade students to all of their classes. This provides students a chance to practice navigating the hallways, meet and interact with new students and teachers, and see what ninth grade classes and assignments are like. Shadowing is also a positive experience for teachers and administrators (Mizelle, 2005). By having an eighth grade teacher spend a day in the life of a ninth grade teacher, it will hopefully give them a new perspective while also allowing them a chance see what they can be doing better to help prepare their students for ninth grade.

Mentoring Programs.

Mentoring programs take on many shapes depending on the district. One such program has been created at Crabapple Middle School in Georgia. The school recruits mentors from local organizations and provides them training about the purpose of the program and their role. These mentors meet with specifically chosen students once a week. The students involved in the mentor program are students that are identified by teachers and administrators as being at risk academically but not those classified as Special Education. The mentors work with students on organizational skills, study skills, and computer skills. They also stress the importance of school attendance and having students take pride in their own academic success (McElory, 2000).

Depending on the school, a mentoring program might differ, but this model has proven successful for Crabapple Middle school and their students. These programs help prevent students grades from dropping during their ninth grade year, which in turn could help prevent students from dropping out.

Summer Socials.

Summer Socials are optional activities that take place in the summer between student's eighth to ninth grade school year (Cauley and Jovanovich, 2006). They can be outdoor activities aimed at helping students build social networks. This helps free students of the fear of entering high school and not having friends. Summer socials allow students to build and develop peer relationships prior to the beginning of school. This can also be a time for students to practice opening their lockers, to become more associated with the high school building, and to meet teachers, administrators, and counselors. This is also a great opportunity for parents to become involved. Parents can get to know the school, staff, and other students. While students are participating in activities, parents can be engaged in separate activities to help educate them on how to help their student make the transition to high school.

Freshman only first day of school.

One of the most interesting and unique ideas I have come across is the freshman only first day of school. The first day of school is attended by freshman only. The freshman class has the school to themselves (Cauley and Jovanovich, 2006). The school day begins with an orientation at which faculty and staff are introduced. Students are presented with the beliefs, rules, and procedures of the school. Next, students travel to their first class in which they meet their teacher and together go over the student code of conduct. From there, student's progress through their schedule moving around the building and meeting teachers. Lunch is conducted in a picnic

fashion at which students are encouraged to socialize with peers. At the end of the day, students complete an evaluation of their first day of high school. Over the course of the day, a faculty member video tapes the events, and these are later shown at a parent assembly later in the evening. The freshman only first day of school allows students to experience their first day of high school without the nervousness and fear of being embarrassed which can be brought on by the presence of older students. Students can work out any problems they have opening their locker or not being able to find their classes in a more risk free environment.

Saturday School Program/Tutoring.

Saturday School is an opportunity for freshman to receive extra help on their course work (McElory, 2000). Due to increase demands of high school, many students have academic difficulties. Saturday school gives them a chance to practice what they are doing in the classroom and complete homework. McElory (2000) especially suggests Saturday school for math which many students struggle with at the high school level.

Study skills/Time management classes.

This concept is very similar to the Mentoring program except these special classes are usually provided by a classroom teacher. Preferably begun in middle school and continued into high school, these classes prepare students for the increasing academic rigor of high school. These classes can be provided to all students or just students identified as academically at risk depending on the district and the amount of resources available. These classes cover study skills, organization, conflict resolution, anger management, self-discipline, time management, and other basic academic and social skills (Mizelle, 2005; Hertzog & Morgan, 1997; Cauley and Jovanovich, 2006).

School within a school.

School within a school is an idea that more schools are adopting. The basic idea is that freshman should be located in a section of the school building that is purposefully segregated from the rest of the building (Cauley and Jovanovich, 2006). The purpose of segregating freshman is to help them through their transition to high school. The physical segregation allows students a year to adjust to high school life separate from the pressures of older students. It gives students a chance to mature mentally and physically, allows schools to provide more intensive services to students who are having difficulty adjusting, and allows students to form a deeper bond with freshman teacher and other staff members, so they feel comfortable asking for assistance when required.

Parents.

Eighth and Ninth grade parent meeting.

Parents play a key role in a student's transition to and success in high school. However, parents involvement in schools significantly drops by the time students reach this critical point (Mizelle, 2005). Schools need to work to keep parents involved in student's lives. One way is to hold eighth and ninth grade parent nights. These meetings are very similar to student orientations. Parents meet with the teachers, counselors, and administrators that will be working with their student. Together they should go over course requirements, course electives, extracurricular activities, school rules, policies, and procedures (McElory, 2000). Schools may even want to give parents a tour of the building so they can find things like the main office, gym, and auditorium. While schools may hold these parent nights, many parents may choose not to or will be unable to attend. To increase parent participation, schools must allow for multiple meetings at different days and times. Schools can provide transportation and child care to parents who would otherwise be unable to make it due to lack of transportation or young children at

home (Hertzgog & Morgan, 1997). Schools should try to accommodate parent's needs in order to make it possible for them to attend and receive the information necessary to help their student during the middle to high school transition.

Keeping parents informed and up to date.

Teachers and parents need to communicate more effectively in order to help students succeed. As technology changes, so is the way parents and teachers are communicating. In addition to traditional newsletter and calls home, many teachers are putting grades and assignments online so parents can keep track of their students progress. They can see if there are tests or quizzes coming up, if the students failed to hand in any of that weeks assignments, and overall how the student is doing. If problems do arise together teachers and parents can work to fix the problem before it escalates.

Parents also have to be kept updated and informed about all programs that are available to help their student academically. If a student is falling behind, teachers can inform parents of options for additional academic services that could benefit their child. This could include such things as after school tutoring programs or Saturday school. The more parents know about their child's performance in school, the school itself, and available services the more parents can help their child succeed in ninth grade and beyond. The responsibility to gain and share this knowledge requires a joint effort on the part of parents and teachers.

Spend a day in High School.

To help parents develop a greater understanding of what their student is going through, parents may want to spend a day shadowing their student (Mizelle, 2005). While it will not provide the most authentic experience, teachers and fellow students may treat the student differently due to parent presence, it will hopefully give parents a look into their child's world.

The more knowledgeable parents are about their child's day to day life the more support they can provide their child.

Teachers/Staff.

Five year plan development.

Teachers with the help of parents, administrators, and counselors can create a detailed plan for students that beginning in seventh grade will carry them to the end of high school (Hertzog & Morgan, 1997). This idea is helpful to teachers as it allows them to evaluate what kind of progress they wish to see in their students over the next five years and also how they expect students to achieve the goals set out in the plan. Teachers can evaluate what kinds of skills students will need to have in order to be successful each year and then provide the proper instruction and supports students will need to meet those expectation and requirements.

Teacher Exchange.

Teacher exchange is an idea that promotes eighth and ninth grade teacher to switch places for a day (McElory, 2000; Hertzog & Morgan, 1997). Ninth grade teachers come and teach a day at the middle school. This provides future ninth graders a chance to meet some of their future teachers. It also allows middle school teachers a chance to experience high school and develop a better understanding of what they need to do in their classroom in order to prepare their students for the following year.

Teacher/Counselors trained to identify struggling students.

In order to make sure all students are making the transition successfully, teachers need to receive training in how to identify at risk students (McElory, 2000). This is done relatively easily for academics. Ninth grade teachers should evaluate student performance in eighth grade through the use of grade records or more authentically through middle school portfolios. Ninth grade

teachers can then compare past performance to current. They should be sensitive to any drops in grades or performance. Students who are struggling academically or socially might act out in class or become withdrawn. Whatever the case, teachers need to be able to identify struggling students early and provide them with the necessary supports.

Ninth Grade Teams.

The concept for ninth grade teams are very similar to the more common middle school teams. Groups of the four or five main subject area teachers are given the same students in which to work with. These teachers can then get together each week to discuss student progress towards goals, student grades, and any students they think might be struggling and then suggest corrective actions they can take to help support the student (Hertzog & Morgan, 1997). This collaborative approach is beneficial for students as it helps teachers more correctly evaluate student progress. If one teacher is having difficulty with a student while another teacher is successful with them, the teacher who is struggling may receive aid and advice on how to better educate the student. It also helps prevent students from falling through the cracks. One teacher might overlook a student, but it is less likely that five will.

All.

Transition Team.

Transition Teams are made up of students from both the middle and high school, parents, and teachers of students from both grades (Hertzog & Morgan, 1998; Mizelle, 2005; Hertzog & Morgan, 1997). The goal of the transition team is to create a program that effectively meets the needs of all students during their transition from middle to high school. Transition teams should take into account social and academic changes students experience during transition. It should also evaluate the value of parents and teachers in transition to develop a comprehensive

plan. By having members of all three groups, students, parents, and teachers, it will lead to a transition program that is meaningful and valuable to all, not just those on the transition team. The team is responsible for arranging all transition events and evaluating their effectiveness. Done correctly transition teams have the potential to greatly increase the number of students that are successful.

Creating an Effective Transition Program in Today's Schools

Transition programs are designed to meet the needs of individual schools. Different programs work for different schools; it depends on the school, the teachers, the administrators, the students and the parents. While each school must develop a transition program that works for them, a transition program needs to have two key features to be effective. First, whatever program a school decides to install it has to be able to be adapted depending on individual student needs (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009). Not one transition program will work for all students. Students with disabilities are more likely to drop out during the eighth to ninth grade transition than students that are not identified (Letrello & Miles, 2003). This is in part due to the greater difficulty they have coping with the increasing academic rigors of high school. Transition programs need to take into account individual students needs and provide additional or modified services to students who require them.

The second key is the incorporation of parents, students, and teachers in the development and implementation of a transition plan. Research (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009) has proven that full transition programs that include all three groups are the most effective at successfully transition students from Middle to High School.

While it might seem like a simple a straightforward task, developing an effective transition program that meets the needs of all three groups and that can be adapted to meet

individual needs proves extremely difficult. It requires students, parents, and teachers to communicate effectively about their needs during the creation of a transition plan and then having each group reflect on what programs work, what programs don't work, and what needs to be improved upon in the coming years. This reflection process will help refine a school's transition plan. This process of creation and refinement of transition services is a challenging task for already overloaded students, parents, and teachers. However, the first step to creating is evaluating the needs and desires of all three groups and creating a program that is tailored to meet those needs. This is the purpose of my research.

Introduction and Purpose

Many transition programs are focused primarily on the students and teachers. These two groups are the two most directly involved in the transition process. The students are the ones who are making the transition, and the teachers are working directly with students as they transition. While these programs are designed with noble intentions, they largely ignore the role of the parent. While parents involvement in school remains valuable to student success throughout high school, parent involvement greatly diminishes as students enter high school (Mizelle, 2005). In order to increase parent involvement during student transition, schools have to design transition services that incorporate and educate parents. Parent involvement is essential as parents can provide additional emotional, social, and academic support to their students. My goal is to investigate what programs are being provided to parents, are these programs working for parents, and what programs they would find most useful in order to provide the proper support to their child as he or she transitions.

Methodology

Data Collection

The instrument used to collect data was a survey. The questions of the survey were created to gauge parents' need and/or interest in receiving additional transition services. The items included in the survey were created to analyze parents' feelings about their current involvement in the transition process. They were asked to respond to questions about the helpfulness of current middle and high school parent transition programs. The survey also included a checklist of different activities and programs that are targeted to help parents help their student through transition. Parents were asked to check off activities that they would find helpful during the transition. Finally, parents were asked what challenges their student faced or might face during transition, and what parents' transition programs would help them help their student.

Participants

The surveys were administered online to parents whose children attended a rural middle and high school in upstate New York. An online survey was chosen due to ease of distribution and participant response. The surveys were sent to 476 different e-mail accounts, representing the parents of 1,058 sixth through twelfth grade students. This sample was selected to investigate the experience of parents whose students are beginning the process of transitioning to high school and also to acquire the experience of parents whose students have concluded the transition process. The size and the grade levels included in the sample gave a good representation of parents' ideals about their role in the transition process.

Data Analysis

Survey data was collected over a period of two weeks. At the end of the two weeks, parent responses were reviewed. Multiple choice questions were analyzed by reviewing the number of parent responses to each available option. Short answer questions were evaluated by placing parent responses into one of several general. For example, parent responses to question

three were broken down by the number of parents that thought that the student orientation night was helpful, and the number of parents that did not find it helpful. After evaluating the number of parent responses that fall into each category, I looked at individual parent responses to further understand their thoughts, opinions, and/or concerns.

Question One: Prior to the beginning of high school, how involved were you in your child's schooling?

Question one's possible answers were created on a Likert scale. Survey recipient could either indicate that they were regularly involved, occasionally involved, or rarely involved. Of the 482 surveys distributed, eighty-two responses were received. The responses to question one were broken down as follows: seventy-four of the eighty-two survey respondents agreed that they were regularly involved, six marked that they were occasionally involved, zero agreed to being rarely involved, and two skipped the question.

The responses to the question shows that the parents that were willing to take the time to complete the survey are the parents that are involved in their child's schooling. The vast majority believe they were regularly involved in their child's schooling before the transition to high school.

Question Two: Have you, or do you plan to attend the high school's parent orientation night?

The high schools parent orientation night is the only transition activity at the school that was surveyed that is targeted directly towards parents. One night during the spring parents of incoming freshmen are provided information about the high school and are allowed to meet with counselors, teachers, and administrators. Question two was created to analyze the number of parents who take advantage of this program. The possible answers to question two were either yes or no. Of the eighty-two responses, seventy-one agreed that they had attended or were

planning to attend the school's parent night. The other eleven responded that no, they were not going to attend.

The high percentage of yes responses to question two shows that parents are interested in being educated about high school. They are taking advantage of the program, but the responses to the question don't provide us with more information about how beneficial the orientation night was. The next two questions on the survey build directly off question two and asked them to analyze their expectations of the parent orientation night and its helpfulness.

Question Three: If you did attend, how helpful was the orientation?

Question three was designed to ascertain parents response to the parent orientation night. Sixty-four parents responded to the question. The other eighteen skipped the question. Of the sixty-four responses, fifty-four agreed that the parent orientation night was helpful, seven parents responded that the parent orientation night was not helpful, and three answers were thrown out due to parents having stated that they have not yet attended the orientation.

Many reasons were cited for how the parent orientation night helped parents. The main reasons cited included that it provided parents with a chance to meet teachers and administrators, to learn about high school requirements, to learn about possible electives and extra curricular activities, and to basically provide information about what parents and students can expect over the next four years. Teachers and administrators stressed the new expectations that come with entering high school including increased student autonomy and increased academic rigor.

While the majority of parents found the orientation helpful, they also offered some comments on how the school could improve the orientation and make it even more valuable. Several parents commented on how they wished the orientation was done in smaller groups so that more individual attention could be paid to their questions and needs. One parent of a child

with a disability commented that she believed that small group orientations would be especially helpful for her and her son who has a disability. She wanted to learn more about graduation options and requirements including the differences between regents, local, and IEP diplomas and the requirements for each. She believes that by having small group orientations, it will provide parents with more answers which are relevant to their needs and their child's needs.

The seven parents who agreed that the orientation was not helpful all had largely the same complaints. They noted that the orientation is excessively long and boring. Parents also stated that they attended the orientation for each of their children as they entered high school. They believed the information presented is repetitive, with teachers and administrators using the exact same presentation year in and year out. One parent commented that, "After the 3rd child it was like a broken record" another stated that the presenters themselves "sounded bored with their speeches." Some parents were also concerned that the stress the teachers put on the new academic rigors of high school including more challenging classes and higher levels of homework scared their children and made them more nervous than ever to enter high school. While the idea behind the orientation night is to educate parents and students, these parents believed that the process did exactly the opposite. In order to improve the orientation night, schools need to evaluate negative reactions and responses and make the changes necessary to improve the process.

Question Four: If you are planning to attend, what do you hope to learn at the orientation.

Question four was included on the survey to analyze what parents whose students have not yet gone through the transition to high school and who have not yet attend the parent orientation hope to get out of it. Seventeen parents responded to the question. Four responses

were thrown out because parents stated that the question did not apply to them because they had already attended the orientation.

The remaining thirteen responses fell pretty evenly into two main categories. Parents were primarily looking forward to gaining more information about high school expectations of students and high school course requirements. Parents were wondering what their children can expect when they get into high school including how will teacher expectations of students change, what kind of change can students expect in the amount of homework they are given, how can students receive extra help if they are struggling, how will the grading system change, and how will parent teacher interactions change. The other main concern was about course requirements. Parents wanted to know what courses are required for their child to graduate. They also wanted to know what course electives are provided to students.

Question Five: Please place a check next to the services that you would make use of or would find helpful if it were made available to you. (Check all that apply).

Question number five allowed parents to indicate which additional transition services parents would take advantage of if there were made available to them. Seventy-eight parents responded to the question while the other four decided to skip the question. Seven different adult transition programs were outlined in question five. They included summer socials, student shadowing, school counselor meetings, a parent education program, weekly parent meetings, weekly school updates, and the creation of a transition team. Summer socials are held the summer before ninth grade and involve the school holding an open house, picnic, or breakfast for parents and students to meet teachers, counselors, and administrators.

Student shadowing involves parents shadowing their students for a day to try and develop a better understanding of their school life. School counselor meetings are usually held between

the student and the counselor. This survey suggests the idea of parents also attending school counselor meetings to discuss high school requirements, course electives, and students long term goals for high school and beyond. Parent education programs are school sponsored seminars that are focused on how parents can help their student succeed in high school. Weekly parent meetings are meetings held by parents for parents. They focus on helping other parents understand school policies and procedures. They also help parents solve school problems and can help ease parent concerns. Weekly school updates involve increasing communication between high school teacher and parents through the use of e-mails, websites, and online grade books. These can help keep parents up to date and informed about students grades and assignments. The last program included was a transition team. This program involves teachers, administrators, students, and parents working together on a board, to develop a more effective eighth to ninth grade transition program. All of these programs are designed to better educate parents so they can provide quality and educated support to their children during the transition from middle to high school.

Parents were allowed to check as many services as they thought they would partake in. The program with the most number of votes was the weekly school updates with sixty-six parents agreeing that they would use this if it were made available. Some teachers already do provide services such as websites and online grade books, however, more teachers can provide these services, update them regularly, and possibly expand them in order to provide parents with a more in depth understanding of students grades, progress, completed assignments, missing assignments, etc.

The other six parent transition services also peaked parent interest. Sixty-three parents agreed that they would like to meet with the school counselors to discuss class schedule. The

next two highest were summer socials and the parent education program, which both had thirty-nine parents say that they would use these services. Thirty-eight parents agreed that the creation of a transition team appealed to them. The two lowest scores were student shadowing which received twenty-four votes and weekly parent meetings with only ten. The responses make it clear that parents are interested in receiving more information about how to help their student(s). They are looking for teachers and administrators to keep them more informed about school requirements and their students' grades and progress.

The program with the least amount of parent interest was the weekly parent meetings. While reviewing the short description of the program included on the survey it was determined that the description was very vague and did not adequately explain the program. The description stated, "Weekly meetings at which parents can discuss school policies, procedures, and or any problems or concerns." The description left out that the meetings were parent led and centered on educating parents about school from the parent perspective. It is believed that survey takers may have misunderstood the description believing the weekly meetings to be formal meetings led by teachers or administrators. This may have contributed to the lowness of the number of interested parents.

Question Six: If your child has already transitioned to high school, what challenge(s) did your student or you face, and what services or information would have been helpful in dealing with them?

Question six was created to try and identify the areas in which parents see their students struggling and then to try and come up with programs that might be of use to students and parents to try and deal with those issues. Forty seven parents responded to survey question six. Five responses were thrown out because they failed to respond to the question or had students

who had not yet transitioned. The remaining responses were divided into seven categories including difficulties dealing with increased academic rigor, social issues, logistics, communication, organization, and new freedom.

Parent responses to the survey varied according to their experiences and that of their children. Ten stated that their children experienced no real challenges during transition. Another eleven parents noted increased workload as the key difficulty during transition. These parents agreed that their children were having difficulty adjusting to the increased amount of homework and studying that began in high school. One parent noted that during middle school her child had very little homework; the amount drastically increased upon entering high school and her student was struggling to keep up. Another parent wrote that they wished that middle school better prepared their student for the increased academic rigors of high school.

Seven parents identified communication with teachers as their primary concern. Parents wanted to be notified earlier if their students started to struggle academically or socially. They also wanted to be updated about student progress on a more regular basis in both formal reports and informal teacher reports. One parent noted that they had yet to receive any communication from their child's teachers other than five week progress reports and report cards. The teacher had not once contacted them by phone or e-mail. It was also stated that the five week reports were just too far apart for some students. Within the course of five weeks, a student's grade can fall dramatically; biweekly or weekly updates may help parents stay more on top of students grades and prevent students from falling behind. Regular communication may also allow parents to build stronger relationships between parents and teachers. These relationships will prove helpful if a problem at school does arise.

In addition to difficulties with parent teacher communication, one parent identified student teacher communication as a transition issue. They believed that the high school teachers are less likely to offer help to students whether that be by answering questions in class or providing after school help to struggling students. The parent also believed that some of the responsibility for decreased communication between teachers and students in high school is due to students being to afraid to ask questions. In order to solve these problems, the parent suggested teachers spending time with eighth graders and their teachers prior to transition. The goal of this is for the teacher to develop a better understanding of student needs before the year begins; that way they can develop more effective lessons and provide additional supports to students who may need them before they fall behind.

The next two highest responses, both with four parents identifying it as their primary concerns, were difficulties with socializing with peers and dealing with the new freedoms of high school. Parents were concerned about the increasing social pressures that are ever present in high school including cliques, bullying, changing friendships, and peer pressure. One parent even suggested having a monthly group counseling session, led by the school counselor, centered on helping students cope with social issues. When parents identified new freedom as their primary concern, they also mentioned their student struggling with increasing responsibilities in high school. They have increased academic, social, and emotional demands. Parents saw their children struggling with balancing all their new responsibilities. The only suggestion these parents had was to support the child. They believed they would eventually learn on their own how to handle their new responsibilities.

The last two major response categories, with three responses each, were difficulties with organization and difficulties with logistics. Parents main concerns in these two categories were

keeping students lockers and notebooks organized, keeping track of homework assignments, opening their lockers, and getting to their classes on time. Students may have some difficulty with traveling around their new building. Students are allowed to visit the school prior to the beginning of the school year to see where their classrooms are located. They can also practice opening their lockers. Parents also suggested giving student more time in the hall, so they are able to go to their lockers, get it open, and get to class without being late. Keeping students organized can prove more difficult. Parents noted that students had difficulties keeping track of assignments. They would either forget what the assignment was or misplace work sheets. The loss of assignments in turn damaged students grade point averages. Students are supplied agenda's in middle school and are required by teachers to use them daily. During student freshman year, an agenda is provided, but it's use is not as closely monitored as in high school. Making sure students are filling out agendas may help students be more organized. Parents may also want to check students assignments every night to make sure they are being completed. Teachers and parents may want to work out a system so they know what the assignments are and where the student will be completing their assignments.

Question Seven: If your child is still preparing to transition, what is your biggest concern and what assistance would be helpful in dealing with it?

Question number seven was directed towards parents whose children had not yet transitioned to high school. They were required to identify areas in which they believed their child might struggle during transition and services that may be helpful in alleviating those struggles. Thirty-four parents responded to question number seven. Of those responses four were thrown out because they failed to respond to the question, or they identified that their child had already transitioned. Of the remaining thirty responses, three said that they were not concerned

about their child's transition to high school. They all believed that their child transitioned successfully from intermediate school to middle school, and they should have little difficulty with this transition. The remaining responses were categorized into concerns about academics, communication, social issues, and logistics.

The number one concern was academics. Fifteen parents agreed that they were concerned that their child would be overwhelmed with the increased academic rigors of high school. Classes begin to become more difficult. Students who haven't struggled during middle school may find high school more challenging. Students who were already struggling may become more overwhelmed with difficult content. Also, teachers are often more strict in high school about homework. They assign more and expect it to be handed in on time. Parents want their child to understand the importance of completing homework and excelling academically. The parents mentioned that they are now beginning to think about college. They want to make sure their students are doing well and taking all the classes they need in order to do well and then proceed to post secondary education. In order to help children be prepared for the increased academic rigors of high school, parents say they need to warn their children before hand. Before entering high school, they should have a better understanding of what to expect. This can be done by the parents and by teachers. They need to be preparing the child, so high school isn't as big of an adjustment.

The next highest concern, with eight responses, was parent, teacher, and student communication and interactions. As academics become increasingly difficult, it is important for parents, teachers, and students to openly communicate. This way problems can be solved before they evolve into bigger problems and students begin to struggle academically. Parents were concerned that their child would be unable or unwilling to openly communicate with their

teachers. They feared that high school teachers would be too busy due to the large number of students each teacher is responsible for to provide individual assistance to students who are struggling or need extra help. Parents hoped that teachers would make themselves regularly available to students in order to provide academic support. They also hoped that teachers would effectively communicate their classroom expectations to their students. Students should have a deep understanding of what the teacher expects from them as students. This means understanding the classroom behavior policies, homework policies, ways to ask questions in class, etc. In addition, parents also hoped that their child would speak up and ask for help when they were having problems understanding classroom content. They were concerned that their children would be too afraid to ask for help from their teachers and as a result may, “fall through the cracks.” To help prevent problems with communication, teachers need to make their expectations clear; they need to be available to parents and their students, and they must be invested in student success. Students need to understand classroom expectations and learn when and how to ask the teacher for help. Parents need to act as a support system for the child. If the student is having difficulty communicating with their teacher the parent can help build those skills. The parent may also contact the teacher to let them know of their concerns. All three groups need to be communicating in order for students to achieve their best. This amount of communication will vary depending on student need.

The last two types of responses, both with two parent responses, were social and logistical difficulties. Socially, parents were primarily concerned about their students' interactions with older students, peer pressure, and bullying. They were concerned that their younger and often smaller students would be harassed by older students. Parents offered no ideas on how to prevent this problem or support students if and when a problem arose. Logistically, parents were

mainly worried about their children navigating the halls and getting to class on time. One parent said that allowing students into the high school before the start of the year would likely solve this concern.

Question eight: Do you have any ideas or suggestions about possible services that would help parents ease student transition to high school?

The final question of the survey was an open ended response question that allowed parents to identify any final suggestions they had about services that would help parents help their student transition to high school. Forty-four parents responded to the question. Two responses were thrown out because they failed to answer the question. Of the remaining responses, twelve parents said that they had no additional suggestions for services. The majority of these parents said they had no additional suggestions or none at this time, others stated that they thought the services already in place at the school, including orientation and tours of the high school, were helpful enough to effectively transition their students to the high school. The remaining parents responses fell into three main categories. These categories included ways to increase communication, ways to increase student preparation, and ways to increase parent involvement.

Eleven parents suggested ways to help improve communication. This communication would be between parent, teachers, and students. To improve parent teacher communication, parents repeatedly mentioned that they desired more regular communication with teachers. Some mentioned that they thought the weekly school updates mentioned in question five would be very beneficial. Another idea was requiring a beginning of the year and midterm teacher parent meeting to discuss student progress. Requiring all teachers to use a website which is updated regularly may prove beneficial. On this website, teachers could post homework assignments,

downloadable homework documents, additional resources, grades, missing assignments, podcasts, etc. These resources will help keep parents up to date and informed while also helping students if they forgot the homework or lost a worksheet.

Teachers need to also work on trying to improve communication amongst their colleagues. Parents suggested several ways in order to improve teacher communication. They want to see increased communication between middle and high school teachers. This may be achieved by having high school teachers spend a day in the middle school getting to know incoming freshman. They can also have a meeting with the middle school teachers. This meeting will focus on middle school teachers' experiences with students and discussion of any effective methods and strategies they have found that work with the students. One parent suggested having a freshman team much like the teams that are established in middle schools. The freshman team will work together to provide a high quality education to the students on their team. They will be given a time every day to meet and discuss student needs, students who are struggling, strategies that work, etc. This will help teachers create more effective lessons while also preventing students from "falling through the cracks."

The final type of communication that was mentioned in question eight of the survey was parent student communication. Parents need to keep an open line of communication with their students. This allows students to be comfortable coming to their parent if they are experiencing difficulties in school. In turn, parents need to teach students to be responsible for themselves and their actions. Parents need to teach their students how to recognize they have a problem and take the necessary steps to solve it. This goes for academics as well as social, emotional, and physical issues. In the words of one parent, "If the parents still look at their freshman as a small child then how can they be open to talking about drugs, peer pressure, bullying, sex and all the other things

our children will be exposed to in high school.” Parents need to be prepared to deal with the issues that their students will face when their children enter high school. The parent who was quoted above supported the idea of keeping an open line of communication with their student so their child feels comfortable coming to them when problems such as these arise. The parent also promoted the school hosting an event which will be focused on educating parents about issues that students face in high school, such as drug use. The event will educate parents about these issues, ways to deal with them, as well as ways to communicate with their children.

Eleven parents suggested ways to increase student preparation for high school. According to several parents, schools need to start transition programs earlier. Schools need to increase academic demands in middle school so the adjustment to high school is easier academically. This parent stated that, “8th grade requirements should progress throughout the year to be more like high school, particularly in homework expectations and amount of independent work.” The other major suggestion was for eighth grade students to spend time with ninth graders to discuss life in high school including any problems that may arise, classes, teachers, etc. This can be done by having ninth graders come in and talk to the eighth graders. Eighth graders may also shadow ninth graders so they get the chance to experience a day in high school. This gives them a chance in meet teachers, interact with older students, sit though a high school class, see what homework looks like, and practice navigating the halls.

The last major response category was to increase parent involvement with eight responses. Parents whose responses fell into this category thought that parents need to be there to support their student. They need to be the ones checking to make sure homework is done, checking students grades, and making sure their student isn’t struggling. One parent even stated, “If parents were more involved kids would not have the problems that they do.” While this

statement may not be true in all situations, parents are a valuable support system for their child. Their support can only help the student.

Conclusions

My research focused on the role of parents in student transition from middle to high school. Previous research had already proven that the involvement of parents in the transition process is essential for the schools transition program to be successful (Smith, 1997). The intent of my research was to answer the following questions. What programs are being provided to parents? Are these programs working for parents? What programs they would find most useful in order to provide the proper support to their child as they transition?

The answer to the first question, what programs are being provided to parents, are not many. The primary focus of districts is to help students transition, so many transition activities are focused directly at students. Transition activities for parents should focus directly on helping to educate parents further about high school and their child's performance in school so that they can offer support. At the school district I conducted my research, one of the only transition activities directed specifically to help educate parents is the parent orientation night. The school also provides teachers with a website program onto which teachers can post assignments, grades, additional resources etc. Over the course of the research, no other transition services were found to be directly focused on parents.

The next question evaluates the effectiveness of parent transition programs that were already in place in the school district. Survey question number three was created to attempt to answer this larger research question. The vast majority of parents noted that the orientation was helpful. The high school orientation night is conducted to give parents and their students a better understanding of what to expect as they enter high school. It gave parents a chance to meet

school faculty and staff. It also provided more information to parents about high school expectations, such as increased academic rigor; scheduling is included in the presentation. Presenters go over high school requirements, electives, and extra-curricular activities. While the high school orientation night can be very valuable, parents also critiqued the process. Many parents noted that the presentation was too long and boring. As school faculty and staff presented the higher expectations of high school, students who attended might feel overwhelmed and even more nervous about entering high school. Parents also wanted more one on one time with teachers and staff to discuss their individual child's needs.

Teacher websites are online parent resources that are becoming increasingly prevalent and important to parents and their students. At the school researched, teachers are provided a website through a school program. While parents liked the idea of having these resources online, the websites were often not updated enough to be valuable to parents and their students. They would not post homework daily, so if their child did forget an assignment they weren't able to access it online. This process takes dedication on the part of the teacher to be effective.

Overall, the transition services in place are of use to parents. They help to educate parents and to keep them informed about high school which is the goal of parent transition services. The services in place however, have some drawbacks. In order to make transition services more effective, the school needs to modify existing transition services to make them more effective. One idea is to include a guided tour of the high school during the parent orientation night to allow parents and students to know where their services are. They also might want to provide more than one parent orientation night so that more parents can attend, and the orientation can be done in smaller groups. This may help parents get more information specific to their child's needs. Schools may also want to consider putting in place additional transition services that work

for different families with varying situations. A new option is to offer virtual tours to parents who are unable to come to the school and personally navigate the school.

After reviewing the effectiveness of programs already in place within the district, the main focus of this research project was to identify other possible services that would help parents. Survey questions five through eight were directed at trying to identify other resources that would prove beneficial for parents. The overall consensus of survey responses identifies two areas of need. Parents wanted to increase the amount of communication between teachers, parents, and students. In question number five, the vast majority of parents said that weekly parent updates would be extremely helpful. In order for parents to be helpful to their students, they have to understand how the student is performing in class. Weekly school updates provide information about student's assignment, grades, etc. This process is also helpful because it is not very time consuming on the part of the parent. They can quickly check the student's homework assignment online and make sure it is done at home. The quick and ease of these transition program makes it appealing to many parents. It is becoming increasingly popular in school districts today as more teachers are creating website and posting assignments and grades online. However, to be useful, teachers have to make sure they are updating it regularly. This take dedication on the part of the teacher, but it will prove beneficial for students. Other ideas to increase communication in high school are to have beginning of the year, midterm, and end of the year parent teacher and possibly even student meetings. These meetings can be used to evaluate student progress and areas of need.

Additional ideas of ways to increase communication, such as transition teams, can be found under the methods section of this research article. Communication between teachers, parents, and students is key to student success. All three groups have to understand their role in

education. If all three groups fulfill their role and communicate regularly they can ensure student progress. They can identify and solve problems before they evolve into greater problems which hinder student success.

The other need was greater parent education about high school. Parents need to be provided with a deeper understanding of what their child is facing in high school, academically, socially, emotionally, and physically. This can be achieved in a number of ways. Sixty three parents who responded to the survey said they would take advantage of meeting with the school counselor to discuss their student. While the orientation night offers an overview of high school requirements and the high school experience, one on one meetings with the school counselor could provide parents an opportunity to get answers to questions specific to their student. At these meetings, the school counselor, parent, and student could work out a plan for the student for the next four years. It could also be a time for the student or parent to voice any concerns about high school. Counselors could provide parents and students information regarding any services that might be beneficial to the student or further educate the parents on what can be expected as the student enters high school. Other ideas to help further educate parents include parent education programs or meetings. These meetings could provide parents the opportunity to learn more about issues their students may face in high school including but not limited to adolescent development, drugs and alcohol, bullying, teen depression, and academic difficulties. Parents, whose children have already transitioned successfully or even graduated from high school, may want to attend these meetings and discuss their experiences. They can share any struggles that they or their children faced, how they overcame them, and any information they believe might be helpful to parents of incoming or new high school students.

Parents need to be educated and informed about what their child is or will be facing in high school, so they can offer the support their child needs in order to be successful. Research has already proven that parent involvement is key to a successful transition program (Smith, 1999). Now schools must analyze their transition programs and make sure that they not only include parents but also meet parents two primary needs, education and communication. If their transition program currently fails to meet these two primary needs schools need to evaluate what types of parent transition programs would work for their school. There are many options, including a number of programs listed in the literature review and analysis section of this paper. These programs must be installed within the school, and then reviewed on a regular basis to ensure effectiveness.

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Appendix A

1. Prior to the beginning of high school, how involved were you in your child’s schooling?
(circle one of the following).

Rarely Involved
Involved

Occasionally Involved

Regularly

2. Have you, or do you plan on attending the High school Parent Orientation night?
(circle one of the following).

Yes

No

3. If you did attend, how helpful was it?

4. If you are planning to attend, what do you hope to learn at the orientation?

5. Please place a check next to the services that you would make use of or would find helpful if it were made available to you.

Service	Rank
Summer Socials – The summer before ninth grade the school holds an open house, picnic, or breakfast for parents and their students to meet teachers, counselors, and administrators.	
Student Shadowing – Parents can shadow their student for a day to learn more about their life within school.	
School Counselor Meetings – Parents and students meet with school counselors to discuss high school requirements and students four year plans.	
Transition Teams – Teachers, Administrators, Students, and Parents work together on a team to develop a more effective eighth to ninth grade transition program.	
Parent Education Programs – School sponsored seminars focused on how parents can help their students succeed in high school.	
Weekly Parent Meetings - Weekly meetings where parents can discuss school policy, procedures, or any problems/concerns	
Weekly School Updates – Using teacher e-mails, websites, and online grade books parents are provided weekly updates on grades and assignments.	

6. If your child has already transitioned to high school, what challenge(s) did your student or you face, and what services or information would have been helpful in dealing with them?

7. If your child is still preparing to transition, what is your biggest concern and what assistance would be helpful in dealing with it?

8. Do you have any ideas or suggestions about possible services that would help parents ease student transition to high school?