


2015

# The Relationship Between Middle School Configurations and Student Success

Asia Ali-Hawkins  
*Walden University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations>

 Part of the [Elementary and Middle and Secondary Education Administration Commons](#), and the [Junior High, Intermediate, Middle School Education and Teaching Commons](#)

---

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection at ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu](mailto:ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu).

# Walden University

## COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Asia Ali-Hawkins

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
and that any and all revisions required by  
the review committee have been made.

### Review Committee

Dr. Nori Mora, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty  
Dr. Mary Lou Morton, Committee Member, Education Faculty  
Dr. Michelle Brown, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer

Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University  
2015

Abstract

The Relationship Between Middle School Configurations and Student Success

by

Asia Ali-Hawkins

MA, Gwynedd Mercy College, 2006

BS, Temple University, 1999

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

October 2015

## Abstract

Public schools have used varying school configurations for middle grades—typically K-8 or traditional middle school arrangements—to improve students' academic outcomes. A small Northeastern school district was experiencing problems with student achievement, suspensions, and truancy, and was considering school configuration as a potential method of improving student performance. The purpose of this quantitative study was to explore the associations between school configuration and student achievement, suspensions, and truancy. Erikson's psychosocial theory of development and Dickinson's middle school philosophy guided this study since both address the needs of adolescents. Five years of archival data were collected from 2 demographically comparable Northeast school districts: one with K-8 schools and one with a traditional middle school configuration. Student sample sizes for each of the 5 years ranged from 1,841 to 2,076. Chi-square analyses for each year of data were used to examine the associations between configuration (elemiddle/middle) and the 4 independent variables: math achievement (proficient/not proficient), reading achievement (proficient/not proficient), suspensions (suspended/not suspended), and truancy (truant/not truant). Key results yielded statistically significant associations in certain years for each independent variable. The K-8 school students had higher achievement in math 3 of the 5 years and in reading for 2 of the 5 years. This group also had a lower percentage of truancy 4 of the 5 years, but a greater proportion of suspensions 4 of the 5 years. Results of this study can influence positive social change as district administrators can use the data to guide their decisions regarding which school configuration is most beneficial for middle school aged students.

The Relationship Between Middle School Configurations and Student Success

by

Asia Ali-Hawkins

MA, Gwynedd Mercy College, 2006

BS, Temple University, 1999

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

October 2015

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to give honor to God. I would like to thank my loving husband and my three wonderful children for their support and patience with me during this journey. I would also like to thank Dr. Nori Mora and Dr. Morton for their support and guidance through this doctoral process. Last but not least, I would like to honor, acknowledge, and dedicate this paper to my parents, whom have both gone to glory during my doctoral journey.

## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	iv
Definition of the Problem .....	4
Rationale .....	5
Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level .....	5
Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature.....	6
Definitions.....	6
Significance.....	7
Guiding/Research Question .....	8
Review of the Literature .....	9
Implications.....	27
Summary.....	28
Section 2: The Methodology.....	30
Introduction.....	30
Conclusion .....	46
Section 3: The Project.....	50
Introduction.....	51
Description and Goals.....	51
Rationale .....	52
Review of the Literature .....	53
Implementation .....	56
Potential Resources and Existing Supports.....	57

Potential Barriers .....	57
Proposal for Implementation and Timetable.....	58
Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others .....	58
Project Evaluation.....	59
Implications Including Social Change .....	60
Local Community .....	60
Far-Reaching.....	61
Conclusion .....	61
Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions.....	62
Introduction.....	62
Project Strengths .....	62
Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations .....	63
Scholarship.....	63
Project Development and Evaluation.....	64
Leadership and Change.....	64
Analysis of Self as Scholar .....	65
Analysis of Self as Practitioner.....	65
Analysis of Self as Project Developer .....	66
The Project’s Potential Impact on Social Change.....	67
Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research .....	67
Conclusion .....	68
References.....	69



Appendix A: The Project .....	79
Appendix B: Active Elemiddle and Middle School 5 year Averages .....	95
Appendix C: School District's A, B 2012 Demographic Data .....	96
Appendix D: NIH Certificate.....	97
Appendix E: Data Usage Agreement.....	98

List of Tables

Table 1 Focus District and State Math and Reading Proficiency Averages  
.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**....8

Table 2 Results of Chi-Squared State Math Assessments.....37

Table 3 Results of Chi- Squared State Reading Assessments.....40

Table 4 Results Chi- Squared Suspensions.....43

Table 5 Results Chi-Squared Truancy.....45

Active Elemiddle and Middle School 5 year Averages .....95

School District’s A, B 2012 Demographic Data .....96

## Section 1: The Problem

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this doctoral study was to explore the relationship of student achievement, suspensions, and truancy rates of middle school-aged students who attended the K-8 model and those who attended traditional middle schools. In this study, middle school data of 4 K-8 schools from the focus district were compared to a traditional middle school data from a neighboring school district with similar demographics. I wished to explore which configuration was most beneficial to middle school-aged students. The results will influence school districts' decisions about reconfiguration and reform. In this section I will present the problem, rationale, guiding research questions and past research on school configuration.

### **The Middle School Movement**

The middle school movement took place in the 1960s because educators recognized the developmental changes that adolescents go through, which require educators to focus on the social and emotional development of adolescents (Armstrong, 2006). By the 1970s, there were 2,080 middle schools in existence (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2004). By 1998 the number of middle schools in existence was 10,944 and by 2002 there were a total of 12,000 middle schools (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2004). U.S. institutions acknowledged that there were differences in the growth and development of adolescents and different school structures needed to be in place in order to address these differences. In recent years, middle school student achievement data have been analyzed closely and scholars have

determined that many adolescents in large urban districts were not achieving as well as their counterparts who attended middle schools in more affluent areas.

### **The Impact of No Child Left Behind**

When No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation was passed, school districts nationwide began to pay closer attention to student achievement data. Schools were charged to demonstrate that they were making adequate yearly progress (AYP) on state exams. AYP is the measure by which schools and districts are held accountable for student performance on standardized state exams under Title I of the NCLB Act. The results of the Pennsylvania state exams in a large urban district revealed that middle-school aged students struggled in terms of achievement (Byrnes & Ruby, 2007).

According to student achievement data nationwide, middle school-aged students who attended urban public schools that serve minority and economically disadvantaged students were not achieving at adequate proficiency levels (Byrnes & Ruby, 2007).

Academic achievement on state assessments has become the factor to determine whether or not a school is successful as a result of NCLB legislation (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Based on the results of the 2011 Pennsylvania state exam results, 12 out of 19 middle schools in one large district did not make AYP (Pennsylvania Department of Education [PDE], 2012). This factor demonstrated a need for a study to examine school configuration, K-8 and 6-8, and its impact on middle school student achievement as well as suspensions and truancy.

### **K-8 Configuration**

As a result of low student achievement of middle school- aged students, many educators continue to debate on which grade configuration is most beneficial, the traditional middle school or the K-8 school. Traditional middle schools may service Grades 5-8, 6-8, or 7-8. For the purpose of this study, traditional middle schools were based on the 6-8 grade configurations. Armstrong (2006) stated that school districts are considering the K-8 model over the traditional middle school model as an attempt to increase academic achievement of middle school-aged students by avoiding a transition during the onset of puberty. Spark (2010) suggested that middle school-aged students who remain in K-8 schools see greater increases in academic achievement than their counterparts who move to traditional 5-8 middle schools due to larger grade cohorts that are present in middle school than in K-8 schools. Average enrollment of traditional middle schools serving students in Grades 6-8 is 800 students or more, while average enrollment of middle school-aged students attending K-8 schools is 225. Larger school populations can make it difficult to provide adequate support for all students.

Some Florida school districts have also revealed that students in K-8 schools have higher achievement on standardized tests than students who attend middle schools (Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability [OPPAGA], 2005). The state of Florida cited that parental dissatisfaction of middle schools and larger class sizes aid in the differences of student performance of the different school configurations. These results influenced decisions of these Florida school districts to move to the K-8

model (OPPAGA, 2005). Based on these studies many school districts are adopting the K-8 model and the numbers of traditional middle schools are decreasing.

The movement from traditional middle schools to the K-8 model was mainly due to middle school-aged students' low achievement on standardized tests (Armstrong, 2006). Although some school districts in one northeastern state have adopted the K-8 model, many of the districts continue to educate students in traditional middle schools while others are making the transition to the K-8 model. Of the 15 districts in one northeastern county, a few school districts have adopted a K-8 model. District administrators in one of the 15 districts in the county continue to engage in conversations concerning the decision to reopen the district's traditional middle school configuration of 6-8 based on low student achievement within these grade levels. Some administrators in this school district have argued that a traditional 6-8 middle school will offer programs and services more appropriate for adolescent children than the K-8 schools, while others feel that student achievement of middle-school aged students is higher in K-8 schools.

### **Definition of the Problem**

There is controversy in a small northeastern school district concerning which school configuration, K-8 or 6-8, is most beneficial to middle school- aged students. Over the past 2 years, informal conversations about converting back to the traditional middle school structure have taken place at district leadership and school board meetings. This study included four schools that transitioned from being K-5 schools and are now K-8 schools. The district has greater than 65% of the students receiving free and reduced lunch and currently has four K-8 buildings and a high school. One traditional middle

school from a neighboring district with similar demographics (See Appendix C) was also included in order to compare the different configurations. All schools are located in the same county, are within a 10 mile radius of each other, and have student populations that are high minority and have a high percentage of students who receive free or reduced lunch (School Digger, 2015). Schools included in the research continue to struggle making state AYP targets consistently even after the adoption of the K-8 model (PDE, 2012). The total middle school-aged student populations ranged from 1841 and 2076 total students between the 2007- 2008, and 2011-2012 school years. The K-8 schools and traditional middle schools served students who were more than 65% economically disadvantaged between 2008 and 2012 (School Digger, 2015).

## **Rationale**

### **Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level**

Because the adoption of the K-8 model is becoming popular across the United States, it is important to collect data to see if districts that have adopted the K-8 model have data to support that the K-8 model is more beneficial to adolescents than traditional middle schools. This research topic was selected in order to explore how school configuration affects student achievement, number of suspensions, and student truancy rates. There is a need for this study because many school districts, including large urban districts, are trying to figure out which middle school configuration is the most appropriate for their school district. Districts are adopting the K-8 model with the desire to improve student achievement, discipline, and attendance, but they may not have enough appropriate data to make these decisions. The local district included in this study

also made the decision to close its traditional middle school and adopted the K-8 model. The purpose of this study was to determine which configuration was more beneficial for middle school-aged students in a small northeastern school district that is contemplating reopening its traditional middle school. Data from a neighboring district's middle school was used in order to compare the two configurations.

### **Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature**

Large urban school districts such as Cincinnati, Philadelphia, New York, Minneapolis, and Baltimore are transitioning to develop K-8 schools (Armstrong, 2006; Byrnes & Ruby, 2006; Spark, 2010; Weiss & Kipnes, 2006). Prior research has been conducted on the comparison of K-8 schools to traditional middle schools. The National Database of Elemiddle (K-8 schools) and Middle Schools found that students who attended K-8 schools had better attendance rates, fewer discipline referrals, and higher academic achievement than students who attended traditional middle schools (Hough, 2009). In the Philadelphia School District, older K-8 schools performed better than middle schools on the state assessment (Byrnes & Ruby, 2007).

### **Definitions**

*Configuration:* The manner in which things are arranged (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2014) In reference to this study configuration referred to the grade levels that exist in a school (K-8, 1-8, 5-8, or 6-8).

*Elemiddle:* For the purpose of this study elemiddle was a term used to describe schools that service students in grades K-8 or 1-8. Elemiddle is a term used by Hough



(2009) to describe schools that serve students in both elementary and middle school grades.

*Traditional middle schools:* For the purpose of this study, traditional middle schools referred to those schools in which students are placed together in three different configurations- 5-8, grades 6-8, or grades 7-8 (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2014)

### **Significance**

As a result of low student achievement of middle school- aged students, many educators continue to debate which grade configuration, K-8 or the traditional middle school model is most beneficial for students. The focus district included in this study has adopted the K-8 model and closed the doors of its middle school, but continues to struggle to make AYP. Within the past 10 years many large urban districts have adopted the K-8 model in hopes to improve student achievement, discipline, and attendance rates, of middle school aged students (Byrnes & Ruby, 2007). In one district the leadership is exploring the reopening of its traditional middle school. The purpose of this study is to investigate which school configuration promotes greater student achievement, has lower student suspensions, and lower truancy rates and to use the results to aid in the decision-making of the district. Table 1 shows state reading and math state assessment data averages for middle school-aged students of the focus district from its closed middle school, as well as statewide middle school assessment results. The assessment results displayed support the problem and the rationale for the study.

|

Table 1

*Focus District and State Math and Reading Proficiency Averages*

School Year	District Math	State Math	District Reading	State Reading
2001	29.8	51	31.4	60.1
2002	36.4	51.7	29.9	58.8
2003	26.1	51.3	36.0	63.4
2004	29.6	57.9	38.0	68.9

*Note:* Focus School District State assessment data and state assessment results

*Source:* Pennsylvania Department of Education

### **Research Question**

The guiding question for the study is as follows: Which school configuration, K-8 or 6-8, is most beneficial to middle school-aged students for the school district of study?

In past research studies conducted in the Philadelphia school district, scholars have compared the middle school configuration and the K-8 configuration and found that the K-8 model was most beneficial to middle school-aged students (Byrnes & Ruby, 2007; Weiss & Kipnes, 2006). In the local school district in this study, the traditional middle school closed 10 years ago and the data collected can offer insight into which configuration is most beneficial to the students in the school district and if opening a traditional middle school should be considered. The research questions for this quantitative study follow:

**Research Question 1:** Is there a relationship between reading and math achievement of middle school- aged students and school configuration?

**Research Question 2:** Is there a relationship between student suspensions of middle school aged students and school configuration?

**Research Question 3:** Is there a relationship between student truancy rates of middle school aged students and school configuration?

The null hypothesis for the study is there is no relationship between school configuration and student outcomes.

$H_01$ : There is no relationship between math and reading achievement of middle school- aged students and school configuration..

$H_11$ : There is no relationship between the numbers of suspensions of middle school- aged students and school configuration.

$H_21$ : There is no relationship between truancy rates of middle school- aged students and school configuration.

### **Review of the Literature**

For this research study I used the Walden University Library resources. Research terms included, but were not limited to, *middle school student achievement*, *school configuration*, *traditional middle schools*, and *K-8 schools*. The databases used to find scholarly articles were ERIC, Education Research Complete, SAGE Premier, and ProQuest Central. My search parameters were articles within the past five years and peer-reviewed articles and publications. Once current studies and scholarly articles were found, sources from reference lists provided other related peer-reviewed articles that were related to the study. I also collected information and data from district and state department of education websites. These resources provided pertinent information related to the research study.

## **The Emergence of Middle Schools**

Education has evolved from the one room schoolhouse in the 1800s to the current education system, which has many different variations to school configuration. During the 1950s and 1960s the prominent grade spans were K-6, 7-9, and 10-12 (Dove, Pearson, & Hooper, 2010). The emergence of middle schools in the 1960s was considered to be a milestone in education, which played a role in recognizing that the needs of adolescents were different than their elementary counterparts. The developmental changes of students required educators to take an approach that focused on the social and emotional development of adolescents, which impacted cognitive development (Armstrong, 2006). Alexander (1963) discussed the difficulty of adolescents in finding their way in elementary schools whose practices were geared more towards younger students, or junior high schools whose practices mirrored high schools. The middle school movement caused an increase in the number of middle schools in existence and a decrease in the number of K-8 and junior high schools in existence (Meyer, 2011).

The theoretical framework related to this study is Erik Erikson's psychosocial stages of development. Erikson's theory focused on the roles of individuals and society and the different conflicts that are faced over a person's life span (McLeod, 2008). The conflict that is faced during the adolescent years is ego identity vs. role confusion. In this stage children begin to think about their roles in society and may face an identity crisis. This in conjunction with developmental changes that adolescents experience defines the separate needs of middle school- aged students.

The conceptual framework addressed in this study was of middle schools and their set of educational philosophies and pedagogical goals that are different from primary and secondary schools. Styron (2008) claimed that the purpose of the middle school is to provide a smooth transition from elementary school into middle school and to provide programming that is more suitable for adolescents. Dickinson (2001) stated that the developers of the middle school concept identified the function of middle schools, which is to address the developmental needs of the students who are transitioning and have a set of needs that are different from elementary or high school students. In order for middle schools to be successful, middle schools must address the cognitive, emotional, and physical developmental needs of students including intellectual, social, emotional, and physical aspects across the school community (Dickinson, 2001). Armstrong (2006) listed developmentally appropriate practices that aid in the success of middle schools. Some of these practices include providing a safe school environment, establishing small learning communities, establishing personal adult relationships, and creating engaged learning experiences, all of which support positive and effective learning environment for students (Armstrong, 2006). Styron stated that school environment, collaboration, interdisciplinary teams, scheduling, and professional development are keys to having a successful middle school. When staff work together to provide an environment that is conducive to learning, planning instruction, and have a shared vision student outcomes are more likely to be positive.

## **Looking at the Data and Research**

According to Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) student achievement of U.S. students is significantly lower than the student achievement of other countries (George, 2011). The results of these studies prompted U.S. legislators to look deeper into how students were being educated in schools. NCLB legislation was created in an attempt to influence teaching and learning so that 100% of U.S. students achieved at proficient levels in math and reading. This meant that schools and districts had to delve deeper into their state achievement data in order to make data-informed decisions about effective teaching practices. Middle school-aged students who attended urban schools achieved significantly lower than their elementary counterparts. Once researchers looked even deeper they discovered that there was a difference in achievement of middle school-aged students that attended K-8 schools and those who attended traditional middle schools. These data have prompted many large urban districts to adopt the K-8 model in hopes to improve student achievement of middle school-aged students (Hough, 2011).

School districts across the U.S. are making the decision to abandon the traditional middle school model and are educating middle school-aged students in K-8 schools. Cincinnati, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Minneapolis, Memphis, and Baltimore are a few of the larger school districts that are reconfiguring to adopt the K-8 model in some of their schools (Armstrong, 2006). In a large Pennsylvania school district, many K-5 elementary schools and some of traditional middle schools have transitioned into K-8 schools. Smaller urban fringe districts just outside of Philadelphia have also adopted the K-8

model and closed their middle schools. These decisions have caused educational researchers to investigate the differences in school climate and student achievement in traditional middle schools and K-8 schools in order to determine which grade configuration best supports the social- emotional and academic needs of adolescent students (Gordon, Peterson, Gdula, & Klingbeil, 2011).

Past scholars that have completed research comparing school configurations found that the K-8 model had a greater impact on student outcomes. The National Database of Elemiddle (K-8 schools) and Middle Schools found that students who attend K-8 schools have better attendance rates, fewer discipline referrals, and higher academic achievement than students who attend traditional middle schools (Hough, 2009). Byrnes and Ruby (2007) and Weiss and Kipnes (2006) explored the concept that student achievement, student discipline, and attendance are impacted by school configuration in urban school districts. Byrnes and Ruby and Weiss and Kipnes compared K-8 and traditional middle schools in a large urban school district and suggested that the K-8 model was the configuration that was best suited for middle school-aged students in attendance rates, student discipline, self- esteem, and achievement. Past research results revealed that school configuration does impact student outcomes in districts with urban populations.

In research on middle schools and K-8 schools, the K-8 model is more beneficial for middle school-aged students in cognitive and social–emotional development. Gordon, Peterson, Gdula, and Klingbeil (2011) found that the K-8 model was more beneficial for adolescent students’ social-emotional needs and achievement. Middle school-aged

students who attend K-8 schools had significantly higher grade point averages and better math and reading achievement scores on standardized assessments. The transition from elementary to middle had a negative impact on students' psychological and social emotional well-being (Gordon et. al, 2011).

School configuration has been the topic of discussion internationally as well. In a qualitative study in Israel, Tubin and Oplatka (2010) examined teacher perspectives about their preferable grade configuration. In 1948 when the state of Israel was established Israeli school configurations were 1-8 elementary schools and 9-12 high schools. In 1968 the Israeli government reformed its education system and adopted 7-9 junior high schools and 7-12 comprehensive schools (Tubin & Oplatka, 2010). In the study, 16 out of 25 teachers were in favor of reverting back to the 1-8 model due to maladaptive behavior, low achievement, low self- esteem, and inadequate teacher- student relationships in the junior high configuration (Tubin & Oplatka, 2010). Other participants in this study felt that reversion to the 1-8 model was a possible solution but not necessary and should take place under certain conditions. These teachers felt that the 1-8 model allowed for building more positive relationships with the students but should also include the implementation of subject specific teachers to promote higher proficiency levels for teachers and students in the content areas. Others felt that the junior high school model should remain with improvements because the maladaptive behaviors of the junior high school students were common for that age group and only temporary. Educators should focus on addressing the issues of educating adolescent students instead of investing in a structural change (Tubin & Oplatka, 2010). Some educators feel that the K-8 model helps to build positive



relationships with students and their families while others felt that middle schools could offer the same by improving the middle school structure and practices.

**School practices.** People that support the traditional middle school feel that the middle school model helps to prepare students for the transition to high school and provides a structure that best supports the social and emotional needs of the students. Armstrong (2006) stated that there is a need for middle schools because they better address the intellectual, social, and emotional needs of adolescents as they experience puberty. Supporters of the middle school model feel that middle schools best address the social and emotional growth of adolescents which is critical to the academic growth of students (Armstrong, 2006). Middle school advocates argue that the reasons for unsuccessful middle schools are related to schools not approaching education for adolescents appropriately (Armstrong, 2006). In a study conducted about instructional practices in middle schools researchers found that most of the educators that were part of the study were knowledgeable of effective student- centered teaching practices, but these practices were not observed during classroom observations (Teague, Anfara, Wilson, Gaines, & Beavers, 2012). Although many traditional middle schools struggle, there are traditional middle schools that are successful due to effective practices that are implemented in the schools.

Supporters of the middle school model feel that effective practices need to be in place in order for middle schools to be successful. Dickinson (2001) wrote that when middle schools do not implement policies and practices appropriately, problems occur within the school. These problems result in lower student achievement, increased

discipline problems, and lower attendance rates (Dickinson, 2001). Erb (2006) also made the claim that there are many traditional middle schools across the country that are not successful because they have not implemented the model effectively. Wormeli (2011) suggested that successful middle schools need to create an atmosphere in which staff understands students' concerns about belonging, empathizes with students, understands the characteristics of adolescent children, focus on the positive, and the school community builds hope for the students. Armstrong (2006) listed developmentally appropriate practices that aid in the success of middle schools. Providing a safe school environment by addressing the root of discipline problems will help students develop into proactive members of society; establishing small learning communities to create a school within a school supports greater student success; establishing personal adult relationships allows student to gain a sense of safety, confidence, and purpose for learning; and creating engaged learning experiences help to promote motivation and get students interested in their own learning (Armstrong, 2006).

Supporters of middle schools argue that the answer to improve traditional middle schools is not to abandon them but to put in place effective reforms. Sustainable middle schools should focus on reform that builds capacity for teachers by improving their knowledge, skill, and disposition, which will in turn positively affect student outcomes (Anfara & Mertens, 2012). Fullan (2007) defines capacity building as “the policy, strategy, or action taken that increases the collective efficacy of a group to improve student learning through new knowledge, enhanced resources, and greater motivation on the part of people working individually and together” (p. 58). In a school effectiveness

study, researchers concluded that school effectiveness was not determined by school population but school practices that were implemented at the middle school level (Ali & Heck, 2012). Middle schools offer greater opportunities for teachers to team and work together as well as create an experience that may ease the transition into high school (Styron & Nyman, 2008). Middle school advocates argue that the middle school model provides greater opportunity for teaming and building small learning communities that will create a support for groups of students.

Some researchers explored differences between high performing and low performing middle schools. Styron and Nyman (2008) conducted a study of middle schools that determined if climate, organizational structures, and instructional practices differed in low- performing and high- performing middle schools. Teacher perceptions about middle school practices, school climate, and school health were collected and revealed that interpersonal relationships and collegial collaboration played a major role in student performance in high- performing schools. In low performing schools, the teachers' perceptions were that organizational structures and principal influence impacted student performance (Styron & Nyman, 2008). Teachers in low-performing schools felt that reasons for low student achievement were due to extrinsic factors and did not site teacher practices as factor, while teachers in high performing schools felt that effective practices impacted student outcomes.

Scholars also explored middle school student performance and success of students attending the K-8 model. Ruppert (2009) conducted a qualitative study in a K-8 school that examined reflections of students and staff members of a middle school team within

the building that adopted and implemented middle school practices. The results revealed, that in order to enhance the middle school experience of adolescents that attend K-8 schools, it is necessary for the schools to implement middle school activities and practices. These practices include teaming, in which a set of teachers are responsible for the same group of students, unified arts classes, intramural sports, curriculum enrichment, and advisory periods. Ruppert (2009) reported that the collaboration, as a result of the teaming, had the greatest impact on the students' experiences because it improved teacher to teacher communication which translated into support for the students and their social emotional needs.

**Student achievement.** School reconfiguration has been a part of school reform in districts across the nation. Many school districts are making the move from middle schools to K-8 as a result of low student achievement in the middle schools (Armstrong, 2006; Erb, 2006). Some educators feel that since middle schools focus on the social and emotional growth of the students it takes away from their academic education. Results from high- stakes testing and accountability are playing major roles in the district reorganization decisions. Districts are changing their grade configurations in an attempt to increase student achievement scores. NCLB legislation in 2002 has an accountability component that influences these changes. If schools fail to make AYP consequences such as state interventions may occur. Many of the nation's middle schools have not seen success on state standardized assessments, and as an attempt to avoid consequences for not making AYP, schools are reconfiguring in hopes that student achievement of middle school-aged students will improve (George, 2011). Making AYP has become the factor

that determines school success. AYP is based on student achievement on state exam as outlined in NCLB legislation (2002). Middle school advocates feel that standardized testing is not a good reason to disband middle schools because middle schools better address the social and emotional needs of adolescent students (Armstrong, 2006). State standardized student achievement has influenced decision about adopting the K-8 model, and student emotional needs have not had as much of an impact of the decisions.

Many studies have been conducted that compared student achievement data of traditional middle schools and K-8 schools and the conclusions differ. The results of a study conducted in 2007 in the Philadelphia School District found that older K-8 schools performed significantly better than their middle school counterparts on the state assessment. The results of this particular study also revealed that middle school-aged students who attended newer K-8 schools did not achieve at higher levels than their middle school counterparts (Byrnes & Ruby, 2007). Dove, Pearson, and Hooper (2010) found that there were no significant differences in student achievement of 6<sup>th</sup> graders who attended middle schools and elementary schools. Weiss and Baker- Smith (2010) researched 9<sup>th</sup> grade students that attended K-8 schools and middle schools and how the students transitioned into high school. Some of the results showed that course failure of 9<sup>th</sup> grade students were greater for those students who attended middle schools as opposed to those who attended K-8 schools (Weiss & Baker- Smith, 2010). Research shows that students attending both K-8 and traditional middle school configurations experienced success and failure once transitioning into high school.

Longitudinal studies conducted by scholars demonstrated the impact of school configuration on student outcomes over time. Schwerdt and West (2011) examined how school configurations impacted achievement outcomes in Florida public schools. The research examined data of students in grades 3 to 10 between the 2000-2001 and 2008-2009 school years. Schwerdt and West found that students in the state of Florida moving from elementary schools into sixth or seventh grade experienced drops in achievement during the transition year. They found that the middle school transition caused greater drops in achievement than the transition from middle school to high school. Data revealed that on standardized test, Florida middle school students had lower achievement than Florida K-8 students. These results suggest that the transitioning into a traditional middle school had a negative impact on student outcomes. A longitudinal study that looked at students that entered grade three between 1998 and 2002 until the students completed eighth grade revealed that students who entered traditional middle schools experienced significant drops in Math and English scores on state standardized assessments, in comparison to middle school-aged students who attended K-8 schools (Rockoff, 2011). The data from the research also indicated that the achievement gap between middle school students and K-8 students widened as the students moved through the middle school grades (Rockoff & Lockwood, 2010). As students move from elementary schools and into traditional middle schools they struggle to see growth in achievement.

Some school districts have experienced success once adopting the K-8 model. Elizabeth School District in New Jersey replaced its six middle schools with K-8 schools.

Between 2005 and 2011 the district saw an increase in student achievement scores in Math and Reading. The district's Perfect Score program went from honoring 12 students in 2005 to honoring 330 students by the end of the 2011 school year for their achievement on the state test. The district had multiple schools recognized by the U.S. Department of Education for being National Blue Ribbon Schools in spite of having three of the schools with 71% of minority students and a large percentage of the students being identified as economically disadvantaged (Tractenberg, 2012). The district's commitments to improving their students' academic experience, community partnerships, reconfiguration, and other factors have influenced academic progress. Although the reconfiguration to K-8 schools is not cited as the sole reason for the district's improvement, it may be a contributing factor of the success.

**Student discipline and social issues.** There are other factors that scholars believe are impacted by school configuration. Behavior is linked to student achievement in such a way that students that exhibit antisocial behaviors are more likely to struggle academically (Gu, Lai, & Le, 2011; Juvonen, Wang, & Espinoza, 2011). Research has shown that there is a relationship between school configuration and student discipline. The shift to middle school is accompanied by greater student independence, greater individuation, and greater influence of pro-social and antisocial behaviors. This shift may also mean less supervision and greater access to drugs and alcohol (Catalano, Oxford, Harachi, Abbott, & Haggerty, 1999). In a study conducted in Chicago, surveys were used to examine which factors influenced and explained problem behavior and which structures and supports were in place for those students that exhibited pro-social

behavior. Results suggested that pro-social activities such as clubs and activities that are meant to promote positive interactions between staff and students, compound most negative behaviors of middle school aged students (Sullivan & Hirschfield, 2011). Arcia (2007) found that adolescents that transitioned to middle schools in grades six or seven had more discipline referrals than their K-8 counterparts. Hough (2009) similarly found that K-8 middle school students had significantly less suspensions than traditional middle school students. Results from studies that researched students entering middle school in 6<sup>th</sup> grade found that 6<sup>th</sup> grade students who attended elementary schools had fewer discipline infractions than 6<sup>th</sup> graders who attended middle schools, and sixth grade students who attended middle schools were more likely to be disciplined for drug violations (Cook, MacCoun, Muschkin, & Vigdor, 2008; Laitsch, 2007).

Scholars have found that configuration also impacts student self-esteem and social-emotional well-being. In the study conducted by Weiss and Kipnes (2006) student outcomes of eighth grade students who attended K-8 and traditional middle schools were compared in which few differences were found except in the areas of self-esteem and perceived threat. In a similar study conducted by Gunter and Bakken (2010) differences in behavior, suicidal thoughts, violence, and substance abuse between sixth graders who attended K-8 schools and traditional middle schools were investigated. The results found that there were no significant differences in violence or substance use of sixth graders who attended middle schools and those who attended elementary schools, but there were differences in suicidal thoughts based on grade configuration. Sixth grade graders who attended elementary schools reported that they were more likely to engage in self-



injurious behavior or have suicidal thoughts than their sixth grade counterparts who attended middle schools (Gunter & Bakken, 2010). A study conducted in rural school communities that compared sixth graders that experienced a transition and sixth grade students that did not, revealed that students that experienced a transition were less likely to experience bullying than those students who did not experience a transition (Farmer, Hamm, Leung, Lambert, & Gravelle, 2011).

**Attendance.** Research has also shown that there is a difference in student attendance in the different school configurations. According to Fink (2010), middle school-aged students who attended K-8 schools had higher attendance rates than their counterparts who attended middle schools. Gottfried (2010) researched the relationship of student attendance to academic achievement. The results revealed that elementary school students' attendance rates were higher than that of middle school students (Gottfried, 2010). Another study revealed that entrance into traditional middle schools increased student absences and were connected to higher dropout rates in tenth grade (Schwerdt & West, 2011; West, Schwerdt, & Riddell, 2012). Rockoff and Lockwood (2010) also found that student absence rates were also higher in traditional middle schools than in K-8 schools.

**School size.** Another reason that districts are supporting the K-8 model is because in a traditional middle school the student population size is larger than that of an elementary school. Traditional middle schools tend to have much larger student populations which can affect how much personal attention students receive from teachers (Weiss & Kipnes, 2006). Weiss and Kipnes (2006) have also mentioned school size as

being one of the possible advantages that K-8 schools have over traditional middle schools. In the 2007 study conducted by Byrnes and Ruby it was reported that traditional middle schools have larger student populations in each grade level which makes it harder to give more direct attention to individual students which may affect how the student does academically and behaviorally (Byrnes & Ruby, 2007). It is suggested that smaller school size allows educators to implement best practices more effectively and support a larger percentage of struggling students which in turn may translate to better achievement K-8 schools (Hough, 2005).

**Transitions.** Duchesne, Ratelle, and Roy (2012) identified worries that are related to the transition into middle school. These worries are related to worries about academics, worries about teachers, and worries about peers. These worries can be addressed by having the right teachers that impact whether or not the student will become well-adjusted (Duchesne et. al., 2012). Supporters of the K-8 model believe that the grade configuration fosters positive relationships more so than middle schools because students have already established relationships with the elementary teachers in the school that they attend. This reduces the anxiety of the transition into the middle years. Based on the results of past research conducted by Weiss and Kipnes (2006), it is suggested that school transition and school size also affects student achievement and social differences in middle school- aged students who attend K-8 schools and traditional middle schools. Moving from an elementary school to a middle school creates an extra transition that is not present in a K-8 school. Schwartz, Rubenstein, and Zabel (2011) presented evidence on how the number of transitions and timing of transitions can affect student

achievement. The report revealed that students that transition to schools with higher grade spans experience more difficulty than students who attend schools that include lower grade spans (Schwartz et. al., 2011). The results of a study conducted by Jeffrey Grigg suggest that transition to a new school does impact student achievement and social factors negatively (Grigg, 2012). According to Weiss and Kipnes (2006) a student's social and emotional state can affect the student's performance in school. A study of New York schools revealed that students who transition into middle school experience a greater decline of achievement in language arts and math than their K-8 counterparts (Spark, 2010). Researchers claim that the transition reduces self- esteem because students go from being the oldest in the building to becoming the youngest in the building (Byrnes & Ruby, 2007).

**Student and staff demographics.** The majority of the studies reviewed for this project included schools that serve high minority and high poverty student populations that reveal that middle school students who attend K-8 schools outperform middle school students who attend traditional middle schools (Byrnes & Ruby, 2007; Fink, 2010, Hough, 2009). Byrnes and Ruby (2007) identify student demographics, such as socioeconomic status and minority populations, as aiding in the external factors that impact student achievement in both models. State exams reveal that schools with a higher percent of low socioeconomic students have lower achievement in math and reading than schools with lower percentages of low socioeconomic students (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2012). Byrnes and Ruby (2007) suggested that urban middle

schools tend to have a higher rate of low socio- economic and minority students which has shown to impact student achievement.

Teacher population also creates a difference in K-8 and traditional middle schools. Balfanz, Spiridakis, and Neild (2002) stated that years of experience, teacher certification, retention rates, and student- teacher ratios are some of the differences cited between K-8 and middle schools that seem to affect student achievement. Research conducted by Jackson and Davis (2000) implies that since most teacher training programs are geared more towards teaching elementary or high school students, there are lower retention rates at the middle school level which may have a direct impact on teacher practices and in turn impacts student achievement. In 2009 there were fewer than 20 states that required teachers to be highly qualified in middle school which means that most teachers were either elementary certified or secondary certified (Neild, Farley-Ripple, & Byrnes, 2009). In a 2008 study in which teacher perceptions on working conditions in both K-8 and traditional middle schools teachers in both configurations reported positive perceptions in the areas of effective leadership, teacher empowerment, quality facilities, and resources and negative perceptions in the area of available time for planning and professional development. In addition middle school teachers reported negative perceptions in professional development while K-8 teachers had positive perceptions about professional development (Cooper, 2008).

**Parent input.** Parents are also making their voices heard in the debate over the K-8 and middle school configuration. In an Arizona school district a group that included parents petitioned the school board to expand their K-5 school to a K-8 school. Parents

expressed their concerns about safety and other issues in sending their children to the middle school that housed 6-8 grade students (Bloom, 2008). Parents in New York were very supportive of the decision to transition to the K-8 model. Parents felt that the K-8 model offered a nurturing and safe environment for students as they transitioned into the middle years (Meyer, 2011). Also, middle schools tend to have less parent involvement than that of the elementary counterparts (Weiss & Kipnes, 2006). Parents have demonstrated a preference of the K-8 because they feel their children are safer in a K-8 school.

In a study in which K-8 and middle school principals' perceptions about school-family relationships were recorded, it was found that elementary principals perceived to have more parental involvement than middle school principal perceptions. In addition middle school principals reported that their teachers engaged in ineffective school-family communications than that of the elementary principals (Flynn & Nolan, 2008). These results demonstrated that among principals, there is a perceived relationship between parental involvement and school configurations. A study survey was also a part of the study and the New York City parents whose children attended K-8 schools rated their schools higher in quality of education and school safety than the parents of students who attended traditional middle schools (Rockoff & Lockwood, 2010).

### **Implications**

The implications from this study should aid stakeholders in making configuration school reform decisions. In districts where middle schools exist, this study should assist school stakeholders to seek out effective practices that are beneficial to the middle school

model as well as ways to better prepare students for the transition. Schools can also develop Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) and Truancy Elimination plans to address the issues of negative student behaviors and attendance issues. This study should give some insight into the conflict concerning grade configurations and how grade spans matter in regards to achievement, attendance, and discipline.

### **Summary**

Many school districts that once had active middle schools have made the decision to restructure their district schools to have K-8 schools and close the middle schools. The transitions came about as part of district reform and the desire to improve student achievement on state assessments. Much research has been conducted to determine which grade configuration is most beneficial for middle school- aged students. The focus district for this study is one of the many districts across the country that made the decision to close its middle school and adopt the K-8 model and now this district is considering reopening its middle school. For this study student math and reading achievement, student suspensions, and truancy rates were explored in both the K-8 school configuration as well as the traditional middle school model in order to determine which configuration is most beneficial for middle school–aged students. A quantitative study was conducted that compared middle school data of K-8 middle school-aged students of the focus district and a neighboring local district’s traditional middle school between 2008 and 2012. I looked to find if achievement, number of suspensions, and truancy rates were impacted by school configuration, and if so were the differences significant. This

study should assist in the debate of whether or not the K-8 model is more beneficial for middle school-aged students than a traditional middle school.

## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Introduction**

The results of the research and studies reviewed were helpful to this study. Weiss and Kipnes' (2006) and Byrnes and Ruby's (2007) studies, along with concepts related to middle school education, were helpful because both studies took place in a northeastern school district with a high percentage of low socioeconomic students and other demographics similar to the focus district. Northeastern K-8 schools and traditional middle schools with similar socioeconomic demographics were the focus of this study. The northeastern district used in the reviewed studies is one of the largest in the country that includes both K-8 and traditional middle schools, which allowed for comparisons within both grade configurations. The newer K-8 schools have now been in existence for an additional 5 years since the Byrnes and Ruby study was conducted in 2007. Conducting this study offers some valuable data when comparing the newer K-8 schools to the data from the middle schools that were in existence, as well as the traditional middle schools that still exist since it has been five years since the Byrnes and Ruby study was completed.

### **Research Design and Approach**

In this quantitative study, I examined student achievement, number of suspensions, and truancy rates of middle school- aged students who attended traditional middle schools and K-8 schools. Current and archived student achievement data from the 2007-2008 to the 2011-2012 school years from four K-8 schools in the focus district, which are in a small urban fringe district, were collected, analyzed, and compared to data



from a neighboring district's traditional middle school. Student suspension data and truancy rates of middle school-aged students between 2008 and 2012 from the focus district's four K-8 schools were compared to student suspensions of the neighboring district's traditional middle school. Both districts have similar student populations and demographics in terms of socio-economic status and minority populations. (See Appendix C)

This study was a correlational quantitative research design in which student achievement data, number of suspensions, and truancy rates of middle school-aged students who attended K-8 schools and traditional middle schools were collected using quantitative methods. A correlational research study is used to explore the relationship between two or more variables (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtler, 2006). The variables that were explored were school configuration (independent variable) and student math and reading achievement, student suspensions, and student trancies (dependent variables). School configurations included two groups, students who attended a traditional middle school, grades 6-8, and those who attended K-8 schools. Quantitative methods are more appropriate than qualitative methods because numerical data were collected for this study. A qualitative research design was not selected as interviews or observations were not used in the study, which is characteristic of a qualitative research. I examined if school configuration (K-8 or traditional middle schools; independent variables) indicated a relationship to student achievement, number of suspensions, and truancy rates of middle school students (dependent variables). These variables are difficult to manipulate because the data are collected and archived, which makes this research design appropriate for the

study (Lodico et al., 2006). Student data from four K-8 schools and a traditional middle school were analyzed. Chi-squared tests were used to analyze and compare the data of middle school-aged students who attended K-8 schools and middle-school-aged students who attended traditional middle schools. Chi-squared analyses tests for a relationship between two variables (proficient, not proficient; suspended, not suspended; truant and not truant). Chi-squared tests can be used with nominal or ordinal values (Green & Salkind, 2011). Since my study uses nominal variables chi-squared tests are most appropriate.

State assessment data, suspensions, and truancy data were analyzed from four K-8 schools and one traditional middle school. The achievement data, suspension data, and truancy data were obtained from public state websites and district personnel from the focus district. These sources provided the necessary information needed to conduct the study.

### **Setting and Sample**

In this study I examined student data from a traditional middle (6-8) and K-8 schools. Current and archived student data from four K-8 buildings and one traditional middle school were collected, analyzed, and compared. The schools that were a part of this study are all located in the Northeast region of the United States. The focus district has four K-8 schools that are a part of the study and are located in a small northeastern school district. School District B has an existing middle school and is located in another small district that borders the focus district. According to School Digger (2011) the existing K-8 and traditional middle school had 65% or more of the students who received

free or reduced lunch and were considered to be economically disadvantaged. The total middle school student school populations ranged from 816 to 1173 total students from the 2008-2012 school years. Each school has a minority population of 67% or greater. (See Appendix C)

### **Instrumentation and Materials**

Archived and current state assessment data, number of suspensions, and truancy rates were analyzed from the K-8 schools and the traditional middle school. Districts' websites, Pennsylvania Department of Education websites, and the School Digger website were viewed in order to obtain student achievement, suspension, truancy, and demographic data.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Student achievement, number of suspensions, and truancy rates from K-8 and the traditional middle school were collected and analyzed. Chi-squared tests were conducted using SPSS and were used to analyze and compare student achievement data from state assessments, number of suspensions, truancy rates of middle school-aged students who attended K-8 schools and middle-school-aged students who attended traditional middle schools. Achievement data were collected and analyzed from the 2007-2008 to the 2011-2012 school years for the K-8 and middle schools that are still in existence. Number of suspensions and truancy rates from the 2007-2008 to the 2011-2012 school years from the K-8 schools were compared to the number of suspensions and truancy rates of the traditional middle school from the same school years. Because the two different groups of students (middle school students attending the K-8 configuration and middle school

students attending the traditional middle school configuration) were compared using two variables for each dependent variable, chi-squared tests were used to analyze the data. Chi-squared tests are used to demonstrate if there is a relationship between two variables (Green & Salkind, 2011). Student math and reading achievement data, student suspensions, and student trancies were retrieved from the state department of education website for each of the five school years used in the analysis. Different nominal values were assigned to the independent variables (elemiddle and middle) in order to differentiate between the two groups when conducting the chi-squared tests. Two different nominal values were given to the dependent values before running the analysis (e.g. proficient/ not proficient, suspended/ not suspended, truant/ not truant). For each school year, elemiddle and middle school student nominal values were entered into the SPSS spreadsheet and assigned a nominal value for the dependent variables (proficient/ not proficient, suspended/ not suspended, truant/ not truant). The chi-squared analyses were then conducted to determine the relationship between school configuration and student math and reading achievement, student suspensions, and student trancies.

### **Assumptions, Limitations, Scope and Delimitations**

It has been 10 or more years since the district in this study have closed its middle school and adopted the K-8 model. This has allowed more data to be collected and compared to see if any differences in achievement, number of suspensions, and truancy exist between the K-8 and middle school configuration. Because I analyzed data, identifying which practices or systems that each model had in place that positively impacted achievement, number of suspensions, and truancy rates, observations or

experimental research was not a part of this study. Although past studies have done so, student, parent, and teacher perceptions, and experiences were not collected, which may have offered insight into which configuration is preferred. Another limitation to this study was that lack of resources, both human and financial. This may have had an impact on student outcomes. Limitations to this study were teacher quality, teacher experience, student transiency, and school climate. These are factors that have a direct impact on student outcomes, but were not used as a part of the research study. Based on these limitations, future studies conducted can include observations, interviews, and experimental research to offer more information about transitions, teacher effectiveness, and effective practices to support student achievement and success of middle school-aged students.

### **Protection of Participants**

In an effort to protect the anonymity of the schools and students, school names or student names were not used when results were reported. For this study, archived data were collected and analyzed, and no experimentation took place which did not require the researcher to interact with the subjects of the study.

### **Quantitative Results**

After the achievement, suspension, and truancy data from K-8 schools and the traditional middle school were collected, chi-squared tests were used to analyze and compare the data from the two configurations. Chi-squared tests were used because independent variables (configuration, middle school-aged students who attended K-8 configuration versus middle school-aged students who attended the traditional middle

school configuration) were used to compare two nominal values of the dependent variables (proficient/ not proficient, suspended/ not suspended, and truant/ not truant ) for both configurations. Reading and math achievement, suspension data, and truancy data were analyzed to compare elemiddle (K-8) to the traditional middle school of the neighboring district used in the research. The Bonferonni Adjustment was utilized because multiple tests were run for each dependent variable. In order to determine significance,  $p$  scores are compared to  $\alpha$  value of .05. When multiple tests are run, a corrected significance must be used to minimize the risk of error. When the Bonferroni Adjustment is used .05 is divided by the number of tests run. Since separate tests were run for each of the five school years .05 was divided by 5. The corrected  $\alpha$  value is  $.05/5 = .01$ . If  $p$  values were less .01, this meant that there was a statistically significant difference between school configuration and student achievement, number of suspensions, and student trancies. Due to differences in middle school student enrollment numbers of the two configurations, averages in proficiency, suspensions, and trancies were considered (See appendix B).

### **Student Achievement**

Achievement data from the state math and reading assessments were collected for the focus district's elemiddle schools and the neighboring district's traditional middle school. Data were retrieved from the state department of education website and were used in school math and reading achievement analysis. Table 2 shows the results of the chi-squared test conducted to analyze K-8 schools and the middle school math achievement of the two configurations with nominal variables of students being 'proficient' and 'not

proficient'. The table shows the number of middle school-aged students who attended the elemiddle configuration and those who attended the traditional middle school configuration for each school year, who were proficient and those who were not proficient on the state math assessment. The  $N$  value is the total number of middle school-aged students attending both configurations in the given year. The Pearson chi-squared value is represented by the number in the  $\chi^2$  column on the table. The statistical significance between the elemiddle and the middle school configuration is the  $p$  value. A  $p$  value of  $< .01$  shows that there is a statistically significant difference in math achievement between the elemiddle and the traditional middle school configurations.

Table 2

*Results of Chi-Squared test for 5 Year Math Assessments of Middle School-aged Students*

School Year		Elemiddle	Middle	<i>N</i>	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
2008	Proficient	452	543	2076	1.42	1	.234
	Not Prof	463	618				
2009	Proficient	505	572	2016	19.85	1	.000
	Not Prof	348	591				
2010	Proficient	539	588	2004	42.90	1	.000
	Not Prof	292	585				
2011	Proficient	554	613	1888	22.51	1	.000
	Not Prof	262	459				
2012	Proficient	549	585	1851	6.70	1	.010
	Not Prof	303	414				

$\alpha=.01$

$p<.01$ , 3 out of 5 years

*Note:* 2008-2012 school year K-8 and traditional middle school state math assessment proficiency categories

*Source:* Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Table 2 shows the results of a chi-squared test that was conducted to analyze five year proficiency values of math achievement scores on the state exams of middle school-aged students who attended K-8 school configuration and middle school students who attended a traditional middle school. Math proficiency values for elemiddle and traditional middle school achievement data between 2008 and 2012 schools years were used in the analysis. In each of the five school years used in the data analysis, middle



school students who attended the elemiddle configuration had higher math proficiency percentages than those who attended the traditional middle school (See Appendix B). The results show that there was a relationship between student math proficiency values 3 out of 5 years (2009, 2010, and 2011); 2008,  $\chi^2(1, N=2076) = 1.42, p=.234$ ; 2009,  $\chi^2(1, N=2016) = 19.85, p=.000$ ; 2010,  $\chi^2(1, N=2004) = 42.90, p=.000$ ; 2011,  $\chi^2(1, N=1888) = 22.51, p=.000$ ; 2012,  $\chi^2(1, N=1851) = 6.70, p=.010$ . These results show that there was a statistically significant difference in math proficiency levels of middle school-aged who attended the K-8 configuration and middle school-aged students who attended the traditional middle school configuration in 2009, 2010, and 2011. The elemiddle configuration proficient percentages were higher than the proficiency percentages of the traditional middle school population (See Appendix B) which means a significantly greater percentage of middle school-aged students who attended the K-8 configuration were proficient on the state math assessment compared to middle school students who attended the traditional middle school, suggesting that the elemiddle configuration is most beneficial to students in regards to math achievement.

Table 3 shows the results of the chi-squared test conducted to analyze K-8 schools and the middle school reading achievement of the two configurations with nominal variables of students being 'proficient' and 'not proficient'. The table shows the number of middle school-aged students who attended the elemiddle configuration and those who attended the traditional middle school configuration for each school year, who were proficient and those who were not proficient and the state reading assessment. The  $N$  value is the total number of middle school-aged students attending both configurations in

the given year. The Pearson chi-squared value is represented by the number in the  $\chi^2$  column on the table. The statistical significance between the elemiddle and the middle school configuration is the  $p$  value. A  $p$  value of  $< .01$  shows that there is a statistically significant difference in reading achievement between the elemiddle and the traditional middle school configurations.

Table 3

*Results of Chi-Squared test for 5 Year Reading Assessments of Middle School-aged Students*

School Year		Elemiddle	Middle	$N$	$\chi^2$	$df$	$p$
2008	Proficient	466	616	2074	.92	1	.338
	Not Prof	448	544				
2009	Proficient	507	586	2014	15.92	1	.000
	Not Prof	346	575				
2010	Proficient	539	640	2053	15.81	1	.000
	Not Prof	323	551				
2011	Proficient	511	613	1891	6.03	1	.014
	Not Prof	305	462				
2012	Proficient	496	554	1841	1.36	1	.243
	Not Prof	352	439				

$\alpha=.01$

$p > .01$ , 3 out of 5 years

*Note:* 2008-2012 school year K-8 and traditional middle school state reading assessment proficiency categories

*Source:* Pennsylvania Department of Education

Table 3 shows the results of a chi-squared test that was conducted to analyze five year proficiency values of reading achievement scores on the state exams of middle school-aged students who attended a K-8 school configuration and middle school students who attended a traditional middle school. Reading proficiency values for elemiddle and traditional middle school achievement data between 2008 and 2012 schools years were used in the comparison. In each of the five school years used in the data analysis, middle school students who attended the elemiddle configuration had higher reading proficiency percentages than those who attended the traditional middle school, with the exception of 2008, in which the middle school configuration had higher reading proficiency percentages (See Appendix B). The results show that there was a relationship between student reading proficiency values 2 out of 5 years; 2008,  $\chi^2(1, N=2074) = .92, p=.338$ ; 2009,  $\chi^2(1, N=2014) = 15.92, p=.000$ ; 2010,  $\chi^2(1, N=2053) = 15.81, p=.000$ ; 2011,  $\chi^2(1, N=1891) = 6.03, p=.014$ ; 2012,  $\chi^2(1, N=1841) = 1.36, p=.243$ . These results show that there was not a statistically significant difference in reading proficiency levels of middle school-aged who attended the K-8 configuration and middle school-aged students who attended the traditional middle school configuration in 2008, 2011, and 2014. The elemiddle configuration proficient percentages were statistically higher than the proficiency percentages of the traditional middle school population (See Appendix B) 2 out of 5 years, which means a significantly higher percentage of middle school-aged students who attended the K-8 configuration were proficient on the state reading assessment compared to middle school students who

attended the traditional middle school, suggesting that there is no relationship between school configuration and reading achievement of middle school aged students.

### **Discipline**

Student suspension data were collected for the four K-8 schools and the traditional middle school. The focus district's data were retrieved from school district personnel and from the state's safe schools website and was used in the analysis. Traditional middle school data were retrieved from the safe schools website and used in the analysis. Table 4 shows chi-squared test results conducted that analyzed the number of student suspensions from four K-8 schools and a traditional middle school with nominal variables of students 'suspended' and students 'not suspended'. The table shows the number of middle school-aged students who attended the elemiddle configuration and those who attended the traditional middle school configuration for each school year, who were suspended and those who were not suspended based on data received from annual Safe School's reports. The  $N$  value is the total number of middle school-aged students attending both configurations in the given year. The Pearson chi-squared value is represented by the number in the  $\chi^2$  column on the table. The statistical significance between the elemiddle and the middle school configuration is the  $p$  value. A  $p$  value of  $< .01$  shows that there is a statistically significant difference in student suspensions between the elemiddle and the traditional middle school configurations.

Table 4

*Results of Chi-Squared test for Student Suspensions from 2008-2012*

School Year		Elemiddle	Middle	N	$\chi^2$	df	p
2008	Suspended	114	159	2076	.69	1	.408
	Not Susp	801	1002				
2009	Suspended	208	129	2016	62.45	1	.000
	Not Susp	645	1034				
2010	Suspended	224	115	2053	96.74	1	.000
	Not Susp	638	1076				
2011	Suspended	242	76	1891	169.18	1	.000
	Not Susp	574	999				
2012	Suspended	258	94	1851	130.08	1	.000
	Not Susp	594	905				

$\alpha=.01$

$p < .01$ , 4 out of 5 years

*Note:* 2008-2012 school year K-8 and traditional middle school student suspensions

*Source:* Pennsylvania Department of Education

Table 4 shows the results of a chi-squared test that was conducted to analyze five years of student suspensions of middle school-aged students who attended a K-8 school configuration and middle school students who attended a traditional middle school in a neighboring district. Student suspensions for elemiddle and the traditional middle school between 2008 and 2012 schools years were used in the analysis. In each of the five school years used in the data analysis, middle school students who attended the elemiddle configuration had higher suspension percentages than those who attended the traditional

middle school configuration (See Appendix B). The results show that there was a relationship between student suspensions and school configuration 4 out of 5 of the years analyzed (2009, 2010, 2011, 2012); 2008,  $\chi^2(1, N=2076) = .69, p=.408$ ; 2009,  $\chi^2(1, N=2016) = 62.45, p=.000$ ; 2010,  $\chi^2(1, N=2053) = 96.74, p=.000$ ; 2011,  $\chi^2(1, N=1891) = 169.81, p=.000$ ; 2012,  $\chi^2(1, N=1851) = 130.08, p=.000$ . The elemiddle configuration suspension percentages were higher than the suspension percentages of the traditional middle school population (See Appendix B) which means a significantly higher percentage of middle school-aged students who attended the K-8 configuration were suspended in comparison to middle school students who attended the traditional middle school, suggesting that the traditional middle configuration is most beneficial to students in regards to number of suspensions.

### **Attendance**

Truancy data were collected for the four elemiddle schools and the traditional middle school. The focus district's data were retrieved from school district personnel and from the safe schools website and were used in the analysis. Traditional middle school data were retrieved from the safe schools website and utilized in the analysis. Table 5 shows chi-squared test results conducted that compared the number of truant students from four K-8 schools and a traditional middle school from a neighboring district with nominal variables of students 'truant' and students 'not truant'. The table shows the number of middle school-aged students who attended the elemiddle configuration and those who attended the traditional middle school configuration for each school year, who were truant and those who were not truant, based on data retrieved from annual Safe

School's reports. The  $N$  value is the total number of middle school-aged students attending both configurations in the given year. The Pearson chi-squared value is represented by the number in the  $\chi^2$  column on the table. The statistical significance between the elemiddle and the middle school configuration is the  $p$  value. A  $p$  value of  $< .01$  shows that there is a statistically significant difference in student truancy between the elemiddle and the traditional middle school configurations.

Table 5

*Results of Chi-Squared test for Student Truancies from 2008-2012*

School Year		Elemiddle	Middle	$N$	$\chi^2$	$df$	$p$
2008	Truant	111	65	2076	28.14	1	.000
	Not Truant	804	1096				
2009	Truant	70	299	2016	100.82	1	.000
	Not Truant	783	864				
2010	Truant	18	193	2053	108.07	1	.000
	Not Truant	844	998				
2011	Truant	72	0	1891	98.61	1	.000
	Not Truant	744	1075				
2012	Truant	22	336	1851	284.21	1	.000
	Not Truant	830	663				

---

 $\alpha = .01$ 
 $p < .01$ , 5 out of 5 years

*Note:* 2008-2012 school year K-8 and traditional middle school student truancies

*Source:* Pennsylvania Department of Education

Table 5 shows the results of a chi-squared test that was conducted to analyze five years of student truancy of middle school-aged students who attended a K-8 school configuration and middle school students who attended a traditional middle school in a neighboring district. Student truancy for elemiddle and the traditional middle school between 2008 and 2012 school years were used in the analysis. In 4 out of the 5 school years used in the data analysis, middle school students who attended the traditional middle school configuration had higher truancy percentages than those who attended the traditional middle school (See Appendix B). In 2011 the middle school configuration had less truancy than the elemiddle configuration. The results show that there was a relationship between student truancy and school configuration each of the five years; 2008,  $\chi^2(1, N=2076) = 28.14, p=.000$ ; 2009,  $\chi^2(1, N=2016) = 100.82, p=.000$ ; 2010,  $\chi^2(1, N=2053) = 108.07, p=.000$ ; 2011,  $\chi^2(1, N=1891) = 98.61, p=.000$ ; 2012,  $\chi^2(1, N=1851) = 284.21, p=.000$ . These results show that there was a statistically significant difference in student truancy of middle school-aged students who attended the K-8 configuration and middle school-aged students who attended the traditional middle school configuration. The middle school configuration truancy percentages were higher than the truancy percentages of the traditional middle school population, with the exception of 2011 school year (See Appendix B), which means a significantly higher percentage of middle school-aged students who attended the traditional middle school configuration were truant in comparison to middle school-aged students who attended the elemiddle school configuration during 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2012 school years



suggesting that the elemiddle configuration is most beneficial to students in regards to attendance.

### **Conclusion**

The study was conducted in order to explore the relationship between school configuration and student achievement, number of suspensions, and truancy rates of middle school-aged students. The focus district's four K-8 schools and the neighboring district's traditional middle school were used in the study. District administrators from the focus district for this study have had discussions about considering the reopening of a traditional middle school that will educate students in grades 6-8 in order to address needs of this student group. The neighboring district's middle school was used because it does have an active traditional middle school with demographics similar to the focus district. It was important to compare active schools and to use same year data because students were administered the same state assessments and were subject to the same reporting guidelines for student discipline and attendance.

Chi-squared tests were used to determine if there was a relationship between school configuration (independent variable) and math and reading achievement, student suspensions, and student truancy (dependent variables) during the 2018-2012 school years. Five chi-squared tests were run for each variable in order to minimize possible result errors that may have resulted from having large sample sizes. The Bonferonni Adjustment was utilized because multiple tests were run for each dependent variable. In order to determine significance  $p$  scores are compared to  $\alpha$  value of .05. When multiple tests are run, a corrected significance must be used to minimize the risk of error. When

the Bonferroni Adjustment is used .05 is divided by the number of tests run. Since a separate tests were run for each of the five school years .05 was divided by 5. The corrected  $\alpha$  value is  $.05/5 = .01$ . If  $p$  values were less than .01, this meant that there was a statistically significant difference between school configuration and student achievement, number of suspensions, and student truanancies. Due to differences in student enrollment of the two configurations, percentages had to be viewed for each dependent variable (See appendix B).

The results of the chi- squared tests used to test the relationship between student math achievement and school configuration revealed that there was a relationship between school configuration and student math achievement 3 out of 5 of the years, with significantly higher percentages of students attending the elemiddle configuration being proficient on the math assessment. This showed that there was a statistically significant difference between elemiddle and traditional middle school configurations in regards to student math achievement.

When analyzing reading assessment results the chi-squared test revealed that there was a relationship between school configuration and reading achievement 2 out of 5 years, with a higher percentage of students in the elemiddle configuration scoring proficient in the two years. This showed that there was not a statistically significant difference between the elemiddle and traditional middle school configurations in regards to reading achievement because 3 out of the 5 years because the alpha value was .01 or greater.

Chi-squared tests results revealed that there was a relationship between school configuration and number of suspensions 4 out of 5 years. This showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the elemiddle and traditional middle school configurations, with a fewer percentage of students attending the traditional middle school configuration being suspended than students who attended the elemiddle configuration.

Chi-squared tests results revealed that there was a relationship between school and configuration and number of truant students 5 out of 5 years. The traditional middle school configuration had higher truancy rates than the elemiddle configuration 4 out of 5 years, and the elemiddle school had higher truancy rates 1 out of the 5 years. This showed that there was a statistically significant difference between school configuration and student truancy, with a fewer percentage of students attending the elemiddle configuration being truant than students who attended the traditional middle school configuration.

Chi-squared tests results suggest that middle school-aged students who attended the K-8 configuration performed better on state math assessments and had fewer students who were truant. Results from the chi-squared test that analyzed the relationship between school configuration and student suspensions, suggest that middle school-aged students who attended the traditional middle school were suspended less than middle school-aged students who attended the K-8 configuration. When analyzing reading assessments using chi-squared tests there was not a statistically significant difference between school configuration and state reading assessments.

There are factors discussed in the review of the literature that may help explain the results. Traditional middle schools tend to have populations that are much larger than middle school populations in a K-8 building (Weiss & Kipnes, 2006). The smaller population in a K-8 school can allow for more focused support for students. Students may establish meaningful relationships with staff members in a K-8 configuration, which can have a positive impact on students as they transition into the middle grades. Possible differences in discipline policies in the two districts may have had an impact on student suspensions as well. Differences in discipline policies can affect how behavioral infractions are reported and how consequences for different infractions are assigned.

The identity crisis that middle-school-aged students experience, as described by Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, can also impact student academic, behavioral, and attendance outcomes. As students make decisions about which social groups they desire to belong to, they make choices about how they want to perform academically and how they want to behave in school. Due to the conflict that is faced during the adolescent years, ego identity vs. role confusion, middle school-aged students may face an identity crisis. This in conjunction with developmental changes that adolescents experience defines the separate needs of middle school-aged students, set of educational philosophies and pedagogical goals that are different from primary and secondary schools and supports the creation and implementation of a transition plan.

## Section 3: The Project

### **Introduction**

According to the data collected and analyzed, middle school-aged students achieved at higher proficiency rates on state assessments in math and had fewer students who were truant than student who attended the traditional middle school model. In addition, there were fewer suspensions of students in grades 6-8 in the traditional middle school configuration than in the K-8 configuration. District administrators in the focus district are considering reopening a traditional middle school after restructuring and closing the doors of the middle school almost 10 years ago. In this project, I will address a district transition plan that will support the academic, emotional, and developmental needs of middle school-aged students in the district as they transition from one configuration to the next. The transition plan will provide the district with strategic directions on how to support students at each transition level and to proactively resolve issues that students face as they transition from one level to the next.

### **Description and Goals**

The overarching goal of the project is to create and implement a districtwide transition plan that will support the academic, social, and emotional development of middle school-aged students in the focus district and improve student achievement, discipline, and attendance. Goals that will need to be met during the process are a) create a draft transition plan and present it to the Superintendent, b) meet with School Board members and business manager to present plan for approval, c) create a transition planning committee, d) review and revise the draft plan, e) implement and revise the

transition plan. The transition plan will address students transitioning from fifth grade to sixth grade and eighth grade to high school. In this project, I will address the problem of the doctoral research study as it will act as a guide for the district to implement practices that will address student achievement, discipline, and attendance by meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of middle school- aged students as they transition into middle school in either a K-8 configuration or a traditional middle school configuration if the district decides to reopen its middle school. The purpose of the transition plan is to provide schools that promote positive academic achievement, foster positive behavior, and to provide a school climate that is conducive of learning and social- emotional growth.

### **Rationale**

The school environment is where many transitions occur for children. Transitions are important, and comprehensive plans need to be implemented in order to meet the developmental needs of students at specific grade levels (SERVE, 2005). This project was chosen for the focus district because district officials are considering reopening the doors to its middle school. According to the research data, the K-8 configuration was more beneficial for middle school-aged students in regards to math achievement and attendance. Students who attended the K-8 configuration had higher math test scores on state assessments and had lower truancy rates. Fewer students were suspended in the traditional middle school configuration. If the decision is made to revert back to the middle school model, the district needs to maintain and/or improve student achievement, discipline, and attendance by implementing a comprehensive transition plan. This project

will provide a guide to schools for transitions at the middle school level and at the high school level.

### **Review of the Literature**

Transition is defined as change, a passage from one style, form, state, or from one place to another (Wesley, 2001). School is where transitions happen for many children, and though they may be welcomed, they can cause anxiety and difficulty for some students (University of California, Los Angeles, 2003). Students experience transitions from grade level to grade level and are more impactful from configuration to configuration. School transitions can effect student achievement, attendance, behavior, and student social-emotional development (Kingery, Erdley & Marshall, 2011). It is important that schools and districts implement transitional practices that promote positive student outcomes. Effective transitions positively impact student achievement, attendance, and discipline and influence student success throughout their academic careers (UCLA, 2003). Balfanz (2009) examined the impact of middle school education on student graduation rates and stated that there has been a strong correlation between middle school experience and high school graduation rates, which gives insight into how important school transitions are for adolescents.

Developing comprehensive transition plans are important due to the diverse populations. Special education students, english language learners, and students considered to be at-risk need support as they transition through school. Children with learning disabilities perceive lower levels of social support and higher levels of bullying after transitions than their regular educated peers (Hughes, Banks, & Terras, 2013).

Effective transitions plans are beneficial to students who have struggled academically and behaviorally during their years prior to the transition (Langenkamp, 2010). School districts with effective transition plans from middle school to high school were found to have lower dropout rates than districts that had little to no transition plans (Smith, 2006).

Transitions and change can cause stress for many people, especially children at different grade levels. Students struggle with transitions throughout their academic careers, from kindergarten up to 12<sup>th</sup> grade and beyond. Transitions may cause students to face social and emotional challenges that can have a negative impact into adulthood (UCLA, 2003). A survey conducted in 2004 revealed that kindergarten teachers reported that 48% of the incoming students they teach have moderate to severe problems with transitions (SERVE, 2004). Malaspina and Rim- Kaufman (2008) conducted a longitudinal study of students from kindergarten to seventh grade and the impact of two normal transitions on student outcomes and found that student discipline infractions increased at the first transition in their academic careers. Some students have difficulty with transitions, which can cause an inability to retain content and to create a cycle that may lead to retention or dropout (Andrews & Bishop, 2012). In a 2009 study in which student perceptions were collected twice annually about school climate, psychological functioning, and academics Benner and Graham (2009) revealed that students did well prior to transitions but experienced difficulty after the transition into high school and suggested that schools need to implement stronger transition plans to support students during pivotal transition grades. Effective transition planning helps to reduce student anxiety and promote success as students move from one configuration to another.



All stakeholders are important in implementing effective transitional practices. Involving students' families, earlier experiences, and students' interest supports effective transitioning (Nebraska Department of Education, 2001). Effective transitional practices are implemented by multiple stakeholders in different settings and are a continuous process (Harvard Family Research Project, 2004). When parents are included in the transition plan, they are likely to be involved in their children's educational experience. When a comprehensive intervention plan is implemented for students entering primary school, parental involvement increases and improves (Giallo, Trevauld, Matthews, & Kienhuis, 2010). The most important evaluation of a school or program will come from how students and parents view their school experience.

School personnel play an important role in implementing and providing smooth transitions for students at all levels. These transitions are most effective when school environment is appropriate to students' developmental needs and when staff members are aware of and respond to such needs. Effective transitions include programs that recognize students' abilities and accomplishments. Students need an engaging learning environment that addresses unique styles of learning and differentiation that will foster student success. School personnel must be cognizant of the impact of transitions and establish appropriate supports for students (UCLA, 2003). In a study students were given a School Concerns Questionnaire and students with higher school concerns reported that they did not like school and had reduced trust and respect for teachers (Rice, Fredrickson, & Seymour, 2011). Student self-perceptions, as they move from elementary to middle school, include a decline in support from teachers and an increase in school related

problems (Martinez, Aricak, Graves, Peters-Myszak & Nellis, 2011). It is important to offer supports to students at transitions in order to effect positive perceptions about teachers. This support should be evident as students interact with all school personnel. Counselors can also play a role in helping to establish positive relationships between staff and students by implementing school programs and training that focus on developing the social-emotional development of children (T. Conroy, personal communication, May 28, 2014). School transitions can create many challenges that can negatively affect students' academic achievement and social well-being; school guidance counselors can provide supports for students as they transition from one level to another (Augst, Kelsey, Akos, & Patrick, 2009).

### **Implementation**

The proposed project is the implementation of a transition plan for students moving into middle school and students transitioning from middle school into high school. After the transition plan is completed, the results from the research study and the transition plan will be presented to district's superintendent to be considered as the draft transition plan for the district. The plan would be reviewed and approved by the superintendent, as the superintendent provides the visionary leadership needed in order to make the plan a district priority. The superintendent will need to present the draft to the school board of directors and the district's business manager in order to determine the feasibility of the implementation of the plan. These individuals are important to the process as they make the decisions about allocating funds needed to carry out the plan. A team that is inclusive of central office administrators, building administrators, teachers,

support staff, parents, and community leaders, and community members will be established. The team will review, revise, implement and evaluate the plan.

### **Potential Resources and Existing Supports**

The district has resources available throughout the district that can be utilized in developing implementing and effective transition plans. Schools in the district have practices and structures that can support students as they transition from one level to another. The district has a total of eight guidance counselors that can help support students during transitions from one configuration to the next. The kindergarten center has a half day guidance counselor, each of the four K-8 schools has a full-time counselor, and the high school has three full-time counselors. The district had also begun to draft a Literacy Transition Plan from birth to post-secondary school, which can provide insight and ideas in developing a districtwide transition plan. Vertical articulation meetings with elementary and middle school teachers, and eighth grade teachers and high school personnel take place each year. This practice will be a part of the transition plan. Parents high school course selection nights, and Back to School Nights across the district. All these practices are beneficial to successful transition plans and will be included.

### **Potential Barriers**

There is a possibility that the plan will be rejected by the superintendent and the school board members. A rejection of the plan will mean that extra time will need to be spent on revising the plan. Another possible barrier is that the human resources and financial resources are not available to support the full implementation of the plan.

Establishing a comprehensive team and coordinating schedules to meet with all of the key members can be time consuming and can be a possible barrier to the process.

### **Proposal for Implementation and Timetable**

Full implementation and evaluation will be completed within two years. During the first year the school transition team will be established. The team will thoroughly review and revise the draft plan to ensure that the plan meets the needs of the diverse learners in the district. The plan needs to be inclusive of guidelines and provisions set forth by NCLB, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Title One. The plan will also include current structures and practices that support effective transitions and opportunities for families and community members take part in effective transitional practices. The transition plan will be aligned with district's improvement plan and strategic plan. The team will finalize the plan and present it to the superintendent and the school board for approval. After approval portions of the plan will be implemented. Full implementation will take place in year two with checkpoints along the way. Surveys will be used to collect data from teachers, students, and parents, and the results will be analyzed as part of the program evaluation. The results will guide updates and revisions that may be required.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others**

There are different individuals responsible for ensuring that the transition plan is developed and implemented effectively. The superintendent plays a major role in implementing the plan. The superintendent will need to give the initial approval and present the plan the school board and the business manager for approval and funding. The

school board will review and approve the plan at the monthly school board meeting. The superintendent will also select district and community members to be a part of transition planning committee. The committee will consist of teachers, administrators, parents and community leaders. The committee will be responsible for reviewing the plan and making any necessary revisions. The committee will also be responsible for checking on the progress and implementation of the plan as well as the evaluation of the plan. Building and district administration will be responsible for offering training and communicating the plan to the staff and families. District building staff will be responsible for implementing the plan and providing feedback to the planning committee along the way. Guidance counselors will create and plan for support of students and families as they transition from one level or configuration to the next. Students and families will be responsible for taking part in the programs and initiatives set forth in the transition plan. All of the individuals responsible are very important to successful implementation of the transition plan.

### **Project Evaluation**

After the transition plan has been implemented it will need to be evaluated in order to determine its success, and to plan for possible revisions to the plan. The overall goal of the transition plan is to create programs and effective practices that will make transitions from one configuration to the next successful to students and families, and with as little stress as possible. The transition planning committee will be responsible for evaluating the plan. The evaluation of the plan will focus on the outcomes of parental involvement, student discipline, student attendance, and student achievement of students

at the transition grades. Student, teacher, and parent attitudes will also help to determine the success of the plan as this will provide insight on the positives and negatives of the plan. Previous school year attendance, discipline, and report card grades of students at transition grades will be used as baseline data, and will be compared to student data after the transition plan will be implemented. Based on the literature reviewed, students that have difficulty with transitions show a decrease in grades and self-esteem, and an increase in truancy, and discipline referrals. Looking at these data points will offer valuable information about the success of the transition plan.

### **Implications Including Social Change**

#### **Local Community**

It is very important that educators focus on the needs of students as they transition through school. Creating a transition plan will address the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of students in the district. A transition plan will provide strategic programming and activities that will support with addressing the issues that students face as they move from one configuration to another. The plan will also support educators and help to create positive school climates, by implementing effective practices that motivate and support diverse learners. Implementing an effective plan can help to increase parental involvement, reduce discipline infractions, improve attendance, and raise achievement scores. Parents and students often have anxiety as the move from kindergarten, elementary, middle, and high school takes places. The transition plan will help to relieve some of the anxiety by providing supports to students and parents at middle school and high school transition points.

**Far-Reaching**

Literature indicates that student transitions are a concern globally. Struggles during transitions are common around the world. The transition plan can be replicated in school districts around the world and can be used to support the academic, social-emotional, and developmental needs of students. If the transition into middle school is stressful high school dropout rates become a concern. This can be addressed by implementing a transition plan that addresses the needs of all students.

**Conclusion**

Students require a learning environment that is supportive and engaging at every level. Districts and schools need to provide a support system that students will need as they grow and develop and transition through schools. At each level (kindergarten, elementary, middle, and high school) students have different needs and schools need to address those different needs. Developing and implementing a robust transition plan can be helpful in providing support to students and families as transitions occur throughout school. The proposed project is a transition plan that will address the academic, social, and emotional needs of students as they transition to middle school and to high school. Prior studies reveal that when transition plans are implemented students, families, and school staff benefit; parent involvement increases, student esteem improves, school climates improve, and achievement outcomes improve.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Introduction**

District administrators are contemplating restructuring its elemiddle schools and reopening its middle school that serves grades 6-8 students. Researchers have shown that students who attend traditional middle schools have lower student achievement, more discipline infractions, and higher truancy rates than middle school students who attend the elemiddle configuration. If the district does decide to open a traditional middle school, implementing a transition plan can help to address and meet the academic, social, emotional, and developmental needs of the students. The transition plan will not only address the transition to middle school, but it will focus on other major transitions that students experience as they move throughout schools.

### **Project Strengths**

Developing and implementing a transition plan has many benefits, and it can be useful whether or not the district chooses not to reopen the middle school. An effective transition plan can reduce stress and enhance self-esteem and confidence in students. Peer-group relations and relationships with teachers can also improve with the implementation of a transition plan. Greater enjoyment of learning and improved achievement can also be a result for students. When parents take an active role in student transitions, they are educated and understand the developmental and educational phases that their children experience, and they are more likely to be involved in their child's education. Teachers will be able to better meet the needs of students because they will



establish more community support and have a wider range of resources to help students navigate through school.

### **Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations**

The creation of a transition plan may not directly impact student achievement, attendance, and student discipline. In order for the practices and initiatives presented in the plan to be effective, the plan must be implemented with fidelity. The transition planning team needs to develop a subcommittee that periodically checks implementation, and collects data to check for effectiveness. The action items should also be adjusted when necessary to meet the needs of the district. Changes and adjustments made to the plan should be based on the needs of the students, data collected, and feedback given by all stakeholders. After full implementation, the plan should be reviewed annually in order to determine the plans effectiveness.

### **Scholarship**

This research has allowed me to focus my thinking and develop as a scholar as I worked on writing and collecting the data. Concordia College (2014) described scholarship as research that advances theoretical knowledge, professional application of disciplinary knowledge, or the production of a work of art. It helped me to become a critical thinker and taught me how to really analyze data. Scholarship positively impacted my performance on my job and aided in planning for professional development for my staff. I researched and used scholarly articles to use during PLC meeting and staff meetings. I learned how to properly cite sources and to find my scholarly voice.

Conducting this research has shown me how scholarship has caused me to become a reflective practitioner and to perform better on the job as an educator.

### **Project Development and Evaluation**

I learned that when developing a project it takes a lot a planning that needs to be well thought out. The project needs to be based on the needs of the school and district and also be aligned with the district's mission and vision. Scholarly research should be used as the project is being created and implemented. Developing a project should include checkpoints and data collection during project implementation. The evaluation will provide valuable information to determine if the project impacts student outcomes or if the project needs to be revised. Evaluation should be on-going, and district and school administrators need to make sure that the action items of the project need to be implemented with fidelity.

### **Leadership and Change**

Research is done to learn something or to gather information. Leadership is demonstrated when the researcher uses the information gathered to promote positive social change. Effective leaders use data collected to lead change efforts and to move the organization forward. Change is necessary when an organization has experienced failure of some sort, and it takes a bold leader to implement those changes. For this particular project study in which student achievement, discipline, and achievement of middle school-aged students was examined to determine which grade configuration was most impactful, I found that student achievement and attendance was better for students attending the elemiddle model in the focus school district. This study is important to the

focus district because the district is considering reopening a traditional middle school. The development of a transition plan will promote positive student outcomes if the focus district does or does not choose to reopen its traditional middle school. The transition plan will not only benefit students transitioning to middle school, but it will support the transition into high school as well. The transition plan will also promote positive community and parent partnerships with the schools in the district.

### **Analysis of Self as Scholar**

Completing a doctoral study and developing a project has helped me to develop some new skills. I have deepened my knowledge of how to conduct research and what it means to be a scholar. Studying and reading other scholarly work has helped me to find my own scholarly voice. Research has helped me to become a critical thinker and how to analyze arguments and assumptions in other works of research as well as my own. This process has helped me to use what I learned from the research and integrate it into the developed project. I have strengthened my desire to be an active life-long learner and to make decisions in my leadership role based on data and research. Through this process I have developed a desire to expand my professional experience and work with local colleges and universities in the research department and with helping to develop future educators.

### **Analysis of Self as Practitioner**

Developing my skills as a researcher has helped to improve my skills as a school leader. Conducting this doctoral study has given me more confidence in my decision-making and practice as an educator. My staff meetings and Professional Learning

Community (PLC) meetings are more focused and based on data and research. Teachers are encouraged to read and research scholarly literature and to become critical thinkers. Research has allowed me to do some self- reflection and has given me new ideas of how to do things differently and more effectively. I have gained knowledge that I have been able to share with colleagues that will help to move the district forward and to improve practices. Being a doctoral student has put me in the position to be able to work with district leaders and to take part in decision- making that will impact the entire district.

### **Analysis of Self as Project Developer**

The skills that I gained in conducting research, becoming a scholar, and building my skills as a reflective practitioner aided me in becoming a project developer. The same efforts that I used in researching for my doctoral study were used in my project development. I first had to reflect on the problem posed in the doctoral study, the research results, and the needs of the district to decide what the project would be. According to the review of the literature and the results from the research there is a need to put some effective transition practices into place in order to result in positive outcomes at the middle school level. This analysis and reflection made me realize that students go through various transitions as they move through school and need supports at major transition years as they move from one configuration to the other. The research sparked a desire to develop Transition Planning for Middle School Students, which is a project that would not only benefit students in my school, but students across the district and could potentially benefit students across the nation.

### **The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change**

Social change positively transforms behaviors, culture, and outcomes over time through the implementation effective programs and practice. Implementing a transition plan can positively impact student outcomes at the middle school level in any configuration. An effective transition plan can improve students' overall school experience resulting in greater achievement, better attendance rates, and decreased dropout rates. A comprehensive transition plan can ease student and parent anxieties as students move from one configuration to another. Teaching and learning can improve because the transition plan will require teacher collaboration and focus on age-appropriate curriculum development. An effective comprehensive plan can create positive relationships and effective communication with families, community leaders, and the school. Positive school experiences connected with activities implemented through the school transition plan can help teenagers grow into focused adults and help them make sound decisions about their future careers. With school configurations being similar nationally, this plan can also be impactful in other districts and other states.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

Transition Planning for Middle School Students can support a district and their efforts of continuous improvement of achievement, student discipline, and student attendance. After the district's superintendent and school board approve the plan, there are next steps that need to be taken. Implementing a transition plan will require the development of a core team that will be responsible for the plan. The team will be required to make any necessary revisions and to evaluate the plan during implementation.

Data and information collected can be used to determine how the plan affects student outcomes. The plan can and should be included as part of the district's strategic planning process. Future research related to the project can include a qualitative research project that examines attitudes and experiences of students, parents, and teachers and how the transition plan impacted their experiences as students transitioned. A longitudinal study can also be conducted to follow students through school before and after major transitions. The data collected in a longitudinal study can provide information that can give insight into the effects of transition planning activities.

### **Conclusion**

Students experience stress as they transition from one school configuration to another. This stress can result in lower student achievement, low self-esteem, discipline issues, and poor attendance. Implementing effective transition plans can positively influence the factors related to student stress at transition points. The transition plan is important to meeting the specific needs of students as they move through school. Transition planning also helps to create a school environment that is supportive to all students and conducive of learning. Developing and implementing a transition plan needs to be based on the needs of the district and it needs to be implemented with fidelity in order to be successful and to gather valid results. These results are important to the analysis, evaluation, and possible revisions of the plan as they will aid in continuous growth and improvement of the district. A comprehensive improvement plan can and will help to develop well rounded, productive citizens which is the ultimate goal of education.

## References

- Ali, E., & Heck, R. H. (2012). Comparing the contexts of middle- grade schools, their instructional practices, and their outcomes: A regression discontinuity approach. *NASSP Bulletin*, 96 (2), 93-118.
- Andrews, C.,& Bishop, P. (2012). Middle grades transition programs around the globe. *Middle School Journal*, 44 (1), 8-14.
- Andrich, J. (2010). Comparing achievement between k-8 and middle schools. 21<sup>st</sup> *Century Education*.
- Anfara, V. A.,& Mertens, S.B. (2012). Capacity building is a key to radical transformation of middle grades schools. *Middle School Journal*, 58-64.
- Arcia, E. (2007). A comparison of elementary/K-8 and middle schools' suspension rates. *Urban Education*, 42(5), 456-469.
- Armstrong, T. (2006). *Best schools*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Augst, K.,& Akos, P. (2009). Primary transitions: How elementary school counselors promote optimal transitions. *Journal of School Counseling*, 7(3).
- Balfanz, R. (2009). Putting middle grades students on the graduation path: A policy and practice brief. Westerville, OH: National Middle School Association. Retrieved from [www.nmsa.org/portals/0/pdf/research/Research\\_from\\_the\\_Field/Policy\\_Brief](http://www.nmsa.org/portals/0/pdf/research/Research_from_the_Field/Policy_Brief).
- Balfanz, R., Spiridakis, K., & Neild, R. (2002). Will converting high-poverty middle schools to k-8 schools facilitate achievement gains. *Report by the Philadelphia Education Fund*. Philadelphia: PA.

- Benner, A. D., & Graham, S. (2009). The transition to high school as a developmental process among multiethnic urban youth. *Society for Research in Child Development, 80*(2), 356- 376.
- Bloom, A. (2008). K-8 or middle school? Which is better? *The Arizona Republic*. Retrieved from <http://www.azcentral.com>
- Bohan-Baker, M., & Little, P. (2004). *The transition to kindergarten: A review of current research and promising practices to involve families*. Cambridge: Harvard Family Research Project.
- Bonnett, J., & Pohlman, S. J. (2011). Advocates claim k-8 schools improve grades, skills. *Tribune Business News*. Retrieved from <http://www.lodinews.com/news/article>
- Byrnes, V., & Ruby, A. (2007). Comparing achievement between k-8 and middle schools: A large empirical study. *American Journal of Education, 114* (1), 101-135.
- Catalano, R. F., Abbott, R., & Haggerty, K.P. (1999). A test of the social development model to predict problem behaviour during the elementary school period. *Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health, 9*, 39-56
- Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA. (2003). An introductory packet on transitions: Turning risks into opportunities for student support. Retrieved from <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>.
- Concordia University (2014). What is scholarship? Retrieved from <https://www.concordiacollege.edu/academics/research/celebration-of-student-scholarship/what-is-scholarship/>



- Cooper, J. B. (2008). Examining the relationship between grade configuration and teacher's perceptions of working conditions in public k-8 schools and middle schools in north carolina. *The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*. Proquest UMI Dissertation Publishing, 3310951.
- Cook, P.J., MacCoun, R., Muschkin, C., & Vigdor, J. (2008). The negative impacts of starting middle school in sixth grade. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 27(1), 104- 121.
- Dickinson, T.S. (2001). *Reinventing the middle school*. New York, NY: Routledge
- Dove, M.J., Pearson, C. L., & Hooper, H. (2010). Relationship between grade span configuration and academic achievement. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 21(2), 272-298.
- Duchesne, S., Ratelle, C. F. & Roy, A. (2012). Worries about middle school transition and subsequent adjustment: The moderating role of classroom goal structure. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 32(5), 681-710.
- Erb, T. O. (2006). Middle school model are working in many grade configurations to boost student performance. *American Secondary Education*, 3(3), 4-13.
- Farmer, T. W., Hamm, J. V., Leung, M., Lambert, K.,& Gravelle, M. (2011). Early adolescent peer ecologies in rural communities: Bullying in schools that do and do not have a transition during the middle grades. *J Youth Adolescence*, 40, 1106-1117, DOI 10.1007/s10964-011-9684-0.

- Fink, L. L. (2010). A comparison of grade configuration on urban sixth to eight grade students' outcome in regular and special education. *Doctoral Dissertation, University of Maryland, College Park.*
- Flynn, G., Nolan, B. (2008). What do school principals think about current school- family relationships? *NASSP Bulletin*, 92 (3), 173-190.
- Fullan, M. (2007). *The meaning of educational change*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- George, P.S. (2011). The American middle school movement: Taking a long view. *Middle School Journal*, 44-52.
- Giallo, R., Treyvaud, K., Matthews, J., & Kienhuis, M. (2010). Making the transition to primary school: An evaluation of a transition program for parents. *Australian Journal of Educational & Developmental Psychology*, v10, 1-17.
- Gordon, M.F., Peterson, K., Gdula, J., & Klingbeil, D. (2011). Review of the literature on grade configuration and school transitions. *Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, University of Minnesota*, 1-23. *and understanding data*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education Inc.
- Gottfried, M.A. (2010). Evaluating the relationship between student achievement and attendance in urban elementary and middle schools: An instrumental variables approach. *American Educational Research Journal*, 47(2), 434-465.
- Grigg, J. (2012). School enrollment changes and student achievement growth: A case study in educational disruption and continuity. *Sociology of Education*, 85 (4), 388-404.

- Gu, H., Lai, S., & Ye, R. (2011). A cross- cultural study of student problem behaviors in middle schools. *School Psychology International, 32*(1), 20-34.
- Gunter, W. D., & Bakken, N. W. (2010). Transitioning to middle school in sixth grade: A hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) analysis of substance use, violence, and suicidal thoughts. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 30*(6), 895-915.
- Hough, D. L. (2009). Findings of the first & only national data base on elemiddle & middle schools. *Middle Grades Research Journal, 4*(3), 81-96.
- Hughes, L., Banks, & P., Terras, M. (2013). Secondary school transition for children with special needs: a literature review. *Author's Support for Learning, 28*(1), 24-34.
- Juvonen, J., Wang, Y., & Espinoza, G.,(2011). Bullying experiences and compromised academic performance across middle school grades. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 31*(1), 152-173.
- Keaton, P. (2012). Numbers and types of public elementary and secondary schools from the common core of data: School year 2010- 2011. *National Center for Education Statistics.*
- Kingery, J., Erdley, C., & Marshall, K. (2011). Peer Acceptance and friendship as predictors of early adolescents' adjustment across the middle school transition, *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 57* ( 3) Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/mpq/vol57/iss3/2>
- Laitsch, D. (2007). Middle school entry year and student behavior. *Research Brief, 5*(5), 1-3.

- Lanngenkamp, A. (2010). Academic vulnerability and resilience during the transition to high school: The role of social relationships and district context. *Sociology of Education* 83(1): 1-19.
- Lodico, M.G., Spaulding, D.T., & Voegtle, K.H. (2006). *Methods in educational research: From theory to practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey- Bass.
- Malaspina, D., & Rimm-Kaufman, S. E. (2008). Early predictors of school performance declines at school transition points *RMLE Online: Research in Middle Level Education*, 31(9), 1-16.
- Martinez, R.S., Aricak, O.T., Graves, M. N., Peters- Myszak, J., & Nellis, L. (2011). Changes in perceived social support and socioemotional adjustment across the elementary to junior high school transition. *J Youth Adolescent*, 40(5), 519- 530.
- Mason, A. (2012). Proposed k-8 at York schools has pros and cons, experts say. *York Daily Record*. April 2012.
- McLeoad, S. (2008) Erik erikson. *Simply Psychology*. Retrieved from <http://www.simplypsychology.org/Erik-Erikson.html>
- Meyer, P. (2011). The middle school mess. *Education Next*. 11(1).
- Nebraska Department of Education. (2001). The primary program: Growing and learning in the heartland. *Nebraska Department of Education, Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Area Education Agencies, Head Start-State Collaboration Office*, Second Edition.

- Neild, R. C., Farley-Ripple, E. N., & Byrnes, V. (2009). The effect of teacher certification on middle grades achievement in an urban district. *Educational Policy, 23*(5), 732-760.
- Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability (2005). K-8 schools may help school districts improve student performance. *OPPAGA, 5* (2), 1-6.
- Office of the State Superintendent (undated). Transition planning for 21<sup>st</sup> century schools. *Public Schools of North Carolina*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/curriculum/home/transitions.pdf>.
- Pennsylvania Department of Education (2012). *Academic achievement report 2010-2011*. Retrieved from <http://paayp.emetric.net>.
- Philadelphia School District (2012). School profile- Add b. anderson school. Retrieved from <https://webapps.philasd.org>
- Philadelphia School District (2012). School profile- Bryant academics plus school. Retrieved from <https://webapps.philasd.org>.
- Philadelphia School District (2012). School profile- Tilden middle school. Retrieved from <https://webapps.philasd.org>
- Portland Public Schools (2011). K-8 and middle school performance. *Summary of Research, December 2011*.
- Rice, F., Frederickson, N., & Seymour, J. (2011) Assessing pupil concerns about transition to secondary school. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, v81*, 244 - 263

- Rockoff, J. E., & Lockwood, B. B. (2010). Stuck in the middle: Impacts of grade configuration in public schools. *Journal of Public Economics*, 94, 1051- 1061.
- Rockoff, J. E., & Lockwood, B. B. (2010). Study finds students in k-8 schools do better than students in stand-alone middle schools. *Education Next*. Retrieved from [www.educationnext.org.ansformation](http://www.educationnext.org/ansformation)
- Rosenkrans, N. (2012). TPS presents transformation plan to public. *Toledo Blade*. Retrieved from [www.toledoblade.com](http://www.toledoblade.com).
- Ruppert, N. B. (2009). Can a k-8 school address the needs of adolescents. *Voices From the Middle: Narrative Inquiry By, For, and About the Middle Level Community*. 259-286.
- School Digger (2012). Add B. Anderson School. Retrieved from [www.schooldigger.com](http://www.schooldigger.com).
- School Digger(2012). Penn wood middle school. . Retrieved from [www.schooldigger.com](http://www.schooldigger.com).
- School Digger (2012). Southeast Delco School District. Retrieved from [www.schooldigger.com](http://www.schooldigger.com).
- School Digger (2012). Tilden Middle School. Retrieved from [www.schooldigger.com](http://www.schooldigger.com).
- School Digger (2012). William Cullen Bryant School. Retrieved from [www.schooldigger.com](http://www.schooldigger.com)
- Schwartz, A.E., Stiefel, L., Rubenstein, R., & Zabel, J. (2011). The path not taken: How does school organization affect eighth- grade achievement. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 33 (3), 293-317.

- Schwerdt, G., & West, M. R. (2011). The impact of alternative grade configurations on student outcomes through middle and high school. Harvard University.
- SERVE (2005). Terrific Transitions: Supporting Children's Transition to Kindergarten: Retrieved from <http://www.ihdi.uky.edu/nectc>.
- Smith, J. S. (2006). Similarities and difference in stakeholder perceptions of the transition from middle school. *American Educational Research Association*, San Francisco, CA.
- Spark, S.D. (2010). NYC study gives K-8 schools an edge over middle schools. *Education Week*, 30(3), 1-3.
- Styron, R.A., & Nyman, T.R. (2008). Key characteristics of middle school performance. *Research in Middle Level Education*, 31(5), 1-17.
- Sullivan, C. J., & Hirschfield, P. (2011). Problem behavior in the middle school years: An assessment of social development model. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*. 48(4), 566- 593.
- Teague, G.M., Anfara, V.A., Wilson, N.L., Gaines, C.B., & Beavers, J.L. (2012). Instructional practices in middle grades: A mixed methods case study. *NAASP Bulletin*, 96(3), 203-227.
- Tractenberg, P. (2012). Report on Elizabeth school board notes key successes in district. *Star- Ledger*. Retrieved from <http://blog.nj.com>
- Tubin, D., & Oplatka, I. (2010). Teachers' perspectives on 40 years of reform: the case of the Israeli junior high school. *Educational Studies*. 16(4), 391-402.

- Turque, B. (2008). Doubts linger on pre-k-8 strategy; Schools chancellor pushes Program as part of D.C. reform. *The Washington Post*, Washington DC.
- U.S. Department of Education (2012). *No child left behind*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/nclb>
- Useem, E. (2009). Big city superintendent as powerful CEO: Paul vallas in philadelphia. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 84, 300-317.
- Weiss, C. C., & Baker- Smith, E.C. (2010). Eighth- grade school form and resilience in the transition to high school: A comparison of middle schools and K-8 schools. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 20(4), 825- 839.
- Weiss, C. C. & Kipnes, L. (2006). Middle school effects: A comparison of middle grades students in middle schools and K-8 schools. *American Journal of Education*, 112(2), 239- 272.
- Wesley, P. (2001). Smooth moves to kindergarten. Chapel Hill: Chapel Hill Training Outreach Project Incorporated.
- West, M. R., Schwerdt, G., & Riddell, J. B. (2011). The impact of alternative grade configurations on student outcomes through middle and high school. Retrieved from <http://ftp.iza.org/dp6208.pdf>
- West, M. R., & Schwerdt, G. (2012). The middle school plunge. *Education Next*. 12 (2).
- West, M. R., Schwerdt, G., & Riddell, J. B. (2012). Students who attend middle schools at Risk of dropping out of high school. *Education Next*. Retrieved from <http://educationnext.org>
- Wormeli, R. (2011). Movin' up to the middle. *Educational Leadership*, 68(7), 48-53.



## Appendix A: The Project

### **Transition Planning for Middle School Students**

*(Modeled after North Carolina's Transition Planning for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools)*

Transition is defined as change, a passage from one style, form, state, or from one place to another (Wesley, 2001). School is where transitions happen for many children, and though they may be welcomed, they can cause anxiety and difficulty for some students (UCLA, 2003). Students experience transitions from grade level to grade level and are more impactful from configuration to configuration. School transitions can effect student achievement, attendance, behavior, and student social-emotional development (Kingery, Erdley & Marshall, 2011). It is important that schools and districts implement transitional practices that promote positive student outcomes. Effective transitions positively impact student achievement, attendance, and discipline and influence student success throughout their academic careers (UCLA, 2003). Balfanz (2009) states that there has been a strong correlation between middle school experience and high school graduation rates which gives us insight into just how important school transitions for adolescents are. Students require a learning environment that is supportive and engaging at every level. Districts and schools need to provide a support system that students will need as they grow and develop and transition through schools. At each level (kindergarten, elementary, middle, and high school) students have different needs and schools need to address those different needs. Developing and implementing a robust transition plan can be helpful in providing support to students and families as transitions occur throughout school. The proposed project is a transition plan that will address the academic, social, and emotional needs of students as they transition into middle school

and into high school. Prior studies reveal that when transition plans are implemented students, families, and school staff benefit. Parent involvement increases, student esteem improves, school climates improve, and achievement outcomes improve when transitions are smooth. The proposed project is the implementation of a transition plan that will offer support to all students, staff, and families to students transitioning into middle school and into high school.

## **ELEMENTARY TO MIDDLE GRADES**

Children transitioning from fifth to sixth grade come with a variety of academic skills, attitudes, behaviors, and school experiences. Adolescents come with unique social, emotional, physical, and cognitive needs due changes related to puberty. At this age children are concerned with how they are viewed by their friends which may bring some undesirable behaviors. When students attend middle school they have to become more organized and responsible as they learn the different teaching styles of various teachers and meet the different course requirements that the teachers put forth. It is very important for educators to set up programs and structures within school systems that will meet the unique needs of adolescents in order to support their and meet their social, emotional, academic, and developmental needs. The transition plan from elementary to middle school need to be created with the student in mind, and needs to be shared with families and community leaders.

**Goal 1:** Build collaboration among elementary and middle grade schools and teachers.

*Action Step 1:* Organize a transition day or night for incoming sixth graders and their parents during the end of the fifth grade school year to help ease the building anxiety that takes place during the summer months.

*Action Step 2:* Plan and implement a weeklong visit for students during the summer months in order to allow students to bond and interact with each other prior to the start of the school year.

*Action Step 3:* Plan and implement a sixth grade orientation for students and parents prior to the start of school. Sixth grade students will report to school one or two days before other middle school students and meet key staff members and learn about school policies and procedures.

*Action Step 4:* Disseminate information about dismissal and arrival procedures, grading guidelines, expectations and school policies to students and parents to assist students in the transition process.

**Goal 2:** Develop and implement programs on common issues faced by adolescents such as drug awareness, health issues, and interpersonal relationships.

*Action Step 1:* Work with district personnel to create and provide a health and wellness curriculum appropriate for middle- school aged students.

*Action Step 2:* Implement a Student Assistance Program (SAP) to address and support students with possible drug and alcohol issues.

*Action Step 3:* Create and offer individualized intervention plans and counseling for students in need of social, emotional, and academic support as early as possible. Students will be identified through the Student Assistance Program (SAP) and Response to Interventions and Instruction (RtII)

*Action Step 4:* Develop and implement a process for referring students in need of support services.

**Goal 3:** Provide a developmentally appropriate environment to promote student transition and success.

*Action Step 1:* Provide on-going professional development for staff based on specific adolescent needs, teaching the middle school-aged students, diversity (cultural, academic, socioeconomic status, gender) and differentiated instruction.

*Action Step 2:* Provide middle grades research-based behavioral intervention programs and time in which diverse groups of students share feelings, problem solve and implement strategies based on emotional, social, and academic needs.

*Action Step 3:* Create opportunities for students that promote positive social relations and interactions (dances, assemblies, pep rallies and clubs).

*Action Step 4:* Review school facility layout and designate hallways for sixth, seventh and eighth grades to address individual, developmental and academic success.

**Goal 4:** Promote programs that ensure student success in school.

*Action Step 1:* Teach study skills regularly and provide organizational tools needed to help students be successful.

*Action Step 2:* Review and implement established homework policies that promote the balanced curriculum and assign homework that aligns with daily instruction.

*Action Step 3:* Provide time and opportunities for teachers to meet as grade level teams to have conversations regarding homework assignments, testing schedules, field trips, and other events and share this information with students and parents.

*Action Step 4:* Establish core teacher teams that work collaboratively to provide appropriate learning communities that include grade level, vertical teams, and subject area teams to address all student needs.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TO HIGH SCHOOL

Educators and parents must communicate and collaborate to create positive, ongoing and effective initiatives for students entering high schools in order to meet their social, emotional, physical and academic needs. These years are vital to young adults who begin to establish who they will be as adults. Teenagers need initiatives and social constructs that introduce them to peers through a variety of activities and events. They need a solid support system that provides them with a safety net when they encounter higher academic standards and social and emotional issues. Effective supports should influence academic rigor, improved graduation rates, reduced dropout rates, and positive social relationships between students, teachers and families. It is imperative that transition plans and programs are supported by all stakeholders and implement strategies that will reduce the anxiety of moving into high school.

**Goal 1:** Build relationships among transitioning students, parents, older peers, teachers and key staff.

*Action Step 1:* Develop student mentor/ mentee programs to pair incoming ninth graders with high school students during the eighth grade school year.

*Action Step 2:* Establish core teacher teams that work collaboratively to provide appropriate learning communities to address all student needs and interests.

*Action Step 3:* Develop advisor and advisee programs for the middle and high schools.

*Action Step 4:* Develop courses taught by all personnel offered at both the middle grades and high schools that are based on student interest.

**Goal 2:** Prepare students for transitioning to the next grade level, career and work.

*Action Step 1:* Develop a variety of transition activities for students, parents, and school personnel prior to the start of school.

*Action Step 2:* Create guides or handbooks to help students and teachers plan and prepare academically for the transition from 8th to 9th grade.

**Goal 3:** Develop transition programs and a variety of activities that meet the social and emotional needs of the students.

*Action Step 1:* Hold a spring social event for current and incoming high school students.

*Action Step 2:* Have middle school students shadow high school students a couple of times in the spring.

*Action Step 3:* Implement service learning projects that require middle school students to collaborate with high school students.

*Action Step 4:* Implement pen pal and letter writing in which eighth graders correspond with high school students.

**Goal 4:** Develop vertical alignment planning for middle, high school and district level personnel.

*Action Step 1:* Set up a structure that allows team teaching between eighth and ninth grade teachers.



*Action Step 2:* Schedule opportunities for teachers and administrators from both middle and high schools to exchange their roles and responsibilities.

*Action Step 3:* When feasible provide joint professional development in the content areas.

**Goal 5:** Develop and implement a plan to meet the challenges facing the district's high school.

*Action Step 1:* Appoint a committee, with a community leader as a chairperson, to gather data on the issues facing middle and high schools in the district.

*Action Step 2:* Schedule community forums to engage business leaders, policy makers, parents and students in a dialogue that will assist the district in developing support for intervention programs.

*Action Step 3:* Seek out funding sources and support for entrepreneurial activities and courses for students and teachers to develop.

## Appendix B: Active Elemiddle and Middle School 5 year Percentages

	<b>Math</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Suspensions</b>	<b>Truancy</b>
Elemiddle				
2008	49.4	50.9	12	12
2009	59.2	59.4	24	8
2010	64.9	62.5	26	2
2011	67.9	62.6	28	9
2012	63.7	58.5	30	2
Traditional Middle School				
2008	46.8	53.1	14	6
2009	49.2	50.5	11	26
2010	50.1	53.7	10	16
2011	57.2	57.0	7	0
2012	58.6	55.8	9	34

*Source:* Pennsylvania Department of Education

## Appendix C: School District's A, B 2012 Demographic Data

	Minority Population	F/R Lunch
District A	67%	66%
District B	96%	80%

*Source:* School Digger

## Appendix D: NIH Certificate



## Appendix E: Data Usage Agreement

**DATA USE AGREEMENT**

This Data Use Agreement, effective as of 9/1/2013, is entered into by and between **Asia Ali-Hawkins** and **School District B**. The purpose of this Agreement is to provide Data Recipient with access to a Limited Data Set (“LDS”) for use in research in accord with the HIPAA and FERPA regulations.

1. **Definitions.** Unless otherwise specified in this Agreement, all capitalized terms used in this Agreement not otherwise defined have the meaning established for purposes of the “HIPAA Regulations” codified at Title 45 parts 160 through 164 of the United States Code of Federal Regulations, as amended from time to time.
2. **Preparation of the LDS** **School District B** shall prepare and furnish to Data Recipient a LDS in accord with any applicable HIPAA or FERPA Regulations
3. **Data Fields in the LDS.** No direct identifiers such as names may be included in the Limited Data Set (LDS). In preparing the LDS, **School District B** shall include the **data fields specified as follows**, which are the minimum necessary to accomplish the research. **Grades 6-8 attendance, discipline, and local and state assessment data between the 2008-2009 and 2011-2012 school years for K-8 and middle schools; archived discipline, attendance, and local and state assessment data from middle schools that closed due to school reform and grade reconfigurations.**
4. **Responsibilities of Data Recipient.** The data recipient agrees to:
  - a. Use or disclose the LDS only as permitted by this Agreement or as required by law;
  - b. Use appropriate safeguards to prevent use or disclosure of the LDS other than as permitted by this Agreement or required by law;
  - c. Report to Data Provider any use or disclosure of the LDS of which it becomes aware that is not permitted by this Agreement or required by law;
  - d. Require any of its subcontractors or agents that receive or have access to the LDS to agree to the same restrictions and conditions on the use and/or disclosure of the LDS that apply to Data Recipient under this Agreement; and
  - e. Not use the information in the LDS to identify or contact the individuals who are data subjects.

5. Permitted Uses and Disclosures of the LDS. Data Recipient may use and/or disclose the LDS for its Research activities only.
6. Term and Termination.
  - a. Term. The term of this Agreement shall commence as of the Effective Date and shall continue for so long as Data Recipient retains the LDS, unless sooner terminated as set forth in this Agreement.
  - b. Termination by Data Recipient. Data Recipient may terminate this agreement at any time by notifying the Data Provider and returning or destroying the LDS.
  - c. Termination by Data Provider. Data Provider may terminate this agreement at any time by providing thirty (30) days prior written notice to Data Recipient.
  - d. For Breach. Data Provider shall provide written notice to Data Recipient within ten (10) days of any determination that Data Recipient has breached a material term of this Agreement. Data Provider shall afford Data Recipient an opportunity to cure said alleged material breach upon mutually agreeable terms. Failure to agree on mutually agreeable terms for cure within thirty (30) days shall be grounds for the immediate termination of this Agreement by Data Provider.
  - e. Effect of Termination. Sections 1, 4, 5, 6(e) and 7 of this Agreement shall survive any termination of this Agreement under subsections c or d.
7. Miscellaneous.
  - a. Change in Law. The parties agree to negotiate in good faith to amend this Agreement to comport with changes in federal law that materially alter either or both parties' obligations under this Agreement. Provided however, that if the parties are unable to agree to mutually acceptable amendment(s) by the compliance date of the change in applicable law or regulations, either Party may terminate this Agreement as provided in section 6.
  - b. Construction of Terms. The terms of this Agreement shall be construed to give effect to applicable federal interpretative guidance regarding the HIPAA Regulations.
  - c. No Third Party Beneficiaries. Nothing in this Agreement shall confer upon any person other than the parties and their respective successors or assigns, any rights, remedies, obligations, or liabilities whatsoever.

- d. Counterparts. This Agreement may be executed in one or more counterparts, each of which shall be deemed an original, but all of which together shall constitute one and the same instrument.
- e. Headings. The headings and other captions in this Agreement are for convenience and reference only and shall not be used in interpreting, construing or enforcing any of the provisions of this Agreement.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, each of the undersigned has caused this Agreement to be duly executed in its name and on its behalf.

**DATA PROVIDER**

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Print Title: \_\_\_\_\_

**DATA RECIPIENT**

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Print Title: \_\_\_\_\_