

Transitioning Middle Level Students Through a Tuition Model in  
Pennsylvania's Public School System

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Pennsylvania's Public School System

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## Abstract

This quantitative research study used seven hypotheses to detail a unique tuition model practice occurring within five Pennsylvania public school districts: Bryn Athyn, Duquesne City, Midland Borough, Saint Clair, and Wilkinsburg. These five districts do not have a high school and tuition resident students to neighboring school districts to meet graduation requirements. The purpose of this study was to identify middle level student and parent perceived similarities and differences towards transition factors prior to students being tuitioned to a secondary school located outside of the district. Through the use of surveys, a convenience sample study was selected for the design structure. The sample population (N = 108) was targeted to collect perceptual data from student (n = 54) and parent (n = 54) groups. Survey items were aligned into five construct categories: peer interaction, access services, teacher support, academic rigor, and school safety. By focusing on the mean of created construct data sets, descriptive statistics measured the relationships between student and parent grouped variables for statistical significance ( $p < .05$ ). Parents generally displayed more concern for survey items and constructs than students recorded. Both groups offered their highest level of concern towards academic rigor and teacher support constructs. The largest concern level differences between student and parent groups existed within peer interaction and school safety constructs, which also eclipsed the statistical significance expectation and rejected two null hypotheses. From these findings, recommendations for practice were illustrated to establish a successful transition program by addressing tuitioned families' concerns to overcome perceived barriers.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

A variety of economic and political factors have financially strained Pennsylvania's K-12 public school system over the last few decades. This research study condensed many of those facets together to detail the increased financial difficulties faced by small school districts, especially those located in southwestern Pennsylvania. To remain relevant, school boards were challenged to meet budgetary challenges while serving in their primary role of educating resident children. The first chapter detailed those barriers and discussed ways that a few small Pennsylvania school districts efficiently performed that function through a tuition model.

The tuition model allowed districts to focus resources on neighborhood elementary schools while paying tuition to neighboring school districts to educate high school students. This research study focused on gaining student and parent perceived fears for the transitional process as those middle level students prepared to leave the neighborhood school district. Student and parent perceptions provided specific family concerns, or fears, to be addressed in an effective transition program to a secondary school located outside of the resident district. The data collected and analyzed will allow administrators to better meet the needs of a unique student population, and recent historical developments in this region suggest that the tuition model trend will continue to gain momentum. This progressive movement reinforced the importance to complete the given research study.

To assist in formulating the organization of the first chapter, background information was provided to narrow research along with internal and external economic

pressures to present the problem statement and purpose of the study. Research questions were illustrated to address the problem statement. Through the use of surveys for data collection, a quantitative, convenience sample research design was created. Statistical analysis produced information for the significance of the study, and statements detailed the importance of adding the newly found student transitional information into the research pool. Limitations, assumptions, and defined terms for the study were produced for clarity to conclude the first chapter.

### **Background**

The nation's public K-12 education system has seen a variety of reform movements to address the leveling of student access over the past 50 years. Federal initiatives began with President Lyndon B. Johnson signing into law the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, and that legislation focused on providing equitable educational services for all students. Individual states continued to address a firm understanding of the legislation through court rulings to establish acceptable practices (Bowden, 2009; Chingos, 2010; Cogswell, 2009). The emphasis of state rule increased over the next few decades; however, President George W. Bush reauthorized the 1965 federal law with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 legislative addendum. At that point, stricter limitations and expectations were placed on states to uphold accountability and access criteria for all children. President Barack Obama placed his emphasis on the accessibility movement through the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015. Once again, the goal was to provide all students with the ability to receive a quality education, and states were guided towards strengthening evaluation and accountability systems for determining whether school districts were adequately performing this function.

The federal government also established the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) of 2004 and the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (2010) to assist with service access to children and adults. IDEA (2004) addressed students with identified needs through disability considerations, and the Affordable Care Act (2010) lobbied for all Americans to have access to quality, affordable healthcare. Both legislative actions had an effect on students and schools, and all of the prescribed federal legislative activity came at a substantial monetary cost too. However, the federal government was not absent in initial efforts to financially assist. President Obama bestowed a \$4 billion Race to the Top grant initiative to assist with school reform efforts during his tenure (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Yet, intermittent federal boosts of monetary income did not adequately fund individual school district needs, and federal contributions remained the smallest contributor towards local school district budgets throughout the nation (Himes & Barrick, 2015). States and local tax funding sources absorbed the burden of federal initiatives (Carr-Chellman & Marsh, 2009; Pennsylvania Department of Education [PDE], 2015a).

While federal dollars were minimized in local communities, families needed more financial support in difficult economic times. Over 50% of the nation's total student population qualified for free school meal programs, and that number equated to more than 30 million students since 2012 (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2017). In 2016, Pennsylvania alone qualified over a million students into the program (PDE, 2015a). Pennsylvania's challenges continued to mount through growing student needs coupled with minimal federal contributions. By 2010, Pennsylvania school budgets only received an average of 10% of funding from federal sources (Himes & Barrick, 2015). State

funding contributed an average of 35% towards district budgets (Pennsylvania Department of Education [PDE], 2015c); hence, the burden of balancing school district budgets remained at the local, community level in Pennsylvania (Carr-Chellman & Marsh, 2009; PDE, 2015a).

The financial pressures associated with limited funded mandates and strict budget parameters highlighted Pennsylvania's antiquated school funding system (Dady, 2010; Quinn & Steinberg, 2015). Local revenue was primarily supplied through property taxes (PDE, 2015c). As assessment values were the focal point for revenue streams, land and building owners absorbed the tax burden at unequal amounts. Pennsylvania did not have an established reassessment law, and counties were left to regulate assessment procedures. Some counties have not reassessed properties in decades (Montari & Weaver, 2007; Weber et al., 2010). Thus, the inconsistencies in the practices maintained by the state's counties further exasperated the inequality in taxation issue. By not providing a consistent statewide property tax reassessment practice, many counties placed a higher tax burden on those families who elected to build new homes (Montari & Weaver, 2007; Weber et al., 2010). Those new home values were placed on county tax records at current market values, which placed an unequal burden on those with newly built homes. With local property taxes making up the majority of school district budgets, questions regarding the equity of this taxation practice gained public attention and placed school districts under more budgetary scrutiny (Superville, 2014).

Pennsylvania school districts also had monetary challenges associated with soaring retirement costs and healthcare obligations (Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, 2010; Pennsylvania School Employees' Retirement System [PSERS], 2013,

2016). In 2010, school districts contributed 5% towards the Pennsylvania School Employees' Retirement System; however, only six years later, the districts were mandated to contribute 30% towards retirement benefits (PSERS, 2016). Employee healthcare benefits saw dramatic increases as well, and the Affordable Care Act (2010) required districts to provide coverage to a wider scope of employees. These additional costs were difficult for schools to absorb. The Pennsylvania Taxpayer Relief Act (Act 1) of 2006 also limited districts from raising taxes above prescribed levels without a voter referendum taking place. Act 1 (2006) legislation did contain increase allowances for certain employee benefit exceptions noted herein. However, even modest tax millage increases appeared negatively to community stakeholders (Brown, 2014). This was especially important to many small southwestern Pennsylvania towns and school districts where student populations have been steadily decreasing over the past few decades (Beaver Valley Intermediate Unit [BVIU], 2015; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010, 2013).

With fewer students, uncontrollable rising costs, and a limited tax base structure, the economic stratification escalated in small town areas from decades of financial downturn (Niederberger, 2014). The steel industry demise made it difficult for southwestern Pennsylvania towns to maintain a middle class community (Polke, 2015; Smydo, 2007). Median household income levels were less than half regional and national averages, and the residing school districts had a high percentage of students enrolled in free meal programs (PDE, 2015a; Pennsylvania School Performance Profile [SPP], 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2015; U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2016). The schools also qualified for federal Title I programs to increase efforts to raise student achievement levels in math and reading content areas for disadvantaged students (U.S.



Department of Education, 2015). Many of these schools did not perform adequately within Pennsylvania's school rating system either (SPP, 2014). If desired, students did have the opportunity to voucher out of neighborhood schools and into charter schools, but this remained an unfamiliar practice to most families, even 20 years after the law was established (Pennsylvania Charter School Law, 1997).

While Pennsylvania Charter School Law (1997) allowed students to opt for tuition vouchers and local transportation to charter schools, students who were most likely to depart from low performing neighborhood schools were those students with highly educated parents (Kennedy, 2012; Zimmer et al., 2009). Educated parents coincided with loftier salaries and higher academic achieving students (Okpala, Okpala, & Smith, 2010). The intentions of offering an opportunity to voucher students into higher performing schools was well intended in design, but resegregation of demographic trends surfaced in its actual practice as families tended to self-segregate (Garcia, 2008; Kennedy, 2012; Wilkinson & Pratt-Dawsey, 2016; Zimmer et al., 2009). Most research targeted students who vouchered away from the home district while limited research detailed the effects left on resident school districts as higher performing peers opted for charter schools outside the district (Mathis & Welner, 2016; Zimmer et al., 2009). School choice reforms needed refinements to meet diversity objectives too (Garcia, 2008; Mathis & Welner, 2016).

A variety of uncontrollable internal and external threats challenged Pennsylvania school district budgets (Abraham, 2011; Fontaine, 2010; Hartman & Shrom, 2014; PSERS, 2013, 2016). Proud communities fought to keep neighborhood schools relevant in areas of foregone industrial wealth, but the local economy and taxpayers were unable

to financially fulfill that obligation (Brown, 2014; Montari & Weaver, 2007). There was no ability to create additional tax revenue by virtue of new homes being built either. Families were not going to pay unequal and higher property taxes for suffering schools and community environments; thus, they elected to build in trendy areas that afforded their children vibrant possibilities. Hence, downtrodden school boards faced escalating issues associated with maintaining reliable tax revenue, having decreased student enrollments, and securing infrastructure and aesthetics for aging school buildings (Baker & Levin, 2014; Hallenbeck, 2012; Weber et al., 2010). School boards had to find a remedy as unparalleled challenges continued to mount (Price, Herzenberg, Brandon, & Herzenberg, 2012).

In 2015, Pennsylvania had 500 school districts located across the state, and each school district was a separate governing entity. Counties did not preside over individual school districts. Per Article III of the Pennsylvania School Code (1949), districts were governed by school boards comprised of nine community members who were voted into those positions during regular election voting sessions. These board positions did not carry any salary or monetary benefits along with them. However, the satisfaction associated with given positions entailed community pride in an authoritative post to aid in the betterment of the neighborhood school system (Faust, 1976; Hayek, 2013; Howley, 1996). Board members enjoyed the local control philosophy (S. D. Tanner, personal communication, May 5, 2015), as traditions and values surfaced in many aspects of the neighborhood schools. However, once proud districts fought to remain relevant while financial issues escalated (Pennsylvania Department of Education [PDE], 2015a; PSERS 2013, 2016). Not only did student achievement suffer in poor economic climates (SPP,

2014), but many physical buildings suffered too. Infrastructure construction costs compounded as regular maintenance procedures were bypassed with condensed annual budgets (Abraham, 2011; Keller & Hartman, 2001). Preventative maintenance plans were surpassed with reactionary maintenance practices.

School consolidation and mergers became the topic of discussion as financial pressures reached very uncomfortable levels. However, due to the nature of local school board control, these occurred on very rare occasions in Pennsylvania (David, 2007, 2009; Faust, 1976; Hallenbeck, 2012; Weber et al., 2010). Consolidation efforts did exist in districts where one school board controlled multiple school buildings, so it was customary to see consolidation efforts to minimize the number of local schools within the same district. Yet, that still did not occur without public outcry in many instances (Morikis, 2010; Palmer, 2010; Reisenweber, 2012). To consider merging two separate school districts into one district was a huge challenge, and only one such voluntary merger took place in Pennsylvania in over 30 years (David, 2007, 2009; Pennsylvania School Boards Association, Education, Research, and Policy Center, 2009). Consider the extenuating factors that school boards and superintendents did not want to forgo their positions and lose local control (Faust, 1976; Hallenbeck, 2012; Weber et al., 2010). Thus, school boards and administrators sought methods to educate their students in an optimal manner while securing the school district entity, and a tuition model concept for educating secondary students was formulated (Duquesne City School District, 2015; Polke, 2015; Rose, 2015; Schaeffer, 2015; Smydo, 2007). Tuitioning students meant that the resident school district only educated students through Grades K-6 or K-8 within the district. Then, the resident school district paid tuition to a neighboring school district for

those students to complete secondary school requirements and graduate from the accepting high school.

Five Pennsylvania school districts of Bryn Athyn, Duquesne City, Midland Borough, Saint Clair, and Wilkinsburg opted for tuitioning secondary students to other districts to complete graduation requirements, and three of those districts were located within 50 miles of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (Rose, 2015; Schaeffer, 2015; Smydo, 2007; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). This recent trend allowed financially distressed districts the opportunity to reinvest waning monetary resources towards neighborhood elementary schools while high school students were tuitioned outside of the resident district. Elementary students encompassed a lower per student cost associated with educating them, so districts immediately saved revenue through outsourcing secondary students (PDE, 2016b). By negotiating the tuition agreements in an era when financial resources were scarce for all districts, the small school districts were able to secure lower tuition rates than those amounts being spent on students within resident schools (PDE, 2016b; Rose, 2015). Furthermore, the tuitioned secondary students were offered more expansive curricular and co-curricular programs at their new schools. Through student engagement opportunities, students were afforded a better learning environment to maximize student achievement (Hallenbeck, 2012; Larson, 2011), and student diversity improved at the new schools as well (Anderson, 2011; Stewart, 2011).

Tuitioned secondary students were afforded a better academic experience while the resident school districts also seized capital funds through the tuition model. Elements of efficiency, equity, and access for all were present by tuitioning students into neighboring school districts. The success of that practice suggested that future tuition

agreements would be considered in other districts too. No political positions were lost in the home school districts, neighborhood elementary schools became more relevant in downtrodden communities, and secondary tuitioned students were offered an education with expansive curricular and co-curricular options. Perhaps the tuition model will be seen as a viable option as more and more districts opt for the model with documented success. Thus, attention needed to turn towards the population of students being tuitioned away from neighborhood secondary schools. Their unique transitional experience occurring during critical middle level years was absent from research pools. A study was needed to detail factors and concerns for this rare population of students, especially as the tuition practice has gained popularity in the last decade (Rose, 2015; Schaeffer, 2005; Smydo, 2007).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The focus of this research study was to provide perceived response data for the students being tuitioned in the three southwestern Pennsylvania school districts of Duquesne, Midland, and Wilkinsburg. While Duquesne and Wilkinsburg tuitioned students outside the district at the conclusion of Grade 6, Midland tuitioned students after Grade 8 (Duquesne City School District, 2015; Polke, 2015; Rose, 2015; Schaeffer, 2015; Smydo, 2007). These students experienced a transitional process that was unlike the vast majority of other students across the state. With the transition process from elementary to secondary schooling being one of the most highly researched educational topics, the traditional transition of students naturally matriculating through grade levels within one school district system dominated research (Gauchat, 2010; McGee, 2009; Rappa, 2012; Wesley, 2001). Another popular researched transition topic included students who

elected to attend a charter, parochial, or specialized school located outside of their home district (Kerns, 2014; Ozek, 2010; Stoddard, 2012). Neither of those two researched transition topics exemplified the rare transitional experience garnered by the population of students leaving Duquesne, Midland, and Wilkinsburg; thus, targeting those districts yielded insight from a population of students and parents that was absent from research.

This absent transitional data for tuitioned students is important to add into the pool of research due to the recent developments in southwestern Pennsylvania regarding districts opting for the tuition model (Duquesne City School District, 2015; Polke, 2015; Rose, 2015; Schaeffer, 2015; Smydo, 2007). By identifying family concerns before students are tuitioned out of the local district, school officials are afforded information that can assist in developing future transitional programs specific for similar populations. These transition programs can be designed to curb perceived or authentic transitional barriers identified by students while still residing in resident elementary schools. It is reasonable to conclude that similar tuition practices will increase in Pennsylvania as districts continue to face financial hardships coupled with decreasing student enrollment figures (BVIU, 2015; PDE, 2015a; Pennsylvania Charter School Law, 1997; PSERS 2013, 2016).

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to identify middle level student and parent perceived similarities and differences towards transition factors prior to students being tuitioned to a secondary school located outside of the district, so administrators can be afforded the opportunity to create a successful transition program by addressing families' levels of concern to overcome perceived barriers. Prior research provided framework for

contributing, or inhibiting, success factors regarding student transitions (Anderson, 2012; Hallenbeck, 2012; Kerns, 2014; Larson, 2011; Sias, 2008; Stoddard, 2012), and those factors were examined through the use of survey instruments with students and parents. Through the use of surveys, a convenience sample, quantitative research design was selected to measure student and parent concerns towards peer interaction, service access, teacher support, academic rigor, and school safety (Anderson, 2012; Hallenbeck, 2012; Kerns, 2014; Larson, 2011; Sias, 2008; Stoddard, 2012).

The study was performed while students were enrolled and present in their resident, middle level classrooms, Grade 6 or Grade 8. The students had not been transitioned away from the resident school district at this point; thus, research pertained to student and parent concern levels prior to having an interactive schooling experience at the accepting secondary school. This was believed to offer more authentic levels of concern for data analysis. It was also a popular practice used in many research studies for comparison with traditional K-12 transitions that took place within one school district system (Gauchat, 2010; McGee, 2009; Rappa, 2012; Wesley, 2001).

Seven research questions were formulated for the research study, which were derived from a review of literature (Anderson, 2012; Hallenbeck, 2012; Kerns, 2014; Larson, 2011; Sias, 2008; Stoddard, 2012). The same questions were organized into hypotheses and null hypotheses for group measurements. The following were the seven research questions identified and analyzed within the dissertation study:

1. What are the similarities and differences for student and parent perceptions on peer interaction when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district?

2. What are the similarities and differences for student and parent perceptions on school service access when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district?
3. What are the similarities and differences for student and parent perceptions on access to teacher support when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district?
4. What are the similarities and differences for student and parent perceptions on academic rigor when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district?
5. What are the similarities and differences for student and parent perceptions on school safety when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district?
6. Are there differences between student and parent perceptions for each school?
7. Are there differences among students in two grades?

### **Significance of the Study**

Through the use of surveys for data collection, a quantitative research design (Asaad, Melewar, & Cohen, 2015; Hamid, 2008; Warsame, 2011) was selected for a convenience sample population (Hoekstra, 2014; Piotrowski, 2015) to identify factors perceived to be a concern by students and parents before students are tuitioned to a secondary school located outside of their resident school district. Once completed, administrators will be provided with critical information to assist in developing an authentic, research-based transition program for student success. This was performed by classifying transition research into five construct categories of peer interaction, service



access, teacher support, academic rigor, and school safety for middle level students (Anderson, 2012; Hallenbeck, 2012; Kerns, 2014; Larson, 2011; Sias, 2008; Stoddard, 2012). By using previous research to identify students' transitional factors, the current research study was afforded the opportunity to evaluate similarities, or differences, from that research performed with this unique population of tuitioned students.

Surveys were provided to students and parents to collect their perceived levels of concern for construct items in a Likert scale response format (Ekanem, 2013; Likert, 1932; McLeod, 2008). Then, grouped means and variables were compared through descriptive statistics (Clark, 2012; Coleman, Atkinson, & Waduge, 2015; Hughes, 2010; Sutton, 2013; Warachan, 2011). Descriptive statistics allowed the researcher the ability to weigh the relationships between student and parent grouped variables through statistical analysis and calculating formulas for statistical significance. This comparison practice offered consistency founded within prior research for a new population of students transitioning from middle level grades into secondary schooling. Thus, a reliable data collection process and analyzation was confirmed for a new transition model of students who were being tuitioned away from their resident district. The consistency in process allowed the new information obtained from the uniquely tuitioned population of students to be accurately portrayed, and the collected data offered a voice for tuitioned students into modern research. It also offered administrators insight into perceived transitional barriers before the tuition process took place, and future transitional programs could use this information to assist in developing programs that meet the needs of families to accurately depict forthcoming transitional barriers.

## **Limitations and Delimitations**

Limitations for the study included factors that the researcher did not control. It was assumed that students and parents were completely honest with their survey responses; however, the researcher could not guarantee respondent honesty. Another limitation involved a concern over the respondent participation rate. An invitation to participate, consent form, and a parent survey were given to all students to deliver home to parents. Signed parental consent was needed for students to participate in the survey; thus, documents needed to go back and forth from school to home with the students. Considering that there was limited parental communication about the study, there was concern over the number of subjects that would be willing to take part in the research study. However, the participating school districts greatly assisted with retrieving documents from parents, and the schools also returned an equal number of completed parent and student surveys. Both achieved acceptable power expectations for reliability (Brant, n.d.; Cohen, 1988, 1992; Lipsey, 1990), and no lapses existed for unequal group sizes or possible generalization errors (Testa, 2010).

Delimitations included aspects of the study, which the researcher was able to manage. Respondent data were collected after students completed 50% of their final year of schooling within the resident school district. A convenience sample selection was detailed to invite survey responses from all middle level students and parents in southwestern Pennsylvania who were facing an upcoming transition through a tuition model. Three public school districts located within 50 miles of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania maintained a tuition model for secondary students, and those three school districts were invited to participate in the research survey for students and parents. By collecting data

prior to student departure from the home school district, it was assumed that the collected data provided the most accurate perceived levels of concern towards developed constructs.

Student and parent survey responses were selected for group data comparisons, but individual student and parent surveys were not coded together, which may have resulted in nested effects of group comparison (Stockburger, 1996). By selecting group data for comparison, assumptions were concluded that the student and parent groups were independent from one another (Barany, 2003; Whitley & Ball, 2002), and differences existed between the two groups being measured (Barany, 2003). Also, dependent variables were assumed to be normally distributed with similar variance in both groups (Whitley & Ball, 2002).

### **Definition of Terms**

*Academic rigor* - was the level of difficulty prescribed through high academic standards that made courses and classes challenging for students (Bowers & Powers, 2009; Hughes, 2010).

*Concern* - identified amounts of anxiousness towards perceived transitional elements contained within surveys. Respondents were asked to consider five varying levels of concern to answer survey questions in a Likert scale format (Ekanem, 2013; Likert, 1932; McLeod, 2008).

*Constructs* - were developed and grouped into five categories based on prior student transition research. Synonymously used with the term factors in this study, constructs collected unobservable feelings, or levels of concern, towards five targeted

transitional subtopics on survey instruments for measurements (Enfield & Nathaniel, 2013; Wang & Degol, 2016).

*High stakes tests* - encompassed students completing the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) in Grades 7-8 for language arts and math. Grade 8 students also completed the science PSSA. High school students performed end of course Keystone Exams in algebra, biology, and English composition, and those assessments were typically completed in Grade 9 and Grade 10 (Pennsylvania Department of Education [PDE], 2015d).

*K-6, K-8, and K-12* - were labels to denote kindergarten (K) and student grade levels (6, 8, and 12) held by a given building or school district. For example, the abbreviation K-8 signified that the school entity encompassed kindergarten through Grade 8 students, which tallied nine grade levels.

*Middle level grades* - encompassed students enrolled in Grade 6 through Grade 8.

*Parent* - was the legal guardian representing the student participating in the research study. Regardless of the relationship to the child, the student's guardian was considered to be the adult whom the student resided with, and the guardian was labeled synonymously with parent throughout the study. One legal guardian per student was invited to complete the parent survey.

*Peer interaction* - involved student desires to belong and their ability to build positive peer relationships upon entering the new school. This identified the aspiration for a harmonious fit and creation of new student relationships to be formed (Gauchat, 2010; McGee, 2009).

*Pennsylvania School Performance Profile (SPP)* - was Pennsylvania's state report card mechanism for rating public schools in 2013-14. Each established public school building received a numeric score of 0-100. The higher the numeric score, the better the performance rating (Pennsylvania School Performance Profile [SPP], 2014).

*Perceptions* - issued the possibility of varying student and parental viewpoints for the importance of transitional factors and potential barriers established through research (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Falbo, Lein, & Amador, 2001; Smith, 2007).

*Resident school district* - was the location where Pennsylvania students lived, which also determined the public school district for students' attendance. This was also known as the home school district.

*School board (board)* - per Article III of the Pennsylvania School Code (1949), public school districts' governing bodies comprised of nine community members who were voted into the positions during regular election voting sessions. No compensation was attached to these elected positions.

*School safety* - entailed students' mental and physical comfort expectations from a variety of aspects associated with attending a new secondary campus. The new building layout, travel, and adolescent bullying and fighting were considered for this construct (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Kennedy, 2012; Mizelle & Irwin, 2000).

*Service access* - as an established distance barrier for students who left neighborhood schools and had direct consequences for accessing curricular assistance and needed school services. The distance traveled between locations also inhibited co-curricular experiences (Anderson, 2012; Ekanem, 2013; Sias, 2008).

*Teacher support* - focused on students' ability to build new, trusting relationships with new teachers for reliability and consistency towards academic and social success (Hallenbeck, 2012; Larson, 2011).

*Tuition Model* - identified the process where the resident school district paid for students to attend another secondary school located outside of their home school district. This tuition model practice was achieved through a negotiated contract established between the sending and accepting school districts which prescribed the per student cost paid by the resident school district for educational services at the receiving school.

*Tuitioned* - Used as a verb in instances to identify those specific students enrolled in a school through a tuition model. Tuitioned students were targeted as the convenience sample population for the research study.

### **Summary**

While efficiency, equity, and access elements within public school systems have been debated topics for generations across the nation, Pennsylvania's trends surrounded varying levels of funding, unequal tax burdens, economic stratification of classes, and student achievement accountability within the public school landscape. Wealthy neighborhoods and families absorbed heavier, local tax obligations, and their children were provided with optimal public schooling opportunities. This wealth gap continued to widen as federal and state monetary contributions decreased to local school districts; thus, school districts were forced to raise local property taxes to balance budgets and remain relevant. The wealthier communities tolerated this practice while the poorer neighborhoods suffered. Additional issues surfaced due to the lack of state regulations regarding property reassessment practices. Gone were the prosperous days of

southwestern Pennsylvania's industrial small towns, and local schools felt the community's economic demise too. Southwestern Pennsylvania's middle class diminished in many areas, which accelerated an economic, social stratification of classes that even the charter school (1997) voucher system did not remedy.

To remain relevant, school districts were forced to discover cost savings mechanisms, and one attempt included a tuition model concept. The three small southwestern Pennsylvania school districts of Duquesne, Midland, and Wilkinsburg practiced a tuition model during the 2016-17 school year, where secondary students were tuitioned into nearby high schools. This allowed the resident school districts to refocus resources on neighborhood elementary schools while offering expansive opportunities to secondary students outside the neighborhood. The accepting school districts saw immediate benefits associated with monetary tuition payments and student diversity. Arguments for leveling characteristics of educational efficiency, equity, and access were generated through tuition agreements. Both school districts benefited from the costs associated with educating students while offering enriched program environments.

With many positive benefits established to promote future cooperative tuition agreements made between school districts, it was extremely important to provide information detailing student transitions from the resident school district to the accepting school district setting. Identifying student and parent perceptions related to this transitional experience offered important data. A convenience sample of students and parents provided insight via survey responses (Campbell, 1955; Spreen, 1992; Zhen et al., 2006). Through identified constructs, levels of concern for student and parent groups were analyzed through the use of mean scores for group comparison and descriptive

statistics (Ganzert, 2012; Thomas, 2012; Turner, 2013; Warsame, 2011). By including descriptive statistics, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software assisted with the statistical analysis (Clark, 2012; Coleman et al., 2015; Hughes, 2010; Sutton, 2013; Warachan, 2011). Discovered themes provided new research for a growing trend of tuitioned students within southwestern Pennsylvania. The addition of this information was provided to assist public school officials with an opportunity to build comprehensive transition programs for tuitioned students prior to students leaving the resident school district.



## **Chapter II**

### **Literature Review**

This chapter of research viewed national and statewide educational trends, funding, and political parameters in an attempt to create an efficient public school system that fostered equity and access for all children (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 [NCLB], 2003). Beginning with a wide scope of literature, the information detailed a themed trail to resolve social stratification issues associated with location of residence (NCLB, 2003; Pennsylvania School Code, 1997). To coincide, minimal legislative accomplishments were established to resolve unequal funding distributions and tax burdens at the federal, state, and local levels (Carr-Chellman & Marsh, 2009; Himes & Barrick, 2015; Pennsylvania Department of Education [PDE], 2015a). With a focus on student achievement, engagement, and access opportunities, school choice initiatives attempted to offer options that neighborhood schools failed to make available (McKelvey, 2013; NCLB, 2003; Robinson, 2006). Yet, funding developments remained in question, especially at the state level in Pennsylvania (Brown, 2014).

Rooted in an antiquated state educational funding system that has been primarily based on local wealth considerations (Dady, 2010; Quinn & Steinberg, 2015), Pennsylvania school districts have faced uncommon financial burdens in recent years associated with employee benefits (Pennsylvania Public School Employees' Retirement System [PSERS], 2013, 2016), special education, and charter school payments (Pennsylvania Department of Education [PDE], 2015b). The financial strains have surfaced in coordination with state legislative enactments that also limited the authority of local school boards to raise taxes (Pennsylvania Taxpayer Relief Act [Act 1], 2006).

To complicate matters in the southwestern region of Pennsylvania, student enrollment figures have been declining in numerous school districts since the 1970s (Beaver Valley Intermediate Unit [BVIU], 2015), especially in locations where steel mills have closed and industries have waned. Beaver County once serviced a K-12 student population of 48,000 students in 1971. Other than some moderate leveling in the 1990s, the student population has consistently declined to 22,000 in 2015 (BVIU, 2015).

With minimal consolidation, redistricting, and merger efforts made throughout Pennsylvania due to a variety of economic, political, and social issues (Hallenbeck, 2012; Weber et al., 2010), three school districts started a practice of tuitioning their secondary students to nearby high schools. This practice allowed school districts to keep elementary students in the neighborhood schools, while offering expansive curricular and co-curricular programs to secondary students. Beginning in the 2016-17 school year, the Pittsburgh region had Midland Borough, Duquesne City, and Wilkesburg School District tuitioning secondary students outside of their home, resident school district to attend neighboring high schools located in separate districts. Transitioning these students was the focus of this research. While much of the research compiled to date discussed normal matriculation transitions within the same school system or to an institution of family choice (Gauchat, 2010; McGee, 2009; Wesley, 2001), research benefited from an investigation of the tuition option to add insight and assist in improving the transitional process for students into accepting secondary schools through a tuition model.

### **Federal Initiatives and National Trends in Public Education**

Pennsylvania was not unique in identifying adequacy and funding challenges facing the state's public education system (Baker & Levin, 2014). Many other states

have faced similar issues based on funding resources, school choice, declining enrollments, and student achievement measurements too. While the federal government has taken a broad approach to solidifying legislative action with regards to education, those considerations have had lasting effects on public education trends and expenditures. In the modern era of educational reform, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson focused on providing educational service access for all students. George W. Bush reauthorized the law into the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 legislative addendum; however, President Obama's Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 was the latest edition of educational changes. Over time, the federal government slowly moved accountability authority back towards the individual states. The theme of local control within education has historically taken precedence. Whether that occurred due to the limited amount of federal funding (Himes & Barrick, 2015) as opposed to state and local funding (Carr-Chellman & Marsh, 2009; PDE, 2015a) to schools was one primary conclusion drawn as a viewpoint from those in Pennsylvania.

While adequate funding will always be the focal point in providing education nationwide, maintaining public education resources has been an increasingly difficult task in Pennsylvania. Other states have devised a funding formula to properly fund K-12 and postsecondary education, and unseen funding amounts have surfaced from the federal government too. President Obama's administration offered substantial grants in a three phase cycle to states where federal educational reform initiatives were sought. Even though the federal government pushed out over \$4 billion in the second phase of Race to the Top grants in 2010, the disparity for the nine states awarded funding ranged from

\$700 million in New York and Florida to \$75 million in Rhode Island and Hawaii, respectively. Through all three phases, 23 states were awarded, and Pennsylvania received over \$40 million in the third phase of the funding (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). To qualify for the grant, states provided a plan for educational reform. However, a new teacher and principal evaluation system linked to standardized test scores highlighted this funding initiative. Couple that mandate with the desire to embed the federal government's common core principles into state curriculum, and it was quickly noticed how community members felt that control was escaping the state and local school districts. However, federal funding has typically coincided with national initiatives. Pennsylvania's acceptance of \$40 million officially linked the state to national guidelines.

While the federal government has promoted global concepts and offered additional revenue for educational reform, individual states have been continually challenged to provide students with a relevant, cost-effective education. Studies have concluded that proper allocation of educational resources have been established in states like Illinois through the use of Kruskal-Wallis tests (McKelvey, 2013) and the Florida Education Finance Program, where results yielded a high level of equity for the available funding (Bowden, 2009). The Ohio Open Enrollment Task Force (2013) made recommendations to Ohio's Department of Education on process and funding of open enrollment to assist in the effectiveness of the statewide initiative that was most recently expanded in 1998. All of these efforts continued to address funding formulas while providing students with an equitable academic setting.

Some states have opted to streamline resources by addressing varying population trends and low student enrollments. Nebraska enacted legislation to promote school consolidation in 1997. Cogswell (2009) studied 52 of Nebraska's small school districts since the legislation was established, and Cogswell (2009) identified that per pupil cost rates were significantly higher in small districts. Perhaps, more stringent consolidation legislation was needed beyond initial efforts to realize monetary benefits. Nebraska began the positive financial process of consolidation, but legislative refinements were needed to curb the financial burden of small districts placed on the state. As states continued to spend enormous amounts of money on education, legislation critically measured and questioned facets of efficiency, equity, and access for students.

### **Effectiveness of Pennsylvania's K-12 Public Schools**

Pennsylvania school districts have increasingly been challenged to meet state and federal mandates while funding formulas (Baker & Levin, 2014; Dady, 2010) and taxation (Pennsylvania Department of Education [PDE], 2015c) expectations have strained property owners and legislatures alike within the Commonwealth. Recent trends of soaring retirement increases of 11%, 16%, and 20% in consecutive years have crippled school district budgets through mandated payment obligations, while employee contribution rates remained around 7% (PSERS, 2013, 2016). Charter school tuition payments (PDE, 2015b) and consumable commodities such as transportation fuel costs (U.S. Department of Energy [DOE], 2015) have also constricted budgets with added monetary expenditures in recent years. In 2009, diesel costs were \$2 per gallon, and that cost rose to over \$4 per gallon in 2013 (DOE, 2015). Yet, the Pennsylvania Taxpayer

Relief Act, Special Session 1 [Act 1] of 2006 placed limitations on school boards for annual taxation increases without a voter referendum taking place.

In Pennsylvania's southwestern region, many school districts faced additional monetary setbacks associated with declining student enrollments (BVIU, 2015; Polke, 2015; Smydo, 2007), which has had a moderately negative effect on state reimbursement funding (PDE, 2015c). The combination of decreasing enrollments, an antiquated funding source, and rising costs have caused districts to explore alternative methods for operating an efficient school system while serving in their primary role of educating resident children (Dady, 2010; Superville, 2014).

Public schools in Pennsylvania were funded in three levels. The first two levels included federal programs and state reimbursement formulas that encompassed elements of community wealth (Dady, 2010), and the third revenue source was primarily driven by local property taxation (Carr-Chellman & Marsh, 2009). A small percentage of locally earned personal income taxation was also added to district revenue, and this amount equated to sharing residents' 1% to 3% of salaries between the local municipality and school district (Pennsylvania Local Tax Enabling Act [Act 32], 2008). The federal resource was the smallest contributor, which was approximately 10% of districts' budgets in 2010 (Himes & Barrick, 2015), and those monetary contributions usually targeted areas of need associated with disadvantaged students, academic achievement, intervention, prevention, and professional development programs (NCLB, 2003). Pennsylvania's state contribution accounted for roughly 35% of school budgets in 2010, and it was associated to local wealth measured with market value for properties, personal income aid ratios, and student enrollment (PDE, 2015c). State and federal contributions

varied greatly for independent school districts through wealth measurements (Quinn & Steinberg, 2015). Local municipalities covered the remaining budget amounts needed through local taxation of property and earned income. Thus, local sources supplied schools with an average of 55% of their annual revenue. Pennsylvania legislatures have continually decreased the state's percentage share of funding to K-12 schools since 1990, and the Commonwealth ranked as one of the lowest monetary assisting states in the country for K-12 education by Brown (2014).

### **External School District Budget Strains**

Property tax, both building and land, were the focal point for school district revenue (Carr-Chellman & Marsh, 2009). A variety of equity issues have continued to be magnified through the use of this primary funding stream in Pennsylvania. First, the burden of home taxation has dramatically increased over time. As state subsidies decreased (PDE, 2015a), local taxes increased to draw in resources. Another inequity that continued to hinder this process was that many counties throughout the Commonwealth have not reassessed land or buildings in decades. Weber et al. (2010) argued that Pennsylvania should enact one property reassessment law to create uniform consistency across all counties. Otherwise, an inequality gap in property taxation will continue to widen. As of 2007, 31 of the 67 total counties had not reassessed or adjusted ratios since 1990 (Montari & Weaver, 2007). State legislatures have been leaving those decisions to local, county officials. Thus, those families who built new homes in 31 counties faced tax millage rates based on old data configurations. Yet, their homes were placed on tax rolls at current values, and those families were heavily overtaxed. The

inequality in the system was evident, and it will continue to grow without reassessments taking place on a regular schedule (Weber et al, 2010).

Another external strain on district budgets was the Pennsylvania Charter School Law, Act 22 of 1997, which surrounded the advent of charter schools in Pennsylvania. Not only was school choice new to the state through this law, but districts were also required to pay tuition and transportation for resident students who elected to attend public charter schools through school choice initiatives. Tuition amounts varied tremendously as well. Each district received a per student cost based on total district budgets in accordance with the number of students who were enrolled in the district (PDE, 215b). In 2006, the average K-12 pupil cost in Pennsylvania was \$11,028, which was the 11th highest in the country (Carr-Chellman & Marsh, 2009). By 2012, that amount increased to \$13,340 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012); however, individual Pennsylvania districts varied spending amounts by as much as \$8,000 per pupil in both directions from that figure. Furthermore, special education students often doubled per pupil costs and payments if electing to attend a charter school (PDE, 2015b). This tuition burden has placed many districts in financial despair. Consider the impact that this formula and payments had on districts where enrollments were declining, which is a growing trend in many Pennsylvania counties. It has already been determined by Superville (2014) that school budgets were somewhat fixed in nature, and costs were going to incrementally increase over time. However, as student enrollment numbers decrease, there was a direct correlation to an increase in per pupil spending. As per pupil costs increased, payments to charter schools increased, which created higher costs once again. It was a perpetual problem without any viable answers.



Transportation expectations were not foreign to administrators, as districts have historically been required to transport resident students who attended parochial schools within ten miles of the district borders to school. Charter School Law (1997) also offered the same transportation benefit to charter students. At first, resident school districts received a partial charter school tuition reimbursement amount of 20% from the state to assist with transportation costs. However, that assistance program momentarily disappeared altogether at the state level and then returned again in smaller increments. Districts absorbed all travel costs associated with charter schools in 2014-15. Consider the high diesel fuel prices of \$4 per gallon in 2014 compared to \$2 per gallon in 2009 or \$1 per gallon in 2000 (DOE, 2015), and the impact of transporting students was an obvious increasing financial issue for schools. It was also difficult to determine if school choice or traditional options were paying dividends in student achievement outcomes too (Benson, 2012; Hayek, 2013; Roberts, 2012; Shreck 2010). Suggestions encouraged funding resources be tied to standardized tests, while observing policy redesign as accomplished in New York (Baker & Levin, 2014). Accumulating higher costs for the benefit of providing better educational services and optimal student achievement results would be tolerable. However, providing services and programs at accelerated costs for minimal, if any, benefit was difficult to accept.

The Prevailing Wage Act (1961) mandated that a predetermined prevailing wage rate be paid for labor on given governmental projects in excess of \$25,000. Thus, added expenses were involved even for small capital projects. Abraham (2011) supported the additional costs claim by displaying that the predetermined prevailing wage rate in Pennsylvania was set 30% to 76% higher than similar documented occupational wages

within the same state. In Pennsylvania's Beaver County, prevailing wages, which also encompassed fringe benefits into the hourly rate wage, ranged from \$37.61 for cement finishers to \$49.36 for sheet metal workers in 2011. Keller and Hartman (2001) conducted a study of 25 Pennsylvania school districts who completed construction projects between 1992 and 1997. It was determined that all of those districts paid higher construction costs than those accepted within industry competition, and all of those districts accrued additional taxation obligations for their homeowners. Yet, Wial (1999) argued that project costs do not decrease without prevailing wage, as less skilled labor yields lower productivity as wages decrease. Hence, the projects took longer to complete and caused for additional hours of wages for less skilled workers.

### **Internal Budgetary Conflicts**

Districts demonstrated a process of financial responsibility to eliminate all excess spending; however, the U.S. Census Bureau (2012) reported that school districts will have 78% of annual budgets consumed by employee wages and benefits. Certainly, other contracted services and utility costs consumed additional mandatory spending too. Thus, fiscal responsibility was restricted to maneuvering miniscule, discretionary spending. Even then, that nominal, discretionary spending amount was associated with purchases that were not truly optional. Material replacements of textbooks, computers, or unforeseen emergency maintenance projects occurred during fiscal years. Given needs easily mandated remaining budget amounts and even demanded attention from reserve balance funds. In districts that maintained budgets in excess of \$19,000,000 annually, Pennsylvania School Code (2003) prohibited those districts from accruing more than 8% of total annual budget figures into a reserve fund balance. That "rainy day" reserve fund

balance can be carried over from year to year; however, reserve amounts must not exceed the 8% maximum amount unless approval was issued from the state for assets needed to cover upcoming large scale purchases or building projects.

Servicing debt responsibilities for capital projects and repayment of bonds was a primary responsibility of central office, and it was at the forefront of conversations to orchestrate a tax increase for the community (Act 1, 2006). Debt management was a very important aspect to minimize as district enrollments decreased and budgets tightened. As difficult conversations towards consolidation or the dissolving of district borders through merger acquisitions arose, adjacent districts avoided creating formal relationships with districts that carried large amounts of debt (David, 2007). Educational Resource Strategies (2009), supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, reinforced that smaller districts typically overspend to meet staffing obligations. When budgetary amounts were consumed, the percentage of debt increased as well. To remain attractive and financially fit for the possibility of a consolidation or merger, a district must refrain from new building projects. Districts must also maintain a quality preventative maintenance program to ensure lasting facilities through difficult financial hardships.

Districts will first search internally to maximize revenue sources through controlling staffing factors. Even though consolidation of non-instructional services increased efficiency and overall quality, data suggested minimal cost savings took place (DeLuca, 2012). Administrators initially avoided altering instructional programs, so the first financial overhauls occurred within discretionary spending. However, Superville (2014) determined that savings amount was minimal once again. Administrators also entertained outsourcing non-teaching functions such as cafeteria services, transportation,

facilities management, and even teaching assistants (Alexander & Rogers, 1988; Burk, 1982). Although the noted services remained paramount to properly operating a school district, the relative costs were unilaterally consistent in overall spending. Yet, the primary reason for these outsourcing considerations was to avoid directly paying rising retirement (PSERS, 2013, 2016) and healthcare benefits for district employees. The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 became more stringent in 2014 with meeting escalating cost mandates. By outsourcing these groups to minimize paying for federally required healthcare, districts also avoided being linked to mandatory state retirement increases (PSERS, 2013, 2016). The tactic was not a determination of whether these individuals deserved given benefits. This was merely a potential costs savings alternative due to very high healthcare and retirement costs. This also avoided potential litigation scenarios where teacher benefits would possibly be matched by other non-curricular, unionized groups employed by the district. In the 2014-15 fiscal year, PSERS (2013) required an employer contribution rate of 21.4%, which was a 4.5% increase over the previous year. Employees contributed 7.4% of their salary towards retirement in 2014-15. By 2016-17, PSERS (2016) district contribution costs rose to 30.03%, but employee contributions remained seemingly unchanged. In the private sector, more leverage existed with less expensive alternatives. By outsourcing, districts ultimately saved money by indirectly paying for employee wages, benefits, and retirement through a competitive bidding process with provider contracts.

With the largest percentage of districts' expenditures taking place within teaching personnel salaries, this was one focused area where budget gains were accomplished although Section 1124 of the PA School Code (1949) had strict parameters for permitted

furloughs. A substantial drop in student enrollment was one consideration for allowable furloughs; however, economic reasons were not permissible for teacher furloughs until recent amendments were conjoined into Section 1124 (Murphy, 2014). Yet, low enrollments had a direct correlation to economic conditions. By acknowledging both as accessible reasons for furloughs, authority was given to districts to enact cost saving remedies for economic downturns without the threat of lengthy court appeals to halt efforts. The updated legislation also addressed seniority rights and the platform for furloughs to occur. The state strayed from seniority driven job security, although past practice for districts has been to furlough their most recently hired employee first.

### **Redistricting, Consolidation, and Mergers of Schools**

While Pennsylvania has debated public education funding resources, Wenders (2003) described how the state has historically been active in consolidation efforts. In the mid 1900s, Pennsylvania had amassed 2,530 school districts. By the 1970s, that number decreased to 505 districts, and by 2003, that number was reduced to 501. On July 1, 2009, Pennsylvania witnessed a voluntary merger which dissolved the Center Area and Monaca School District. Those two districts combined to form the Central Valley School District (David, 2009). This merger was unprecedented, and it was tabbed as the first voluntary merger in state history. In fact, it was the first consolidation of any kind since the late 1980s, when a federal desegregation lawsuit forced five school districts near Pittsburgh to create the Woodland Hills School District (Pennsylvania School Boards Association [PSBA], 2009). The seemingly successful Center-Monaca merger has created conversation for the possibility of additional mergers taking place in the

Pittsburgh area; however, many political, financial, and educational angles aligned to assist in the Central Valley merger process (David, 2007).

Even when it was accurately calculated for a school district to consider consolidating, merging, or creating a tuition agreement outside of the district, community dissent existed (Palmer, 2010). Schools were the community hubs in many small towns (Burton, 2010), and they provided financial revenue for local businesses (Morikis, 2010). Hallenbeck (2012) found that the culture of a school and community were embedded with one another. The school was a symbol of the community, and as Flynn-Trace (2011) identified, schools indirectly created an identity for the citizens. By taking away the school as traditionally known, many people felt as though their past and memories were forgotten.

As Faust (1976) found early on, it was imperative to include all stakeholders in the process of identifying monetary and curricular deficiencies while allowing community members to also view the possibilities and experiences for future students after an alteration of the school system was administered. Winer (2010) stated that the process should provide for ample discussion and an implementation timeframe of at least one year for consolidation practices. By embedding many key community personnel in the process (Faust, 1976), the district was transparent in proceedings through engaging stakeholders. All voices had an opportunity to be heard. It was important to also discover a method to honor the historic past (Mertens, 2013) while embarking towards building a new culture and eventually new traditions. The new setting automatically created those facets as Flynn-Trace (2011) discovered. The unintended consequence of

creating a new culture was also embraced by the community as they also participated in forming that new identity.

Mergers took much effort to redefine district lines, alter tax rates, and have school boards agree to common guidelines forthcoming; however, consolidating schools within the same district was challenging as well. Reorganization efforts in primary grades occurred more regularly; yet, the research herein detailed recent progress in the areas of middle and high schools in Pennsylvania. In 2016-17, only five school districts across the Commonwealth did not have a secondary campus to educate resident high school students, and three of those schools were located in the southwestern part of the state. These unique accommodations surfaced due to district financial strains and lengthy enrollment declines yielding consolidation and outsourcing concepts. Duquesne City School District operated an elementary program and assisted in tuitioning Grades 7 through 12 to the nearby school districts of East Allegheny and West Mifflin. Duquesne was under state control for fiscal reasons, and the state's appointed board voted to close Duquesne High School in 2007 (Smydo, 2007). The Midland Borough School District has always serviced their K-8 students within one district building; however, Midland has tuitioned Grade 9 through 12 students to East Liverpool (Ohio), Beaver Area, and a variety of charter schools since 1986. The urban Pittsburgh school district of Wilkinsburg joined the trend in 2015, and board members voted to begin tuitioning approximately 200 students in Grades 7 through 12 into Pittsburgh Public Schools (Polke, 2015) in 2016-17. Pittsburgh Public Schools had a student population of 25,000.

Southwestern Pennsylvania continued to have school consolidation efforts occurring at primary levels, but it remained rare that high schools were consolidated.

Yet, two districts have recently completed that task. In 2012, the Conneaut School District combined three high schools into one by a 6 to 3 school board vote (Reisenweber, 2012). In 2014, the Armstrong School District elected to close two neighboring high schools and built a new school to combine all of the collective students. Armstrong did fail once at a similar high school consolidation conglomerate in the 1990s. It was one instance where athletic and community pride in schools prevailed in board elections and decisions to override fiscal responsibility were upheld (White, 2014). As Burton (2010) discovered through descriptive statistics, small schools benefited their community through socialization opportunities, and they also fostered business revenue in the local municipality (Morikis, 2010).

Once the consolidation, or merger, of schools took place, maintenance for the new structure was needed immediately. Noted failures resulted from lack of planning, poor communication, or perceived unjust benefits (Crowe, 2013; Schumacher, 2011). Slade (2012) offered that principals felt micropolitical issues surfaced in consolidated buildings. Results gave insight into future training opportunities for future instances. In the first year after a consolidation took place, principals spent more time as building managers (Thurman, 2012). A study of 12 pairs of consolidated Texas school districts between 1996 and 2006 by Stewart (2011) found that only a subtle financial benefit was realized after the consolidation process was administered. Thompson's (2014) review of 56 public schools in Nassau County, New York revealed findings that recommended maintaining the organizational format of multiple schools instead of combining them. Although the study acknowledged that a merger would assist with driving diversity efforts, financial indicators for efficiency were being governed effectively in the current



model. Many financial gains achieved through consolidations, or mergers, were offset by the additional costs associated with transportation (Price et al., 2012; Stewart, 2011). Simply combining schools does not ease pressures associated with costs. Having planned foresight to condense transportation and operating systems allowed for real savings to take place and provided principals with the tools to continue as educational leaders in the new setting as opposed to basic building management practices.

### **School Choice and Achievement**

School choice initiatives have taken place in various forms throughout the country for centuries. Although historically a primary function for private and parochial schooling when families paid tuition, school choice in Pennsylvania allowed for student attendance in charter schools at the resident district's expense. Pennsylvania's public education system saw major movement in this area over the last 20 years in an effort to provide equity for student opportunities. Pennsylvania Charter School Law was enacted in 1997, and it allowed students to voucher into public charter schools without any financial commitment from families. No longer were students bound to a school district simply by their residence and zip code. The plan allowed students to have academic options and escape possible economic and achievement barriers associated with poorly performing neighborhood schools. Elongated, insufficient student achievement patterns have resulted in schools being placed into Pennsylvania's Corrective Action Plan due to not meeting NCLB (2003) obligations, and in those cases, students were eligible to voucher into another district. Morgan-Davis' (2013) findings of those schools in Corrective Action Plans noted the need for enhanced instructional, curricular, and remediation programs to improve student performance levels and escape state oversight.

School choice allowed families to make decisions to leave given situations for optimal learning environments.

Home school districts were responsible for tuition payments and transporting the students to the public charter schools. Also, Pennsylvania Cyber Charter School began the first cyber charter institution in Pennsylvania in 2000 (Chellman & Marsh, 2009). At that point, families had an option to depart their home school districts without physically moving, and Kennedy (2012) found that educated parents were more likely to move their children to higher performing schools. That further exasperated the stratification of classes process since lower achieving, poor students were left behind in struggling neighborhood schools (Kennedy, 2012). Furthermore, Duim (2013) identified that schools competing against one another for students in California uncovered tensions between school officials. Mader (2010) reviewed the longest-running and largest-scale private voucher program in the country in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. There, competition effects were positive, and the effects of facing an additional competitor were statistically insignificant.

While offering students the ability to select charter schooling without monetary commitments seemed noble when the local, public school was failing, research does not indicate that student success took place by simply leaving the local school district. In fact, many traditional schools produced student achievement results that surpassed neighboring charter school performance levels (Benson, 2012; Pettett, 2002). Ozek (2009) found that students who opted out of their neighborhood schools performed significantly worse on standardized tests than those who remained in their school of residence. The impact of opting out varied greatly with respect to grade and

socioeconomic status of students. If students with educated parents were the students who were more apt to leave the local school in search of a better academic setting (Kennedy, 2012), those typically underperforming subgroups of English language learners (ELL), special education, and low socioeconomic students remained seated in the neighborhood school district (Kennedy, 2012). Thus, student diversity suffered when school choice options were formulated, as educated families attempted to leave neighborhood schools for more appealing institutions.

School choice did not have to exist in a combative, competitive nature either, and non-traditional approaches to expansive educational opportunities occurred in creative ways while students remained in the home school district too. Choice allowed students to maneuver between their traditional, home school and another facility that offered opportunities of interest to the student. Engaging the student while remaining attached to their home district and peers offered expanded curricular options to enable success while maintaining a positive connection to the community (Anderson, 2012; Sias, 2008). This type of collaboration has historically been performed in Pennsylvania through regional vocational, trade, and technical schools. Students gained essentialist, academic coursework within their home district. Then, they attended the specialty school for direct instruction in their desired area of interest. Other cooperative programs existed between college and high schools for dual credit considerations too. While these programs took a financial commitment from the local district, they remained more cost effective than having the student opt for a charter school. Other creative opportunities existed such as the University of Pennsylvania's cooperative effort with University City High School in Philadelphia to develop a Student Success Center, which benefitted both institutions

(Wyant, 2013). When establishing joint partnerships, shared vision and goals must be articulated in a manner to offer clear guidance and oversight (Eckel & Hartley, 2008).

Modern financial pressures have yielded creative administrative responses to program considerations and flexibility in the growing era of personalized education. However, in realizing that school choice does exist, other student success factors needed to be managed to make the academic change holistically beneficial. Placing a student into a new facility, which appeared to be an improved learning environment, was only one element towards improving the learning experience. As Hallenbeck (2012) found, students needed to accept a new culture and build relationships with peers, faculty, and staff to be successful at the new school. Through engaging in curricular and co-curricular activities in the school of choice, students increased their chances of success at the academic institution (Anderson, 2012; Sias, 2008). By students embedding themselves into the entire spectrum of curriculum, socialization, and process, they ultimately improved their chances of success. The speed, at which, that occurred was also important, and it accentuated the need for a positive transition program. Students were not simply matriculating from building to building within the same district along with common peers anymore. School choice allowed for broader educational maneuvering which brought on larger challenges associated with the transition process.

Many school districts in southwestern Pennsylvania saw declining enrollments since the 1980s (BVIU, 2015), and those districts have been searching for ways to combat the issue for a long time. Maintaining a small school district was not necessarily the issue as property taxes primarily drove revenue, not student enrollment figures. The problem involved an enrollment decline when the structure of the school was established

to serve a larger population. Many inefficiencies existed in that scenario. Small schools, or at least low student numbers in classrooms, did boast performance benefits.

Tennessee's Student Teacher Achievement Ratio class size reduction program of the 1980s, commonly known as Project STAR (Mosteller, 1995) was widely considered to be the model for K-3 class size considerations of 13-17 students to enhance achievement levels. It also displayed longitudinal success beyond elementary school. Small class sizes did exist in varying enrollment school districts; yet, it was logical to conclude that small school districts also had small class sizes. Student demographics played a larger role in class size indicators for success. A study by Howley (1996) found that a small, rural school in West Virginia enhanced the achievement levels of poor students, whereas large schools and districts enhanced the achievement of affluent students.

In opposing research, Reichardt (2000) evaluated California's class size reduction program by observing seven Florida school districts, who were practicing California's program through a mixed-model approach. After acknowledging that the Florida system operated under a more efficient cost formula, recommendations were established with student achievement indicators at the forefront. Classroom size was not part of the emphasis. Reichardt (2000) found that California had an opportunity to enhance student achievement by increasing the qualifications of K-3 teachers. Without placing equivalent qualifications on those providing the instruction in both states for measurement purposes, students may not have been given equally competent teachers to evaluate student progress adequately. Classroom size may have had no impact. Hattie (2005) used meta-analysis principles to illustrate that quality teachers correlated with student achievement, not class size. Lowering class sizes from 25 to 15 students had minimal effect on

achievement, primarily due to the fact that teachers did not change teaching strategies and learning activities as class sizes decreased. Chingos (2010) researched student performance after the installation of Project STAR classroom parameters were implemented into the Florida school system in 2004. The effects of class size reduction efforts in Florida measured through cognitive and noncognitive analysis indicated that after three years of implementation, student achievement in treated school districts was determined to be insignificant across grade levels and demographic subgroups.

### **Transitioning Students Into Secondary Schools**

Many school districts maintained multiple elementary schools that were embedded throughout district borders while those same districts maintained only one high school. Typically, elementary schools were positioned in areas where larger populations had existed over time in a neighborhood school concept. Each of those elementary schools established different identities. Many accepted themes of local economies and demographics as students attended elementary schools near their homes. Thus, diversity suffered in primary grades. As students reached middle school levels in Grades 5 through 8, they were combined into larger facilities within the school district community. Diversity improved along with transitions for students into larger peer groups (Anderson, 2012; Stewart, 2011). This process occurred again in high school, when typically all of the students culminated into one conglomerate graduating class. Some school districts even had multiple high schools, but students still maintained a similar promotion hierarchy that originated where they resided. Therefore, when observing the entire scope of an educational schooling system, it appeared as a pyramid of schools where students matriculated upwards towards the peak before graduating. As

separate facilities were subtracted in the process and students left one building to join another, peer groups were unsettled intermittently throughout the transitional process. Most students matriculated through natural transitions and normal peer barriers successfully, and the collective body of students cohesively matured into high school graduates. However, some students had difficulties with transitions within the same school system.

Consider the amount of research (Gauchat, 2010; McGee, 2009; Wesley, 2001) established on student transitions, and it was obvious to understand the increased level of state involvement across the nation. In 2005, the Public Schools of North Carolina established state mandated transition plans for students at all levels to assist with academic, social, emotional, and physical needs. Similar practices occurred in other parts of the country too as transitions were critical for student success (Rappa, 2012). The Nebraska Department of Education implemented a transition mandate in 2001. Most professionals acknowledged the need for transition programs to take place within the traditional K-12 setting; however, the reauthorization of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 also set parameters for establishing transition programs for those students exiting K-12 education and beyond. Students identified for special education services under IDEA were required to have a formal individualized educational plan (IEP) with transition elements in place beginning in middle school. IDEA (2004) strengthened those requirements for identified students exiting K-12 education towards post-secondary careers and life endeavors. Thus, all states were required to strengthen post-secondary transitional programs for IEP students through the adoption of federal legislation.

Reviewing the transition topic for students whose progress between middle and high school education was a focal point for a variety of reasons. First, students were leaving an established nurturing environment where teachers and staff have built trusting relationships with students and families over a period of years. Many of the K-6 or K-8 experiences took place in what has traditionally been considered a community school, and the built-in safety nets and relationships established at the neighborhood facility were now absent. Thus, the newness of the larger school and population was intimidating, as no relationships existed there with staff members. Access to the school was also an issue for co-curricular activities to engage students (Anderson, 2012; Sias, 2008), as travel barriers were present that prevented equal access to the new school. As Larson (2011) discovered, relationships with teachers and staff needed to be reestablished to assist with a successful transition, but students were still in difficult adolescent stages. Students enjoyed the new sense of freedom prescribed in bigger schools. There were larger groups of students; thus, the size provided an atmosphere of safety among intimate peer groups. Students were able to remain private and hidden. Yet, along with the new found freedom came the need for students to initiate conversations and build relationships (Hallenbeck, 2012) with staff and adults to assist in rectifying academic and peer issues. In elementary style facilities, the adults found those children more readily in smaller environments. However, in secondary schools, students were required to self-advocate and seek out the adults for assistance when needed. This change was difficult and unmanageable for some teens. Thus, if students waited for secondary school personnel to identify their needs before any action took place, that assistance did not appear until it reached uncorrectable levels due to the number of students being serviced on a daily basis at large high schools.



Transitioning adolescents from middle level facilities onto a secondary campus had innate student and societal meaning too. It was public education's final rite of passage towards adulthood which carried a meaning of freedom from secular boundaries. While courses became more rigorous, students succeeded beyond essentialist curriculum paramount in lower grade levels. Interests were channeled into curriculum selections. Student transcripts took on a heightened meaning for post-secondary considerations, and school choice initiatives presented regional options as students identified personal strengths, areas of interest, and career options. Some students discovered their niche to flourish within, while others searched for direction. Building relationships in high school assisted with career development and direction over time, but the initial transition process was critical towards calculating a successful high school career. A study by Kerns (2014) found that students who attended a ninth grade only freshman academy in South Carolina did not score significantly different on an end of course English state assessment than those peers in a traditional Grades 9 through 12 high school setting over a longitudinal, four-year span. Stoddard (2012) reinforced similar achievement results in comparing a freshman academy with a traditional high school. This further exemplified that the transition of entering ninth grade was consistent, regardless of the facility. Students had the same experiences and barriers to overcome. An additional study that detailed those same students' success in 10th grade would have assisted research further as the freshman academy students would again be transitioned to another facility while traditional Grade 9 through 12 students were established into their high school environment.

As Childress (2013) found, perceptions of school officials stated concerns over the effectiveness of reported Grade 9 transition practices with regards to Virginia's public high school size, demographics, and community type. Gauchat (2010) and Anderson (2012) reinforced the need to engage freshman into the new school in some manner to increase attendance and achievement. Grillo (2012) also discovered through administrator perceptions in Massachusetts that benefits existed in using peer mentoring programs for transitional programs with Grade 9 students, and special education referrals were lower in districts where adjustment programs were instituted too. Creating a middle school intervention program assisted with preparing students for the upcoming transition and allowed students to become familiar with personnel, practices, and expectations forthcoming. An appropriate program also entailed elements of communication beyond student and staff interaction to engage family members into the process (Kennedy, 2012).

### **Summarizing Trends in Southwestern Pennsylvania**

As wages (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), retirement (PSERS, 2013, 2016), and healthcare (Affordable Care Act, 2010) costs continued to rise in Pennsylvania's public education system, many school districts were concurrently seeing a reduction in student enrollment figures. Specifically, Beaver County saw its student population fall from 25,000 to 21,000 between 2005 and 2015 (BVIU, 2015). School boards were feeling additional pressure to guard against raising taxes as the current taxation structure placed an unequal burden on taxpayers (Weber et al., 2010). Furthermore, many small town economies have deteriorated in southwestern Pennsylvania as the amount of students qualifying for free and reduced price lunches continued to climb (Niederberger, 2014). In fact, Pennsylvania had 50% of all the Commonwealth's students identified in free and

reduced price lunch programs by 2015 (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2016). School boards were faced with the dilemma of managing budgets and providing an optimal learning environment for students while also managing positive community morale and support for desired objectives (Hallenbeck, 2012). As funding from the state (PDE, 2015a) and enrollments declined, decisions needed to be made to escape the established school structure and seek alternatives for optimizing student experiences and achievement levels while meeting strict budget parameters.

The financial hardship placed on small school districts to provide an efficient secondary educational campus was challenging, especially in declining student enrollment areas (BVIU, 2015). Not only did resident families accept a heavier tax burden to fund their secondary schools (Weber et al., 2010), but middle and high school level students suffered due to the limited curricular and co-curricular program experiences being offered to them. With fewer course selections available, students were restrained to essentialist parameters. Modern educational reform trends of personalizing education for students was minimized in this environment. Distant learning and cyber services expanded course selections for some students; however, the majority of pupils continued to be batched together in a “one size fits all” format that theorist Ken Robinson (2006) lobbied against. Without having course options available, teenagers became disengaged with school. This practice lessened the objective of having students take ownership of their learning process. Student achievement and creativity also suffered in such a restrictive setting (Robinson, 2006). While class sizes seemed beneficial (Mosteller, 1995) in small schools, teachers had the additional burden of instructing multiple courses throughout the day. That limited the available time to design creative

lessons and supplemental materials for those students who desired enrichment opportunities in courses.

Beaver County has witnessed a couple of school structural changes when faced with financial challenges. In 1986, the Midland Borough School District closed its high school and began tuitioning students to nearby high schools. In doing so, they preserved their community K-8 school. Operating a high school was much more expensive than operating a primary school. Pennsylvania Department of Education (2016b) also acknowledged that educating secondary students carried a higher burden for districts as elementary and secondary tuition rates were calculated. Of the 500 Pennsylvania school districts, approximately 95% had a higher secondary student tuition rate than an elementary student tuition rate. In 2009, the first voluntary state merger took place between Center Area and Monaca School District, which formed the Central Valley School District (David, 2009). Monaca, a small district with about 700 total students, faced tough budget decisions while enrollment figures continued to decline; however, administrators kept spending at a minimum and maintained a fiscally sound district. Monaca's retiring superintendent and low debt structure made the process manageable for the larger Center Area School District to consider the merger possibility (David, 2007). With top Center Area administrators regaining similar posts within the newly created Central Valley School District, the merger was achieved after intermittent delays associated with leveling of community taxation.

Allegheny County witnessed a change in the 2016-17 school year. The small, urban Wilksburg School District began tuitioning over 200 students in Grades 7-12 into the neighboring Pittsburgh Westinghouse Academy 6-12 (Polke, 2015). In the second

year of the six-year agreement, Wilkinsburg spent \$9,600 per student in tuition expenses. The total amount accumulated to just over \$2 million in 2017-18. Considering that Wilkinsburg had an annual district budget of almost \$30 million in 2015-16, tuitioning six grade levels for a cost only \$2 million plus transportation was a positive budgetary maneuver. Pennsylvania's School Performance Profile (2014) displayed that Wilkinsburg spent \$20 million in 2012-13 on instructional expenses alone. Those expenses dealt directly with the related costs associated with the interaction between teachers and students as defined by the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Bureau of Budget and Fiscal Management. In simple math terms for 13 grade levels, Wilkinsburg spent \$1.5 million per grade on instructional services during 2012-13. That tallied over \$9 million for Grades 7-12, and those students were outsourced beginning in 2016-17 for only \$2 million. New expenses existed in their tuition model too, but not at a price of \$7 million annually. Wilkinsburg paid an additional \$1 million to Pittsburgh Public Schools to assist with transitional efforts made in 2016-17. Even then, the cost-benefit analysis weighed heavily in Wilkinsburg's favor to outsource secondary students.

Duquesne City School District adopted a similar structure about a decade prior to Wilkinsburg by tuitioning Grade 7 through 12 students to nearby West Mifflin and East Allegheny School District. Per review of 2015-16 financial data on Duquesne City School District (2015), Duquesne paid over \$3.1 million in tuition for 296 secondary students. Duquesne also spent \$9 million on instructional expenses in their K-6 elementary facility. In Duquesne's case, per grade level spending was \$1.28 million. By outsourcing their secondary campus at roughly \$10,500 per student, Duquesne spent \$525,000 per grade level, which was a large cost savings. Midland Borough School

District spent \$3.9 million on instruction for its K-8 school facility in 2012-13, which equated to \$425,000 per grade level. Midland tuitioned approximately 25 students per year to other secondary public schools; however, Midland formed a tuition agreement in 2015 with Beaver Area for roughly \$10,200 per student (J. Hansen, personal communication, February 7, 2016). That equated to an estimated \$255,000 per grade spending amount for instruction purposes. Even with estimation errors present, Midland's cost savings of \$170,000 per grade made for an obvious decision to continue outsourcing secondary students through tuition agreements.

When making a determination that outsourcing students was a way to maximize the district's ability to reconfigure and offer elementary students a quality education within a community school, transitional and achievement focus needed to be administered with the departing secondary group. Transition was critical to immediate and long-term success indicators. Midland Borough School District students were transported 10 miles to attend Beaver Area High School. Access and equity considerations for a 72% economically disadvantaged pupil population (Pennsylvania School Performance Profile [SPP], 2014) were important factors to recognize. Distance traveled from the small town was one factor, but other potential barriers existed as Beaver had a much lower 20% economically disadvantaged student population. Both Midland and Beaver had a majority of White students at 62% and 93%, respectively; however, Midland had a 26% Black population while Beaver did not have another race category of students higher than 2%. Both districts had special education percentages below the state average of 15%. Beaver had 11% of students identified into special education, while Midland had 14% of students identified (SPP, 2014).

Wilkinsburg opted for a transitional plan into Pittsburgh Public Schools in 2016-17 that kept all of the Wilkinsburg students together for the first year of the agreement at Pittsburgh City Schools' Westinghouse Academy, a Grades 6 through 12 facility located in Pittsburgh's nearby Homewood community (Rose, 2015). Wilkinsburg shared very similar student demographics with Westinghouse Academy (SPP, 2014). Wilkinsburg had 75% of students qualified as economically disadvantaged while Westinghouse had 79%. Wilkinsburg's dominant race consideration was 91% Black and Westinghouse's student population was even higher at 97% Black. They also shared similar special education percentages. Wilkinsburg had 27% of students identified while Westinghouse identified 24%. Of the three tuition models studied, the student demographics between Wilkinsburg and the accepting institution of Westinghouse Academy shared the closest student demographic trends.

Duquesne City School District, influenced by state involvement, tuitioned secondary students to either East Allegheny or West Mifflin High School. Students were able to select which high school they wanted to attend. Although West Mifflin was larger in student enrollment figures, West Mifflin and East Allegheny shared very similar student demographic trends (SPP, 2014); thus, the two were averaged together for ease of comparison. Duquesne displayed the largest amount of economically disadvantaged students in the study at 80%, and corresponding East Allegheny and West Mifflin averaged a 50% rate between their populations (SPP, 2014). Duquesne had a majority of Black students at 70%, while the two accepting high schools averaged 30% Black. East Allegheny and West Mifflin's largest race demographic was White at 63%, while Duquesne had a 10% White population. Duquesne also had the highest identified group

of special education students at 30% while East Allegheny and West Mifflin averaged 14% of students identified (SPP, 2014).

### **Importance of Engaging Students**

McKelvey (2013) linked educational resources with student achievement. Having funds available afforded school administrators the opportunity to meet the needs of students, especially students identified into demographics of historically underperforming subgroups. Desperate economic measures contributed to a local school district conceding that the most appropriate method for educating secondary students was to tuition them to another district; however, curricular programs, experiences, and opportunities drove student engagement and achievement (Robinson, 2006). Student achievement was a primary reason to drive decision-making efforts, and an expansive curricular setting offered widespread programs that allowed students to achieve to their potential. As Ken Robinson (2006) noted, traditional education systems were built on standardization and the creation of a singular end product. Pennsylvania's K-12 public education system established standards and included eligible content benchmarks, which has primarily driven standardized testing measurements in Grades 3 through 8. A few state mandated course exams in algebra, language arts, and biology occurred in the early years of high school as well. As financial resources became scarce for districts, resources were streamlined towards the standards-based curriculum efforts at the expense of the extended curricular and co-curricular programs offered. By tuitioning high school students into other secondary institutions, students were given extended opportunities for maximizing achievement levels in a desired area of interest which was not available at the residing school. Students were also offered co-curricular experiences too.



Connecting children to schools occurred in a variety of ways, and campuses with healthy elective and co-curricular programs were very important for students to find their creative niche (Hallenbeck, 2012; Larson, 2011). This allowed students to be connected beyond academics, and that discovered niche offered students an opportunity to be bonded beyond the classroom and form relationships with new peers and staff. Once students' confidence grew, they felt safe and established. They began to take responsibility for their own education and took ownership of their new school setting (Flynn-Trace, 2011).

The tuition process contained extensive involvement for district personnel, but the ultimate objective was to determine the best educational experience for tuitioned students. Teachers, administrators, and families had varying opinions of the ideal schooling system. Hearing and learning from those entrenched in the process (Faust, 1976) allowed for future considerations and improvements to be accomplished, as tuitioning secondary students became a viable option for small communities in economic and enrollment declines. The financial decision affected many, as the loss of a high school was felt throughout the community (Hallenbeck, 2012; Morikis, 2010). Students lost a sense of belonging which was highly detrimental to the educational process. Thus, connecting students with the new school and peer groups quickly was important. Supporting students at the critical points of transition to optimize experiences and achievement was vital to immediate and longitudinal success (Rappa, 2012). Offering school officials information towards identifying student needs in preparation for transition and program implementation was identified as a worthwhile consideration when outsourcing secondary students. By educating stakeholders about the transition process through insight offered from those who have experienced the tuition model,

valuable perceptions and information compiled may aid a transition program that manages and minimizes real or perceived barriers associated with the transition. Identifying needs and determining methods to support students through the difficult process will assist in future tuition considerations.

### **Conclusion**

While Pennsylvania schools faced the arduous task of providing an optimal learning experience for students while budgets condensed and enrollments declined (Dady, 2010; Superville, 2014), administrators and board members sought alternative methods to educate secondary students. Typically, this dilemma existed in small school districts where the costs associated with operating an expansive secondary campus were financially straining districts. As enrollment figures decreased, per pupil spending increased (Cogswell, 2009). This inverse relationship had a rippling effect as per pupil costs translated into a district's expected tuition payment to charter schools (PDE, 215b). The combination of escalating expenses (Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, 2010; PDE, 215b, PSERS, 2013, 2016) with decreasing funding (Brown, 2014; Himes & Barrick, 2015; PDE, 2015a) continued to boost per pupil spending costs which consumed budgets at an increasingly perpetual sum. Small districts annually condensed secondary programs to achieve balancing budgets, but that technique of eliminating curricular or co-curricular programs made school choice options more inviting for students to depart from the resident, secondary campus at the expense of the resident school district.

Districts sought out alternative options to monetary contentions, which were truly limited. Varying taxation discrepancies, debt accumulation, and political elements existed in school district communities that lessened the realistic opportunity that future

voluntary mergers will take place (Dady, 2010; Palmer, 2010; Quinn & Steinberg, 2015). First, consider that board members would be giving political positions away, which lessened their impact on the local school community (Burton, 2010; Flynn-Trace, 2011). Furthermore, at least, one superintendent would lose his post, and unless one superintendent was near retirement, that alternative was not likely. Those two occurrences alone derailed merger possibilities; yet, Pennsylvania's deviating property, wage, and business taxation levels also created unique obstacles (Brown, 2014; Carr-Chellman & Marsh, 2009). Voluntary mergers encompassed many economic, political, and social barriers (Hallenbeck, 2012; Weber et al., 2010) which made them rare occurrences (David, 2007; PSBA, 2009).

The concept of tuitioning secondary students into non-district secondary schools offered the resident school district an opportunity to negotiate tuition payments, regardless of rising per pupil costs. This methodology allowed for districts to keep board members, superintendents, and local control intact while tendering secondary students with the advantage of attending an institution with a broader scope of curricular and co-curricular events for better engagement and achievement concerns. This strategic, outsourcing tactic dramatically assisted with financial shortcomings, and it allowed the district to focus on substantiating primary schools with the needed resources to assemble proper staffing and facilities to meet the needs of elementary students (McKelvey, 2013; Morgan-Davis, 2013). Focusing on early childhood development provided district students with the academic tools needed to appropriately achieve in standards-based education with accompanying peers later in high school.

Student transition became the focal point of the dissertation research, and it has been studied at varying levels within this chapter (Gauchat, 2010; McGee, 2009; Wesley, 2001). The aspect where transition research can improve existed in the rare instance where students were taken from their host district and outsourced, without option, through a tuition model. Although outsourcing secondary students has only occurred in five districts across Pennsylvania, those have all predominantly occurred in recent years (Duquesne City School District, 2015; Hansen, 2016; Polke, 2015). Research that decoded feelings, perceptions, and themes to illustrate barriers for students in transition was critical to identify before this outsourcing concept became a common practice in other districts. However, identifying student needs has not yet occurred in formal research. Outsourcing, or tuitioning, students was a distinctly different practice than the natural matriculation progression of pupils within one conglomerate K-12 district, and it was also different than the transition that took place for committed students who elected to attend private or charter schools for specific engagement purposes (Kennedy, 2012). Students, unknowingly, were faced with new expectations and perceived barriers associated with a new school culture. Preparing for those, wanted or unwanted, changes was vital to fostering student success into tuitioned secondary schools. Properly embedding students into the new secondary school was paramount for longitudinal success (Anderson, 2012; Hallenbeck, 2012; Larson, 2011; Rappa, 2012; Sias, 2008). Thus, gaining student and parent input from those who used the tuition model was an important piece that was absent from research. That insight garnered from this research study assisted in identifying an absence in research. No developments previously existed to identify tuitioned students' perceived barriers before being tuitioned outside of the resident

district. Formal research completed with this unique group of middle level students provided information that can be articulated into the creation of a successful transition program for districts that are currently tuitioning secondary students or for those districts exploring the tuition model.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

The methodology chapter was organized to establish procedural requirements needed to complete a convenience sample, survey research design for a unique population of transitioning students. One student and one parent survey was completed at two Northeast school districts that did not educate resident students beyond middle school within the district. Instead, students were tuitioned to neighboring school districts to attend high school. Although the tuition model occurred on a rare basis within the Northeast state, it was a growing trend within the last decade. Furthermore, the state's economic climate declined and pressures surrounding adequately funding public education were rooted in longstanding turmoil.

The state's ability to provide an efficient, equitable, and accessible public school system has been challenged. However, the tuition model offered small school districts the ability to provide support for the local, neighborhood elementary schools while providing expansive curricular and co-curricular opportunities to high school students. Many efficiency, equity, and access attributes were accomplished through tuition models. It was reasonable to conclude at the time of the study that other districts would monitor the progress of tuition model practices as communities become unable to fulfill the financial obligation associated with educating resident students. Although transitions, especially middle level transitions, have been widely researched topics, this unique transitional experience of students being placed into secondary schools located outside of their resident school district without choice was an area absent from research. This

methodology chapter captured and measured student and parent levels of concern towards potential barriers to give their perceptions a formal voice.

The purpose of the study was to identify middle level student and parent perceived similarities and differences towards transition factors prior to students being tuitioned to a secondary school located outside of the district. By doing so, administrators are afforded the opportunity to create a successful transition program by addressing families' levels of concern to overcome perceived barriers. The study investigated middle level student and parent perceptions of peer interaction, service access, teacher support, academic rigor, and school safety before transitioning students to a secondary school outside of their resident school district.

The chapter was articulated in a manner described through proper methodological protocol to identify hypotheses expectations, participants, sampling, and instrument validation. Data tables assisted in the development and structure of the variable information to detail concise pictorial representations, and the chapter concludes with statistical treatments performed along with areas of possible limitations embedded within the study.

### **Research Design**

The purpose of this study was to identify middle level student and parent perceived similarities and differences towards transition factors prior to students being tuitioned to a secondary school located outside of the district, so administrators can be afforded the opportunity to create a successful transition program by addressing families' levels of concern to overcome perceived barriers. In one Northeastern location, only three school districts did not offer students secondary schooling within their resident

district. Duncan, Moore, and Walton only educated resident adolescents through sixth or eighth grade, respectively. Then, students were tuitioned to another school district to complete high school requirements. Duncan and Walton ended neighborhood schooling after sixth grade, while Moore educated students through eighth grade. The study was performed while students were completing their final year of public schooling within the resident school district.

Through the use of surveys, a quantitative, convenience sample research study was selected for the design structure to extract respondent data from student and parent groups. Properly constructed survey instruments were established as an acceptable research practice for extracting respondent data (Campbell, 1955; da Costa, Hall, & Spear, 2016; Fowler, 2002; Robotham, 2013; Zehn et al., 2006), and surveys have been established as a proven data collection tool to assist in quantitative research designs (Asaad et al., 2015; Hamid, 2008; Warsame, 2011). A convenience sample study was selected for data retrieval for a specialized group of families located in one geographic area (Hoekstra, 2014; Piotrowski, 2015). By inviting all of the available respondents in the region to participate, a high degree of data accuracy and reliability existed (Minor, 2015).

The research design was constructed in coordination with the primary purpose of the quantitative study: To identify middle level student and parent perceived similarities and differences towards transition factors prior to students being tuitioned to a secondary school located outside of the district, so administrators can be afforded the opportunity to create a successful transition program by addressing families' levels of concern to overcome perceived barriers. That overarching purpose was also replicated in the



beginning 25 questions within the research design. Survey Questions 1 through 25 were presented as construct items to gain respondent perceptions, or feelings, for measurement purposes (Enfield & Nathaniel, 2013; Wang & Degol, 2016).

Within each of the five identified constructs, four or five survey question items were created to identify levels of concern by student and parent respondents. For peer interaction, teacher support, academic rigor, and school safety constructs, a sum of 5 to 25 points was available to be accumulated. Five points signified the lowest level of concern while 25 points represented the highest level of concern. For the service access construct, one survey question (Question 8) was removed from construct comparisons and viewed independently in the analysis as Question 8 contained an assigned variable outside of the Likert scale range of 1 through 5. An assigned value of 6 was assigned to that construct item for respondents who did not answer the question per the directions for that question. Thus, the service access construct contained four survey items and had a range of 4 to 20 points available for the sum total.

Data collection and statistical exploration identified themes and conclusions on student and parent perceptions. Those perceptions entailed a unique, transitional experience that was forthcoming for middle school students. The students targeted were those in their final year of schooling within the resident school districts of Duncan, Walton, or Moore, which consisted of either sixth or eighth grade. The research design engaged students and parents as pupils were in the midst of their final year of neighborhood schools and anticipating the upcoming transition. Surveys were given to students and parents after students completed 50% of their final year of schooling within the home district. The research questions for the dissertation study were as follows:

1. What are the similarities and differences for student and parent perceptions on peer interaction when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district?
2. What are the similarities and differences for student and parent perceptions on school service access when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district?
3. What are the similarities and differences for student and parent perceptions on access to teacher support when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district?
4. What are the similarities and differences for student and parent perceptions on academic rigor when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district?
5. What are the similarities and differences for student and parent perceptions on school safety when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district?
6. Are there differences between student and parent perceptions for each school?
7. Are there differences among students in two grades?

### **Surveys**

Through the primary use of surveys as data collection tools (Campbell, 1955; da Costa et al., 2016; Fowler, 2002; Zehn et al., 2006), a quantitative research design (Asaad et al., 2015; Hamid, 2008; Warsame, 2011) was derived for the exploration of middle school students' traits, perceptions, and experiences as those students planned to be tuitioned to a secondary school outside of their resident school district. For comparison

data and analysis, parents and guardians were asked to complete a similar survey as the students. Essentially, the surveys were the same with small detail changes to properly address the individual completing the survey instrument. The questions were focused on perceptions of transitional elements detailed in prior research studies, and those areas encompassed safety, access and logistics, peer interactions, rigorous curriculum, and relationship building with teachers and staff (Anderson, 2012; Hallenbeck, 2012; Kerns, 2014; Larson, 2011; Sias, 2008; Stoddard, 2012). The surveys were completed after students completed 50% attendance in their final year within their home, resident school district to gain insight into perceptions for this unique group of adolescents (Campbell, 1955; Spreen, 1992; Zehn et al., 2006) before they transitioned into the new school building foreign to their neighborhood school district. Through the exploration process of using surveys, the research design included inviting all students and one corresponding parent subject to participate in the quantitative plan through convenience sampling. Convenience sampling, a method of non-probability sampling, allowed respondents to be specifically targeted; otherwise, the desired population would have been very difficult to locate through random sampling techniques (Biag, 2014; Hoekstra, 2014; Minor, 2015; Piotrowski, 2015; Steen, 2011).

### **Hypotheses**

The purpose of this study was to identify the factors perceived to be a concern by students and parents before students were transitioned to a secondary school outside of their resident school district. Thus, identifying and collecting data for student perceptions on peer interaction, service access, teacher support, academic rigor, and school safety before students departed resident schools was important to form themes on perceived,

predetermined barriers that existed from student perspectives. Through the use of surveys, demographic variables of gender, age, race, socioeconomic status, academic performance, and the number of peer friendships were garnered. To compare responses, parents were asked to complete a duplicated survey to assist in illustrating their level of concern towards existing barriers prior to the student transition as well. The following were the hypotheses used in the study:

- Hypothesis 1. There is a statistically significant difference between student and parent perceptions on peer interaction when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district.
- Hypothesis 2. There is a statistically significant difference between student and parent perceptions on school service access when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district.
- Hypothesis 3. There is a statistically significant difference between student and parent perceptions on access to teacher support when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district.
- Hypothesis 4. There is a statistically significant difference between student and parent perceptions on academic rigor when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district.
- Hypothesis 5. There is a statistically significant difference between student and parent perceptions on school safety when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district.
- Hypothesis 6. There is a statistically significant difference between student and parent perceptions for each school.

- Hypothesis 7. There is a statistically significant difference among students in two grades.

The specific null hypotheses used were:

- Null Hypothesis 1. There is not a statistically significant difference between student and parent perceptions on peer interaction when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district.
- Null Hypothesis 2. There is not a statistically significant difference between student and parent perceptions on school service access when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district.
- Null Hypothesis 3. There is not a statistically significant difference between student and parent perceptions on access to teacher support when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district.
- Null Hypothesis 4. There is not a statistically significant difference between student and parent perceptions on academic rigor when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district.
- Null Hypothesis 5. There is not a statistically significant difference between student and parent perceptions on school safety when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district.
- Null Hypothesis 6. There is not a statistically significant difference between student and parent perceptions for each school.
- Null Hypothesis 7. There is not a statistically significant difference among students in two grades.

## Population of Participants

While the school districts of Duncan, Moore, and Walton resided within borders of small areas of less than five square miles and have suffered through deteriorated local economic conditions, Table 3.1 compared the school district communities. Though many similarities existed between the school district communities, each was distinctly different in proximity to the region’s largest metropolitan city. The National Center for Educational Statistics (2015) categorized Moore School District’s locale as a town, fringe area defined by having between 2,500 and 25,000 residents and positioned within 40 miles of a large metropolitan city. Both Duncan School District and Walton School District were categorized as suburban, large locales due to their close proximity to a principal city, which encompassed more than 250,000 people (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015).

Table 3.1

*Comparison of the Communities’ Population, Location, and Wealth*

Characteristic	Moore	Duncan	Walton
Total population <sup>a</sup>	2,600	5,600	16,000
Total area <sup>b</sup>	5 square miles	2 square miles	3 square miles
City size and location <sup>c</sup>	Town, fringe	Suburban, large	Suburban, large
Distance to metropolitan city	40 miles	12 miles	8 miles
Household median income <sup>d</sup>	\$24,970	\$19,811	\$15,813

Note. <sup>a</sup>Rounded 2012 population U.S. Census Bureau data. <sup>b</sup>U.S. Census Bureau data 2012 rounded. <sup>c</sup>Defined by the 2015 National Center for Educational Statistics. <sup>d</sup>U.S. Census Bureau data 2014 illustrated a \$53,482 national average, and state averages in residing counties were \$50,242 and \$52,390, respectively.

Duncan School District was positioned in Duncan City and encompassed two square miles in area (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). It was located 12 miles from the closest metropolitan city. A once thriving industrial steel town with over 20,000 residents in the 1930s and 1940s, Duncan declined to 5,600 residents by 2012 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Walton School District was located in Walton City and bordered the largest urban school district in the region. Walton encompassed three square miles (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), and it was located eight miles from the downtown metropolitan area. Walton City once housed 30,000 residents in the 1950s and 1960s; however, the following decades encompassed periods of poor economics. By 2012, the population declined to approximately 16,000 people in Walton City (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). The Moore School District was located approximately 40 miles from the metropolitan city. Moore encompassed a small town atmosphere with the district's total area containing five square miles. A once vibrant industrial community that saw its population maintained at over 6,000 residents from 1930 to 1960, Moore suffered from the steel industry demise in the second half of the 1900s. By 2012, Moore's population declined to approximately 2,600 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

While weighing the recent economic climate in Duncan, Walton, and Moore, one measurement selected for comparison was the median household income level for the given municipalities. Per the U.S. Census Bureau (2015), a median household income value consisted of the middle value where half of the total conglomerate household incomes were higher and half of the volume of home incomes were lower. In ascending order per U.S. Census Bureau (2015) data recorded for 2014, Walton had a median household income of \$15,813. Duncan had a \$19,811 median household income value,

and Moore had a \$24,970 median household income value. Nationally, the median household income level was \$53,482. In the county where Walton and Duncan were located, the median income amount was \$52,390. In the neighboring county where Moore resided, the median household income level was \$50,242. Walton, Duncan, and Moore had income levels below half the regional and national average in 2014 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015).

As identified by the Pennsylvania School Performance Profile (2014) for the 2013-14 year, the school districts of Duncan, Moore, and Walton qualified for federally funded Title I services for disadvantaged students as defined by the U.S. Department of Education (2015) which encompassed families who qualified for free or reduced price school meals per federal income criteria (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2016). Pennsylvania Department for Partnerships (2016) showed a 43% statewide average of students that qualified for free school meals in 2013-14. Duncan's economically disadvantaged student population was 80%. Walton had 75% of students qualified for free or reduced price meals, and Moore qualified 73% of students into the federal meal program. In qualifying for Title I services, additional funding was supplied and directed towards language arts and mathematics curricular programs to assist in meeting acceptable standardized testing expectations among the disadvantaged. In 2014, Moore received \$198,180 in Title I funding. Duncan received \$908,258 under the federal program, and Walton received \$1,502,151 (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).



## Student Demographics

The Pennsylvania School Performance Profile (2014) offered student demographic data for the 2013-14 school year. As illustrated in Table 3.2, Duncan School District educated 345 students. The district's student demographic profile consisted of a 52% female to 48% male gender split. By largest categories of race, 70% were Black, 15% multi-racial, and 10% White. Walton School District educated 896 students. The district's student demographic profile consisted of an even 50% female to 50% male gender split. By largest categories of race, 91% were Black, 4% multi-racial, and 4% White. Moore School District educated 286 students. The district's student demographic profile consisted of a 46% female to 54% male gender makeup. By largest categories of race, 62% were White, 26% Black, and 8% multi-racial. Duncan

Table 3.2

### *Comparison of School District Student Demographics*

Characteristic	Moore	Duncan	Walton
Student population <sup>a</sup>	286	345	896
Female	46%	52%	50%
Male	54%	48%	50%
Race			
Black	26%	70%	91%
White	62%	10%	4%
Multi-racial	8%	15%	4%
Others	4%	5%	0%
Identified special education <sup>b</sup>	14%	30%	27%
Economically disadvantaged <sup>c</sup>	73%	80%	75%

Note. <sup>a</sup>Student population data as defined by the state's 2013-14 School Performance Profile. <sup>b</sup>The 2013-14 state average was 15% of district students were identified into special education. <sup>c</sup>The state qualified 50% of all students into the federal government's free and reduced meal program.

and Walton, the two districts closest to the metropolitan city, displayed a high Black population. However, Moore had a majority of White students.

A similar demographic trend occurred while observing the special education populations within the school districts. Special education students were identified within parameters established by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 legislation, which addressed individuals with disabilities attending public schooling from the age of 3 to 21. Through a review of the 2013-14 Special Education Data Report (Pennsylvania State Data Center, 2015), Duncan identified 30% of the student population into special education, and Walton identified 27% of students. Moore identified 14% of district students into special education. Pennsylvania had a 2013-14 state average of 15% of all students identified into special education programs (Pennsylvania State Data Center, 2015).

### **School Grade Structure**

Duncan operated one K-6 elementary school and began tuitioning secondary students to two neighboring school districts in the 2007-08 fiscal year. Walton operated a K-12 traditional educational school design through the 2015-16 fiscal year; however, secondary students in Grades 7-12 were tuitioned into a large neighboring school district beginning in 2016-17. At that point, Walton only operated two K-6 elementary schools. Moore School District had a lengthy history of tuitioning students. Moore operated a traditional K-12 educational school plan until 1985. Since then, Moore has operated a single K-8 school, and high school students have been tuitioned to other secondary schools. One high school was even located in a different state. In 2015-16, Moore finalized a 20-year tuition agreement for Moore pupils to attend an in-state high school.

Moore also hosted two charter schools within district borders where many district students opted to attend.

### **School Achievement Profiles**

The state's school achievement report card mechanism (Pennsylvania School Performance Profile [SPP], 2014) rated schools based on a variety of factors to determine a value for comparison among schools. Each school building received a different score, which was primarily driven by standardized testing and student achievement data. The scores ranged from 0 to 100 with a few bonus points also available, and the overall point total was assigned to one of six categories for determining school effectiveness. Moore's K-8 school received a 73.0 SPP score in 2013-14, which was positively rated as being proficient in the state's evaluation system (SPP, 2014). Duncan's K-6 school received a 51.8 SPP score in 2013-14, which placed the school into the state's lowest rating area (SPP, 2014). Any score below 60.0 fell into this category. As Moore and Duncan only had one school building reported for SPP scoring, Walton had four separate school facilities that received scores. The two K-6 elementary schools received SPP scores of 62.9 and 68.0, respectively (SPP, 2014). Those two scores fell into the second lowest category, but 70.0 would have qualified for proficiency. Walton Middle School, comprised of Grades 7-8, received a rating of 46.4; and Walton High School, comprised of Grades 9-12, received a score of 34.6 (SPP, 2014). Both the middle school and high school scores fell into the bottom level of the state's rating system.

For additional student achievement data to add insight into the respondent population, segments from the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (Pennsylvania Department of Education [PDE], 2015d) and the Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment

System (2015) were included. Schools were given percentage values for the number of students who achieved proficient or advanced scores on the annual state mandated standardized exams. This percentage represented the number of students who achieved the state's minimum acceptable allowance of performance. In short, this was the percentage of students who passed the exam before value-added formulas were included to measure yearly growth expectations. The scores herein encompassed single grade level results compiled into one data set for individual school buildings (PDE, 2015d). The scores on Table 3.3 provided information to further define and understand the achievement data compiled for the all of the schools. Moore and Duncan operated one school building each, while Walton operated two buildings. Moore had 17% of students achieve proficient or advanced in mathematics, and 47% of students met minimum state expectations in language arts. Four percent of Duncan students tallied proficient and advanced scores in math, and 11% of students achieved a satisfactory level in language arts. Walton had two elementary buildings, Tipton and Karns, for comparisons. For math achievement, those two buildings garnered proficient and advanced scores of 17% and 9%, respectively. In language arts, Walton had those same two buildings score 32% and 23%, respectively at acceptable levels.

Table 3.3

*School Configurations With School and Student Achievement Comparisons*

Profile	Moore	Duncan	Walton schools		State average
			Tipton	Karns	
School Performance Profile <sup>a</sup>					
Building score	73.0	58.1	68.0	62.9	76.1
Rating	Green	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Green
Building standardized tests					
Math					
Proficient/Advanced scores	65%	23%	61%	38%	72%
Reading					
Proficient/Advanced scores	53%	38%	41%	50%	69%
Sampled student test scores					
Math					
Proficient/Advanced scores	17%	4%	17%	9%	72%
Reading					
Proficient/Advanced scores	47%	11%	32%	23%	72%
Year tuition model began	1985-86	2007-08	2016-17		
Grades remaining in district	K-8	K-6	K-6 (two schools)		

Note. <sup>a</sup>The state's 2013-14 School Performance Profile scores for each building. Walton had two K-6 buildings, which received separate scores. Duncan and Walton included Grade 6 sampled students, and Moore included Grade 8 sampled students. Scores ranged from 0 to 100. Green suggested that value-added growth expectations were achieved. Red stated that students did not meet growth parameters, and yellow showed that students displayed moderate growth in the value-added system.

**Sample of Subjects**

The desired group of student respondents illustrated in this study encompassed those students who were in their final year of traditional schooling within their home, resident school district in 2017-18. Thus, sixth grade students from Duncan and Walton were targeted as subjects, and eighth grade students from Moore were also sought. It was acknowledged that separate age groups could have created varying responses and themes due to natural development and maturity factors; thus, the student respondents identified

their age in the survey for further analysis. This approach assisted with the comparison of data and development of themes across varying ages. Other demographic information collected did not directly identify individual students; therefore, student responses and identities were further protected.

The total number of student respondents targeted for the study was 21 eighth grade students at Moore, 44 sixth grade students at Duncan, and 64 sixth grade students at Walton. No sample group was selected, and the entire candidate pool of 129 students was targeted for participation in the optional survey. After initially agreeing to participate in the research study, Walton had a change in senior leadership who opted the district out of the survey process. Thus, the available convenient sample size condensed to 65 total available students between Duncan and Moore. School district, guardian, and student permissions were obtained for human subjects to participate in the study per mandated protocol expectations as defined in the institutional review board process. Students completed a survey of 33 questions. Twenty-five of those questions were designed to gain student perceptions towards constructs comprised of peer interaction, service access, teacher support, academic rigor, and school safety prior to their arrival at the new secondary campus. Students completed the survey after they completed 50% of their final school year within the resident school district.

Parents and guardians were also identified as a sample population for comparison data. Sixty-five adults were also selected for the sample group by being a parent, or legal guardian, of a child who qualified for the study through either Duncan or Moore school systems. Thus, the adult respondent population consisted of guardians whose child was enrolled as a student in their final year of education within the resident school district

during the 2017-18 school year. In Duncan, that consisted of parents with a child in Grade 6. At Moore, parents had a child in Grade 8. As performed with the students, parents also completed the survey after the midway point of their child's last year within the resident district.

It was acknowledged for the parent sample population that having a child in either Grade 6 or Grade 8 could have created varying parental responses due to their opinion and reference of their child's development while answering survey questions. Thus, parent respondents were also identified by their child's grade in the survey process. Other demographic information collected did not directly identify individual parents to their child or school group. This practice protected respondent information to allow individuals to freely respond without fear of identification.

The total number of adult respondents available for the study was 21 parents at Moore and 44 parents at Duncan. One parent, or guardian, respondent survey was offered per student. No subset was selected as the entire candidate pool was targeted for participation in the optional survey. The desired number of adult respondents equaled the total number for students, which included 65 subjects. Parent permission and consent were also sought for human subjects to participate in the study per mandated protocol expectations for adults as defined in the institutional review board approval process. Parents completed a survey of 36 questions that depicted parent perceptions towards peer interaction, teacher support, academic rigor, and school safety before their child's arrival at the new secondary school.

## Power

Sample size was related to power or strength of the experiment's representation of the total candidate population (Phillips & Jiang, 2016). Considering the limited number of 65 overall student and parent participants collectively available in the two school districts, a high respondent participation rate was needed to achieve reliability expectations (Lipsey, 1990). Fifty-four students and parents participated in the research study, which achieved a lofty 83% participation rate.

Brant's (n.d.) calculator illustrated the power analysis for significant relationships when null hypotheses were rejected to determine if the sample size was large enough to produce reliable results. The online calculator determined the desired number of participants needed given a confidence interval, the amount of power desired, and the effect size. While using Brant's (n.d.) calculator, an alpha level of  $p = .05$  was selected for testing group hypotheses. Then, the degree of power was selected to determine the ability of rejecting a null hypothesis when it is false, and .80 was chosen as the acceptable level (Cohen, 1988, 1992). To compare the means between student and parent groups, the effect size was set at an acceptable standard deviation level of .50 for research expectations (Murphy & Myors, 1998). By using Brant's calculator, with a confidence level set at  $\alpha = .05$ , it was determined that 40 participants were the most subjects needed for any of the rejected null hypotheses. Thus, 40 participants were needed in each of the student and parent groups to achieve an acceptable power parameter. With 54 subjects in each student and parent group, research expectations for power were achieved.



## **Sampling Type and Procedures**

Duncan School District, Moore School District, and Walton School District were selected for this study due to their unique school structure. The three districts shared a common characteristic in using a tuition model to educate all secondary students outside of the home, resident school district. Only five school districts within the state used the tuition model by 2017, and the three districts sought in this research study were located regionally together and shared characteristics. These districts have witnessed a decline in student enrollment figures in recent decades (BVIU, 2015). As small school districts combat financial strains to remain in existence (Montari & Weaver, 2007), one possible remedy to alleviate operational pressure was to tuition secondary students outside of the district. By eliminating the secondary school program, the resident school district focused on maintaining appropriate K-6 or K-8 neighborhood schools. The three districts invited to participate in this study have demonstrated this practice. With continued student enrollment declines likely (BVIU, 2015) and uncertain financial funding forecasts looming (Fontaine, 2010; Hartman & Shrom, 2014; PSERS, 2013), it is reasonable to conclude that other districts will explore a tuition model to educate resident high school students as a remedy to create financial stability within the school district and to adequately maintain neighborhood elementary schools in the future.

After the Walton School District denied participation for its students in the survey process, Duncan and Moore School Districts confirmed their intent to participate. The next determination was to select a population. The study encompassed all student subjects who were in their final available grade level within the resident school district, along with one corresponding guardian from each student's home. Thus, for Duncan

students, Grade 6 would constitute their final grade in the district. They were tuitioned out of the district beginning in Grade 7. For Moore students, they remained in the home district through Grade 8 before being tuitioned out of the district in Grade 9. The selection of adolescents in their final grade assisted in identifying student traits, attitudes, and experiences as they prepared to leave the home district. Parent perceptions regarding those same elements were also recorded. Gathering this information allowed for computation of data, statistical analysis, and development of themes.

### **Convenience Sampling**

Convenience sampling was constructed in the research design by using the targeted two school districts for completion of student surveys (Appendix C). The convenience sample technique was chosen due to the accessibility for the low number of 65 total student units available between two regional school districts. In this case, the entire population of students was the target group based on criterion sampling principles as all students possessed a unique experience simultaneously and resided regionally together (Palys, 2008; Spreen, 1992). All of the students were in their final year of public schooling within their resident school district. That experience entailed that all students would be tuitioned to secondary schools outside of their home district to complete high school requirements. Traits of the students were identified by age, gender, academic achievement, peer friendships, and socioeconomic status.

One parent, or guardian, per student was also invited to complete a parent survey (Appendix D). By using the convenience sampling approach and including all available students, it was equally as important to include 65 adults as a separate target group to compare surveys. Due to varying family structures, it was not prescribed as to which

guardian should complete the parent survey. However, the survey did contain variable trait inquiries of gender, age, socioeconomic status, and relationship to the student respondent questions that assisted in compilation of themes at the conclusion of the research study.

Five school districts in the state used the tuition model for educating their high school students, and 500 total school districts existed. Thus, the student and parent experiences in this tuition process were unique to those families within the remaining 495 school districts across the state. Two of the five districts were selected as a convenience sample due to the close proximity to one another, a desire to participate, and accessibility for the study. As the convenience sampled student group prepared to leave their home school district, student and parent perceptions were important to identify perceived barriers or concerns associated with peer interaction, service access, teacher support, academic rigor, and school safety that families were managing internally while students were in their final year within the resident school district. By identifying the collected themes, it allowed for the enhancement of transition programs and additional research to be administered particularly to the given populations at Duncan and Moore.

Convenience sampling, a form of non-probability sampling, contributed to the internal validity of the research design (Biag, 2014; Piotrowski, 2015). Confirmation of results for similar student populations of students will need to take place in future research studies for external validity (Bernard, 2002; Godambe, 1982). Results established within the current study may better prepare Duncan and Moore administrators in developing transitional programs to assist with perceived or existing barriers as defined by students and parents.

## **Sample List**

To gather the list of sampled students, an administrator was contacted at each of the school district locations. Duncan and Moore officials easily identified the appropriate grade level of students desired for the research study. In both cases, an administrator was involved and delegated this task to another district employee to facilitate. Due to the restrictive nature of public schools for safety concerns, districts agreed to assist but elected to refrain from providing the researcher with active student names or other identifiable information. All of the districts assisted with securing district approval and permission as established in the institutional review board process for children and adults as human subjects. Consent forms were sent home from school with all children, and the forms were returned to school with guardian approval or refusal of participation for potential responders. For students who did not have a form returned, one was also mailed home. School officials maintained a list to determine which students received guardian consent to participate. Students also were required to sign a statement of assent to be included. Once both statements were achieved, those students were made available for completion of the survey during school hours.

While securing the total number of student and parent participants ( $N = 108$ ) for the non-probability, convenience sampling was time consuming, the benefits were directed towards receiving complete information through inviting the entire group of available subjects to take part in the research. By obtaining a subject response rate of 83% for both the student group ( $n = 54$ ) and parent group ( $n = 54$ ), this achievement minimized the opportunity of leaving desired participant data absent from the study. All families were given the opportunity to provide input through this holistic data collection

process. By using a non-probability, convenience sampling method for the population, statistical generalization errors were minimized as the number of participants (N = 108) neared the total population size of 130 possible respondents available in the total candidate pool (Johnson, 2009). A response rate of 83% allowed for analytical generalizations to be made for future studies with similar conditions (Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Charles, 1995). It was also acknowledged that having sample subjects opting for exclusion from the survey process caused for possible analytical generalization issues being established (Kirk & Miller, 1986). The entire sampled group did not take part in the survey; thus, generalization errors may exist in the final data.

### **Data Collection Instrument**

Surveys were the primary research instruments used to allow for comparative data compilation. This common collection method allowed respondent results to be used in statistical application models for data analysis as one standardized measurement has consistently been used for respondent audiences (Assad et al., 2015; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2005; Fowler, 2002; Hamid, 2008). Data and statistics were generated from survey results, which were useful in a causal-comparative design to measure relationships between independent and dependent variables of two groups (Fowler, 2002). Similar data-driven, quantifiable research practices have taken place to reinforce principles and practices associated with surveys as reliable instruments for data collection (da Costa et al., 2016; Robotham, 2013; Warsame, 2011).

### **Construct Design**

To assist in the development of the surveys, five constructs were developed from broader researched student transitional topics surrounding academics, social, and

procedural barriers that students faced as they progressed through traditional educational systems (Gauchat, 2010; McGee, 2009; Morgan & Hertzog, 2001; Smith, 2007; Wesley, 2001). By creating a positive, seamless platform of transitional progression into secondary education, students were afforded the ability to bypass restrictive characteristics discovered. Engaging students and parents in that process was paramount for immediate and longitudinal success (Anderson, 2012; Hallenbeck, 2012; Larson, 2011; Rappa, 2012; Sias, 2008). Through the dissection of research, identified student and parent perceptions brought additional insight into the varying importance of factors identified by each group (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Falbo et al., 2001). The given research study selected five constructs to yield specificity to established research.

The five constructs established were peer interaction, service access, teacher support, academic rigor, and school safety, and those constructs were delivered as survey items to student and parent respondents. For the study, peer interaction was defined through the student's ability to build positive peer relationships upon entering the new school. This construct identified the desire for a harmonious fit and creation of new friendships to be formed. It also acknowledged that peer pressure and social groups may invoke improper teen behavior responses as well. These noted personal and social growth measurement outcomes were important in establishing the first construct as students have traditionally allowed peer group composition to formulate choice patterns (Mader, 2010). By including personal and social growth concepts into the peer interaction construct, barriers and preventative concern areas were made available to respondents (Gauchat, 2010; Grillo, 2012; McGee, 2009).

The second construct involved service access. Service access was defined through having the ability for travel to and from the new school building as well as accessing programs and school personnel at the new campus. While at the school, access also addressed students obtaining free or reduced price school meals, maneuvering through the building, and acknowledging where school personnel were located for assistance, if needed. The conglomerate access of the school and personnel offered logistical information that created an equity consideration for new students. Having access to transportation, facilities, equipment, and personnel resources allowed for an expansive scholastic opportunity that engaged students into curricular and co-curricular experiences, which has founded positive effects (Anderson, 2012; Ekanem, 2013; Sias, 2008).

Teacher support was the third construct. Relationship building was a primary characteristic of the peer interaction construct; however, students also need to establish relationships with teachers at the new school to foster individual development within the classroom (Larson, 2011). After cementing relationships with teachers, Hallenbeck (2012) demonstrated that student confidence to self-advocate and seek assistance occurred more readily when needed. Rappa (2012) and Stoddard (2012) found that after transitions occurred from one building to another, students noticed a lapse in school supports. Once relationships were established between students and staff members to secure tutoring, remediation, or second-chance learning opportunities beyond normal school hours, students also need to manage logistical elements of transportation to maximize that benefit. Students being prepared to meet the expectations and demands of the teacher have been paramount towards yielding academic success (Ekanem, 2013).

The fourth construct was a highly researched topic amongst student transitions, and it encompassed the academic rigor construct (Bowers & Powers, 2009; Falbo et al., 2001; Hughes, 2010; Morgan & Hertzog, 2001; Smith, 2007). Here, the construct was defined by the work expectations associated with students performing at high levels to achieve lofty academic goals established at the new school. Expansive programs and opportunities articulated an increase in academic achievement in rigorous environments as student engagement increased. Students were intrinsically motivated to perform at optimal levels when authentically engaged in areas of interest (Anderson, 2012; Gauchat, 2010; Robinson, 2006).

The fifth, and final, construct of school safety was defined by levels of concern for students' physical or emotional well-being after the transition to the new school took place. Safety factors were paramount in school choice decisions to charter or parochial schools (Kennedy, 2012); however, tuition students may not view charter or parochial schools as viable options. Parents cited safety concerns more prominently in research than students did when transitioning in schools (Akos & Galassi, 2004). The school safety construct identified physical fears while at school and in transit to and from school. It also illustrated bullying and the possible effects of emotional safety involved.

### **Survey Design**

Surveys were selected as instruments to assist in determining student and parent perceptions when transitioning students outside of the resident school district to attend secondary schooling through a tuition model. The student survey (Appendix C) was comprised of 33 questions. Questions 1 through 25 addressed perceptions and levels of concern about the forthcoming student transition, and the remaining seven questions



entailed personal data details. The parent survey (Appendix D) was comprised of 36 total questions. As with the student survey, the first 25 questions were geared towards perceived concern levels associated with the upcoming student transition, and Questions 26 through 33 pertained to student personal data. The adults were also asked to complete three additional demographic questions to offer further insight into describing the respondent completing the form; hence, the parent survey consisted of 36 questions.

Student (Appendix C) and parent (Appendix D) surveys included 33 questions of very subtle differences. Essentially, the questions were simply duplicated on the surveys. The differences only existed to address the respondents appropriately. The slight variations also reinforced communication to parents that the first 33 questions were focused on the student. Thus, the terms *you* or *your* used on the student survey were exchanged on the parent survey to consist of *your child* for proper emphasis of identification who was being addressed in the question. In the final three questions of the parent survey, parents were also asked questions where *you* was used as a direct identifier for personal data. Thus, this also displayed the need to be specific in the identifiers used throughout the beginning 33 questions.

Questions 1 through 25 were designed to seek student and parent perceived concern levels for constructs of peer interaction, service access, teacher support, academic rigor, and school safety for the upcoming middle level student transition. Within each of the five identified constructs, five survey items existed to extract respondent data pertaining to each variable cluster. The questions were created to capture student and parent perceptions prior to the students' transition away from the resident school district. The 25 survey questions were positioned in a 1 through 25 format. For

each of the questions, respondents were asked to select their level of concern for each numbered item in a Likert scale pattern, a technique established by psychologist Rensis Likert (1932). There were five ascending levels of concern to choose from for Questions 1 through 25, and those selections were: (1) *I am not concerned at all*, (2) *I am not concerned*, (3) *I am a bit concerned*, (4) *I am concerned*, or (5) *I am very much concerned*. Respondents only selected one answer, or level of concern, for each question.

The survey, comprised in a Likert scale format embodied 25 Likert items, or questions, to illuminate levels of feelings or attitudes for respondent selections (Ekanem, 2013; McLeod, 2008; Tasci & Yurdugul, 2016; Yazicic, 2016). By using the Likert format within surveys, quantitative values were assigned to qualitative data in a 1 through 5 ascending point value scale to determine the level of concern (Likert, 1932; McLeod, 2008) for each survey item. A respondent selection of 1 was the lowest level of concern, and a respondent selection of 5 was the highest level of concern. H. Boone and Boone (2012) emphasized the Likert scale and made analysis recommendations within descriptive statistics while using surveys to collect attitudinal data.

### **Validity and Reliability of the Survey Instrument**

Reliability of the study was determined by whether the results of the study can be repeated in the future given similar conditions and sampling (Charles, 1995; Joppe, 2000; Kirk & Miller, 1986). Some of the internal validity threats that can derail future studies involve flaws in experimental procedures, treatments, or experiences of the respondents (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). For example, altering the data collection instrument would be one flaw; hence, producing a stable instrument was paramount for securing the possibility of replicating a successful second research study (Charles, 1995). Kirk and

Miller (1986) offered that three types of reliability existed. The first included producing the same results under the same conditions. The second entailed the stability of the measurement with respect to time. Last, the similarity of measurements used in a given time period offered reliability constraints. Wainer and Braun (1998) articulated construct validity concerns in quantitative research studies when researchers interacted with respondents during the data collection process. Thus, care was taken during instrument creation and collection procedures to uphold validity and reliability within the study.

With the consultation of content expert Dr. Jane Beese and methodology expert Dr. Xin Liang, a survey instrument was developed to ensure content validity and reliability. Additional content experts also reviewed the final form of the survey instrument and accompanying design procedures to achieve acceptable validity and reliability mandates. The entire panel of experts who reviewed the instrument and design process consisted of:

- Dr. Jane Beese, Ed.D., Associate Professor, Department of Counseling, School Psychology, and Educational Leadership, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, OH.
- Dr. Xin Liang, Ph.D., Professor, Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership, College of Education, University of Akron, Akron, OH.
- Dr. Charles Jeffords, Ed.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Counseling, School Psychology, and Educational Leadership, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, OH.

- Dr. Matthew Paylo, Ph.D., Associate Professor and Counseling Program Director, Department of Counseling, School Psychology, and Educational Leadership, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, OH.
- Dr. Charles Vergon, J.D., Professor, Department of Counseling, School Psychology, and Educational Leadership, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, OH.

The survey instrument was designed to measure levels of concern towards student and parent perceptions regarding a unique student transitional experience to a secondary school located outside of the home school district through a tuition model.

To assist with identifying whether the survey instrument functioned properly, the survey was shared with five student and five parent volunteers to verify the instrument's proper design and function. These assisting individuals were not participants in the formal research study. Surveys were presented to volunteers in written form to determine the volunteer's ability to correctly comprehend directions and complete responses accurately. Volunteers were directed to select only one answer for each of the questions on the survey by circling one multiple choice answer for each question. However, it was discovered during functional testing that the volunteers were selecting more than one answer to questions on the written survey. This especially took place on Question 30 where the survey instrument asked volunteers to give the student's report card grades, and As, Bs, Cs, Ds, and Fs were individually listed as possible answers. A couple of assisting volunteers circled more than one answer on the survey. The survey already contained directions that asked respondents to select only one response for each question; however, those directions were repeated and made more visible on the survey after the

initial functional screening process. On the same survey line following Question 30, a special directive was added to only circle one response. The proctor's directions (Appendix F) also included a verbal directive to student respondents to only select one answer for each question.

Another correction procedure was administered to the survey after one of the assisting individuals offered an answer to Question 32 that was not possible per the volunteer's answer to Question 31. Question 31 and Question 32 both entailed the respondent to state the number of friends that a student interacted with inside and outside of school. The answer to Question 32 must be equal to or less than the number of friends provided as an answer to Question 31. Thus, Question 32 was given an additional directive for clarification purposes after the written question on the survey, and the clarification statement read that the answer on Question 32 cannot be greater than the answer given on Question 31. The additional information and alterations yielded better results during a second round of reviews of the survey's function with a new set of invited guests to share thoughts about the structure, directions, and design of the survey instrument.

The improved version of the survey was shared with another small group of volunteers to assist with instrumentation validity and reliability measures after clarification notations were added to the original survey. After completing a second evaluation of the survey with a new group of three adolescents and three adults, the survey offered positive results. As prescribed, volunteers only made one selection for each question on the written survey, and no other notations were made on the written copies to suggest that more than one answer was desired from volunteers. The final

version of the survey achieved expectations and functioned properly. By completing two procedural clarification stages of instrument verification, validity and reliability expectations for the survey were accomplished within the study. The survey instrument consisted of questions aligned to constructs that properly collected student and parent respondent data to illustrate perceptions, levels of concern, and demographic information.

### **Instrumentation**

Questions 1 through 25 were assembled in order of the five constructs on both student and parent surveys. Corresponding descriptors existed for respondent clarity towards grouped construct topics of peer interaction, service access, teacher support, academic rigor, and school safety. These descriptors defined each construct that preceded the group of five questions per category. The following 25 questions were used in the student survey and ordered chronologically as well. Student and parent respondents had essentially the same Questions 1 through 25, and they used the same Likert scale (Likert 1932; McLeod, 2008) multiple choice answer selections of: (1) *I am not concerned at all*, (2) *I am not concerned*, (3) *I am a bit concerned*, (4) *I am concerned*, or (5) *I am very much concerned*.

What are student perceptions on peer interaction when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district?

1. Are you concerned about being in a new school and classes with students that you do not know?
2. Are you concerned about making friends in a new school?
3. Are you concerned about having someone to sit with during lunch at the new school?

4. Are you concerned about fitting in with other social groups or cliques at the new school?
5. Are you concerned that you will be pressured to use tobacco, drink alcohol, or do drugs at the new school?

What are student perceptions on school service access when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district?

6. Are you concerned about getting back and forth from home and the new school?
7. Are you worried about getting lost in the new school?
8. Are you concerned about getting forms completed to receive free or reduced price meals to begin the next school year? (Leave blank if you currently do not receive free or reduced school meals.)
9. Are you worried about having enough time to get to your locker and class on time?
10. Are you concerned that the new school will be too crowded making it difficult for you to access a principal, counselor, or a nurse when needed?

What are student perceptions on access to teacher support when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district?

11. Are you concerned that the new teachers will be more strict than your current teachers?
12. Are you concerned that the homework load at the new school will be too much to handle?

13. Are you concerned that your new teachers will not give you as much school work support as they do in your current school?
14. Are you concerned about knowing how to get help if you have questions or problems at the new school?
15. Are you concerned about getting home if you want to stay for tutoring or extra-curricular activities at the new school?

What are student perceptions on academic rigor when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district?

16. Are you concerned about the classes being more difficult at the new school than in your present school?
17. Are you concerned that you have the study skills needed to succeed at the new school such as note taking, test preparation, and writing papers?
18. Are you concerned about high stakes tests that you will take at the new school?
19. Are you concerned about the credit requirements at the new school to be promoted to the next grade level each year?
20. Are you concerned about your grade point average and your class rank?

What are student perceptions on school safety when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district?

21. Are you concerned that students will bully you at the new school?
22. Are you concerned about poor peer conduct while traveling to and from the new school?
23. Are you concerned about being involved in fights at the new school?



24. Are you concerned about getting hurt at the new school?

25. Are you concerned that the teachers and staff at the new school will not watch out for their students the same way as in your current school?

### **Personal Data Questions**

Following the initial 25 survey questions, personal data inquiries were presented to assist with respondent demographic and variable information. Questions 26 through 33 existed on both student (Appendix C) and parent (Appendix D) surveys. In a similar format as in Questions 1 through 25, Questions 26 through 33 were directed at responses concerning the child, not the adult. The upcoming questions were duplicated from the student survey. Response options varied for the personal data questions; however, questions offered selections in a multiple choice fashion, once again, for ease of completion and compiling data.

26. What is your gender?

27. What is your race?

28. What is your age?

29. Do you receive free lunch at school?

30. What report card grades do you typically receive in school?

31. How many friends do you typically interact with outside of school?

32. How many of the friends in Question 30 also attend school with you and are in your same grade level?

33. Do you have an older brother or sister who attends, or attended, the same secondary school that you will attend next year?

### **Additional Parent Personal Data Questions**

The parent survey (Appendix D) encompassed three additional questions (Questions 34 through 36) that were not present on the student survey to assist with descriptors for the parent respondent. Due to the varying possibilities for those assuming parenting and guardianship responsibilities for the child embedded in the research study, it was also important to create a profile for those completing the parent survey to assist with demographic identifiers for analysis. To this point, all questions had been directed towards the child. Yet, beginning with Question 34, parents saw questions directed at them. The following three questions were only present on the parent survey:

34. What is your gender?

35. What is your relationship to child?

36. What is your age?

The additional parent personal data information assisted in defining variables too.

### **Variables**

Variables were coded in the manner listed below. The independent variables were as noted:

- Group (1 = student; 2 = parent) for participants completing surveys.
- Gender (1 = male; 2 = female) of students and parents.
- Race (1 = Black; 2 = White; 3 = Multi-racial; 4 = Hispanic; 5 = Asian; 6 = American Indian; 7 = Other) of students.
- Age (1 = 10 years old; 2 = 11 years old; 3 = 12 years old; 4 = 13 years old; 5 = 14 years old; 6 = 15 years old) of students.
- Grade (1 = Grade 6; 2 = Grade 8) of students.

- Age (1 = 20 to 29 years old; 2 = 30 to 39 years old; 3 = 40 to 49 years old; 4 = 50 to 59 years old; 5 = 60 years of age and older) of parents.
- Relationship (1 = mother; 2 = father; 3 = grandmother; 4 = grandfather; 5 = other) of the parent to the child.
- Free lunch (1 = yes; 2 = no; 3 = don't know) program enrollment of students.
- Report card grades (1 = Fs; 2 = Ds; 3 = Cs; 4 = Bs; 5 = As; 6 = don't know) achieved by students.
- Friends (1 = 0 friends; 2 = 1-2 friends; 3 = 3-4 friends; 4 = 5-6 friends; 5 = 7-8 friends; 6 = 9 or more friends; 7 = don't know) maintained by students outside of school.
- Friends (1 = 0 friends; 2 = 1-2 friends; 3 = 3-4 friends; 4 = 5-6 friends; 5 = 7-8 friends; 6 = 9 or more friends; 7 = don't know) maintained by students outside of school who also attended school with students.
- Siblings (1 = yes; 2 = no; 3 = don't know) who have attended the same future school that students will attend.

The dependent variables were articulated into constructs for student and parent responses. Peer interaction, teacher support, academic rigor, and school safety constructs were accompanied by five survey questions to determine levels of concern to compare student and parent group responses. Each of the questions denoted Likert scale response values of 1 through 5 points in ascending order for levels of concern; thus, each of the four identified constructs had a maximum total of 25 points. The lowest construct sum value of 5 points signified *no concern at all*, and a maximum sum value of 25 points equated to the highest level of *very much concerned*. The service access

construct had four survey questions that used the identical Likert 1 through 5 points scale. Thus, the service access construct had a low score range of 4 points or *no concern at all* to the highest possible score of 20 points or *very much concerned*. The mean scores were used for construct comparisons.

- Students' perception on peer interaction when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district (mean scores).
- Parents' perception on peer interaction when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district (mean scores).
- Students' perception on school service access when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district (mean scores).
- Parents' perception on school service access when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district (mean scores).
- Students' perception on access to teacher support when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district (mean scores).
- Parents' perception on access to teacher support when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district (mean scores).
- Students' perception on academic rigor when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district (mean scores).
- Parents' perception on academic rigor when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district (mean scores).
- Students' perception on school safety when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district (mean scores).

- Parents' perception on school safety when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district (mean scores).

The study researched the effects that the demographic, independent variables of gender, age, race, socioeconomic status, academic achievement, number of friendships, and sibling experience had on student and parent perceptions about the upcoming pupil transition to a secondary school located outside of the resident school district. The study also detailed the differences associated with perceptions and students' grade before departing the resident school district. Last, the effects of transitional students having an older sibling attend the same secondary school were weighed against those perceptions of students who did not have prior experiences with the new school.

### **Data Collection**

After receiving all of the approval considerations required by the institutional review board process for children and adults as human subjects (Appendix A), a parental consent and student assent form (Appendix E) was sought from families for qualifying individuals into the selection process of participants. Assent was again provided on the survey for respondent verification prior to beginning the survey. Respondents were also reminded that they were able to excuse themselves from the process at any point without penalty. The researcher was not the point person for data collection procedures. A neutral party accepted that role at each school to relieve possible reliability and validity issues (Wainer & Braun, 1998).

Respondents were supplied with instructions, and surveys were offered to the convenient sample population of students and parents. Surveys and consent/assent forms were color coded to assist with directives and instructions during data collection

procedures. Consent forms were copied onto blue paper. Parent surveys were copied onto yellow paper, and student surveys were copied onto green paper. The collection process took place through cooperative agreements made with each of the two assisting school districts. For students, the time and location for completing surveys was assigned by individual school officials, as this task was performed during the school day with school personnel assisting. The school official was provided with a proctor's script (Appendix F) for guidance and survey directions to be read to students per institutional review board protocol expectations. Parental consent and parent surveys were completed prior to students completing their survey at school.

Parent surveys were completed independently. Students took the invitation to participate (Appendix B), parent survey (Appendix D), and parental consent form (Appendix E) home for family review. While consent forms were returned to school with the students, parents were asked to mail via the U.S. Postal Service the completed parent survey to the researcher's created post office mailbox address. Some parents mailed the survey, but many others returned the completed survey back to school along with the consent form. Staff at each school accepted those parent surveys and stored them appropriately. The same data collection safeguards and procedures took place with the adult surveys as performed with student surveys. No data existed to specifically identify individual respondents. The parent survey contained written directions for circling one response for each of the 36 questions. As completed in the student process, parents were asked to give consent and acknowledge that they could be excluded from the study at any point should they desire to do so. This mandated consent mechanism existed on the

survey, and it asked respondents to acknowledge consent by placing an “X” next to the statement giving their consent prior to beginning the survey.

For parents, an invitation to participate, a parent survey, and a consent form was sent home from school with students along with a self-addressed stamped envelope and procedural directions. The packets sent home with students contained the following:

1. A written invitation to participate in the study (Appendix B).
2. A copy of the parent survey with instructions (Appendix D).
3. A copy of the parental consent and student assent form (Appendix E).
4. A self-addressed stamped envelope for the parent to return the completed parent survey.

Additional directions (Appendix B) were contained in the invitation to participate for mailing instructions of parent surveys. Parents were asked to complete the consent form (Appendix E) and return it to school with his or her student. Parents were asked to complete the hard copy survey (Appendix D) and return it via U.S. Postal Service to the researcher. By having the physical copies returned, it provided the same data security as previously mentioned without the possible interference of technology. The researcher established a post office box address solely for the purpose of collecting completed surveys for the dissertation study. Upon arrival of parent questionnaires via U.S. Postal Service, survey responses were duplicated into a data collection spreadsheet.

Once all of the students planning to participate had returned parental consent and student assent forms, each student was issued a hard copy of the student survey to complete with a pencil. This allowed for procedural consistency established through verbal and written directions being provided prior to completing the student survey

(Appendix C). Clarification was offered to individuals and the entire group, when needed. Upon reassurance that the students understood the expectations, students were again asked to offer a statement of assent by placing an “X” before the assent statement on the survey. Students were then asked to complete the 33 questions by circling one answer for each question.

Students were reminded that the survey was voluntary, and they could remove themselves at any point in the process without a penalty. Upon completion of the student survey, students placed their own survey into a manila envelope with all other respondents to assist with protecting student identities. The school official sealed the envelope and appropriately stored the responses per protocol until taken by the researcher. Paper surveys completed in a written format were established for two primary reasons. The first was to provide a consistent pattern for primary data retrieval across all schools, without the possibility of technological interference. The second factor to consider was that the researcher was provided with completed *hard copy* student responses. Having these physical surveys allowed for receipt records to be maintained throughout the data collection and computation process.

Possessing and securing the primary hard copy data sources provided confidence with data collection. The researcher had the ability to continue the study by recalling given documents without the need to seek input from respondents a second time. All surveys remained solely at the researcher’s residence and possession during the study, and items were securely locked in file cabinets. Duplication data were stored electronically on a password protected, secured server where the researcher and dissertation chair had access during the statistical analysis phase. Upon completion of the



dissertation, all respondent surveys were provided to the sponsoring university for safeguard protocol.

The available sample size combining Duncan and Moore School was 65 total students and 65 total parents. Of the 130 total available combined subjects, 108 students and parents agreed to participate ( $N = 108$ ). Further subgroups were delineated throughout the study; however, the primary focus of the quantitative research analysis observed differences or similarities between student and parent groups. The total number of students who completed the student survey was 54 ( $n = 54$ ), which corresponded to an 83% response rate. The total number of parents who completed the parent survey was 54 ( $n = 54$ ), which also translated to an 83% response rate.

One important action to document during the data collection process was the intentional care that the researcher took to protect the identity of all respondents. Maintaining confidentiality as described in the institutional review board process was upheld. No personal information was detailed on the completed surveys to identify individuals. Confidentiality was upheld during the study. All physical surveys from both the student and parent groups were kept on file and secured at the researcher's residence. Yet, duplication of data was compiled into spreadsheets, and it was kept on a secured server for researcher and dissertation chair access while the study was performed. Once the statistical analysis was completed, surveys were submitted to the sponsoring university for proper storage protocol, as materials were secured on campus.

### **Statistical Treatment**

Data were compiled using information gathered from student and parent surveys. Through the use of these collection tools, the accumulation of transitional perceptions

and personal data sheet information was collected. Seven hypotheses were generated to expand on student and parent perceptions regarding an upcoming pupil transition to a secondary school located outside of the resident school district. Data were properly collected for statistical analysis in this chapter. The illustrated treatments noted in Appendix G were verified, acceptable historical practices for data analysis within research. This chapter also provided detailed methodology procedures to allow future research candidates the opportunity to replicate the study, if applicable.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) originally authored by Nie, Bent, and Hull (1970) furnished ordinary researchers with the ability to complete statistical analysis decades ago, and it became a popular, accepted practice within academic research. International Business Machines Corporation (2009) acquired SPSS and continued to vendor the product to social science research. The SPSS software was selected as the statistical analysis tool used for the current study as a Likert scale style survey and descriptive statistics were selected for comparing student and parent grouped data. Studies using similar methods were performed with SPSS software (Clark, 2012; Coleman et al., 2015; Hughes, 2010; Sutton, 2013; Warachan, 2011).

For the purpose of identifying databases and relationships between variables, descriptive statistics were selected to condense data sets into meaningful information. By focusing on the mean, or average, of those data sets, the study allowed for the preferred measure of central tendency method to be used for descriptive statistics (Ganzert, 2012; Thomas, 2012; Turner, 2013; Warsame, 2011). Mean scores were used to identify data sets as all respondent scores were included in the calculations. Since convenience-sampling procedures were administered to include all regionally accessible respondents

in data collection, the calculations included data sets from all participants available in the targeted population (Campbell, 1955; Spreen, 1992; Zhen et al., 2006). Outliers were minimized by calculating the mean and having normally distributed data.

Descriptive statistics allowed the researcher the ability to weigh relationships between student and parent grouped variables through statistical analysis and calculating formulas for statistical significance (Ganzert, 2012; Thomas, 2012; Turner, 2013; Whitley & Ball, 2002). Using the mean score also offered the greatest reliability, especially when calculating variability and other statistical computations. This process was generated by assigning numeric values to survey responses for calculating mean scores within parametric statistical procedures. Parametric statistics assumed that a quantifiable variable data set was articulated in a normal distribution pattern anchored by securing a mean score and standard deviation sequence. Hence, variables used in the study were a measurable quantity, which yielded positive results from the perspective of normal distribution expectations.

Parametrics yielded the use of statistical tests to maneuver categorical, non-continuous data. For the given research study, independent samples *t* tests were used to answer the null hypothesis consisting of no difference in mean scores between the student and parent group perceptions (Ganzert, 2012; Thomas, 2012; Turner, 2013; Warsame, 2011). The independent samples *t* tests compared two group mean scores between students and parents. In these *t* tests, statistical significance and effect size monitored sampled responses to determine the likelihood that the sample represented the larger population. With an alpha level established at .05, the Sig (2-tailed) statistic was used to determine *p* values, or likelihood that the results occurred by chance (Ganzert, 2012;

Thomas, 2012; Turner, 2013; Warachan, 2011). If less than a 5% chance existed, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, a statistically significant difference existed between the two groups.

Even though all available respondents were encouraged to take part in the study, not all invited respondents completed the survey. Thus, bias was a consideration for the findings. Inappropriate sampling techniques could have resulted in Type I and Type II errors (Johnson, 1999). A Type I error existed if a true null hypothesis was rejected, which designated that a significant difference was incorrectly identified between groups (Pollard & Richardson, 1987). A Type II error existed if a false null hypothesis was retained, which meant that the researcher did not find a statistically significant difference between two groups when one was actually present (Smith, Levine, Lachlan, & Fediuk, 2002). Even though all available respondents did not participate in the study, the representation remained at an acceptable level, which assisted with the strength of internal validity and minimized Type I and Type II errors (Brant, n.d.; Cohen, 1988; Lipsey, 1990; Phillips & Jiang, 2016). Analysis of parent and student groups was properly completed through the use of descriptive statistics (Clark, 2012; Coleman et al., 2015; Hughes, 2010; Sutton, 2013). Factors identified were normally distributed, having a beneficially low standard deviation.

### **Limitations and Assumptions**

Limitations and assumptions regarding the use of *t* tests within descriptive statistics were presented (Barany, 2003; Boulden, 2013; Ganzert, 2012; Testa, 2010; Warsame, 2011; Whitley & Ball, 2002) in this section. The limitations for the research study were:

- The results of inferential statistics can only be applied to populations that resembled the sample that was tested (Goodwin & Ortiz, 2015).
- The sample and population were roughly normal in distribution, with minimal scores existing far from the mean (Ganzert, 2012; Testa, 2010; Whitley & Ball, 2002).
- Each group should have about the same number of participants. Comparing large and small groups may give inaccurate results (Testa, 2010).
- Without an identifier linking student and parent surveys together, the research design and statistical estimations had nested effects by comparing two groups (Stockburger, 1996).
- All data were independent, and scores were not influenced by each other (Boulden, 2013).
- Data were interval-level or higher. Each unit of measurement was equal to any other unit (Boulden, 2013).

Assumptions of *t* tests were:

- That bivariate independent groups were present (Barany, 2003; Whitley & Ball, 2002).
- That differences existed between the two groups being measured (Barany, 2003).
- Dependent variables were assumed to be normally distributed with similar variance in both groups (Mordkoff, 2000; Whitley & Ball, 2002).
- One-sample *t* tests were considered robust for violations of normal distribution (Warachan, 2011).

- Each observation of the dependent variable stood alone from other observations of the dependent variable (Ganzert, 2012).

### **Conclusion**

The methodology chapter illustrated a convenience sample, survey driven research design established to investigate middle level student and parent perceived levels of concern towards peer interaction, service access, teacher support, academic rigor, and school safety constructs before transitioning tuitioned students to a secondary school located outside of their resident school district. Respondents were selected in a convenience-sampling format due to accessibility, and data were collected per protocol expectations. Descriptive statistics placed numeric values to attitudes from Likert scale items on the surveys; therefore, a quantitative statistical analysis ensued using SPSS software. The methodology construction was deliberate about answering the identified research questions, and surveys were selected as primary data collection tools used to achieve that objective. Computations analyzed data through SPSS software and were presented in numeric tables and narrative essays, a manner expected in standard design procedure.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Results**

The purpose of this study was to identify middle level student and parent perceived similarities and differences towards transition factors prior to students being tuitioned to a secondary school located outside of the district, so administrators can be afforded the opportunity to create a successful transition program by addressing families' levels of concern to overcome perceived barriers. Through the use of surveys, a quantitative, convenience sample study was selected for the design structure to extract respondent data from student and parent groups. By focusing on the mean of those data sets, descriptive statistics were selected to weigh the relationships between student and parent grouped variables through analysis and calculating formulas for statistical significance. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software assisted in the statistical analysis of data and hypotheses testing. The following seven hypotheses were explored in the study:

- Hypothesis 1. There is a statistically significant difference between student and parent perceptions on peer interaction when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district.
- Hypothesis 2. There is a statistically significant difference between student and parent perceptions on school service access when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district.
- Hypothesis 3. There is a statistically significant difference between student and parent perceptions on access to teacher support when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district.

- Hypothesis 4. There is a statistically significant difference between student and parent perceptions on academic rigor when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district.
- Hypothesis 5. There is a statistically significant difference between student and parent perceptions on school safety when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district.
- Hypothesis 6. There is a statistically significant difference between student and parent perceptions for each school.
- Hypothesis 7. There is a statistically significant difference among students in two grades.

This chapter entails the results of the statistical analysis used to test the stated hypotheses. SPSS software served as the statistical analysis tool to derive descriptive statistics for the entire data sample noted in Table 4.1 (N = 108). The 108 participants were comprised of two groups for hypothesis testing. Student (n = 54) and parent (n = 54) groups were identified; however, Table 4.1 further characterized the student subjects

Table 4.1

*Group Frequency Table for Students, Parents, and Grade Levels*

	Frequency (%)	Grade (%)	Duncan	Moore
Students	54 (50%)	6 (31%) 8 (19%)	33	21
Parents	54 (50%)	6 (31%) 8 (19%)	33	21
Total	108 (100%)	(100%)		

Note. N = 108. Student and parent groups were equal n = 54.  
Grade 6 student and parent groups were equal at Duncan n = 33.  
Grade 8 student and parent groups were equal at Moore n = 21.



by acknowledging Grade 6 students from Duncan School and Grade 8 students from Moore School for a total of 54 students. Grade 6 students ( $n = 33$ ) claimed 61% of the participants in the student group, and Grade 8 students ( $n = 21$ ) absorbed 39% of the student group. The parent ( $n = 54$ ) group labeled in Table 4.1 consisted of any adult identified by students as their parent or legal guardian who resided at the student's same residence with them. Families had the choice to select which parent or legal guardian would complete the parent survey if more than one guardian resided at that same residence.

### **Response Rate**

A convenient sample population consisting of 65 combined families from Moore School and Duncan School were available to participate in the survey study, and all families were provided with a letter of invitation along with a consent form to participate. Eleven of those families did not return the consent form to participate; therefore, they were excluded from the survey process. Fifty-four families ( $N = 108$ ) did return the consent forms; therefore, a combination of 54 students ( $n = 54$ ) and 54 parents ( $n = 54$ ) completed one survey for the study. This garnered a response rate of 83% for each respective group. Each school had an equal number of students and parents participate. Thus, the sample size was 54 for both the student ( $n = 54$ ) and parent ( $n = 54$ ) groups. To further delineate respondents, Moore School had 21 Grade 8 students ( $n = 21$ ) and parents ( $n = 21$ ) participate in the study, which comprised 39% of all respondents. Duncan School had 33 Grade 6 students ( $n = 33$ ) and parents ( $n = 33$ ) participate, which totaled 61% of all respondents for the study. By accomplishing a response rate of 83% for all subjects, the nonresponse bias group only accounted for 17% of the available

population. This exceeded industry standards for proper survey collection procedures and added reliability to the study (Fincham, 2008).

### **Demographic Data**

Table 4.2 articulated student (n = 54) and parent (n = 54) demographics for the survey research study (N = 108). The table represented the frequency and percentage of respondents engaged in the study through the completion of one student and one parent survey with corresponding personal data questions. In terms of students, respondents' gender slightly favored females (54%) over males (46%). Likewise, students' race displayed a slight majority of Black (43%) students, with White (37%) students just behind. Ages of students ranged equally from 11 to 14 years old, and 85% of students reported receiving free meals at school. The socioeconomic percentage of free lunches may have been higher than previously identified as Duncan School met federal regulations to provide free meals to all students regardless of their economic status. Moore School followed the federal meal identification guidelines too, but the entire school did not receive free meals as some families paid. A high percentage of students reported an academic performance grade of A (30%), B (37%), or C (20%), and students also reported that they had many friendships established inside and outside of school. Last, 39% of students had a sibling attend the same upcoming, transitional school that they planned to attend, and 52% of students reported that they did not have a sibling attend the upcoming secondary school, which they planned to attend.

Table 4.2

*Demographic Information of Student and Parent Participants Analyzed*

Characteristic	Demographic variable	Student frequency (%)	Parent frequency (%)
Total	All respondents	54 (100%)	54 (100%)
Gender	Male	25 (46%)	6 (11%)
	Female	29 (54%)	48 (89%)
Race	Black	23 (43%)	
	White	20 (37%)	
	Multi-racial	6 (11%)	
	Hispanic	2 (4%)	
	Other	3 (6%)	
Age	11	16 (30%)	
	12	16 (30%)	
	13	6 (11%)	
	14	15 (28%)	
			6 (11%)
			23 (43%)
			18 (33%)
			5 (9%)
			2 (4%)
Socioeconomic status (free meals)	Yes	46 (85%)	49 (91%)
	No	3 (6%)	5 (9%)
	Don't Know	5 (9%)	
Academic achievement	A grades	16 (30%)	
	B grades	20 (37%)	
	C grades	11 (20%)	
	D grades	1 (2%)	
	Don't Know	6 (11%)	
Relationship to student	Mother		43 (80%)
	Father		5 (9%)
	Grandmother		3 (6%)
	Other		3 (6%)
Friends outside of school	1-2	3 (6%)	
	3-4	14 (26%)	
	5-6	11 (20%)	
	7-8	1 (2%)	
	9+	22 (41%)	
	Don't Know	3 (6%)	

(continued)

Table 4.2

*Demographic Information of Student and Parent Participants Analyzed (continued)*

Characteristic	Demographic variable	Student frequency (%)	Parent frequency (%)
Friends outside of school and are also classmates	0	2 (4%)	
	1-2	10 (19%)	
	3-4	14 (26%)	
	5-6	13 (24%)	
	7-8	3 (6%)	
	9+	10 (19%)	
	Don't Know	2 (4%)	
Students had a sibling attend the same secondary school	Yes	21 (39%)	
	No	28 (52%)	
	Don't Know	5 (9%)	

Note. N = 108. The student group (n = 54) and parent group (n = 54) had equal sample sizes. Percentages reflected totals for each independent group of subjects.

Table 4.2 also articulated parent (n = 54) demographics. Parents participating in the study presented a more common profile than students portrayed. The vast percentage (89%) of parent respondents were female, and 80% of adult respondents reported a relationship of *mother* to the student. In terms of age, parents primarily selected a range of either 30-39 (43%) or 40-49 (33%) for the pool of respondents. Forty-nine (91%) parents reported that their child received free meals at school. As with the student responses, this percentage may be higher than initially researched as Duncan provided free meals to all students regardless of socioeconomic status. Even students who did not qualify for free meals within federal guidelines received free lunches at Duncan; however, that was not the practice at Moore.

## Student and Parent Perceptions Data Analysis and Results

Results were derived through a statistical analysis performed in SPSS software. Descriptive statistics presented in Table 4.3 provided details for individual survey questions. Questions 1 through 25 consisted of items which were combined into constructs; however, in Table 4.3, each item was presented for observation. For Questions 1 through 25 on the survey, Likert scaled responses existed in a 1 through 5 ascending order. A response of 1 was the lowest level of concern available, and a score of 5 was the highest level of concern available. The Likert scale scores 1 through 5 were defined on the survey instrument as: 1 = *I am not concerned at all*, 2 = *I am not concerned*, 3 = *I am a bit concerned*, 4 = *I am concerned*, and 5 = *I am very much concerned*.

Table 4.3

*Mean and Standard Deviation of 25 Perception Questions Responded by Both Parents and Students*

Question	<i>N</i>	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Q16. Are you concerned about the classes being more difficult at the new school than in your present school?	108	1	5	2.82	1.42
Q12. Are you concerned that the homework load at the new school will be too much to handle?	108	1	5	2.73	1.18
Q18. Are you concerned about high stakes tests that you will take at the new school?	108	1	5	2.65	1.20
Q17. Are you concerned that you have the study skills needed to succeed at the new school such as note-taking, test preparation, and writing papers?	108	1	5	2.64	1.23
Q1. Are you concerned about being in a new school and classes with students that you do not know?	108	1	5	2.61	1.20

(continued)

Table 4.3

*Mean and Standard Deviation of 25 Perception Questions Responded by Both Parents and Students (continued)*

Question	<i>N</i>	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Q20. Are you concerned about your grade point average and your class rank?	108	1	5	2.58	1.22
Q19. Are you concerned about the credit requirements at the new school to be promoted to the next grade level each year?	108	1	5	2.50	1.12
Q9. Are you concerned about having enough time to get to your locker and class on time?	108	1	5	2.44	1.16
Q7. Are you concerned about getting lost in the new school?	108	1	5	2.39	1.14
Q14. Are you concerned about knowing how to get help if you have questions or problems at the new school?	108	1	5	2.36	1.13
Q11. Are you concerned that the new teachers will be more strict than your current teachers?	108	1	5	2.34	1.05
*Q8. Are you concerned about getting forms completed to receive free or reduced price meals to begin the next school year?	108	1	6	2.34	1.65
Q4. Are you concerned about fitting in with other social groups or cliques at the new school?	108	1	5	2.33	1.07
Q15. Are you concerned about getting home if you want to stay for tutoring or extra-curricular activities at the new school?	108	1	5	2.32	1.30
Q13. Are you concerned that your new teachers will not give you as much school work support as they do in your current school?	108	1	5	2.31	1.15
Q21. Are you concerned that students will bully you at the new school?	108	1	5	2.31	1.26
Q2. Are you concerned about making friends in a new school?	108	1	5	2.27	1.50
Q3. Are you concerned about having someone to sit with during lunch at the new school?	108	1	5	2.25	1.22
Q23. Are you concerned about being involved in fights at the new school?	108	1	5	2.22	1.19

(continued)

Table 4.3

*Mean and Standard Deviation of 25 Perception Questions Responded by Both Parents and Students (continued)*

Question	<i>N</i>	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Q10. Are you concerned that the new school will be too crowded making it difficult for you to access a principal, counselor, or a nurse when needed?	108	1	5	2.20	1.07
Q22. Are you concerned about poor peer conduct while traveling to and from the new school?	108	1	5	2.18	1.08
Q25. Are you concerned that the teachers and staff at the new school will not watch out for their students the same way as in your current school?	108	1	5	2.18	1.16
Q5. Are you concerned that you will be pressured to use tobacco, drink alcohol, or do drugs at the new school?	108	1	5	2.10	1.35
Q24. Are you concerned about getting hurt at the new school?	108	1	5	2.02	1.11
Q6. Are you concerned about getting back and forth from home to the new school?	108	1	5	1.95	1.06

Note. Table organized in descending order of mean scores for survey items. All questions had Likert scale responses of 1 through 5 for levels of concern in an ascending score response pattern. \*Q8 was assigned a variable of 6 for designed absent respondent data; thus, its mean score was artificially higher than its real mean score value.

Mean score responses ranged from the lowest mean score of 1.95 for Question 6 to the highest mean score of 2.82 for Question 16. Survey Question 6, the lowest concern item, asked for the concern level for students getting back and forth from home to the new school. Question 16, the largest item of concern, asked for the concern level for students' classes being more difficult at the new school than classes at students' current school. Other items of note consisted of Question 24 having the second lowest level of concern with a mean score of 2.02 for students getting hurt at the new school, and

Question 12 had a mean score of 2.73, the second highest concern level, for students' homework load at the new school.

Table 4.4 included descriptives for the five construct variables. Frequencies, values for assigned variables, means, and standard deviations were calculated. The same Likert scaled score responses of 1 through 5 were used to articulate construct comparisons. The school safety construct had the lowest concern level for constructs with an averaged mean score of 2.18, and the academic rigor construct had the largest level of concern with an averaged mean score of 2.64. To determine normality of measured variables, skewness and kurtosis values were presented for all constructs. With all positively skewed measurements between 0.53 and 0.24 and Kurtosis values between -0.51 and 0.02, normal distribution requirements were achieved (Field, 2009). Once the descriptives were validated through SPSS software, then hypothesis testing took place.

Table 4.4

*Group Statistics for Five Construct Variables*

Construct	Min	Max	M	*Ave	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
				M			
Peer interaction	5	25	11.56	2.31	4.60	0.39	-0.51
Service access	4	20	8.98	2.25	3.30	0.37	-0.19
Teacher support	5	25	12.06	2.41	4.26	0.24	0.02
Academic rigor	5	25	13.19	2.64	4.90	0.24	-0.36
School safety	5	25	10.91	2.18	4.60	0.53	-0.31

Note. All constructs had a statistic N = 108. Skewness had a 0.23 standard error for all constructs. Kurtosis had a 0.46 standard error for all constructs.

\*Average mean scores were produced per item to level constructs since service access only contained four items while all of the other constructs contained five items.



Each hypothesis was analyzed through similar computations to determine whether to reject the null hypothesis. Independent samples *t* tests were used to identify a Sig. (2-tailed) value, which also illustrated the *p* value to determine whether a significant relationship existed between two groups. An alpha level of .05 was selected as the cutoff level for significance. Thus, if a calculated *p* value was less than .05, the null hypothesis was rejected. Where the null hypothesis was rejected, an effect size calculator (Becker, 2000) was garnered to assist in determining the effect size (Cohen, 1988, 1992) of the relationship between the two groups used in the analysis. A power calculator (Brant, n.d.) further examined the rejected null hypotheses to calculate the reliability of the results for replication studies.

The beginning five hypotheses, illustrated by the designated five constructs, compared student and parent grouped data in a similar manner. The remaining two hypotheses narrowed the focus further to observe individual school and grade level responses through mean score comparisons. In Hypothesis 6, the schools were separated to view results among students and parents at each school location. In Hypothesis 7, Grade 6 and Grade 8 students' responses were grouped for comparison with one another.

### **Constructs to Dependent Variables**

The 25 survey questions pertaining to concern levels were clustered into five variable constructs, and those constructs were labeled as peer interaction, service access, teacher support, academic rigor, and school safety. The constructs were identified as dependent variables for quantitative data analysis in SPSS software. Questions 1 through 5 were grouped together into the peer interaction variable for SPSS software. The service access variable included Questions 6, 7, 9, and 10. Question 8 was removed from the

service access variable and explained further in the following paragraph. The teacher support variable was comprised of Questions 11 through 15. The academic rigor variable included Questions 16 through 20, and the school safety clustered variable was created from Questions 21 through 25. All of the survey questions organized into constructs contained possible respondent answers for levels of concern in a 1 through 5 ascending order in a Likert scaled pattern. The level of concern increased as the respondent's number selection increased.

Question 8 was grouped into the service access construct; however, it was removed from the service access construct variable in the quantitative analysis as all respondents were not instructed to answer the question with a level of concern. Question 8 asked only those families whose student received free lunch to complete a level of concern for the question. Thus, the question was eliminated from the service access variable design as mean scores and other calculations would not have been accurately represented. However, Question 8 was analyzed in isolation, and it was reported independently in the ancillary analysis section of this chapter.

### **Mean Score Comparison**

Using the five constructs, student and parent responses were organized into Table 4.5, which was a group comparison between students and parents. Mean score, standard deviation, and standard error measurements were constructed for two equal and independent groups of students ( $n = 54$ ) and parents ( $n = 54$ ). Table 4.5 illustrated the five variable constructs used in Hypothesis 1 through 5 testing. The average mean score for each question within each construct cluster was added together to provide an overall sum for each mean score in Table 4.5. Peer interaction, teacher support, academic rigor,

and school safety constructs had five mean scores added together for sum totals, while service access only had four mean scores added together.

Table 4.5

*Comparison of Students and Parents' Concern Levels for Constructs*

Construct	Group <sup>a</sup>	*Ave			
		<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SEM</i>
Peer interaction	Students	10.87	2.17	4.17	0.57
	Parents	12.26	2.45	4.93	0.67
	Total	23.13			
Service access	Students	9.33	2.33	3.28	0.45
	Parents	8.63	2.16	3.32	0.45
	Total	17.96			
Teacher support	Students	11.70	2.34	4.22	0.57
	Parents	12.43	2.49	4.32	0.59
	Total	24.13			
Academic rigor	Students	13.22	2.64	4.92	0.67
	Parents	13.17	2.63	4.92	0.67
	Total	26.39			
School safety	Students	9.52	1.90	4.20	0.57
	Parents	12.30	2.46	4.60	0.63
	Total	21.82			

Note. <sup>a</sup>Both student and parent groups had 54 participants in each group (n = 54). \*Average mean scores were produced per item to level constructs since service access only contained four items while all of the other constructs contained five items.

Figure 4.1 illustrated average mean scores of constructs from Table 4.5 between student (n = 54) and parent (n = 54) groups. While both groups offered similar patterns of concern levels for each construct, parents had noticeably higher levels of concern towards peer interaction and school safety variables shown in the graph. The parents' peer interaction average mean score was .28 (13%) higher than the students' average

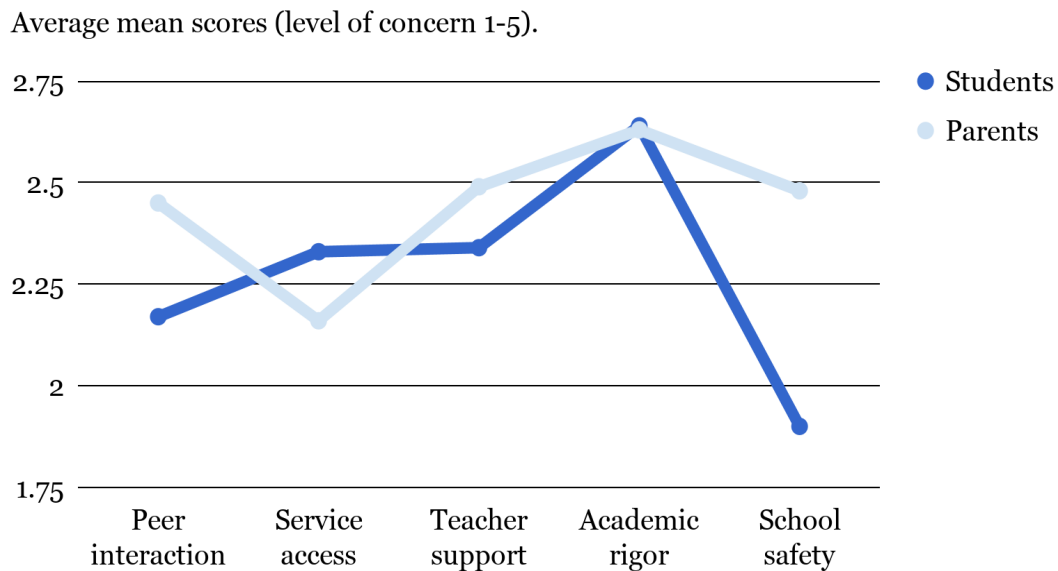


Figure 4.1. Students and parents' construct comparisons.

mean score for peer interaction. However, there was a larger discrepancy with parent perceptions over student perceptions towards school safety, and the parents' school safety average mean score was .56 (28%) higher than the students' average mean score.

### Hypotheses Testing

Seven hypotheses were tested with the assistance of SPSS software to complete the quantitative analysis for each item. Hypotheses 1 through 5 compared student ( $n = 54$ ) and parent ( $n = 54$ ) group responses for each of the five constructs. Hypotheses 1 through 5 measured significance levels for each construct, or variable cluster, in the same manner. Independent samples  $t$  tests were used to perform the quantitative analysis to identify significant relationships between groups. Hypotheses 1 through 4 shared similar output results that no significant relationships existed between independent student and parent groups; therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted. However, Hypothesis 5

regarding the school safety construct had a different outcome, and the null hypothesis was rejected.

Hypothesis 6 administered a similar testing sequence of independent samples  $t$  tests to measure significant relationships between student ( $n = 33$ ) and parent ( $n = 33$ ) groups at Duncan School and student ( $n = 21$ ) and parent ( $n = 21$ ) groups at Moore School. The same five construct variables were used in Hypothesis 6 group comparisons, and the observation of a low  $p$  value during hypothesis testing ultimately led to the null hypothesis being rejected. Hypothesis 7 followed a similar analysis process in using the five construct clusters to measure whether a significant relationship existed between two groups; however, in Hypothesis 7, only students were grouped for comparison. Grade 6 students ( $n = 33$ ) at Duncan School were compared to Grade 8 students ( $n = 21$ ) at Moore School. The null hypothesis was not rejected in Hypothesis 7. Hypotheses 1 through 7 were presented and statistically analyzed as follows:

### **Hypothesis 1**

There is a statistically significant difference between student and parent perceptions on peer interaction when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district.

**Hypothesis 1 results.** An independent samples  $t$  test (Table 4.6) was used to compare peer interaction variable mean scores between two independent groups of students ( $n = 54$ ) and parents ( $n = 54$ ). Means were analyzed using SPSS software to determine whether there was statistical evidence that the student and parent grouped means were statistically different. Using the  $t$  test for Equality of Means in the SPSS output (Table 4.6), the Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.117 was also identified as the  $p$  value.

Since the  $p$  value was greater than the designated alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis was not rejected. At a 5% level of significance, the data did not provide sufficient evidence that the mean concern level for peer interaction between all students and parents was statistically significant.

Table 4.6

*Independent Samples t Test for Equality of Means Between Student and Parent Groups*

Construct	$t$	$df$	*Sig. (2-tailed)	$M$ difference	$SE$ difference	CI	
						LL	UL
Peer interaction	-1.58	106.00	0.117	-1.39	4.60	-3.13	0.35
Service access	1.11	106.00	0.270	0.70	3.30	-0.55	1.96
Teacher support	-0.88	106.00	0.381	-0.72	4.26	-2.35	0.91
Academic rigor	0.06	106.00	0.953	0.06	4.90	-1.82	1.93
School safety	-3.28	106.00	0.001	-2.78	4.60	-4.46	-1.10

Note. CI = confidence interval;  $LL$  = lower limit,  $UL$  = upper limit. \*Sig. (2-tailed) was translated and equal to the  $p$  value, which was  $p < .05$ , two-tailed. Equal variances were assumed for each construct variable.

The student group had a peer interaction mean score of 10.87, and the parent group had a mean score of 12.26 for the same construct. That corresponded to an average mean score of 2.17 for students and 2.45 for parents for each of the five peer interaction items on the survey. With Likert scale options of 1 through 5 on the survey, the response scores fell within survey choices of: 2 = *I am not concerned* and 3 = *I am a bit concerned*. The 2.17 average mean score response for students was their second lowest rated construct. Parents scored peer interaction a 2.45, which was the parent group's second lowest rated construct too. Thus, students had minimal, if any, concern towards

peer interaction before entering the new school; however, parents did have a small amount of concern.

## **Hypothesis 2**

There is a statistically significant difference between student and parent perceptions on school service access when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district.

**Hypothesis 2 results.** An independent samples *t* test (Table 4.6) was used to compare service access variable mean scores between two independent groups of students ( $n = 54$ ) and parents ( $n = 54$ ). Means were analyzed using SPSS software to determine whether there was statistical evidence that the student and parent grouped means were statistically different. Using the *t* test for Equality of Means in the SPSS output (Table 4.6), the Sig. (2-tailed) value was 0.270, which also represented the *p* value. Since the *p* value was greater than the prescribed alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis was not rejected. At a 5% level of significance, the data did not provide sufficient evidence that the mean concern level for service access between students and parents was statistically significant.

The student group had a service access mean score of 9.33, and the parent group had a mean score of 8.63 for the same construct. That corresponded to an average mean score of 2.33 for students and 2.16 for parents for each of the four service access items listed on the survey. With Likert scale options of 1 through 5 on the survey, the response scores fell within survey choices of: 2 = *I am not concerned* and 3 = *I am a bit concerned*. The 2.33 average mean score response for students was their median rated construct. Parents scored service access an average mean score of 2.16, which was their

lowest rated construct by 0.29. It was rare that students had a higher concern level than parents. In fact, it only happened on two constructs of the five presented. The 0.17 higher student rating on service access far exceeded the other construct (0.01) where students also rated a construct higher than parents. Thus, students had more concern than parents for the service access construct. Yet, students only had a small amount of concern, and parents had minimal, if any, concern towards service access items before students entered the new school.

### **Hypothesis 3**

There is a statistically significant difference between student and parent perceptions on access to teacher support when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district.

**Hypothesis 3 results.** An independent samples *t* test (Table 4.6) was used to compare teacher support variable mean scores between two independent groups of students ( $n = 54$ ) and parents ( $n = 54$ ). Means were analyzed using SPSS software to determine whether there was statistical evidence that the student and parent grouped means were statistically different. Using the *t* test for Equality of Means in the SPSS output (Table 4.6), the Sig. (2-tailed) value was 0.381, which also represented the *p* value. Since the *p* value was greater than the prescribed alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis was not rejected. At a 5% level of significance, the data did not provide sufficient evidence that the mean concern level for teacher support between students and parents was statistically significant.

The student group had a teacher support mean score of 11.70, and the parent group had a mean score of 12.43 for the same construct. That corresponded to an average



mean score of 2.34 for students and 2.49 for parents for each of the five teacher support items on the survey. With Likert scale options of 1 through 5 on the survey, the response scores fell within survey choices of: 2 = *I am not concerned* and 3 = *I am a bit concerned*. The 2.34 average mean score response for students was their second highest rated construct. Parents scored teacher support a 2.49, which was the parent group's second highest rated construct too. Thus, students and parents displayed a small amount of concern, collectively, towards teacher support before entering the new school.

#### **Hypothesis 4**

There is a statistically significant difference between student and parent perceptions on academic rigor when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district.

**Hypothesis 4 results.** An independent samples *t* test (Table 4.6) was used to compare academic rigor variable mean scores between two independent groups of students ( $n = 54$ ) and parents ( $n = 54$ ). Means were analyzed using SPSS software to determine whether there was statistical evidence that the student and parent grouped means were statistically different. Using the *t* test for Equality of Means in the SPSS output (Table 4.6), the Sig. (2-tailed) value was 0.95, which also represented the *p* value. Since the *p* value was greater than the prescribed alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis was not rejected. At a 5% level of significance, the data did not provide sufficient evidence that the mean concern level for academic rigor between students and parents was statistically significant.

The student group had an academic rigor mean score of 13.22, and the parent group had a mean score of 13.17 for the same construct. That corresponded to an average

mean score of 2.64 for students and 2.63 for parents for each of the five academic rigor items on the survey. With Likert scale options of 1 through 5 on the survey, the response scores fell within survey choices of: 2 = *I am not concerned* and 3 = *I am a bit concerned*. The 2.64 average mean score response for students was their highest rated construct by 0.30 average points. Parents scored academic rigor a 2.63, which was their highest rated construct too. Thus, academic rigor was the construct with the most amount of concern for both groups and scored almost identically. Students (2.64) did rate the construct 0.01 higher than parents (2.63), which only occurred with one other construct. Since both response values were above 2.5, the level of concern for both groups increased towards the *I am a bit concerned* Likert scaled category. Although the level of concern identified was at a modest level on the Likert scale, students and parents displayed their highest level of concern towards academic rigor items before students entered the new school.

### **Hypothesis 5**

There is a statistically significant difference between student and parent perceptions on school safety when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district.

**Hypothesis 5 results.** An independent samples *t* test (Table 4.6) was used to compare school safety variable mean scores between two independent groups of students ( $n = 54$ ) and parents ( $n = 54$ ). Means were analyzed using SPSS software to determine whether there was statistical evidence that the student and parent grouped means were statistically different. Using the *t* test for Equality of Means in the SPSS output (Table 4.6), the Sig. (2-tailed) value was 0.001, which also represented the *p* value. Since the *p*

value was equal to or less than the prescribed alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. There was a significant relationship displayed between the student and parent groups in terms of the school safety variable.

The student group had a school safety mean score of 9.52, and the parent group had a mean score of 12.30 for the same construct. That corresponded to average Likert scale responses of 1.90 for students and 2.46 for parents for each school safety item on the survey. With Likert scale options of 1 through 5 on the survey, the response scores fell within survey response options of: 1 = *I am not concerned at all*, 2 = *I am not concerned*, and 3 = *I am a bit concerned*. The 1.90 scaled response for students was the lowest rating offered by either group for any construct. Parents scored school safety (2.46) as their median response construct. The 0.56 difference in average mean scores between groups was the largest difference in all of the constructs. Thus, students had no concern for school safety before entering the new school; however, parents did have a small amount of concern.

Since a significant relationship was demonstrated through the  $p$  value calculation and observation, an effect size was also determined for school safety using the Lee Becker (2000) effect size calculator to determine the magnitude of the difference, and an effect size  $r = -0.30$  and Cohen's  $d = -0.63$  were computed in the model. Per Cohen (1988, 1992), the results signified a medium effect size, and students were 21.3% less concerned than parents about the school safety construct.

A power calculator (Brant, n.d.) was also administered to determine the strength of the findings in relation to the sample size used. Since mean scores, standard deviation, and group ( $n = 54$ ) sizes were known, a power calculation was performed to verify that

the sample size was adequate to establish reliability within the significant results identified on the school safety construct. Using Brant's (n.d.) online calculator rooted with Rosner's (2010) mathematical computations, an alpha level was set at  $p = .05$  and means, a common standard deviation, and sample size were added into the model. The online tool returned a .91 power calculation, which exceeded the .80 recommended standard for reliability (Cohen, 1988, 1992). Per the model, only 40 participants were needed to produce acceptable results at the .80 level; thus, the sample size ( $n = 54$ ) achieved sufficient power results.

### **Hypothesis 6**

There is a statistically significant difference between student and parent perceptions for each school.

**Hypothesis 6 results.** An independent samples  $t$  test was used to compare peer interaction, service access, teacher support, academic rigor, and school safety construct variable mean scores between two independent groups of students ( $n = 33$ ) and parents ( $n = 33$ ) at Duncan School (Table 4.7). A second, similar independent samples  $t$  test analysis took place to compare families at Moore School, and two independent groups of students ( $n = 21$ ) and parents ( $n = 21$ ) were analyzed (Table 4.8). Thus, students and parents' levels of concern were compared at each school location without an influence of data responses collected from the other school. Means were analyzed using SPSS software to determine whether there was statistical evidence that the student and parent grouped means were statistically significant.

Table 4.7

*Independent Samples t Test for Equality of Means Between Students and Parents at Duncan School*

Construct	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	*Sig. (2-tailed)	<i>M</i> difference	<i>SE</i> difference	CI	
						LL	UL
Peer interaction	-0.61	64.00	0.55	-0.67	1.10	-2.86	1.53
Service access	1.58	64.00	0.12	1.30	0.83	-0.35	2.96
Teacher support	0.39	64.00	0.70	0.42	1.10	-1.77	2.62
Academic rigor	-0.38	64.00	0.71	-0.48	1.28	-3.05	2.08
School safety	-1.42	64.00	0.16	-1.64	1.15	-3.94	0.67

Note. CI = confidence interval; *LL* = lower limit, *UL* = upper limit. \*Sig. (2-tailed) was translated and equal to the *p* value, which was  $p < .05$ , two-tailed. Equal variances were assumed for each construct variable.

Table 4.8

*Independent Samples t Test for Equality of Means Between Students and Parents at Moore School*

Construct	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	*Sig. (2-tailed)	<i>M</i> difference	<i>SE</i> difference	CI	
						LL	UL
Peer interaction	-1.78	40.00	0.082	-2.52	1.42	-5.38	0.34
Service access	-0.26	40.00	0.800	-0.23	0.93	-2.12	1.65
Teacher support	-2.15	40.00	0.037	-2.52	1.17	-4.89	-0.16
Academic rigor	0.67	40.00	0.508	0.90	1.35	-1.83	3.64
School safety	-3.88	40.00	0.000	-4.57	1.18	-6.96	-2.19

Note. CI = confidence interval; *LL* = lower limit, *UL* = upper limit. \*Sig. (2-tailed) was translated and equal to the *p* value, which was  $p < .05$ , two-tailed. Equal variances were assumed for each construct variable.

Beginning with Duncan School, Table 4.9 was provided to display mean score comparisons for the five constructs in relation to student (n = 33) and parent (n = 33) subgrouped responses only at Duncan School. Figure 4.2, only observing Duncan's subjects, displayed a similar pattern to that shown in Figure 4.1 for all respondents except for the teacher support construct. At Duncan School, students were more concerned than parents that students would not receive as much teacher support at the new school as they did while attending Duncan.

Table 4.9

*Group Statistics for Student and Parent Comparison at Duncan School*

Construct	Group <sup>a</sup>	<i>M</i>	*Ave		
			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SEM</i>
Peer interaction	Students	10.58	2.12	4.27	0.74
	Parents	11.24	2.25	4.64	0.81
Service access	Students	9.09	2.27	3.52	0.61
	Parents	7.79	1.95	3.19	0.56
Teacher support	Students	11.91	2.38	4.63	0.81
	Parents	11.48	2.30	4.29	0.75
Academic rigor	Students	12.42	2.48	4.91	0.85
	Parents	12.91	2.58	5.51	0.96
School safety	Students	9.88	1.98	4.55	0.79
	Parents	11.52	2.30	4.82	0.84

Note. <sup>a</sup>Both student and parent groups had 33 participants in each group (n = 33). \*Average mean scores were produced per item to level constructs since service access only contained four items while all of the other constructs contained five items.

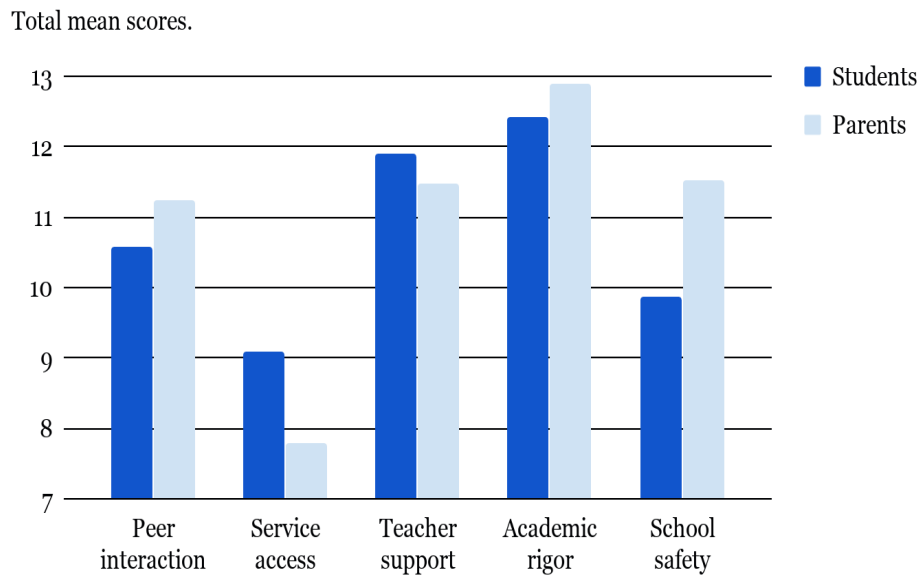


Figure 4.2. Students and parents' mean scores at Duncan.

The five construct variables were also analyzed using the *t* test for Equality of Means in the SPSS output (Table 4.7), and the Sig. (2-tailed) value was observed for each construct variable to determine the *p* value and significant relationships. All *p* values at Duncan were greater than the prescribed alpha level of 0.05; thus, at that point, the null hypothesis was not rejected. There was no significant relationship between Duncan's student and parent groups for any construct variable of peer interaction, service access, teacher support, academic rigor, or school safety. Yet, the hypothesis testing was not finalized as Moore's families were also considered for testing Hypothesis 6.

At Moore School, Table 4.10 illustrated mean score comparisons for the five constructs in relation to student (*n* = 21) and parent (*n* = 21) subgrouped responses from subjects only at Moore School. The visual chart (Figure 4.3) displayed a similar pattern to that provided in Figure 4.1 for all respondents except for the academic rigor construct.

At Moore, students were more concerned than parents about academic rigor at the new school.

Table 4.10

*Group Statistics for Student and Parent Comparison at Moore School*

Construct	Group <sup>a</sup>	*Ave		SD	SEM
		M	M		
Peer interaction	Students	11.33	2.27	4.05	0.88
	Parents	13.86	2.77	5.0	1.10
Service access	Students	9.71	2.43	2.90	0.63
	Parents	9.95	2.49	3.14	0.68
Teacher support	Students	11.38	2.28	3.57	0.78
	Parents	13.90	2.78	4.01	0.88
Academic rigor	Students	14.48	2.90	4.80	1.05
	Parents	13.57	2.71	3.93	0.86
School safety	Students	8.95	1.79	3.61	0.79
	Parents	13.52	2.70	4.02	0.88

Note. <sup>a</sup>Both student and parent groups had 21 participants in each group (n = 21). \*Average mean scores were produced per item to level constructs since service access only contained four items while all of the other constructs contained five items.



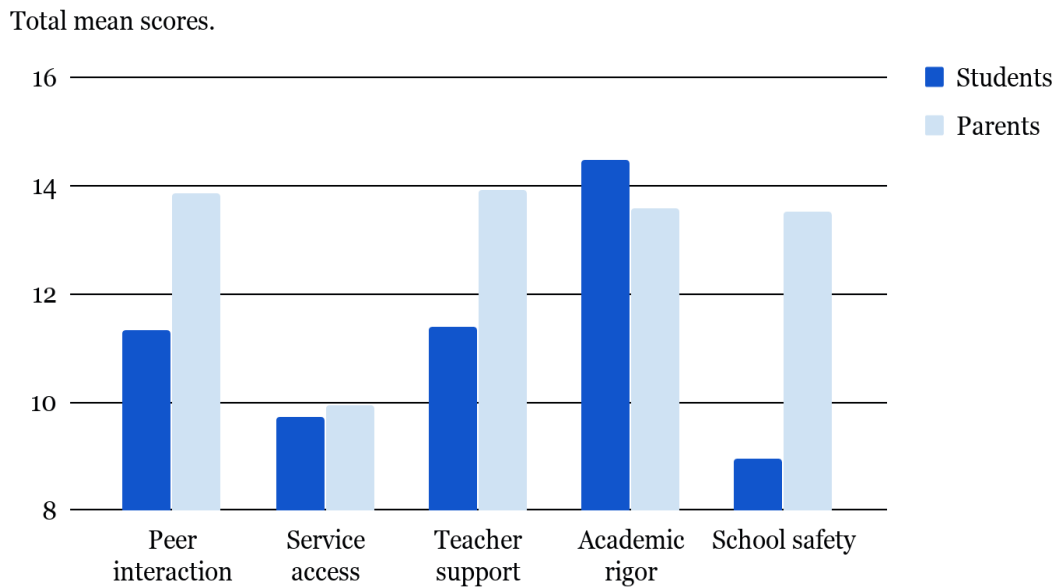


Figure 4.3. Students and parents' mean scores at Moore.

Moore School also had the five construct variables analyzed using the *t* test for Equality of Means in the SPSS output (Table 4.8). The Sig. (2-tailed) value was observed for each construct variable to determine the *p* value and significant relationships. Two of the *p* values were equal to or less than the prescribed 0.05 alpha level; thus, the null hypothesis was rejected due to the findings at Moore School. There were significant relationships between Moore's student and parent groups for variable constructs of teacher support and school safety. The remaining three variable constructs of peer interaction, service access, and academic rigor had *p* values higher than the prescribed .05 alpha level, which displayed that there was not a statistically significant relationship between students and parents within those three variable constructs to reject the null hypothesis.

Effect size was calculated for teacher support and school safety constructs at Moore School to determine the size difference and the statistical significance

demonstrated by a low  $p$  value. Teacher support had a  $p$  value of .04; hence, the effect size was also determined using the Lee Becker (2000) effect size calculator to determine the magnitude of the difference. Effect size  $r = -0.32$  and Cohen's  $d = -0.66$  was computed in the model. Per Cohen (1988, 1992), the results signified a medium effect size, and students were 21.3% less concerned than parents about teacher support at Moore School. Effect size was also determined for the school safety construct due to a low  $p$  value of less than .001, and Becker's (2000) calculator determined that an effect size  $r = -.51$  and Cohen's  $d = -1.19$  signified a large effect size per Cohen's (1988, 1992) standard. Students were 33% less concerned than parents about school safety at Moore School.

A power calculator (Brant, n.d.) was used to determine the strength of the findings in relation to the sample size used. Since mean scores, standard deviation, and group ( $n = 21$ ) sizes were known, a power calculation was performed to verify that the sample size was adequate to conclude reliability within the significant school safety construct analysis. Using Brant's (n.d.) online calculator rooted with Rosner's (2010) mathematical computations, an alpha level was set at  $p = .05$  and means, a common standard deviation, and sample size were added into the model. The online tool returned a .97 power calculation, which exceeded the .80 recommended standard for reliability (Cohen, 1988, 1992). Per the model, only 11 participants were needed to produce acceptable results at .80 power level; thus, the sample size ( $n = 21$ ) achieved sufficient power results.

The power calculator (Brant, n.d.) was also used for the teacher support construct. Using Brant's (n.d.) online calculator rooted with Rosner's (2010) mathematical

computations, an alpha level was set at  $p = .05$  and means, a common standard deviation, and sample size were added into the model. The online tool returned a .58 power calculation, which was below the .80 recommended standard for reliability (Cohen, 1988, 1992). Per the model, 36 participants were needed to produce acceptable results at .80 power level; thus, the sample size ( $n = 21$ ) provided did not achieve optimal power results pertaining to sample size and reliability. This increased the possibility that the null hypothesis was rejected when the null hypothesis was actually true. However, due to the high power level displayed within the school safety construct, rejecting the null hypothesis still remained the appropriate procedure per research standards and protocol.

### **Hypothesis 7**

There is a statistically significant difference among students in two grades.

**Hypothesis 7 results.** A subgrouped mean score for the two grade levels sampled was provided for comparison of the five constructs (Table 4.11). Only students were used in the comparison. Figure 4.4 offered mean score results as a visual representation of Grade 6 and Grade 8 students' responses. No parent data were used in this hypothesis. Grade 6 students ( $n = 33$ ) only attended Duncan School and Grade 8 students ( $n = 21$ ) only attended Moore School. Thus, Figure 4.4 displayed both grade and school mean score data for student groups. The bar chart illustrated that Grade 6 students from Duncan were more concerned about teacher support and school safety construct variables than Grade 8 students were at Moore. However, Grade 8 students at Moore were more concerned with peer interactions, service access, and academic rigor construct variables than Grade 6 students at Duncan.

Table 4.11

*Group Statistics for Grade 6 and Grade 8 Comparison*

Construct	Group <sup>a</sup>	*Ave			
		<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SEM</i>
Peer interaction	Grade 6	10.58	2.12	4.27	0.74
	Grade 8	11.33	2.27	4.05	0.88
Service access	Grade 6	9.09	2.27	3.52	0.61
	Grade 8	9.71	2.43	2.90	0.63
Teacher support	Grade 6	11.91	2.38	4.63	0.81
	Grade 8	11.38	2.28	3.57	0.78
Academic rigor	Grade 6	12.42	2.48	4.91	0.85
	Grade 8	14.48	2.90	4.80	1.05
School safety	Grade 6	9.88	1.98	4.55	0.79
	Grade 8	8.95	1.79	3.61	0.79

Note. <sup>a</sup>Grade 6 had 33 students in the group (n = 33). Grade 8 had 21 students in the group (n = 21). \*Average mean scores were produced per item to level constructs since service access only contained four items while all of the other constructs contained five items.

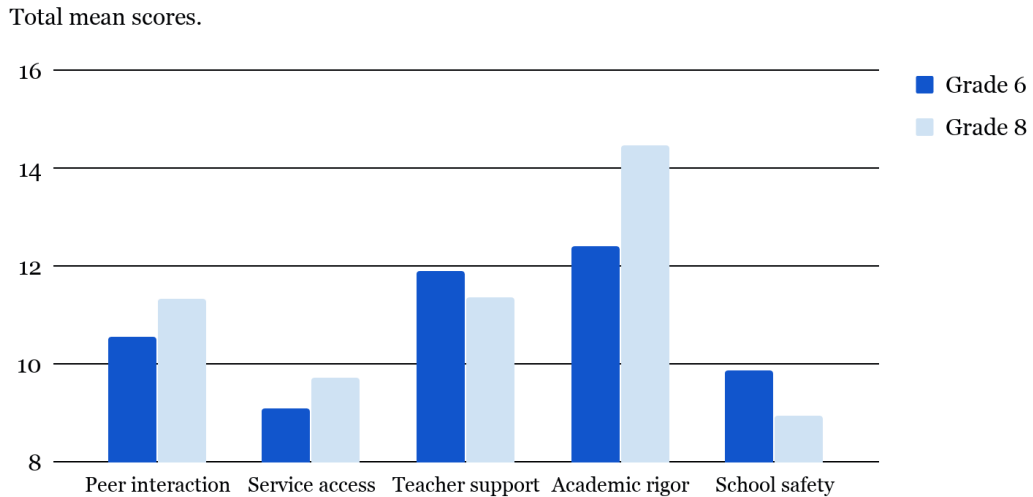


Figure 4.4. Grade 6 (Duncan) and Grade 8 (Moore) mean scores.

For statistical analysis, an independent samples *t* test (Table 4.12) was used to compare students' levels of concern towards peer interaction, service access, teacher support, academic rigor, and school safety construct variable mean scores between two independent groups of students. Levels of concern and mean score data collected from Grade 6 (*n* = 33) students at Duncan School was compared to Grade 8 students (*n* = 21) at Moore School to determine whether a statistically significant relationship existed between student groups. All construct variables were analyzed using the *t* test for Equality of Means in the SPSS program (Table 4.12). The Sig. (2-tailed) value was observed for each construct variable to determine the *p* value and significant relationships. All construct variables had *p* values higher than the prescribed .05 alpha level. This displayed that there was no statistical significant relationship between Grade 6 and Grade 8 students within all of the variable constructs; thus, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

Table 4.12

*Independent Samples t Test for Equality of Means Between Grade 6 and Grade 8 Student Groups*

Construct	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	*Sig. (2-tailed)	<i>M</i> difference	<i>SE</i> difference	CI	
						LL	UL
Peer interaction	-0.65	52.00	0.52	-0.76	1.17	-3.10	1.59
Service access	-0.68	52.00	0.50	-0.62	0.92	-2.47	1.22
Teacher support	0.45	52.00	0.66	0.53	1.19	-1.85	2.91
Academic rigor	-1.51	52.00	0.14	-2.05	1.36	-4.78	0.67
School safety	-0.79	52.00	0.44	-0.93	1.18	-1.44	3.29

Note. CI = confidence interval; *LL* = lower limit, *UL* = upper limit. \*Sig. (2-tailed) was translated and equal to the *p* value, which was *p* < .05, two-tailed. Equal variances were assumed for each construct variable.

### **Ancillary Analysis**

Additional information was sought beyond hypothesis testing to assist in the development of results. Survey Question 8 and Question 33 were used to gather respondent data for further exploration. Question 8 was extracted from the service access construct due to having intentional absent data. Respondents who did not receive free or reduced price meals at school were asked to leave survey Question 8 blank; however, a variable of 6 was included during SPSS input to represent the absent data in Question 8. Thus, SPSS software reported that data were present for the entire respondent pool (N = 108). A crosstabulation was performed on Question 8, which allowed a subgroup of data to be reviewed alongside whole group data. Question 33 was thought to have a connection with levels of concern based on prior sibling experiences at the same secondary school. In short, would student concern levels be altered by having a sibling who already attended the secondary school that the surveyed student will also attend? That question was answered by comparing student groups with and without sibling experience.

### **Sibling Experience**

Although absent from formal hypotheses testing, the researcher decided to explore whether families' prior experiences with the transitioning secondary school had an effect on respondents' levels of concern answers on the survey. Question 33 on the survey asked both students and parents whether a student's sibling already attended the secondary school that the surveyed student planned to attend. A simple *yes*, *no*, or *I don't know* series of multiple choice answers were offered for respondents' selection. Fifty-four students completed surveys; however, five selected *I don't know* and were excluded

from the exploratory research. Forty-nine (n = 49) students were observed in this analysis, which was comprised of a *yes* group (n = 21) and a *no* group (n = 28) of students. Each group intermixed Grade 6 and Grade 8 students from both schools. A mean score comparison of five construct variable averages was performed between those students who answered *yes* and *no* to Question 33 of the survey (Table 4.13). The reason for this inquiry surrounded an expectation that concern levels would decrease for students who already experienced the transition to the secondary school, indirectly, with a separate sibling.

Table 4.13

*Group Statistics for Student Comparison With and Without Sibling Experience at the New School*

Construct	Group <sup>a</sup>	*Ave			
		<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SEM</i>
Peer interaction	Yes	10.19	2.04	3.87	0.84
	No	11.25	2.25	4.45	0.84
Service access	Yes	9.00	2.25	3.62	0.79
	No	9.93	2.48	2.96	0.56
Teacher support	Yes	12.19	2.44	4.49	0.98
	No	11.32	2.26	4.13	0.78
Academic rigor	Yes	11.57	2.31	4.91	1.07
	No	14.14	2.83	4.66	0.88
School safety	Yes	8.90	1.78	4.19	0.92
	No	9.82	1.96	4.34	0.82

Note. <sup>a</sup>Group Yes had 21 students in the group (n = 21). Group No had 28 students in the group (n = 28). \*Average mean scores were produced per item to level constructs since service access contained four items while all of the other constructs contained five items.

Figure 4.5 detailed responses between the *yes* group who had an older sibling attend the forthcoming secondary school and the *no* group who did not have a sibling attend the forthcoming secondary school. Because the forthcoming school was already familiar to the family, the researcher wanted to verify that this experience would lead to lower levels of concern for students. The same statistical analysis process was completed on this inquiry as had been performed on the two groups of students in Hypothesis 7.

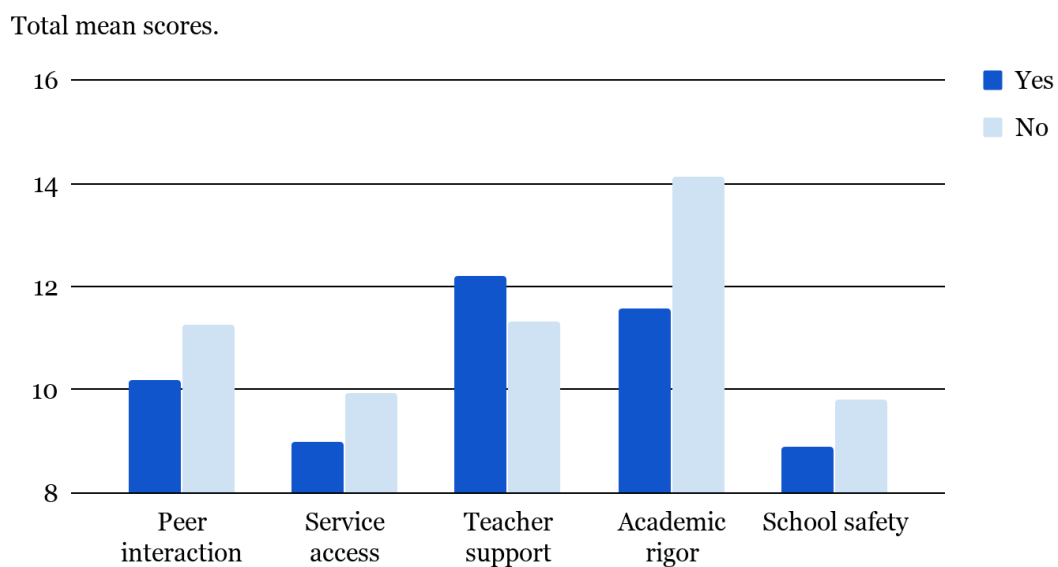


Figure 4.5. Sibling experience with transition school comparison.

An independent samples *t* test (Table 4.14) was used to compare peer interaction, service access, teacher support, academic rigor, and school safety construct variable mean scores between two independent groups of students. Levels of concern and mean score data collected from *yes* students ( $n = 21$ ) was compared to *no* students ( $n = 28$ ) to determine a *p* value and whether a statistically significant relationship existed between groups with and without the sibling experience. All construct variables were analyzed using the *t* test for Equality of Means in the SPSS output (Table 4.14). The Sig. (2-tailed)



value was observed for each construct variable to determine the  $p$  value and possible significant relationships, and all construct variables had  $p$  values higher than the prescribed .05 alpha level. This displayed that no statistically significant relationships existed between *yes* and *no* students within all of the variable constructs. Figure 4.5 suggested that a significant relationship existed between students and parents with regards to the academic rigor construct. However, a .07  $p$  value was calculated, which placed the variable construct outside of the designated alpha level for significance. Thus, a null hypothesis would not have been rejected, if presented.

Table 4.14

*Independent Samples t Test for Significance Between Student Groups With or Without Sibling Experience at the New School*

Construct	$t$	$df$	*Sig. (2-tailed)	$M$ difference	$SE$ difference	CI	
						LL	UL
Peer interaction	-0.87	47.00	0.39	-1.06	1.22	-3.51	1.39
Service access	-0.99	47.00	0.33	-0.93	0.94	-2.82	0.96
Teacher support	0.70	47.00	0.49	0.87	1.24	-1.62	3.36
Academic rigor	-1.87	47.00	0.07	-2.57	1.38	-5.34	0.20
School safety	-0.74	47.00	0.46	-0.92	1.23	-3.40	1.57

Note. CI = confidence interval;  $LL$  = lower limit,  $UL$  = upper limit. \*Sig. (2-tailed) was translated and equal to the  $p$  value, which was  $p < .05$ , two-tailed. Equal variances were assumed for each construct variable.

While a significant relationship did not exist, it was noteworthy to mention that mean values within four of the constructs: peer interaction, service access, academic rigor, and school safety had lower mean scores, or levels of concern, from students who answered “yes” (Table 4.14). That signified students who had sibling experiences with

the secondary school previously were less concerned about four variable constructs than peers who did not have a sibling experience with the secondary school. The assumption made was that the student answering the survey also had experiences at the school by attending events or other visits at the secondary school due to their sibling's enrollment at the school. For students, familiarity with the new school lessened concern levels in four constructs.

It initially appeared odd that the lone construct variable of teacher support displayed mean results contrary to the theory that familiarity lessened student concern levels. Yet, the researcher believed that the *yes* group of respondents gained, or perceived to gain, negative *teacher support* experiences by observing and listening to their older siblings express difficulties with teacher support variables. In some manner, a message was communicated by older siblings that cautioned younger sibling respondents that the new school environment, pertaining to teacher support variables, was going to be more difficult than their prior school. This experience could have occurred in direct conversations between siblings. It could have also occurred while observing the older sibling in discussions with peers or parents. It was also interesting to observe that the *yes* group had higher mean scores for the teacher support construct than the academic rigor construct. This meant that students had higher perceived levels of concern for teacher support variables than the academic rigor variables, which may have suggested a deficiency in relationship building facets between the transitioned students and teachers once tuitioned to the new school.

## **Free Lunch Concern Level**

Question 8 was removed from the service access construct cluster of questions as 13 combined student and parent participants left the question unanswered. However, that was by design. Question 8 only wanted participants to answer the question if students received free or reduced price meals while at school. The question was presented on the student survey as follows:

8. Are you concerned about getting forms completed to receive free or reduced price meals to begin the next school year? (Leave blank if you currently do not receive free or reduced price school meals.)

Students were asked to select a response for Question 8 on the same Likert scale 1 through 5 ascending level of concern order as prescribed for all of the construct survey questions. A variable of 6 was used in SPSS software to illustrate absent respondent data for only Question 8, which meant that the respondent did not qualify for free or reduced price meals at school. This would have created a discrepancy in calculating mean scores if the question was left in the service access construct, as all of the construct variables for Questions 1 through 25 had levels of concern ratings of 1 through 5. Thus, Question 8 was removed from the construct variable cluster of questions and analyzed independently through a crosstabulation exercise (Table 4.15) to review possible relationships in data.

Table 4.15 provided the crosstabulation information for participant groups. Forty-six students ( $n = 46$ ) and 49 parents ( $n = 49$ ) answered Question 8. Thus, it appeared that some respondent uncertainty existed with the survey question or whether the families knew if they qualified for free meals at school. At Duncan, all students were provided with free meals at school regardless of their socioeconomic status, so that may have

caused some confusion when respondents were self-assessing their eligibility for the federal school meal program.

Table 4.15

*Crosstabulation for Survey Question 8: Levels of Concern for Submitting Forms so Qualifying Students Can Receive Free or Reduced Priced Meals at School*

Concern level		Group		Total
		Student	Parent	
1	Count	23	23	46
	% within Q8	50.0	50.0	100.0
	% within G	42.6	42.6	42.6
2	Count	9	17	26
	% within Q8	34.6	65.4	100.0
	% within G	16.7	31.5	24.1
3	Count	10	7	17
	% within Q8	58.8	42.2	100.0
	% within G	18.5	13.0	15.7
4	Count	2	2	4
	% within Q8	50.0	50.0	100.0
	% within G	3.7	3.7	3.7
5	Count	2	0	2
	% within Q8	100.0	0	100.0
	% within G	3.7	0	1.9
6	Count	8	5	13
	% within Q8	61.5	38.5	100.0
	% within G	14.8	9.3	12.0
Total	Count	54	54	108
	% within Q8	50.0	50.0	100.0
	% within G	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note. Student group (n = 46). Parent group (n = 49). Concern level 1 = *I am not concerned at all*; 2 = *I am not concerned*; 3 = *I am a bit concerned*; 4 = *I am concerned*; 5 = *I am very much concerned*; 6 = Assigned to respondents who did not answer.

A simple adjusted mean score calculation was performed to extract all respondents who did not answer Question 8; hence, only concern level ratings of 1 through 5 remained in the calculation. The parent group ( $n = 49$ ) offered an average mean score of 1.76, and students ( $n = 46$ ) produced a 1.93 average mean score. While parents were less concerned than students about completing forms to receive free meals at the new secondary school, both adjusted mean scores were lower than any of the collected mean scores for Questions 1 through 25 (Table 4.3). This signified that having forms completed to receive free meals at the new school, as presented in Question 8, contained the lowest level of concern for any construct question answered by students and parents.

## Summary

### Statistical Analysis

Through hypothesis testing procedures, student and parent perceived similarities and differences were identified for statistical significance. SPSS software assisted in the process by allowing the researcher to review descriptive statistics and independent samples  $t$  tests to find significant relationships between groups. Within the  $t$  test and Equality of Means, the Sig (2-tailed) column represented the  $p$  value, or the significance test, for construct variables. The  $p$  value would reject the null hypothesis at  $p < .05$  alpha level. For Hypotheses 1, 2, 3, 4, and 7, the null was not rejected. Hypotheses 5 and 6 rejected the null hypothesis.

With the established alpha level at .05, Hypothesis 5 and Hypothesis 6 displayed  $p$  values for constructs lower than the accepted .05 level. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected in both. Although the student to parent group compositions differed in

Hypothesis 5 and Hypothesis 6 testing, the school safety construct displayed significant relationships in both independent, statistical computations. The teacher support construct also showed a significant relationship between students and parents in Hypothesis 6. Effect size and power calculations were completed on all constructs with significant  $p$  values, and the school safety construct maintained medium to large effect size determinations and received positive reliability measurements. The teacher support construct had a medium effect size, but it did not meet reliability expectations for power.

### **Major Findings**

Students and parents completed one survey while students were enrolled in their final year of schooling within their resident school district. For students at Duncan, that occurred in Grade 6. For students at Moore, that occurred in Grade 8. As students prepared to leave neighborhood schools to be tuitioned to a secondary school outside of their resident district, students and parents were invited to participate in a quantitative, survey study. Fifty-four of the eligible 65 families opted to participate, which demonstrated a reliable 83% response rate for the convenience sample population.

Items, presented in survey Questions 1 through 25, offered respondents a multiple choice concern level selection in a Likert scale format of 1 through 5 in ascending order. A score of 1 signified the lowest level of concern, and a rating of 5 signified the highest level of concern. For each item, a mean score was calculated (Table 4.3). The range of responses for all 25 survey items included a low mean score of 1.95 to a high mean score of 2.82. Per the Likert scale, a score of 2 equated to a response of *I am not concerned*, and a score of 3 equated to a response of *I am a bit concerned*. All of the item mean scores fell within this range. However, the item with the lowest level of concern (1.95)

involved travel and concern for getting students to and from the new school each day.

The largest area of concern (2.82) for items was the concern that students' classes at the new school would be more difficult than classes in their current school.

Items were grouped together into five constructs, and an average mean score was produced for each construct to provide meaningful comparisons with the same Likert scale 1 through 5 concern level pattern (Table 4.4). School safety, consisting of five survey items, was the lowest scoring construct (2.18) for the combined groups and had the lowest respondent concern level. Academic rigor also contained five survey items and produced the highest level of concern for constructs (2.64) in the combined groups. The construct responses also fell between Likert scale scores of a 2, *I am not concerned* and a score of 3, *I am a bit concerned*.

The major differences between student and parent concerns took place in peer interaction and school safety constructs. Within the peer interaction construct, parents displayed a mean difference score 1.30 higher than students. Likewise, parents also produced a school safety construct mean score 2.78 higher than students, and that difference eclipsed the statistical significance level in Hypothesis 5 too. Likewise, the subgroup analysis performed at Moore School displayed an even larger mean score margin for the safety construct. Parents at Moore registered a school safety mean score 4.57 higher than students, which achieved statistical significance benchmarks. Teacher support was the highest scoring construct overall by parents with a mean score of 13.90, regardless of parent group or subgroup. At Moore, the differences between students and parents qualified teacher support for statistical significance as well.

Grade 6 and Grade 8 students were compared using the same mean difference category for synthesis across all groups. The students produced similar comparison results in the peer interaction (-0.76), service access (-0.62), teacher support (0.53), and school safety (-0.93) constructs. A negative number represented a higher Grade 6 mean score, and a positive number represented a higher Grade 8 mean score. The academic rigor construct did not achieve statistical significance; however, there was a difference in mean scores of -2.05. Both Grade 6 (12.42) and Grade 8 (14.48) student groups scored academic rigor as their highest concern level construct. Grade 6 and Grade 8 scored school safety as their lowest concern construct with average mean scores below a concern level of 2, *I am not concerned* response.

Similarities existed across schools too. Of the combined 10 constructs between the two schools, parents responded with higher mean scores, or levels of concern, on 7 of the 10 constructs. Parents also demonstrated the most consistency in responses across all constructs. At Moore, parents' average mean scores ranged from 2.49 to 2.78, and Duncan showed consistency in student and parent response patterns within peer interaction, teacher support, and academic rigor as all recorded mean differences of 0.67 or less between groups. Overall, service access, teacher support, and academic rigor constructs had similar mean scores between students and parents across all schools.



## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion**

Through the use of surveys, a quantitative, convenience sample research design was selected for the study to extract student and parent perception data for a specialized group of tuitioned students located in one geographic area. By documenting levels of concern identified by families, administrators and school officials are provided with recommendations towards building a successful transition program for tuitioned students. This chapter summarizes the results of each question, discusses the implications of each result to guide practice, and offers suggestions for further areas of study. Research questions were illustrated to address the problem statement. Statistical analysis produced information for the significance of the study, and statements detailed the importance of adding the newly found student transitional information into formal research.

### **Summary of Findings**

The survey results revealed perceived student and parent concerns in a pre-transition format. By using the Likert scale response options of 1 through 5 in an ascending concern level pattern, a consistent understanding of average mean score values, results, and interpretations were established throughout this chapter. The following list of condensed findings were instrumental in formulating recommendations for future practice. The summary of the findings detailed in the study are:

1. The lowest level of concern by average mean score (1.95) for any single survey item for all respondents (N = 108) involved travel for students to and from the new school each day.

2. The highest level of concern by average mean score (2.82) for any single survey item for all respondents (N = 108) was that students' classes at the new school would be more difficult than classes at their current school.
3. The school safety construct had the lowest level of concern by average mean score (2.18) for constructs across all respondents (N = 108).
4. The academic rigor construct produced the highest level of concern by average mean score (2.64) for constructs across all respondents (N = 108).
5. Parents (n = 54) scored the service access construct their lowest level of concern with an average mean score of 2.16.
6. Parents (n = 54) scored the academic rigor construct their highest level of concern with an average mean score of 2.63.
7. Students (n = 54) scored the school safety construct their lowest level of concern with an average mean score of 1.90.
8. Students (n = 54) scored the academic rigor construct their highest level of concern with an average mean score of 2.64.
9. Parents (n = 54) produced a peer interaction construct with a total mean score 1.30 higher than students (n = 54).
10. Parents (n = 54) produced a school safety construct with a total mean score 2.78 higher than students (n = 54), which exceeded significance testing limits. Null Hypothesis 5 was rejected. Students were 21% less concerned than parents about the school safety construct.
11. Moore School parents (n = 21) produced a school safety construct with a total mean score 4.57 higher than students (n = 21), which exceeded significance

- testing limits. This was also the largest discrepancy between any of the tested groups in the study. Null Hypothesis 6 was rejected. Moore students were 33% less concerned than Moore parents about the school safety construct.
12. Moore School parents (n = 21) produced a teacher support construct with a total mean score 2.52 higher than students (n = 21), which exceeded significance testing limits. Null Hypothesis 6 was rejected. Moore students (n = 21) were 21% less concerned than Moore parents about the teacher support construct.
  13. Grade 6 (1.98) and Grade 8 (1.79) student groups scored school safety as their lowest average mean score construct.
  14. Grade 6 (2.48) and Grade 8 (2.90) student groups scored academic rigor their highest average mean score construct.
  15. Of the combined 10 constructs observed between the two schools, parents responded with higher mean scores, or levels of concern, on 7 of the 10 constructs.
  16. Service access, teacher support, and academic rigor constructs had similar mean scores between students and parents across both schools.
  17. Students (n = 21) who had a sibling attend the same transition school had less concern on four constructs (peer interaction, service access, academic rigor, and school safety) than those students (n = 28) who did not have a sibling attend the same transition school.

18. Students ( $n = 21$ ) who had a sibling attend the same transition school had more concern for the teacher support construct than those students ( $n = 28$ ) who did not have a sibling attend the same transition school.

## **Findings and Discussions**

Research questions are presented in this section with corresponding findings, meanings, and supporting literature presented for each item.

### **Research Question 1: What are the similarities and differences for student and parent perceptions on peer interaction when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district?**

The peer interaction construct encompassed five survey items. Students accumulated a total mean score of 10.87, or an average mean score of 2.17 per item, and parents provided a total mean score of 12.26, or an average mean score of 2.45 for each survey question. Thus, parents produced a cumulative peer interaction construct mean score 1.30, or 0.28 per individual item, higher than students. At a 5% level of significance ( $p < .05$ ), the data did not provide sufficient evidence that the mean concern level for peer interaction between all students and parents was statistically significant. With Likert scale options of 1 through 5 on the survey, response scores fell within survey choices of: 2 = *I am not concerned* and 3 = *I am a bit concerned*. Thus, students had minimal, if any, concern towards peer interaction items before entering the new school; however, parents did have a small amount of concern for peer interaction. Both students and parents rated the peer interaction construct their second lowest scoring construct before students were tuitioned to a new school located outside of the resident district.

The peer interaction construct measured social concerns associated with students being accepted into new peer groups, building new friendships, and negative peer pressure considerations for drug and alcohol use at the new school. Gauchat (2010) and McGee (2009) discovered that peer relationships involved students' desire to belong and build positive peer relationships upon entering a new school. Considering that tuitioned students are being relocated into a much larger student body at the accepting school, it is anticipated that students would have a high level of concern for this construct. Yet, the findings were contradictory as students rated the construct low. Cauley and Jovanich (2006) illustrated how children begin to put more emphasis on peer relationships as they enter adolescence, and Letrello and Miles (2003) identified that adolescents struggle with self-image as physical body changes take place during middle level years. With social and physical changes occurring, it is reasonable to conclude that students' self-esteem and confidence levels would be in question upon going through the transition; however, students had very little concern for peer interaction. One possible reason for this outcome can be associated with students having a positive outlook towards the upcoming transition as prescribed in research.

Smith, Feldwisch, and Abell (2006) identified that during transitions from middle school to high school, students were enthusiastic about the possibility of meeting new friends as peer groups increased in size. Wormeli (2011) pressed that while middle level students appeared to be physically youthful, they craved to belong and sought new peer relationships. The transition gives students the opportunity to create new friendships. Tuitioned students reside in small school communities where the same network of friends has been their consistent peer group throughout elementary school. Thus, the opportunity

to meet new friends beyond those long-standing neighborhood relationships is exciting, and students have a positive outlook for building new relationships upon entering the new school. Therefore, the levels of concern associated with peer interactions were lessened as tuitioned students were anxious to expand peer circles.

While concern levels were minimal for this construct in the study, Grillo (2012) established the benefits of building a longitudinal peer mentoring program for transitioning students that begins while students are present in neighborhood schools and continues through students' first year at the new school. By engaging the students into peer and social groups before arriving at the new school, concern levels will be further minimized. Providing cooperative agreements between schools for curricular and co-curricular opportunities will allow students to interact in meaningful platforms, while sharing interests with one another. Burton (2010) found that in cases where students cooperatively shared in athletic and community pride events together, they were afforded meaningful bonding exercises with new peers.

Student demographic considerations at both sending and receiving student locations differed too, which could add to concerns. Yet, Thompson (2014) demonstrated the benefits of diversity improvements once peers were transitioned into larger peer groups. Anderson (2012) and Stewart (2011) found that exposing students to diversity was important when establishing positive peer interactions in a transition program as well as promoting acceptance as a lifelong practice. Tuition models are accomplishing diversity considerations; however, every tuitioned student should have an established adult mentor for regular interactions. By offering accessible adult support at the accepting school, tuitioned students will have an outlet to discuss social and academic

issues before they reach uncontrollable levels. Cooperatively through dialogue and adult mentoring, students will be able to maneuver through peer interactions in the new setting.

**Research Question 2: What are the similarities and differences for student and parent perceptions on school service access when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district?**

The service access construct encompassed four survey items. Students accumulated a total mean score of 9.33, or an average mean score of 2.33 per item, and parents provided a total mean score of 8.63, or an average mean score of 2.16 for each survey question. Thus, students produced a cumulative service access construct mean score 0.70, or 0.17 per individual item, higher than parents. At a 5% level of significance ( $p < .05$ ), the data did not provide sufficient evidence that the mean concern level for service access between all students and parents was statistically significant. Students scored service access as their median rated construct, and parents scored service access as their lowest rated construct. It was rare that students had a higher concern level than parents for any of the five constructs. It did occur twice; however, the other construct's difference was only 0.01 higher per students' responses. Within service access, student response differences of 0.17 higher per item suggested that student concerns need to be addressed. Yet, students still only had a small amount of concern, and parents had minimal, if any, concern towards service access items before students were tuitioned to a new school located outside of the resident district.

The service access construct provided a rare instance where students displayed more concern than parents for survey questions. This can be explained through Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation. Students should have a higher desire to have their

basic physiological and safety needs met as it directly impacts them. Survey items included concern levels for travel to and from the new school, internal school logistics, and the federal meal program provided at the new school. Students were more concerned than parents that they would have basic food and transportation mechanisms in place prior to arrival at the new school.

McGee (2009) and Rappa (2012) identified similar outcomes for transition barriers where student perspectives produced consistent results too. Anderson (2012) found that distance to the new school had direct consequences for accessing curricular assistance and needed school services. Morgan-Davis (2013) reported that remediation and support programs were paramount for increasing student performance. For tuitioned students who do not have transportation access beyond traditional to and from school bus transportation, students are unable to participate in after-school academic support or co-curricular programs. Knowing that transportation will be an issue without a resolution, tuitioned students offered concerns in the survey responses. Sias (2008) further illustrated that travel barriers can prevent equal access for all students. Considering that the two schools observed in the study had tuition options to accepting schools ranging from two miles to 10 miles away from their originating neighborhood schools, travel considerations may have yielded varying levels of concern responses due to the length of travel. Students also had a higher level of concern than parents towards having forms completed to receive free or reduced price meals upon entering the new school. Beyond meeting Maslow's (1943) basic needs hierarchy, students may have had more concern about these service access items due to their limited control over them. Parents needed to take action to access students' benefits and address the concerns.



A transition program should allow students to make a sponsored bus trip to the accepting school district with assisting support from district personnel or through a peer shadowing experience. That peer shadowing experience would also lessen interior school logistic concern levels through peer modeling efforts throughout the day. The accepting school should also create second-chance, tutoring, or other academic support programs during the regular school day to alleviate pressures of irregular transportation needs. Those qualifying for federal meals should be identified through administrative cooperatives as well as presented at orientation programs for further identification assistance. Concerted efforts should be made to verify qualifications as 85% of respondents believed that they qualified for the federal meal program benefit. Furthermore, since families may not have needed to complete forms in their resident school district to receive the benefit, added attention should be made to reach out to families and administrators in the resident school district to identify families and readily offer assistance to complete paperwork.

**Research Question 3: What are the similarities and differences for student and parent perceptions on access to teacher support when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district?**

The teacher support construct encompassed five survey items. Students accumulated a total mean score of 11.70, or an average mean score of 2.34 per item, and parents provided a total mean score of 12.43, or an average mean score of 2.49 for each survey question. Thus, parents produced a cumulative teacher support construct mean score 0.73, or 0.15 per individual item, higher than students. At a 5% level of significance ( $p < .05$ ), the data did not provide sufficient evidence that the mean concern

level for teacher support between all students and parents was statistically significant. Both students and parents rated the teacher support construct as their second highest rated construct. Thus, students and parents displayed a small amount of concern, collectively, towards teacher support before students were tuitioned to a new school located outside of the resident district.

Hallenbeck (2012) and Larson (2011) reinforced that teacher support variables were focused on students' ability to build trusting relationships with new teachers for reliability and consistency towards academic and social success. Eighty-seven percent of respondent students reported having positive academic grades of As, Bs, or Cs before the transition, which reinforced findings by Howley (1996) that discovered a small school in West Virginia enhanced the achievement levels of poor students. Flowers (2010) reinforced that a benefit of being a student in a small neighborhood school was that staff members knew students and families very well; thus, trusting relationships were established and maintained while students attended neighborhood schools. This connection of students with teacher support variables fostered a high achieving environment. Zoda, Combs, and Slate (2011) noted the intimacy of neighborhood elementary schools built trusting relationships between schools and families where daily, positive academic habits were exhibited. Students put forth a greater academic effort because teachers guided and cared for them. Considering the small school and community size that tuitioned students experienced in neighborhood schools, similar quality student-to-teacher relationships existed between students and teachers in their resident schools. Thus, moving beyond the neighborhood school would raise concern

levels for teacher support variables as students do not have similar relationships established there.

Considering that the schools observed in this study had 21 and 44 students, respectively, in the entire grade level, it is reasonable to conclude that the positive longitudinal effects of reliable relationships established over many years will be challenging to replicate upon students arriving within much larger school systems. Hattie (2005) used meta-analysis principles to illustrate that quality teachers correlated with student achievement, not the size of the school. However, as Hallenbeck (2012) noted, the new found freedom associated with being on a new, larger campus will require students to initiate conversations and build relationships with staff and adults to assist in rectifying academic and peer issues. Students primarily were acclimated to elementary school settings where teachers approached students when academic issues surfaced; however, in secondary schools, students are expected to self-advocate and initiate those interactions with teachers and staff. Larson (2011) emphasized that creating a middle level transition program should begin before the critical transition year occurs to promote a process where students become familiar with teachers at the new school. Districts need to embed new teachers into the welcoming process as relationships with teachers and staff should be established to assist with a successful academic transition (Zoda et al., 2011). Kennedy (2012) further identified that an optimal transition program should entail elements of communication beyond student and staff interactions and also engage family members into the process. The more curricular and co-curricular experiences that can occur between new teachers and tuitioned students, the more opportunities exist for natural relationship building exercises between students, parents, and teachers.

**Research Question 4: What are the similarities and differences for student and parent perceptions on academic rigor when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district?**

The academic rigor construct encompassed five survey items. Students accumulated a total mean score of 13.22, or an average mean score of 2.64 per item, and parents provided a total mean score of 13.17, or an average mean score of 2.63 for each survey question. Thus, students produced a cumulative academic rigor construct mean score 0.05, or 0.01 per individual item, higher than parents. Essentially, students and parents rated academic rigor items the same. At a 5% level of significance ( $p < .05$ ), the data did not provide sufficient evidence that the mean concern level for academic rigor between all students and parents was statistically significant. Both students and parents rated academic rigor as their highest scored construct. Thus, academic rigor was the construct with the most amount of concern for both groups and scored almost identically. Although the level of concern identified was at a modest level on the Likert scale, students and parents displayed their highest level of concern towards academic rigor items before students were tuitioned to a new school located outside of the resident district.

One of the accepting tuition school districts provided longitudinal academic performance data for 48 tuitioned students over three consecutive years. From 2014 to 2016, tuitioned students had their lowest grade point average (2.53) while in the first year of attending the new school. The group's GPA (2.7) improved in the second year of attendance, and the group's GPA (3.07) further improved during the third year of attendance at the new school. Kerns (2014) and Stoddard (2012) identified that the first

year of students' transition was the most academically challenging, regardless of school choice options available, and tuitioned students have followed that similar trend. Bowers and Powers (2009) also reinforced that once students maneuvered through new barriers associated with the transition, difficulties directly related to academic rigor were overcome. Hughes (2010) furthered that students needed to focus on the academic challenges facing them and not the peripheral barriers, or noise, detrimental to the learning process. Tuitioned students and parents' high concern levels matched research that the first year of transition was the most difficult academic year for students. The tuitioned student cohort also demonstrated through GPA longitudinal growth that similar academic difficulties existed in the first year of transition. Families will learn of these prior academic struggles through conversations with other students and families in a small town; thus, the highest concern levels calculated were for academic rigor prior to the transition.

The academic rigor construct produced the highest level of concern for constructs (2.64) across all subjects. A successful transition plan should acclimate students prior to arrival and address concerns as early as possible. With 87% of tuitioning student respondents stating that they received positive grades of As, Bs, or Cs on report cards, one can conclude that students should be confident about the upcoming transition and academic challenges ahead. Perhaps state performance ratings assigned to students and schools from the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2015d) had a negative influence on confidence as tuitioned students' grade levels performed below state averages on standardized assessments. One suggested activity would be to align curriculum across buildings for both the sending and receiving

schools. This may include elements of benchmark and diagnostic assessment procedures as well as textbook or online resource considerations. By doing so, teachers from both schools will collaboratively interact, which should also create opportunities for future teachers to interact with students and families. The transition program must connect students in a meaningful manner with the new school to increase attendance rates and maximize student achievement efforts. Lee, McCoy, Zucker, and Mathur (2014) found that having personalized, family meetings with those being transitioned into higher grades was more relevant than group activities. Having guidance counselors meet with nuclear families before students leave neighborhood schools will create an immediate contact to support families through the transition.

**Research Question 5: What are the similarities and differences for student and parent perceptions on school safety when students are tuitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident district?**

The school safety construct encompassed five survey items. Students accumulated a total mean score of 9.52, or an average mean score of 1.90 per item, and parents provided a total mean score of 12.30, or an average mean score of 2.46 for each survey question. Thus, parents produced a cumulative school safety construct mean score 2.78, or 0.56 per individual item, higher than students. At a 5% level of significance ( $p < .05$ ), sufficient evidence was established that the mean concern level for school safety between all students and parents was statistically significant. An acceptable sample size was provided, and power parameters were achieved at the designated .80 level. The results signified a medium effect size, and students were 21% less concerned than parents about the school safety construct. Response scores fell within Likert scale options of: 1 =

*I am not concerned at all, 2 = I am not concerned, and 3 = I am a bit concerned.*

Students rated school safety as the lowest construct by either group, and parents rated school safety as their median construct. The 0.56 difference in average mean scores between groups was the largest difference in all of the constructs. Thus, students had no concern for school safety, and parents had a small amount of concern before students were tuitioned to a new school located outside of the resident district.

School safety entailed students' mental and physical comfort expectations from a variety of aspects associated with the thought of attending a new secondary campus. Akos and Galassi (2004) along with Kennedy (2012) identified that the new building's layout, travel, and peer conflicts created safety variable concerns for transitioning students. Mizelle and Irwin (2000) found that parents were more concerned about school safety issues than students were concerned, and Kennedy (2012) reinforced similar findings too. Tuitioned student and parent responses followed traditional researched outcomes. However, considering the societal climate and recent focus on school safety and security concerns due to increased violent crimes taking place against schools since the Sandy Hook Elementary School tragedy in 2012 (Hanna, Karimi, & Grinberg, 2018; Patel, 2018; Yan, Stapleton, & Murphy, 2018), it is reasonable to conclude that those instances may have added to the inflated differences in respondents' concern levels towards school safety variables. However, even with a heightened awareness for school safety, students offered no concern, and parents offered only a modest amount of concern. To combat levels of concern further, both schools should effectively communicate with all stakeholders the security measures in place and planned at the new location. School district policies, procedures, anti-bullying programs, and mental health

resources should be presented in a community forum to tuitioned students and parents to provide more confidence with school safety measures taking place throughout the transition and beyond.

**Research Question 6: Are there differences between student and parent perceptions for each school?**

At a 5% level of significance ( $p < .05$ ), the data analysis did not provide sufficient evidence that the mean concern level between Duncan School's student and parent groups for constructs of peer interaction, service access, teacher support, academic rigor, or school safety achieved statistical significance. Even though no construct achieved statistical significance between student and parent groups at Duncan, themes did arise. First, student and parent response patterns provided in Research Questions 1 through 5 for all respondents followed similar outcomes for Duncan, but there were some subtle differences for discussion too. Duncan students were more concerned than parents that they would not receive as much teacher support at the new school as they did while attending Duncan. For Duncan families, teacher support and academic rigor constructs had average mean scores of 2.30 to 2.58 between students and parents. The four scores were the highest scores among groups and constructs at Duncan. Response scores fell within Likert scale choices of: 2 = *I am not concerned* and 3 = *I am a bit concerned*. Families at Duncan displayed a modest level of concern towards academic rigor and teacher support items before students were tuitioned to a new school located outside of the resident district.

At a 5% level of significance ( $p < .05$ ), the data analysis provided sufficient evidence that the mean concern level between Moore School's student and parent groups



for constructs of teacher support and school safety achieved statistical significance. An acceptable sample size was provided, and power parameters were achieved at the designated .80 level for the school safety construct; however, the teacher support construct did not achieve acceptable power parameters due to the subgroup sample size, which limited reliability expectations. School safety had a large effect size, while teacher support had a medium effect size. Moore students were 33% less concerned than Moore parents about the school safety construct, and Moore students were also 21% less concerned than Moore parents about the teacher support construct.

Moore parents registered a teacher support construct mean score 2.52 higher and a school safety construct mean score 4.57 higher than students. Parents also had average mean scores for teacher support (2.78) and school safety (2.70) survey items nearing a Likert scale response of 3 = *I am a bit concerned*. In fact, parents rated all five constructs from 2.49 to 2.78, which placed Moore's parents as having the highest overall level of concern towards the five constructs for any subgroup observed. Moore's students produced the highest construct average mean score for any subgroup by assigning teacher support an average mean score of 2.90. Thus, still at moderate levels, Moore parents had higher levels of concern for peer interaction, teacher support, and school safety constructs than students. While Moore's parents rated academic rigor (2.71) consistently with other constructs, Moore's students rated academic rigor (2.90) uncharacteristically high, which displayed that students at Moore had their highest level of concern for academic rigor before being tuitioned to a new school located outside of the resident district.

Smith, Akos, Lim, and Wiley (2008) found that students and parents were generally optimistic about the forthcoming transition to high school from middle school.

Parents displayed concern towards social and safety issues, and students were concerned about the homework load and getting lost in high school. Madjar and Cohen-Malayev (2016) found that elementary students reported positive perceptions towards middle school prior to being transitioned, and Smith et al. (2006) discovered that students looked forward to meeting new friends and having more control over class selections as they progress in high school. By tuitioned students and parents producing Likert scale responses for all groups and subgroups in the ranges of: 1 = *I am not concerned at all*, 2 = *I am not concerned*, and 3 = *I am a bit concerned*, respondents followed traditional researched principles for normal transitions. First, the reported low levels of concern reported by tuitioned students and parents throughout the five constructs demonstrated that families had a positive outlook towards the forthcoming transition. However, parents and students also acknowledged high concern levels for safety (parents) and homework (students) prior to the transition. Tuitioned families faced similar challenges to those documented in research from traditional transition settings.

Duncan and Moore School District tuitioned students to neighboring secondary schools for many years. Thus, if no adjustments are made to the current transition programs, the levels of concern documented by student and parent groups in this study exhibited perceptions that can be reasonably considered consistent for future populations from the same schools. Consistencies existed for both schools between student and parent groups. Universally, parents had higher levels of concern than students, and Moore's parents produced the highest levels of concern for any of the groups or subgroups observed in the entire research study. Transition programs should engage parents, not only students, into meaningful transition activities with the accepting

secondary schools. Parents should be provided with outlets to discuss noted concerns prior to the student's transition.

**Research Question 7: Are there differences among students in two grades?**

At a 5% level of significance ( $p < .05$ ), the data analysis did not provide sufficient evidence that the mean concern level between Duncan School's Grade 6 student group and Moore School's Grade 8 student group for the constructs of peer interaction, service access, teacher support, academic rigor, or school safety achieved statistical significance. Even though no construct achieved statistical significance between student groups, both groups displayed a consistent theme by placing the constructs in a similar ascending order, or level of concern pattern. From the lowest level of concern to the highest level of concern, Grade 6 students attached average mean scores to constructs of school safety (1.98), peer interaction (2.12), service access (2.27), teacher support (2.38), and academic rigor (2.48). From the lowest level of concern to the highest level of concern, Grade 8 students attached average mean scores to constructs of school safety (1.79), peer interaction (2.27), teacher support (2.28), service access (2.43), and academic rigor (2.90). More similarities existed across the two student groups than differences. Grade 6 and Grade 8 student groups scored school safety as the lowest concern level construct, and both groups scored academic rigor as the highest concern level construct. However, even though both groups rated academic rigor as the construct with the highest level of concern, Grade 8 students produced an average mean score 0.42 higher than Grade 6 students.

Grade 8 students had a higher level of concern than Grade 6 students for academic rigor. This can be a normal perception obtained as students are unfamiliar with the

increased academic expectations present in Grade 9 and high school. Anderson (2012) and Gauchat (2010) analyzed similar findings that Grade 9 students were unprepared for the rigorous coursework expected in high school. Smith et al. (2006) furthered that students feared the amount of homework forthcoming in high school. Those perceptions documented an expected change that coursework from Grade 8 to Grade 9 was going to be more difficult than the academic changes from Grade 6 to Grade 7. The findings in this study reinforced prior research. Grade 8 students were aware that greater academic challenges were forthcoming along with more rigorous courses as they enter Grade 9 at the new school.

Grade 8 students also placed a higher concern level on the service access construct than Grade 6 students. This can be explained by Grade 8 students at Moore being required to have federal school meal forms completed by parents to receive the free or reduced price meal benefit. Grade 6 students at Duncan did not need parents to complete the federal form to receive the benefit. Thus, Moore students were more aware that forms needed to be completed again at the new school, while Duncan students were unaware that forms needed to be completed to receive the benefit. Tuitioned student transition programs must inform, identify, and assist families with completing forms to gain the school meal benefit. Without doing so, students will not be receiving the most basic need. Students will remain focused on hunger, which has been documented in Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation model. Until school meals are secured, students will not perform to their optimal academic ability.

The distance between resident schools and accepting tuition schools varied greatly, so transportation concern levels were elevated too in the service access construct.

Grade 8 students had a much further distance to travel to the new secondary school. Also, Grade 8 students were only provided free bus transportation to and from school at regular start and end times. Grade 6 students were provided with regular bus transportation to and from school, but they also had access to an activity bus if they elected to stay after school for curricular and co-curricular activities. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that Grade 8 students would be more concerned about getting to and from the new school due to the longer travel distance and lack of access to an activity bus. To assist, all tuitioned student models should provide a free activity bus for students to attend after-school curricular and co-curricular programs. This will alleviate the burden of students finding transportation home in the evening and lessen concern levels.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Moderate Concern Levels**

The documented concern levels for student and parent groups were minimal to moderate throughout the study. However, themes and observations of tuitioned students offered insight suggesting that improvements need to be administered to current transition practices to further ease perceptions and process. A three-year observation of 48 tuitioned students generated longitudinal performance data for observation at the new school. In Year 1 of the transition, tuitioned students garnered a 2.53 GPA. In Year 2, students improved to a 2.7 GPA, and in Year 3, students climbed to a 3.07 GPA. Survey perception data also showed that the largest area of concern for students and parents surrounded the academic rigor construct, and the observation of 48 tuitioned students reinforced that the first year of entry into the new school was an academic challenge for students. Students' GPA performance demonstrated that perceived concern levels,

although modest on the Likert scale, were real barriers with accompanying fears. The given recommendations can minimize those fears even further by instituting formal communication with families and active monitoring with guided mentoring practices for students to remove barriers through implementation of proven transition strategies.

### **Costs and Benefits**

Even though costs associated with given recommendations mostly involve an alteration of duties for current staff members, some costs will still be incurred in aligning a new transition program. In doing so, many stakeholders, including school board members, should be included in transition discussions and planning from the early stages. Since the tuition model is a negotiated per student amount between school districts, the sending and receiving districts both financially benefit from the agreement. For the sending school districts, tuition payments are typically negotiated at lower per student rates than if students elected to voucher into charter schools. For the receiving school districts, accepting tuition for students is a new revenue resource unknown to public education in Pennsylvania. Thus, contributing monetary amounts towards given recommendations provided will only enhance students' experiences, which in turn, creates a desire for more students to opt into the budget friendly tuition model process. The negotiated tuition amount benefits both districts in the tuition model. Potentially, the largest cost item for consideration amongst the recommendation items involves providing a free activity bus to students who stay beyond regular school hours. This cost is estimated to be approximately \$75 per day or \$13,500 annually (D. J. Frye, personal communication, August 21, 2018). Regardless of the additional costs, the tuition model typically provides a greater savings than charter school payments, especially for special

education students. Thus, additional costs needed to support a beneficial transition program are easily justifiable.

### **Recommendations for Future Practices or Policies**

The purpose of this study was to identify middle level student and parent perceived similarities and differences towards transition factors prior to students being tuitioned to a secondary school located outside of the resident district, so administrators can be afforded the opportunity to create a successful transition program by addressing families' levels of concern to overcome perceived barriers. As student and parent similarities and differences were discussed, administrators at both the sending and receiving schools are presented with 15 recommendations in this chapter to maximize a transition program for tuitioned students. The details are important as DeLamar and Brown (2016) found that at-risk students who participated in transition programs saw increased performance scores in math, science, and English. Students also had higher attendance rates and lower discipline reports than peers who did not participate in transition programs. A proper transition program for tuitioned students will entail the following elements. The 15 recommendations are positioned in order of the research questions and the ancillary analysis as presented and discussed in this chapter. Items are not ordered by importance, and each recommendation can stand alone. Therefore, even though all of the elements are recommended, schools may select which items to address first and build their transition program over time to address unique issues presented. Generalizations cannot be made for all populations; however, a transition program for tuitioned students should include the following 15 recommendations to lessen student and

parent concerns found within the designated constructs or themes from this research study:

Peer interaction construct recommendations (Anderson, 2012; Gauchat, 2010; Grillo, 2012; Letrello & Miles, 2003; McGee, 2009; Stewart, 2011; Thompson, 2014; Wormeli, 2011):

1. Build a longitudinal transition program for tuitioned students that begins while students reside in the neighborhood school. The longitudinal program of connecting students to schools and new peer groups should occur through peer mentoring, curricular, and co-curricular interactions between both the sending and accepting school districts while students are present in early elementary grades.
2. Both the sending and receiving school districts should be promoting acceptance as a lifelong practice within anti-bullying and positive peer interaction school programs as students from varying backgrounds will combine at critical adolescent years. Celebrating diversity and acceptance of differences is instrumental towards building a harmonious fit where tuitioned students with cultural differences feel accepted and comfortable in a new school environment.
3. Connect every transitioned student to one adult at the new school whether formally through a documented mentoring program or informally by student preference. This mentoring system should occur as soon as the school year begins. Preferably, the adult will be associated within an area of interest for the given student where the student has consistent access to the adult. The



adult can assist the student with self-advocacy barriers surrounding academic and social issues before problems become too large to manage. The mentor can intercede and assist while the adolescent is still maturing to perform these functions independently.

Service access construct recommendations (Anderson, 2012; Maslow, 1943; McGee, 2009; Morgan-Davis, 2013; Rappa, 2012):

4. Remediation, tutoring, and academic assistance programs should be organized for tuitioned students to occur within the operation of the regular school day to alleviate concerns associated with transportation needs. Considering varying capabilities at home, students' achievement gaps will continue to widen if families are expected to provide the additional academic support privately. For low income students who also demonstrated low performance levels on state assessments, teachers and administrators must accept the responsibility to meet student support needs within the regular school day.
5. Initiate a peer shadowing experience while students are still positioned within their resident school to assist with internal school logistic concerns at the accepting school. The peer shadowing experience should include normal transportation from the student's home to and from the new school. Many students do not use bus transportation in K-6 or K-8 neighborhood schools as they walk to school in small communities. Thus, the importance of the bus trip beginning from a nearby bus stop at home is important to gain familiarity with the transportation process.

6. Identify families who qualify for free or reduced price school meals under federal guidelines, and provide those families with documentation and assistance for securing the benefit upon arrival at the new school. Identifying families and communicating the federal meal program should be a priority at all parent events, and administrators at both districts should work cooperatively to identify families prior to arrival at the new school. When meeting with new school guidance counselors to schedule classes, the counselor must engage students and families into conversations pertaining to qualifications for the school meal program. Forms should also be available for completion at that time.

Teacher support construct recommendations (Flowers, 2010; Hallenbeck, 2012; Howley, 1996; Larson, 2011; Zoda et al., 2011):

7. Include new school teachers and staff into a longitudinal transition program that allows tuitioned students and families the ability to interact with new teachers and establish relationships prior to arrival on the new campus.
8. Once students are tuitioned into the new school, teachers and staff should find meaningful ways to interact with students in curricular and co-curricular platforms to build trusting, school appropriate relationships with students.

Academic rigor construct recommendations (Bowers & Powers, 2009; DeLamar & Brown, 2016; Hughes, 2010; Kerns, 2014; Lee et al., 2014; Stoddard, 2012):

9. Teachers from both school districts should collaboratively interact to align curriculum across buildings for both the sending and receiving schools. State curricular standards provide common benchmarks for grade level and course

ending expectations; however, proper alignment procedures also include process elements of benchmark and diagnostic assessments as well as curriculum considerations of textbooks or online resources.

10. The transition program must connect students in a meaningful manner with the new school to increase student attendance and academic performance. Making those connections before students leave their neighborhood school will yield the best results. Students and parents should meet with new school counselors while residing in neighborhood elementary schools. Giving the families an immediate contact for the new school allows students to have a connection or resource readily available to answer questions or address concerns, especially over the summer months prior to arrival.

School safety construct recommendation (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Kennedy, 2012; Mizelle & Irwin, 2000):

11. Schools should effectively communicate with all stakeholders the security measures in place and planned at the new location. School district policies, procedures, anti-bullying programs, and mental health resources should be presented in a community forum for tuitioned students and parents to provide more confidence with school safety measures taking place throughout the transition process and beyond. The more consistent safety and prevention programs are between both districts, the more comfortable students will feel as the transition occurs due to finding familiarity in the process.

Moore and Duncan School recommendation:

12. Parents have historically displayed more concern than students in traditional research with similar perceived barriers presented; however, transition programs for tuitioned students should engage parents, not only students, into meaningful transition activities with the accepting secondary schools to properly address parental concerns during personalized meetings.

Grade 6 and Grade 8 students' recommendations:

13. With the awareness of the curricular challenges ahead, mentoring and counselor observance of tuitioned students is paramount towards guiding students to success. Students must be monitored through a formal, documented process until fully embedded into the new school environment, which may take a full year or longer of implementation.
14. Some barriers are real barriers instead of simply perceived barriers. The length of travel can cause concern for students who do not have travel means beyond traditional school bus transportation to and from school, which will limit access and raise concern levels for fear of missing the bus in either direction. Providing a free activity bus for tuitioned students who attend after school programs will improve access to curricular and co-curricular opportunities for all students.

Sibling experience recommendation (Mackenzie, McMaugh, & O'Sullivan, 2012):

15. Tuitioned students with an older sibling who attended the same transition school offered lower concern levels for many constructs. Thus, by including

older tuitioned students who are already present at the new school to assist with the transition of new students, the transition program will offer comfort through familiarity. These older students reside in the same small community and ride the bus together. They will best understand the experiences forthcoming and can offer guidance and answer questions for new students. Their support will greatly assist the transition process.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The ancillary analysis section in Chapter 4 explored whether families' experiences with the transitioning secondary school had an effect on respondents' levels of concern answers on the survey. The survey asked students whether they had a sibling who already attended the same secondary school that the surveyed student planned to attend. For those students who confirmed that they did have a sibling attend the same school, peer interaction, service access, academic rigor, and school safety constructs had lower mean scores, or levels of concern, than those who did not have a sibling experience with the new school. However, the teacher support construct had a higher mean score, or level of concern, from those with sibling experience. Mackenzie et al. (2012) found that sibling experience decreased social threat scores for students in the pre-transition process, and the expectation was that familiarity would lessen concern levels for tuitioned students too. This occurred in four out of five constructs; thus, identifying why the concern level did not lessen for the teacher support construct with sibling experience is an area for additional development.

Other considerations for future studies should contain travel distance from tuitioned students' homes to the transitioning school. Answering whether further

distance traveled equates to higher levels of concern for variables that include transportation and access are important for development of transition programs and further identification of students' needs. Last, a longitudinal study to follow groups of tuitioned students through at least one year of schooling at the accepting secondary school may provide additional data for establishing a successful transition program. By allowing students to offer information once positioned within the new school environment, students can articulate how perceived barriers prior to the transition were inconsequential or developed into real barriers upon arrival at the new school. Allowing students a formal platform for reflection and data collection would be meaningful to research.

### **Limitations**

The convenience sample population originally included Duquesne City, Midland Borough, and Wilkinsburg School District because those three districts used a tuition model to educate secondary students and were regionally located near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Initially, all three school districts verbally confirmed participation in the research study. However, over the course of one year, two of those districts changed superintendents, and Wilkinsburg decided not to participate in the survey study. Therefore, two districts were included in the data collection process. Having a larger, available sample population would have increased the number of subjects and reliability of the results. However, reliability measurements were achieved in Research Questions 1 through 5 by having an 83% (N = 108) response rate from the sample population, while also having equal size student (n = 54) and parent (n = 54) groups for comparisons in each of the questions. Research Question 6 achieved reliability expectations for one

significant finding but fell short on the second significant finding due to having a small subgroup (n = 21) sample size. Research Question 7 did not have any statistically significant findings to produce a reliability measurement.

Another limitation of the study was the inconsistency of responses for whether students qualified for free or reduced price meals. The researcher believes that the inconsistencies occurred because one school district provided free meals to all students regardless of families' economic qualifications for the federal program. Thus, respondents received the benefit but may not have known if they truly qualified for the benefit. Furthermore, the question was supplied to identify respondent demographics, which may not have represented the group appropriately.

The final limitation of note involved recent tragedies that occurred towards students and schools since 2012 (Patel, 2018), which may have had an effect on survey responses for school safety items. Even though school safety remained the lowest level of concern for students and did not appear to alter student responses, there was a possibility that parent scores were impacted by recent national tragedies. Parents rated school safety as their median concern level construct.

### **Conclusion**

While specific recommendations occurred within narratives, a succinct list of recommendations was provided to assist administrators by condensing the research study into meaningful, bulleted information. Alleviating perceived levels of concern can be best accomplished by creating a transition program that offers expansive engagement opportunities for students to interact with future peers and teachers before arrival at the new school. Parent groups, who displayed higher levels of concern than students, must

also be engaged into the transition process by creating and hosting parent events at both the resident school and the accepting secondary school. The transition program should be designed to curb perceived or real barriers while students are attending classes in resident schools.

Academic rigor and teacher support constructs received the highest levels of concern. Transition programs should include teachers who will have tuitioned students present in class during students' first year of transitioning into the new school. Building relationships with the students prior to arrival will aid in communication, especially when academic or social difficulties arise. District administrators should work collaboratively between both schools to establish consistent standards, course objectives, and curricular measurements in earlier elementary grades. By aligning curricular standards and practices at both school locations, academic expectations will be seamless for students as they transition. Vertical and horizontal curricular developments created collaboratively between schools will allow for more consistent student expectations and build meaningful dialogue between professionals, which can only improve perceived or real barriers for tuitioned students.

The statistical relevance documented for school safety should be addressed too. Although student respondents delivered their lowest level of concern for the school safety construct, the discrepancies between student and parent scores were large. Specifically, transition programs must find forums to address parental concerns for school safety. It is stressed that proper transition programs should begin while students are comfortably positioned within their resident school buildings. Having new school personnel organize and lead programs for students and parents in familiar settings will be more inviting for



students and parents to attend. This practice will also aid in potential transportation issues that may limit families from attending events only held at accepting school locations. Finding creative ways for parental involvement should be a primary focus of a transition program that focuses on tuitioned students.

The longitudinal success of tuitioned student transition programs will rely on consistent support given to families. Peer shadowing, mentoring, and counselor monitoring are instrumental characteristics to establish a positive transition program. Tuitioned students will also need regular support from teachers, administrators, and peers too. By identifying student and parental concerns for transition variables, recommendations were constructed to lessen perceived barriers. With the information established in this quantitative research study, administrators are provided with the needed practices to create a successful transition program for tuitioned students.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL

**Youngstown**  
STATE UNIVERSITY

One University Plaza, Youngstown, Ohio 44555

Office of Research  
330.941.2377  
www.yzu.edu

June 2, 2017

Dr. Jane Beese, Principal Investigator  
Mr. Jeff Beltz, Co-investigator  
Department of Educational Foundations, Research, Technology and Leadership  
UNIVERSITY

RE: HSRC PROTOCOL NUMBER: 194-2017  
PROTOCOL TITLE: Transitioning Middle Level Students Through a Tuition Model in  
Pennsylvania's Public School System

Dear Dr. Beese and Mr. Beltz:

The Human Subjects Research Committee of Youngstown State University has reviewed the above mentioned protocol and your responses to the conditions, and determined that it fully meets YSU Human Subjects Research Guidelines. Therefore, I am pleased to inform you that your project has been fully approved for one year. You must submit a Continuing Review Form and have your project approved by June 1, 2018, if your project continues beyond one year.

Any changes in your research activity should be promptly reported to the Institutional Review Board and may not be initiated without IRB approval except where necessary to eliminate hazard to human subjects. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects should also be promptly reported to the IRB.

Sincerely,

Michael A. Hripko  
Associate Vice President for Research  
Authorized Institutional Official

MAH:cc

c: Dr. Charles Vergon, Chair  
Department of Educational Foundations, Research, Technology and Leadership

Youngstown State University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression, disability, age, religion or veteran/military status in its programs or activities. Please visit [www.yzu.edu/ada-accessibility](http://www.yzu.edu/ada-accessibility) for contact information for persons designated to handle questions about this policy.



## APPENDIX B

### INVITATION AND DIRECTIONS TO PARTICIPATE

December 10, 2017

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am currently working on a research project for a doctorate degree at Youngstown State University. My research is focused on the transition that middle level students experience as they enter high school away from their resident school district. I have created a survey to collect information from students and parents/guardians to discover perceptions before students leave the home district. The goal is to offer information to assist with future student transition efforts.

My hope is that you and your student will assist me in this endeavor by completing one survey. The parent survey and parent consent form are attached to this invitation letter. One parent/guardian should complete the parent survey and return the survey in the self-addressed stamped envelope. Return the signed consent form with your child to school. The parent survey consists of 36 multiple-choice questions and will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. The student survey will encompass the same beginning 33 multiple-choice questions with slight changes to address the student as the person completing the survey. Students will complete the survey at school to assist with collection procedures.

I have attached some information about the study, and I hope that you and your student will participate. For your student to participate, simply return the consent form with signed permissions. If you have questions or concerns, please contact me by phone at XXX or XXX by email.

- Directions:
1. Please review and sign the consent form (blue) for you and your child to Participate. Your child will also need to sign the same (blue) form.
  2. Return the consent form (blue) with your child to school.
  3. One parent/guardian should complete the enclosed parent survey (yellow) by circling one response for each question.
  4. Mail the completed parent survey (yellow) in the self-addressed stamped envelope.

Thank you for your consideration and help with this study,

Jeff Beltz

# APPENDIX C

## STUDENT SURVEY

### Student Survey

Student survey on perceptions for transitioning to a secondary school outside of the resident school district.

The student survey contains 33 questions. Only one response is permitted for each question. No information exists in the survey to identify individuals completing the survey, and there is no monetary benefit given to anyone who acknowledges that completing this student transition survey is voluntary, and I can remove myself at any point in the process without a penalty.

Place a "X" in one of the following respondent consent statements to verify intent of involvement

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes. I give my consent to CONTINUE with completing the survey.

\_\_\_\_\_ No. I do NOT give my consent, and I would like to REMOVE myself from completing the survey.

Directions for Questions 1-25:

A. Read each item carefully.

B. Think about your level of concern for the item.

C. Decide whether you are (1) Not concerned at all, (2) Not concerned, (3) A bit concerned, (4) Concerned, or (5) Very much concerned.

D. Draw a circle around one of the five numbers following the item to show the answer you selected.

Circle only ONE response for every question in the survey.

Students' perception on peer interaction when the students are tutored to a secondary school outside of the resident school district	I AM NOT CONCERNED AT ALL	I AM NOT CONCERNED	I AM A BIT CONCERNED	I AM CONCERNED	I AM VERY MUCH CONCERNED
1. Are you concerned about being in a new school and classes with students that you do not know?	1	2	3	4	5
2. Are you concerned about making friends in a new school?	1	2	3	4	5
3. Are you concerned about having someone to sit with during lunch at the new school?	1	2	3	4	5
4. Are you concerned about fitting in with other social groups or cliques at the new school?	1	2	3	4	5
5. Are you concerned that you will be pressured to use tobacco, drink alcohol, or do drugs at the new school?	1	2	3	4	5
Students' perception on school access service when the students are tutored to a secondary school outside of the resident school district	I AM NOT CONCERNED AT ALL	I AM NOT CONCERNED	I AM A BIT CONCERNED	I AM CONCERNED	I AM VERY MUCH CONCERNED
6. Are you worried about getting back and forth from home and the new school?	1	2	3	4	5
7. Are you worried about getting lost in the new school?	1	2	3	4	5
8. Are you concerned about getting forms completed and submitted to receive free or reduced priced school meals to begin the next school year? (I leave blank if you currently do not receive free or reduced price school meals.)	1	2	3	4	5
9. Are you worried about having enough time to get to your locker and class on time?	1	2	3	4	5
10. Are you concerned that the new school will be too crowded making it difficult for you to access a principal, counselor, or a nurse when needed?	1	2	3	4	5
Students' perception on access to teacher support when the students are tutored to a secondary school outside of the resident school district	I AM NOT CONCERNED AT ALL	I AM NOT CONCERNED	I AM A BIT CONCERNED	I AM CONCERNED	I AM VERY MUCH CONCERNED
11. Are you concerned that the new teachers will be more strict than your current teachers?	1	2	3	4	5
12. Are you concerned that the homework load at the new school will be too much to handle?	1	2	3	4	5
13. Are you concerned that your new teachers will not give you as much school work support as they do in your current school?	1	2	3	4	5
14. Are you concerned about knowing how to get help if you have questions or problems at the new school?	1	2	3	4	5
15. Are you concerned about getting home if you want to stay after school for tutoring or extra-curricular activities at the new school?	1	2	3	4	5

Students' perception on academic rigor when the students are tutored to a secondary school outside of the resident school district?	I AM NOT CONCERNED AT ALL		I AM A BIT CONCERNED		I AM VERY MUCH CONCERNED	
	1	2	3	4	5	5
16. Are you concerned about the classes being more difficult at the new school than in your present school?	1	2	3	4	5	5
17. Are you concerned that you have the study skills needed to succeed at the new school such as note-taking, test preparation, and writing papers?	1	2	3	4	5	5
18. Are you concerned about high stakes tests that you will take at the new school?	1	2	3	4	5	5
19. Are you concerned about the credit requirements at the new school to be promoted to the next grade level each year?	1	2	3	4	5	5
20. Are you concerned about your grade point average and your class rank?	1	2	3	4	5	5

Students' perception on school safety when the students are tutored to a secondary school outside of the resident school district?	I AM NOT CONCERNED AT ALL		I AM A BIT CONCERNED		I AM VERY MUCH CONCERNED	
	1	2	3	4	5	5
21. Are you concerned that students will bully you at the new school?	1	2	3	4	5	5
22. Are you concerned about poor peer conduct while traveling to and from the new school?	1	2	3	4	5	5
23. Are you concerned about being involved in fights at the new school?	1	2	3	4	5	5
24. Are you concerned about getting hurt at the new school?	1	2	3	4	5	5
25. Are you concerned that the teachers and staff at the new school will watch out for their students the same way as in your current school?	1	2	3	4	5	5

Student survey on perceptions for transitioning to a secondary school outside of the resident school district.

Personal data sheet information.  
Please complete Questions 26-33 by placing a circle around your selection after each item.

Circle only ONE response per question.

Additional information for comparison of participant perception data.	Male		Female		Hispanic	American Indian	Asian	Other
	Black	White	Black	White				
26. What is your gender?	10	11	12	15	13	15	14	
27. What is your race?	Yes	No	Don't Know					
28. What is your age?	A's	B's	C's		D's		F's	
29. Do you receive free lunch at school?	0	1-2	3-4		5-6		7-8	Don't Know
30. What report card grades do you typically receive in school? (Circle only ONE answer.)	0	1-2	3-4		5-6		7-8	Don't Know
31. How many friends do you regularly interact with outside of school?	0	1-2	3-4		5-6		7-8	Don't Know
32. How many of the friends in Question 31 also attend school with you and are in your same grade level? (Answer cannot be a greater number than the answer given in Question 31.)	0	1-2	3-4		5-6		7-8	Don't Know
33. Do you have an older brother or sister who attends, or attended, the same secondary school that you will attend next year?	Yes	No	Don't Know					

Directions for Questions 26-33: Circle only ONE response for each question.



# APPENDIX D

## PARENT SURVEY

Parent/Guardian survey on perceptions about transitioning students to a secondary school outside of the resident school district. The parent survey contains 36 questions. Only one response is permitted for each question. No information exists in the survey to identify individuals completing the survey, and there is no monetary benefit given to respondents. I acknowledge that completing this student transition survey is voluntary, and I can remove myself at any point in the process without a penalty.

Place a "X" in one of the following respondent consent statements to verify intent of involvement.

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes I give my consent to CONTINUE with completing the survey.

\_\_\_\_\_ No. I do NOT give my consent, and I would like to REMOVE myself from completing the survey.

Directions for Questions 1-25:

A. Read each item carefully.

B. Think about your level of concern for the item.

C. Decide whether you are (1) Not concerned at all, (2) Not concerned, (3) A bit concerned, (4) Concerned, or (5) Very much concerned.

D. Draw a circle around one of the five numbers following the item to show the answer you selected.

Circle only ONE response for every question in this survey.

Parents' perception on peer interaction when the students are transitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident school district.	I AM NOT CONCERNED AT ALL	I AM NOT CONCERNED	I AM A BIT CONCERNED	I AM CONCERNED	I AM VERY MUCH CONCERNED
1. Are you concerned about your child being in a new school and classes with students that he/she does not know?	1	2	3	4	5
2. Are you concerned about your child missing friends in a new school?	1	2	3	4	5
3. Are you concerned about your child having someone to sit with during lunch at the new school?	1	2	3	4	5
4. Are you concerned about your child fitting in with other social groups or cliques at the new school?	1	2	3	4	5
5. Are you concerned that your child will be pressured to use tobacco, drink alcohol, or do drugs at the new school?	1	2	3	4	5
Parents' perception on school access services when the students are transitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident school district.	I AM NOT CONCERNED AT ALL	I AM NOT CONCERNED	I AM A BIT CONCERNED	I AM CONCERNED	I AM VERY MUCH CONCERNED
6. Are you concerned about your child getting back and forth from home and the new school?	1	2	3	4	5
7. Are you worried about your child getting lost in the new school?	1	2	3	4	5
8. Are you concerned about getting forms completed and submitted for your child to receive free or reduced priced school meals to begin the next school year? (I don't think if your child does not receive free or reduced price school meals.)	1	2	3	4	5
9. Are you worried that your child will have enough time to get to his/her locker and class on time?	1	2	3	4	5
10. Are you concerned that the new school will be too crowded making it difficult for your child to access a principal, counselor, or a nurse when needed?	1	2	3	4	5
Parents' perception on access to teacher support when the students are transitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident school district?	I AM NOT CONCERNED AT ALL	I AM NOT CONCERNED	I AM A BIT CONCERNED	I AM CONCERNED	I AM VERY MUCH CONCERNED
11. Are you concerned that your child's new teachers will be more strict than his/her current teachers?	1	2	3	4	5
12. Are you concerned that your child's homework load at the new school will be too much to handle?	1	2	3	4	5
13. Are you concerned that the new teachers will not give your child as much school work support as they do in his/her current school?	1	2	3	4	5
14. Are you concerned that your child will not know how to get help if he/she has questions or problems at the new school?	1	2	3	4	5
15. Are you concerned about your child going home if he/she wants to stay after school for tutoring or extra-curricular activities at the new school?	1	2	3	4	5
Parents' perception on academic rigor when the students are transitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident school district?	I AM NOT CONCERNED AT ALL	I AM NOT CONCERNED	I AM A BIT CONCERNED	I AM CONCERNED	I AM VERY MUCH CONCERNED
16. Are you concerned that your child's classes will be more difficult at the new school than at his/her present school?	1	2	3	4	5
17. Are you concerned that your child has the study skills needed to succeed at the new school such as note-taking, test preparation, and writing papers?	1	2	3	4	5
18. Are you concerned about high stakes tests that your child will take the new school?	1	2	3	4	5
19. Are you concerned about your child meeting the credit requirements at the new school to be promoted to the next grade level each year?	1	2	3	4	5
20. Are you concerned about your child's grade point average and class rank?	1	2	3	4	5

Parents' perception on school safety when the students are transitioned to a secondary school outside of the resident school district?	I AM NOT CONCERNED AT ALL	I AM NOT CONCERNED	I AM A BIT CONCERNED	I AM CONCERNED	I AM VERY MUCH CONCERNED
21. Are you concerned that students will bully your child at the new school?	1	2	3	4	5
22. Are you concerned about poor peer conduct while traveling to and from the new school?	1	2	3	4	5
23. Are you concerned that your child will be involved in fights at the new school?	1	2	3	4	5
24. Are you concerned that your child will get hurt at the new school?	1	2	3	4	5
25. Are you concerned that the teachers and staff at the new school will watch out for their students the same way as in your child's current school?	1	2	3	4	5

Personal data sheet information.  
Please complete Questions 26-36 by placing a circle around your selection after each item.

Circle only ONE response per question.

Additional information for comparison of participant perception data.	Male	Female
26. What is your child's gender?	10	11
27. What is your child's race?	10	11
28. What is your child's age?	10	11
29. Does your child receive free lunch at school?	Yes	No
30. What report card grades does your child typically receive in school? (Circle ONE answer)	As	Bs
31. How many friends does your child regularly interact with outside of school?	0	1-2
32. How many of the friends answered in Question 31 also attend school with your child and are in the same grade level with him/her? (Answer cannot be a greater number than the answer given in Question 31.)	0	1-2
33. Do you have any other children who attend, or attended, the same secondary school that your transitioning child will attend next year?	Yes	No

Directions for Questions 26-33. Circle one response for each question.	White	Multi-racial	Hispanic	Asian	American Indian	Other
26. What is your child's gender?	10	12	13	14	15	Don't Know
27. What is your child's race?	10	12	13	14	15	Don't Know
28. What is your child's age?	10	12	13	14	15	Don't Know
29. Does your child receive free lunch at school?	Yes	Don't Know	Don't Know	Don't Know	Don't Know	Don't Know
30. What report card grades does your child typically receive in school? (Circle ONE answer)	As	Cs	Ds	Fs	9+	Don't Know
31. How many friends does your child regularly interact with outside of school?	0	3-4	5-6	7-8	9+	Don't Know
32. How many of the friends answered in Question 31 also attend school with your child and are in the same grade level with him/her? (Answer cannot be a greater number than the answer given in Question 31.)	0	3-4	5-6	7-8	9+	Don't Know
33. Do you have any other children who attend, or attended, the same secondary school that your transitioning child will attend next year?	Yes	No	Don't Know	Don't Know	Don't Know	Don't Know

Directions for Questions 34-36. Circle one response for each question.	Male	Female
34. What is your gender?	20-29	30-39
35. What is your relationship to the transitioning student?	Mother	Father
36. What is your approximate age?	20-29	30-39

Parent/Guardian participant data.	Grandfather	Grandmother	Other
34. What is your gender?	50-59	40-49	60 or higher
35. What is your relationship to the transitioning student?	Grandfather	Grandmother	Other
36. What is your approximate age?	50-59	40-49	60 or higher

## APPENDIX E

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear Parent or Guardian:

My name is Jeff Beltz. I am a doctoral student at Youngstown State University. I would like to include you and your child in my research study. This form will explain why I am asking for your participation.

#### **PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND**

The purpose of this study is to identify concerns for an upcoming student transition. Your school district does not have a high school. Therefore, students will be sent to another district to attend high school. Your school district will pay tuition for students to attend that nearby high school too. This is known as a tuition model. Students will be tuitioned to complete high school, which is rare in our state. This study aims to identify family concerns to make the transition better. Students and parents will be asked to complete one survey.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

This study will include one parent, or guardian, and one middle school student completing one survey each. It will take 10 minutes to complete. Students will complete the survey at school. Along with this consent form, parents will find a parent survey for completion. Please sign this consent form for participation and complete the parent survey. Return the consent form to school with your student. The parent survey should be mailed in the self-addressed envelope. Students will complete the same questions with only subtle changes at school.

#### **RISKS/DISCOMFORTS**

The survey contains questions that do not appear to cause harm or discomfort. However, questions may invoke feelings of discomfort. Physical risks are minimal. The survey requires basic reading and physical skills to circle answers. If needed, students will receive help at school to complete the task. Parents and students may quit the study at any time without penalty.

#### **EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY**

All data used in the study will be secured. Results will not identify people or school districts.

#### **BENEFITS**

There will be no direct benefit to the adult or student participating in this study. However, the data provided will help administrators design an effective transition program for future students.

#### **QUESTIONS**

Contact principal investigator Dr. Jane Beese XX or student investigator Jeff Beltz XX with any questions. You may also contact the Office of Research at YSU XXX or XXX with questions about participant rights.

**DOCUMENTATION OF CONSENT**

My child and I will participate in the study. The purpose, participation, and possible risks have been explained. I will discuss this process with my child. I understand that I can withdraw my child or myself at any time without penalty. My child may also withdraw from the study at any point without penalty too.

Consent statement: I understand the study and have been given a copy of this document. I am 18 years of age or older. I agree to participate. I agree to allow my child to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent or Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Assent statement: I understand the study. I am under the age of 18. I agree to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Child

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX F

### DIRECTIONS FOR PROCTOR OF STUDENT SURVEY

Script for the school official who will proctor the student survey.

1. Gather all students who have parent/guardian consent and have agreed to participate in the research study into one classroom location.
2. Make sure that each student has a pencil with an eraser.
3. Ask students to leave the pencils on desks and refrain from writing on the survey until directions are reviewed. Instruct the class that no student names should be written on the survey.
4. The school official should ask the students, "If you have questions about doing this work, you can call this number 330-941-2377." The school official should also write the telephone number in a visible place for student reference.
5. Hand out surveys to each of the students. Remind students to keep pencils on their desks.
6. Ask students to read the first six lines on the survey, and the teacher will review consent/assent procedures and understandings with students. Allow students to ask clarification questions pertaining to student participation statements.
7. Students may now use their pencils to complete a consent/assent statement. If students would like to continue with the survey, they should place an "X" on the blank line next to the statement that begins with "Yes". If students do not want to continue with completing the survey, they should place an "X" on the blank line next to the "No" statement. Regardless of whether students elect to participate or not, all students should keep their survey until the entire group has had enough time to finish the survey exercise.
8. Students should also be reminded that they may stop completing the survey at any point should they desire to do so. No penalty will be associated with discontinuing the survey. If a student does want to stop completing the survey, at any point, the student should simply place an "X" on the blank line next to the "No" assent statement. All students should keep their survey until the entire group has had enough time to finish the survey exercise.

9. Review directions for completing the survey with the students. Inform students that only one answer should be selected for each question on the survey. Students should select a response by circling one multiple-choice answer for each question.
10. Directions for Questions 1-25:
  - A. Read each item carefully.
  - B. Think about your level of concern for the item.
  - C. Decide whether you are (1) Not concerned at all, (2) Not concerned, (3) A bit concerned, (4) Concerned, or (5) Very much concerned.
  - D. Select one of the five numbers following the item to show the answer you selected. Only one response can be selected per question. To make your selection, circle the number for your desired response.
    - 1 = I am not concerned at all.
    - 2 = I am not concerned.
    - 3 = I am a bit concerned.
    - 4 = I am concerned.
    - 5 = I am very much concerned.
11. Directions for Questions 26-33:

Select one answer for each of the questions by circling the desired choice in a similar manner as completed on the other parts of the survey.
12. Allow students to begin completing the survey. Remind the group that students can ask questions by simply raising his/her hand for assistance from the school official. The school official should not read survey responses.
13. Upon completion of the surveys, the school official should begin the survey collection process from the students. This should be done by having students pass one legal size envelope around the classroom. Each student should place their own survey into the envelope without taking the other surveys out of the envelope. Once all of the surveys are placed into the envelope by individual students, the school official should immediately seal the envelope. The proctor should not view any of the surveys.
14. Thank the students for their very important role in completing the transition survey.

15. The sealed legal size envelope containing the student surveys should then be placed in a properly secured and locked location with the school official. Completed student surveys and consent forms should be stored in separate, secured locations to protect anonymity.
16. Please contact researcher Jeff Beltz at 724-774-0250 X2800 to make arrangements for the surveys to be retrieved from the school location.

## APPENDIX G

### STATISTICAL TREATMENTS AND ANALYSIS PERFORMED

#### TO ANSWER RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research question	Hypothesis	Dependent and independent variable	Data analysis
What are the similarities and differences for students and parents' perceptions on peer interaction when the students are tutored to a secondary school outside of the resident district?	There is a statistically significant difference between student and parent perceptions on peer interaction when the students are tutored to a secondary school outside of the resident district.	Independent variables: students and parents. Dependent variable: peer interaction construct.	Developed peer interaction construct, SPSS output, descriptive statistics, mean comparison, normality, independent samples t test, p value for significance, null hypothesis determination.
What are the similarities and differences for students and parents' perceptions on school service access when the students are tutored to a secondary school outside of the resident district?	There is a statistically significant difference between student and parent perceptions on school access service when the students are tutored to a secondary school outside of the resident district.	Independent variables: students and parents. Dependent variable: service access construct.	Developed access service construct, SPSS output, descriptive statistics, mean comparison, normality, independent samples t test, p value for significance, null hypothesis determination.
What are the similarities and differences for students and parents' perceptions on access to teacher support when the students are tutored to a secondary school outside of the resident district?	There is a statistically significant difference between student and parent perceptions on access to teacher support when the students are tutored to a secondary school outside of the resident district.	Independent variables: students and parents. Dependent variable: teacher support construct.	Developed teacher support construct, SPSS output, descriptive statistics, mean comparison, normality, independent samples t test, p value for significance, null hypothesis determination.
What are the similarities and differences for students and parents' perceptions on academic rigor when the students are tutored to a secondary school outside of the resident district?	There is a statistically significant difference between student and parent perceptions on academic rigor when the students are tutored to a secondary school outside of the resident district.	Independent variables: students and parents. Dependent variable: academic rigor construct.	Developed academic rigor construct, SPSS output, descriptive statistics, mean comparison, normality, independent samples t test, p value for significance, null hypothesis determination.
What are the similarities and differences for students and parents' perceptions on school safety when the students are tutored to a secondary school outside of the resident district?	There is a statistically significant difference between student and parent perceptions on school safety when the students are tutored to a secondary school outside of the resident district.	Independent variables: students and parents. Dependent variable: school safety construct.	Developed school safety construct, SPSS output, descriptive statistics, mean comparison, normality, independent samples t test, p value for significance, null hypothesis determination, effect size determination, power calculation.
Are there differences between students and parents' perceptions for each school?	There is a statistically significant difference between student and parent perceptions for each school.	Independent variables: students and parents at each elementary school. Dependent variables: peer interaction, service access, teacher support, academic rigor, and school safety constructs.	Evaluated all constructs, SPSS output, descriptive statistics, mean comparison, normality, independent samples t test, p value for effect size determination, power calculation.
Are there differences among students in two grades?	There is a statistically significant difference among students in three grades.	Independent variables: Grade 6 students and Grade 8 students. Dependent variables: peer interaction, service access, teacher support, academic rigor, and school safety constructs.	Evaluated all constructs, SPSS output, descriptive statistics, mean comparison, normality, independent samples t test, p value for significance, null hypothesis determination.