

THE TRANSITION PRACTICES OF ONE COUNTY'S
RURAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICTS
AND THEIR RECEIVING INDEPENDENT
SCHOOL DISTRICT

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Students make many transitions during their years of schooling: from home to school, elementary to middle school, middle to high school, and high school to college or work. These transitions are usually major events in the lives of their students and their parents. The stresses created by these transitions can be minimized when the new environment is responsive to each particular age group (Shumacher, 1998). In an attempt to make the student transition from middle school to high school less traumatic, several schools have begun to develop transition programs (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999). These programs are designed to assist the incoming ninth grade students with feeling more comfortable in their new surroundings. Most schools, however, have done little if anything to assist students in making the transition. The scattered data about student transition from the middle level to the high school suggests that this area is rich in its unexplored vastness (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999). For the purpose of this study, the term “middle level” includes all middle grade and junior high school configurations. Additionally, a pseudonym will be used to ensure the anonymity of the state where the study was conducted.

Defining PK-8 Elementary School Districts

In 1912 in the state of Frontier, there were 5,656 school districts with most districts providing no higher than an eighth grade education (Folks, 1986). Currently, the state has 541 public school districts. One hundred twelve of those offer pre-kindergarten through eighth grades (PK-8) and are known as rural elementary school districts. These districts have a three-member board of education and are not affiliated with a district having grades kindergarten through twelve (K-12). PK-8 elementary school districts began in the state prior to statehood, and many were created in the former Indian Territory in the first five years after 1907. These districts were referred to as “dependent” school districts before the passage of House Bill 1017 in the 1991 legislative session. When the students in these districts complete their academic requirements, they must transfer to a K-12 district, which, in some cases, are many miles away. The interesting aspects of this transition is that most of these PK-8 elementary school districts are located in rural areas and many of the students may have more than one K-12 district option. For the purposes of this study, PK-8 districts will be referred to as rural elementary school districts and K-12 districts as independent school districts. It can become a dilemma for students knowing they may be attending different independent school districts than their current classmates. In most American school districts, students move from elementary to middle school and middle school to high school, they face the sometimes difficult tasks of dealing with a greater number of peers and balancing their competing needs for social support and increased autonomy (Compas & Wagner, 1991).

The focus of the study is to look at the degree of implementation of transition practices for students moving from a rural county's elementary school districts to an independent school district.

Purpose of the Study

The state of Frontier's rural elementary school district students make a major transition by moving from the eighth to ninth grade and by transferring to another district to continue their education. Using the lenses of transition implementation and perpetuation theory's social networks, the purpose of the study is to describe the transition implementation experienced by rural elementary school district students entering the ninth grade at an independent school district, and to describe the ties to the school that exist among these same ninth grade students.

Conceptual Framework

Theoretical or conceptual frameworks impact our traditional understanding by questioning the ideological categories we use and the goals we think we want to achieve (Liston & Zeichner, 1990). Through the theoretical lens of perpetuation theory this study examined the transition of students from a rural county's elementary school districts to an independent school district. This sociological theory of racial segregation, originally developed by Braddock (1980), and expanded by McPartland and Braddock (1981), states that segregation tends to repeat itself "across the stages of the life cycle and across

institutions when individuals have not had sustained experiences in desegregated settings earlier in life”(p. 149). Braddock (1980) derived this theory by focusing on the tendency of black Americans to perpetuate racial segregation. While Braddock’s theory does not preclude the existence of real structural constraints to racial integration, his focus is on how individual agents adjust their behavior to accommodate, and thus perpetuate, these constraints, and how exposure to integrated settings can change this behavior (Wells & Crain, 1994). Hoelter (1982), in his study, supported the findings of Braddock (1980) when he concluded, “black-white status inequality is perpetuated when blacks remain segregated from the knowledge concerning educational and occupational opportunities and methods of attaining specific goals” (p. 7). On the other hand, African American students from desegregated high schools are more inclined to continue their education in predominantly white settings (Braddock, 1980). Wells and Crain (1994) in their study reported that “desegregated black students set their occupational aspirations higher than do segregated blacks, and these career goals are more realistically related to their educational aspirations and attainment than those of segregated blacks” (p. 539). Most of the research reviewed supports the theory that “interracial contact in elementary or secondary school can help blacks overcome perpetual segregation” (Wells & Crain, 1994, p. 549).

Wells and Crain expanded Braddock’s perpetuation theory by including the concept of network analysis: that being, “segregation is perpetuated across generations because minorities lack access to informal networks that provide information about, and entrance to, desegregated institutions and employment” (p. 533). In conjunction with perpetuation theory, they incorporate Granovetter’s (1973) work, which analyzes “strong

ties,” as well as, the strong impact of “weak ties.” Wells and Crain (1994) draw from Granovetter’s (1973) work, which shows the strong impact of weak ties or less formal interpersonal networks – that is, acquaintances or friends of friends – on the diffusion of influence, information, and mobility opportunities. They are avenues through which information and mobility opportunities are obtained. Weak ties play a critical role, because according to Granovetter (1986), they are a bridge to social cliques different from our own.

Strong ties include close relationships between individuals with similar thoughts and beliefs, for example, family members and close friends. Homans (1950) believes “the more frequently persons interact with one another, the stronger their sentiments of friendship for one another are apt to be” (p. 133) and the more similar they are, the stronger the tie connecting them.

Lin (1990) and Montgomery (1992) argued that people on the bottom on the social structure, including African-American students from low-income families, have more to gain than white and wealthy students from the use of weak ties because these ties will invariably link them to more affluent and better connected people, whereas strong ties usually connect them to family and close friends who are also poor. Lin and others have found that “the advantage of using weaker ties over the use of stronger ties decreases as the position of origin approaches the top of the hierarchy” (Lin, 1990, p.251).

Statement of the Problem

Adults who fail to recognize the need to reduce the stress of students associated with the transition to high school need only observe the transformation in students from the spring of their last middle level year to the fall of their entry year at the high school (Hertzog & Morgan, 1998). When students have difficulty with these transitions, schools often provide additional support through school social workers or special programs to enhance school success. As the transition to high school approaches, the stakes become higher as students begin to connect school success or failure with perceived life chances (Hurrelman, Engel, Holler, & Nordlohne, 1988). For students who already have had difficulty negotiating these changes at the middle level, high school success may seem impossible.

The most basic idea behind a transition is that one travels between definable and different points (Smith, 1997). Transition points are generally acknowledged to be home to school, elementary to middle school or junior high, middle level school to high school, and high school to college or career. These troublesome transition points are fraught with hurdles and stumbling blocks for many students. Students become anxious and distraught over the uncertainties of abrupt changes in buildings, teachers, classmates, and programs. Such needless anxiety and apprehension interferes with learning and impairs confidence and self-esteem (Weldy, 1991). Transitions are both difficult and exciting as they mark points of risk and opportunity for student development. Some suggest that students have serious problems making multiple, simultaneous transitions (Simmons, Blyth, Van Cleave, Bush, 1979). Coleman and Collinge (1991) call the students' positive attitudes

toward school bonding. These are times when it is most critical to bond students to the school level where they will spend the next few years (Odegaard & Heath, 1992). If there are no programs of transition or inadequate programs, this makes the transition for students even more difficult.

Hertzog and Morgan (1998) state that, “Programs to assist students in moving from the middle level school to the high school are all but nonexistent” (p. 94). They believe that transitional studies have finally begun to gain more attention, especially from organizations such as the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), the National Middle School Association (NMSA), and the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. Hertzog and Morgan (1997) found that high schools with minimal or no transition programs (two or fewer transition practices for eighth and ninth grade students at the middle and high school level) reported a retention/failure rate in grade nine as high as 40 percent. Furthermore, the researchers found a positive relationship between a decrease in student retention and dropout rate for both male and female students and the degree of implementation of transition program practices.

The reason transition is usually so difficult for a student from middle school to high school is the difference in philosophies of education that are practiced at the two different buildings (VanSciver, 1985). The purpose of middle level education is to be developmentally responsive to the special needs of the early adolescent learner (Clark & Clark, 1994; Lounsbury, 1991; Lounsbury & Clark, 1990; NASSP, 1985). “Middle level schools must 1) be comprised of a unique, autonomous unit separate from the high school, 2) contain programs that are developmentally appropriate including interdisciplinary teaming and teacher advisories, and 3) provide a content that connects

with the everyday lives of the students and instruction that actively involves them in the learning process” (Clark & Clark, 1994, p.4). The junior high was to be based on the characteristics of young adolescents and concerned with all aspects of growth and development (George, Stevenson, Thomason, & Beane, 1992). It was established as a school whose design was twofold: 1) continue to provide for the furthering of skill development, and more importantly, 2) bring added depth to the curriculum (Wavering, 1995). The junior high is a step away from middle level environment and a level that moves the student towards the preparation of high school. Transitional practices are imperative to assist students in making this move.

For the purpose of this study, transition practices identified by the Johns Hopkins Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools (CREMS: Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990) and supported by the National Middle School Association (NMSA, Mac Iver & Epstein, 1991) will be used as a baseline for comparing transitional practices used at both this county’s elementary school districts and independent school district. The 10 most frequently used practices are:

1. Middle grade students visit the high school for an assembly.
2. Middle and high school administrators meet together on articulation and programs.
3. Middle grade counselors meet with high school counselors or staff.
4. Parents visit high school for orientation after their children have entered school.
5. Middle and high school teachers meet together about courses and requirements.
6. Parents visit the high school while children are in the lower grade.
7. High school students present information at middle grades schools.

8. Middle grade students attend regular classes at the high school.
9. Summer meetings at the high school for parents and students.
10. Buddy or big brother/sister programs pair new students with older students.

In spite of the research that supports multiple transitional activities for student success, many schools choose to do very little to support students in transition. It is assumed this anomaly exists for various reasons including the lack of leadership to support the implementation of transitional programs, the time constraints of planning and implementing such programs, the lack of staff to help in carrying out the initiative, and the determination that no problem exists. Thus, the problem studied in this research was, “What are the transitional practices of a rural county’s elementary school districts and their receiving independent school district?”

Significance of the Study

Although there is sporadic talk in Frontier about consolidating small rural school districts and eliminating rural elementary school districts, politically it seems unattainable in the near future. The study will add to the limited research on the transitioning of students from rural elementary school districts to an independent school district. Hertzog and Morgan (1998) state that, “Programs to assist students in moving from the middle level school to the high school are all but nonexistent” (p. 94). In these prior studies of PK-8 student transitioning, the focus was on inner city and suburban districts. The focus of this study will be the transitioning of the students in a rural setting. Rural schools tend

to be smaller than inner city and suburban schools. Rural schools often times reflect a more intimate and stable environment than their metropolitan counterparts.

The study will enhance the practice of education by providing administrators, teachers, and counselors insights into the factors affecting students' transition from a rural elementary school district to an independent school district. "Schools across the country can attest to the fact that students making these transitions from one level to another experience a range of emotions from mild uncertainty and frustration to major anxiety and academic failure" (Ferguson & Bulach, 1994, p. 7).

From a theoretical standpoint, the study will add to the work of Braddock (1980) on perpetuation theory and Granovetter's (1973, 1983, 1986) research on strong and weak ties. In addition, it will confirm or deny the transition practices identified by the Johns Hopkins Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools (CREMS: Epstein & MacIver, 1990).

Researcher

I, the researcher, have been in public school and vocational education for 13 years. I spent the first 10 years in two K-12 public school districts and have been employed the past three years in a vocational education/career and technology school district. With the exception of my first year in education, I have been an administrator at the secondary level. I have always had a passion for what I do and want to do my best to help students be successful. While trying to identify a study that I believed would have merit for practioners as well as add to existing research, I decided on the topic of student

transition. I began to reflect on the first high school in which I was employed to determine a possible study. This high school with grades 9-12, received a small number of students from a rural elementary school district six miles away. As the assistant principal, I was unaware of any programs or activities that helped those students transition into the ninth grade. When I reflect on how the rural elementary students transitioned into the high school, it seemed they isolated themselves from the already established groups. Additionally, the students did not participate in clubs and extracurricular activities to the extent the local students did. That experience lead me to conduct a qualitative study that examined a rural county's nine elementary school districts and the transition of the majority of those eighth grade students to the largest independent school district in that county.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to examine middle school transition implementation practices identified by the Johns Hopkins Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools through the lens of perpetuation theory, and Granovetter's theory of Social Networks concerning the strength of strong and weak ties. The resulting perspectives were described and analyzed to assess the usefulness of each lens for exploring the realities revealed. Qualitative methods allowed for a thick description of the emerging perspectives reflected in the understandings and beliefs of students who have transitioned from rural elementary school districts to one independent school district.

Chapter II is a review of the literature. This chapter will review adolescent development, middle level to high school transition, transition practices, as well as the theoretical framework of the study. Chapter III described the research method. Presentation, analysis and interpretation of the data comprise Chapter IV. Chapter V includes the summary, conclusions, recommendations, and commentary.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Historically, how schools have been organized and the grade levels included therein has been varied and based on changing philosophical beliefs. How should grade levels be split to meet the cognitive and social development of students? Over time, single room schools with multiple grades gave way to the various arrangements found in today's school districts. No one specific format is necessarily considered the most effective. Currently, it usually depends on the school districts as to how the grade levels are structured. In PK-12 grade school districts with a student count of 500 or less, there is typically an elementary school consisting of grades pre-kindergarten to fifth or sixth grade with the middle school or junior high and high school site housing grades six or seven to twelve. In districts consisting of 500 to 1,000, the sites generally have pre-kindergarten through fourth or fifth grade with a middle school site having grades five or six to eighth and a high school of grades nine through twelve. In school districts consisting of 1,000 to 2,000, the sites may consist of one or more elementary schools with grades kindergarten through the fifth grade, a middle school with grades six, seven, and eight, and a high school with grades nine to twelve. In districts of 2,000 to 6,000 students, they may have multiple elementary schools of grades kindergarten through five, a middle level school with grades six and seven, a junior high with grades eight and nine,

and a high school with grades ten, eleven, and twelve. Some districts this size, resources permitting, may even have individual sites for the middle level grades of six, seven, eight, and nine before the students enter into a high with grades ten, eleven and twelve (Frontier State Directory of Education, 2003-2004). In PK-8 grade school districts, most often all students are housed in one facility. This study looked at a rural county's elementary school districts consisting of pre- kindergarten through eighth grade, which serve as feeder schools for a nearby independent school district.

Adolescent Development

The most basic idea behind a transition is that one travels between definable and different points. For human development, two such points are childhood and adulthood; the transitional time between them is called adolescence (Smith, 1997). Early adolescence corresponds roughly to the middle school or junior high school years and includes most pubertal change. Late adolescence refers to approximately the latter half of the second decade of life. Career interests, dating, and identity exploration are often more pronounced in late adolescence than in early adolescence (Santrock, 1993).

Adolescents must negotiate many developmental tasks and challenges during the transition to high school (Newman et al., 2000). Developmental tasks of adolescence include physical maturation; cognitive advancements; emotional development, including becoming more self-reliant and autonomous from parents; expanding relationships with peers; and gaining the ability to have intimate friendships (Newman & Newman, 1999). Mediators, such as personal competence and coping strategies, must also be kept in mind

when assessing the student's transition to a new school (Jarvis, Lohman, & VanLake, 1997; Barone et al., 1991).

Adolescents today face demands and expectations, as well as risks and temptations, that appear to be more numerous and complex than did adolescents only a generation ago (Feldman & Elliott, 1990). Nonetheless, contrary to the popular stereotype of adolescents as highly stressed and incompetent, the vast majority of adolescents successfully negotiate the path from childhood to adulthood (Offer & Church, 1991). The majority of adolescents find the transition from childhood to adulthood a time of physical, cognitive, and social development that provides considerable challenge, opportunities, and growth (Santrock, 1993).

Physical Development

Biological processes involve changes in an individual's physical nature. Genes inherited from parents, the development of the brain, height and weight gains, motor skills, and the hormonal changes of puberty all reflect the role of biological processes in the adolescent's development (Santrock, 1993).

Human beings grow most rapidly at two times during their lives: before they are six months old and then again during adolescence. The second period of accelerated growth, often called the adolescent growth spurt, usually lasts two to three years (Barnes, 1975). Adolescents grow both in height and in weight, with the increase in height occurring first. As they gain weight, the amount and distribution of fat in their bodies change, and the proportion of bone and muscle tissue increases as well. During puberty,

the final 20 to 25 percent of growth in height is achieved, as is the final 50 percent increase in weight (Barnes, 1975).

In girls, the adolescent growth spurt usually begins between the ages of 9 and 11 and reaches a peak at an average of 12.5 years. Then growth slows down and usually ceases completely between the ages of 15 and 18. The growth spurt in boys generally begins about two years later than it does in girls and lasts for a longer time. It begins between the ages of 11 and 14, reaches a peak at about age 15, and slowly declines until the age of 19 or 20 (Salkind, 1994).

Some people confuse the terms “adolescence” and “puberty.” Puberty is a rapid change to physical maturation involving hormonal and bodily changes that occur primarily during early adolescence (Santrock, 1993). Puberty, the shorter period of adolescence during which an individual reaches sexual maturity, lasts from two to four years and is marked by great physical and psychological changes. Children’s bodies become capable of functioning sexually, and their attitudes and behaviors become more mature (Salkind, 1994).

Cognitive Development

All the physical changes do not occur in the absence of changes in the cognitive strategies that adolescents use to solve problems. At best, their world is one of physical and cognitive changes; the challenge is to keep up with the changes and incorporate them into an increasingly higher level of independence (Salkind, 1994).

One of the major achievements of early adolescence is the attainment of what Piaget calls formal-operational thought (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958). Before adolescence, children are largely concerned with the here and now, with what is apparent to their senses and with problems that can be solved by trial and error. During adolescence, most people grow much better able to deal with problems on an abstract level, to form hypotheses, and to reason from propositions that are contrary to fact (Salkind, 1994).

Piaget's theory emphasizes universal and consistent patterns of formal operational thought. His theory does not adequately account for the unique, individual differences that characterize the cognitive development of adolescents (Overton & Byrnes, 1991). These individual variations in adolescents' cognitive development have been documented in a number of investigations (Bart, 1971; Neimark, 1982; Kaufman & Flaitz, 1987). Some individuals in early adolescence are formal operational thinkers; others are not. A review of formal operational thought investigations revealed that only about one of every three eighth grade students is a formal operational thinker (Strahan, 1983).

Social Development

Developmentalists have recently shown a flurry of interest in how children and adolescents reason about social matters. For many years, the study of cognitive development focused primarily on cognition about nonsocial phenomena, such as logic, number, words, time, and the like. Now there is a lively interest in how children and adolescents reason about their social world (Lapsley, 1990).

A developmental need for socialization is particularly strong for middle level students. It is during this stage of development that feelings about parents, teachers, peers and others begin to undergo significant changes (McEwin & Thompson, 1989). Learning to accept and be accepted by others is a vital task in adolescence. Peer groups are important, and friends are selected on the basis of similarity to one's self (Milgram, 1992). Peers are standards and models for behavior with their influence being the strongest during ages 11 to 17 (Irvin, 1992; Clark & Clark, 1994).

Because of their enhanced ability to perceive social cues, and their early programming as to the critical importance of social acceptance, girls learn more easily than boys how to modify their behavior to fit into a group. If the girl's social group is mentally much younger than she is, she will frequently don the mental attire of her friends, and soon be imperceptible from them in thought, manner, and achievement. The girl's chameleon qualities are her saving grace in social situations, but they are also her greatest handicap in the development of her abilities (Kerr, 1985). Researchers consistently have found that girls with high ability feel compelled to hide their intelligence (Bell, 1989; Buescher & Higham, 1989; Kerr, 1985, 1991; Noble, 1987; Reis & Callahan, 1989; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Bright high school girls are often less popular with boys (Casserly, 1979). Boys value the reputation of being an intellectual to a much greater extent than girls (Coleman, 1961). Fox (1977) found that highly capable junior high school girls would not leave their friends for the opportunity to accelerate in their coursework. Locksly and Douvan (1980) discovered that girls with high grade point averages were significantly more depressed, had more psychosomatic symptoms and had lower self-esteem than boys with high grade point averages. Peterson (1988) has found

that self-image scores in high achieving junior high school girls increase as their grades decrease, whereas the opposite is true for boys.

Social and Emotional Aspects of Transition from Middle Level to High School

The question of whether transition programs made available as part of middle-grade schooling aids students in getting to, staying in, and performing well in high school has concerned educators since the creation of separate school for young adolescents (Smith, 1997). Developed first in Denmark in 1903, the primary goal of a separate organization for early adolescents was to encourage larger numbers of elementary school students to remain in school by preparing them for the rigors of high school while maintaining the structure of social closeness found in elementary school (Ayres, 1909; Popper, 1967; Weet, 1916). The transition to high school received little attention from educational researchers before the 1980's, possibly because it was not viewed as a problem for either students or schools (Schiller, 1999). Cicourel and Kitsuse (1963) described this transition as a routinized process in which counselors provide prospective freshmen with information and allocate them to courses. This view of the transition to high school as normative or routine is gradually being challenged by recognition that high schools are in a state of flux as they absorb freshmen classes (Delany, 1991; Felner, Ginter, and Primavera, 1982; Gamoran, 1992; Riehl, Pallas, and Natriello, 1999).

The structure of American school systems is such that the pains of adolescence coincide with entrance into new physical, social, and pedagogical environments that mark teenagers' transition to high school (Schiller, 1999). This move to a new school involves

disrupting relationships with teachers and peers at a time when teenagers are becoming more independent from their families and experiencing less parental involvement in their schooling (Dornbush & Ritter, 1988). The school environment shapes adolescent development significantly. Yet, little empirical study has focused specifically on the process of school transition from eighth to ninth grade. For incoming high school freshmen, this transition is accompanied by increased choices, changes, and responsibilities in the adolescent's academic and social worlds. Theoretical models that attempt to account for students' adaptations to high school typically do not consider concurrent changes in the students' relationships with their peers, family, and neighborhood during the transition to ninth grade (Eccles, Lord, & Buchanan, 1996; Simmons & Blyth, 1987). Although interest in structural school reform has been directed at all levels of schooling, concern over education for young adolescents (ages 10-15) has increased in recent years. Psychologists point to this period in the life cycle, which encompasses puberty, value formation, and social-group identification, as well as marked shifts in learning as a critical stage in human development (Ausubel & Ausubel, 1966; Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Cohen & Frank, 1975; Dusek, 1987; Hill, 1980; Lipsitz, 1984). Focusing on schools that serve students in this age range, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989, pp. 12-13) argued that such schools, "have the potential to make a tremendous impact on the development of their students—for better or for worse—yet they have been largely ignored in the recent surge of educational reform."

A milestone in the lives of young adolescents is making the transition from middle school to high school (Marshall, 1992). As eighth graders prepare to enter ninth grade, they are filled with curiosity, anticipation, and a sense of adventure. They are

aware that they will be abandoning the comfortable, secure surroundings of their middle school and will be venturing into the unknown environs of high school (Marshall, 1992). Some students find the transition to high school liberating, in that it gives them the opportunity to redefine themselves socially (Kinney, 1993) and academically (Rosenbaum, 1986).

Young adolescents entering high school look forward to having more choices and making new and more friends: however, they are also concerned about being picked on and teased by older students, having harder work, making lower grades, and getting lost in a larger, unfamiliar school (Mizelle, 1995; Phelan, Yu, & Davidson, 1994). As young adolescents make the transition into high school, many experience a decline in grades and attendance (Barone, Aguirre-Deandries, & Trickett, 1991); they view themselves more negatively and experience an increased need for friendships (Hertzog et al., 1996); and by the end of tenth grade, as many as six percent drop out of high school (Owings & Peng, 1992). At a time when friendships and social interaction are particularly important for young adolescents, the normative transition into high school often serves to disrupt friendship networks and, thereby, interferes with students' success in high school (Barone, et al., 1991). Thus, it is vital for transition programs to include activities that will provide incoming students social support activities that give students the opportunity to get to know and develop positive relationships with older students and other incoming students (Hertzog et al., 1996; Mac Iver, 1990).

The transition to high school is a significant stressor which, when coupled with maturational change, family system changes, and changes in the nature of peer relations, requires a range of personal, academic, and social coping strategies (Gonzales et al.,

1996). Understanding how this movement of individuals between organizations shapes educational careers requires going beyond mapping changes in school size, curricular structure, and the composition of students in middle school and high school (Felner et al, 1981; Roderick & Camburn, 1996; Schiller, 1995). Students' entrance into more socially and academically diverse environments in high schools creates the potential for both individual advancement and failure (Schiller, 1999).

Transition Practices

Educators know how important it is that students make a comfortable transition into high school, especially since so many students decide how long they are staying in high school during their initial experiences (Lindsay, 1998). This section contains literature on successful transition, the transition role of middle and high school educators, the transition role of the parent, and high school transition concerns.

Successful Transition Practices

Worthington Kilbourne High School's freshman transition program is based on the idea that all learners are capable of success, and that their success is in large part based on how welcome they feel entering their new school (Lindsay, 1998). By adopting some additional transition strategies, educators will find their ninth graders more productive and, ultimately, more successful (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999). When middle school students took part in a high school transition program with several diverse

articulation activities, fewer students were retained in the transition grade (Mac Iver, 1990). Furthermore, middle school principals indicated that they expected fewer of their students to drop out before graduation when the school provided supportive advisory group activities or responsive remediation programs (Mac Iver & Epstein, 1991).

Providing young adolescents with activities that relate directly to the transition into high school certainly is important; however, providing young adolescents with a challenging and supportive middle school experience is equally important in their making a successful transition into high school (Belcher & Hatley, 1994; Mizelle, 1995; Oates, Flores, & Weishew, 1988). For example, Mizelle (1995) found that students who stayed together with the same teachers through sixth, seventh, and eighth grades and experienced more hands-on, life-related learning activities, integrated instruction, and cooperative learning groups were more successful in their transition to high school than were students from the same school who had a more traditional middle school experience. Students also indicated that if their middle school teachers had held students more responsible for their learning, taught them more about strategies for learning on their own, and provided them a more challenging curriculum, their transition to high school would have been eased.

According to Mac Iver (1990), a high school transition program includes a variety of activities that (1) provide students and parents information about the new school, (2) provide students with social support during the transition, and (3) bring middle and high school personnel together to learn about one another's curriculum and requirements. Middle school students want to know what high school is going to be like, and they and their parents need to know about and understand high school programs and procedures

(Phelan, Yu, & Davidson, 1994). In particular, parents need to be actively involved in the decisions their eighth grade student will be asked to make about classes they will take in the ninth grade and understand the long-term effects of the course decisions (Paulson, 1994). Underlying successful high school transition programs are activities that bring middle school and high school administrators, counselors, and teachers together to learn about the programs, courses, curriculum, and requirements of their respective schools (Hertzog et al., 1996; Vars, 1998). Activities that create a mutual understanding of curriculum requirements at both levels and of the young adolescent learner will help educators at both levels to develop a high school transition program to meet the particular needs of their students (Mizelle, 1999). Hertzog and Morgan (1998) believe for a school district to assist students with the successful transition from eighth to ninth grade a transition team is required. The transition team can help eighth grade students develop an understanding of the academic rigors during the eighth grade year instead of waiting until the spring in order to produce the highest level of success. Research supports the more extensive the transition program, the lower the dropout rate and retention rate when students transition from grades eight to nine.

Transition Role of Middle and High School Educators

The transition from middle school to high school is a difficult one (Marshall, 1992). Educators at both levels of schooling need to be instrumental in helping eighth graders prepare for ninth grade, the time when “most American youth begin playing high school hardball, with its emphasis on specialization and the accompanying pressures”

(Lounsbury & Clark, 1990, p. 1). Transitional activities for students should be chosen with care and should be the result of cooperative planning and organizing by middle school and high school personnel.

Underlying successful high school transition programs are activities that bring middle school and high school administrators, counselors, and teachers together to learn about the programs, courses, curriculum, and requirements, of their respective schools (Hertzog et al., 1996; Vars, 1998). Activities that create a mutual understanding of curriculum requirements at both levels and of the young adolescent learner will help educators at both levels to develop a high school transition program to meet the particular needs of their students. In addition to the more typical committee or team meetings with representatives from each level, these activities may include K-12 curriculum planning meetings, and teacher or administrator visitations, observations, and teaching exchanges (Mizelle, 1999). Keeping the lines of communication open between eighth and ninth grade teachers helps to dispel what seems to be a common practice of teachers being expected “to prepare their students for the coursework at the next level of schooling” yet not being “given the opportunity to discuss articulation with colleagues at other levels of schooling” (Mac Iver, 1990, p. 463).

As students move from middle level school to the high school, they make decisions about their future quickly. The fact that many middle level students have some apprehension during this transition heightens the necessity for middle level and high school faculties to work together to assist students in making the transition as stress-free as possible (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999). Parents, too, must be included in the transitional

activities so that they will acquire a better understanding of the high school program (Marshall, 1992).

Transition Role of the Parent

The importance of parents being involved in their young adolescent students' transition from middle to high school can hardly be overestimated. Parents and adolescents typically share similarity in values and attitudes with regard to such concepts as the importance attributed to school and education (Berndt, Miller, & Park, 1989; Gecas & Seff, 1990). When parents are involved in their student's transition to high school, they tend to stay involved in their child's school experiences (Mac Iver, 1990); and when parents are involved in their child's high school experiences, students have higher achievement (Linver & Silverberg, 1997; Paulson, 1994), are better adjusted (Hartos & Power, 1997), and are less likely to drop out of school (Horn & West, 1992).

High School Transition Concerns

Young adolescents entering high school look forward to having more choices and making new and more friends; however, they also are concerned about being picked on and teased by older students, having harder work, and making lower grades, and getting lost in a larger, unfamiliar school (Mizelle, 1995; Phelan, Yu, & Davidson, 1994). The change from middle to high school is seen by many as particularly salient (National Center for Education Statistics, 1992; Zsiray, 1996). The transition into the new academic

environment of high school may have negative consequences for some adolescents (Newman et al, 2000). Previous research has associated the following negative outcomes with the transition from junior high to high school: a) poorer attendance (Barone, Aguirre-Deandreis, & Trickett, 1991; Felner, Primavera, & Cauce, 1981; Moyer & Motta, 1982; Weldy, 1991; Pantleo, 1992); b) declines in GPA (Barone et al, 1991; Blyth, Simmons, & Carlton-Ford, 1983; Felner, Primavera, & Cauce, 1981); c) discipline problems associated with experiencing change to a new school building, moving from self-contained to departmentalized classes, or encountering a different educational philosophy (Moyer & Motta, 1982; Weldy, 1991); and d) decreased participation in extracurricular activities (Blyth et al., 1983). The students view themselves more negatively and experience an increased need for friendships (Hertzog, et al, 1996). Others are devastated by the relatively competitive and impersonal environment of high schools, which leads them to drop out of school (Owings & Peng, 1992; Catterall, 1998; Roderick, 1993; Swanson & Schneider, 1999). High school students typically have more assignments, and there are more distractions due to the increasing complexity of peer relations (Newman et al., 2000). Further, the high school is a more anonymous setting than is the middle school. Some students experience role loss, such as no longer being among the top athletes or scholars. Research has shown that participation in extracurricular activities significantly declines in the first year of high school (Seidman et al., 1996; Gifford & Dean, 1990). For some students, difficulties associated with the transition to high school are tied to feelings of alienation and the lack of social acceptance in the new school environment. Students who are successful in gaining social acceptance in a new school environment were found to have experienced a smoother

transition into high school (Schmidt, 1993). However, students who did not deal well with the transition into high school expressed feelings of alienation leading to misbehavior and an external locus of control in subsequent interaction with restrictive and controlling school personnel (Kulka, Kahle, & Klingel, 1982). In addition, three of four students reported that ninth grade was academically much more difficult, and one of five reported increased feelings of isolation during the ninth grade (National Center for Education Statistics, 1992).

Isolationism was not successful in preventing the United States from becoming involved in a global conflict. Neither is it a successful strategy for individual schools to practice if they are to plan effectively for a productive 12-year experience for their students. Nowhere in education is this philosophy of isolationism so lethal as when practiced by high schools and their feeder middle schools (VanSciver, 1985).

Hertzog and Morgan (1999) conducted a study of Florida and Georgia middle schools and the number of transitional practices each school provided. The purpose of the study was to gather data about the transition practices the schools had in place, the percentage of students who dropped out of high school, and the percentage of ninth grade students who were retained in grade due to lack of academic achievement. The study revealed that schools, which used two or fewer transition practices, had significantly higher ninth grade attrition rates and high school dropout rates than did the schools that had implemented three or more transition practices. Hertzog and Morgan (1996) also found that Caucasian females had the most difficulty in making the adjustment from the student-centered atmosphere of the middle level to the less personal, larger, teacher-centered atmosphere of the high school. It was concluded that the Caucasian females had

developed the “Barbie Doll Syndrome,” which meant they were more concerned about their appearance and social adaptation than school. Students’ feelings of belongingness in their school are positively associated with their motivation toward school, effort, level of participation, and eventual achievement (Felner, Ginter, & Primavera, 1982; Goodenow, 1993).

Perpetuation Theory

Perpetuation theory emerged from the work of Braddock (1980) to explain the continued segregation of black Americans. He found “that minority students who have not regularly experienced the realities of desegregation may overestimate the degree of overt hostility they will encounter or underestimate their skill at coping with strains in interracial situations” (p. 181). “These segregated students make choices that maintain physical segregation when they become adults because they have never tested their racial beliefs” (Wells & Crain, 1994, p. 3).

McPartland and Braddock (1981) discovered a relationship between the willingness of black Americans to live and work in desegregated settings, their age when they first experienced desegregation, and the length of the desegregation experience. They found that segregation tends to perpetuate itself “across the stages of the life cycle and across institutions when individuals have not had sustained experiences in desegregated settings earlier in life” (McPartland & Braddock, 1981, p. 149). While sustained experiences in segregated settings tended to perpetuate segregations, sustained experiences in desegregated settings resulted in higher educational and occupational

aspirations of minority students. These students, as a result of their familiarity to the desegregated setting, were more likely to attend predominantly white colleges (Braddock, 1980).

Using Granovetter's (1973, 1983, 1986) "strong ties" and "weak ties", this event can be explained by the fact that students who remain in segregated environments maintain primarily "strong ties" within their cultural environment. Students exposed to desegregation, however, established "weak ties" with non-minority students allowing them to bridge the cultural boundaries of segregation.

Strong Ties

As stated by Granovetter (1973), "the strength of a tie is a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie" (p. 1361). Strong ties exist between individuals who have established close relationships and reflect similar thoughts, beliefs and interests. These ties would most typically occur between family members and close friends. "The more frequently persons interact with one another, the stronger their sentiments of friendship for one another are apt to be" (Homans, 1950, p. 133), therefore creating a strong tie.

Weak Ties

A weak tie exists between acquaintances or friends of friends, through an individual's less formal interpersonal networks. "Weak ties are more likely to link members of different small groups..." (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1376), thus, providing access to different information. Weak ties provide a bridge to new, socially distant ideas

For students experiencing the perturbations associated with the school transition process, social support may influence their adjustment (Barone et al., 1991). Peers often play a particularly significant role in adolescents' attitudes, including their orientation toward school (Berndt, 1982; Felner et al., 1982; Kelly & Hansen, 1987). Peers often provide support for adolescents as they face new challenges, and, in turn, buffer the effects of the stress associated with the school transition.

The impact of strong and weak ties is significant to young students during the process of transitioning from one site to another regardless of the grade level, which makes it equally imperative to have good transition programs in place. Looking at strong and weak ties assisted in reviewing the problem being studied, which was to research the transitional practices of a county's rural elementary school districts and their receiving independent school district.

Summary

The transition to high school received little attention from educational researchers before the 1980's, possibly because it was not viewed as a problem for either students or

schools (Schiller, 1999). Theoretical models that attempt to account for students' adaptations to high school typically do not consider concurrent changes in the students' relationships with their peers, family, and neighborhood during the transition to ninth grade (Eccles, Lord, & Buchanan, 1996; Simons & Blyth, 1987).

Psychologists point to this period in the life cycle, which encompasses puberty, value formation, and social-group identification, as well as marked shifts in learning as a critical stage in human development (Ausubel & Ausubel, 1966; Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Cohen & Frank, 1975; Dusek, 1987; Hill, 1980; Lipsitz, 1984). Focusing on schools that serve students in this age range, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989, pp. 12-13) argued that such schools, “ have the potential to make a tremendous impact on the development of their students—for better or for worse—yet they have been largely ignored in the recent surge of educational reform.”

Worthington Kilbourne High School's freshman transition program is based on the idea that all learners are capable of success, and that their success is in large part based on how welcome they feel entering their new school (Lindsay, 1998). By adopting some additional transition strategies, educators will find their ninth graders more productive and, ultimately, more successful (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999). According to Mac Iver (1990), a high school transition program includes a variety of activities that (1) provide students and parents information about the new school, (2) provide students with social support during the transition, and (3) bring middle and high school personnel together to learn about one another's curriculum and requirements.

Underlying successful high school transition programs are activities that bring middle school and high school administrators, counselors, and teachers together to learn

about the programs, courses, curriculum, and requirements, of their respective schools (Hertzog et al., 1996; Vars, 1998). When parents are involved in their student's transition to high school, they tend to stay involved in their child's school experiences (Mac Iver, 1990); and when parents are involved in their child's high school experiences, students have higher achievement (Linver & Silverberg, 1997; Paulson, 1994), are better adjusted (Hartos & Power, 1997), and are less likely to drop out of school (Horn & West, 1992).

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Through the theoretical lens of perpetuation theory this study examined the transition of students from a rural county's elementary school districts to an independent school district. This sociological theory of racial segregation, originally developed by Braddock (1980), and expanded by McPartland and Braddock (1981), states that segregation tends to repeat itself "across the stages of the life cycle and across institutions

when individuals have not had sustained experiences in desegregated settings earlier in life”(p. 149). Braddock (1980) derived this theory by focusing on the tendency of black Americans to perpetuate racial segregation. Wells and Crain expanded Braddock’s perpetuation theory by including the concept of network analysis: that being, “segregation is perpetuated across generations because minorities lack access to informal networks that provide information about, and entrance to, desegregated institutions and employment” (p. 533). In conjunction with perpetuation theory, they incorporate Granovetter’s (1973) work, which analyzes “strong ties,” as well as, the strong impact of “weak ties.” Wells and Crain (1994) draw from Granovetter’s (1973) work, which shows the strong impact of weak ties or less formal interpersonal networks – that is, acquaintances or friends of friends – on the diffusion of influence, information, and mobility opportunities. They are avenues through which information and mobility opportunities are obtained. Weak ties play a critical role, because according to Granovetter (1986), they are a bridge to social cliques different from our own.

CHAPTER III

Methodology of Research

This qualitative study is about eighth grade students transitioning from nine relatively small rural elementary school districts to a K-12 independent school district. The independent school district has four elementary schools, one junior high school with grades 7-9, and one high school. Thus, the rural elementary school district students attend three different schools in two school districts in three years: eighth grade in a rural elementary school district, ninth grade at the junior high in the independent school district, and tenth grade in the high school of the independent school district.

For the purpose of this study, pseudonyms will be used for the county, city, school districts, state, staff, and students in order for each to remain anonymous. In addition, this section defines and establishes the qualitative method of study, the population studied, and the methods of data collection.

Qualitative Method of Study

Qualitative research is a form of inquiry that explores phenomena in their natural settings and uses multiple methods to interpret, understand, explain and bring meaning to them (Anderson, 1998). It involves the studied use and collection of a variety of

empirical materials—case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts—that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In qualitative research, the researcher is the principal data collection instrument (Anderson, 1998). This study looked at the concept of students transitioning from a PK-8 rural elementary school district to a K-12 independent school district. The qualitative methodology used for the study was the case study.

Case Study Research

A case study is a holistic research method that uses multiple sources of evidence to analyze or evaluate a specific phenomenon or instance. The most elaborate definition of case study comes from Yin (1994), an experimental psychologist. His two part technical definition reads as follows:

“A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. The case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis” (p. 13).

The case study method is a process and requires the following: selecting a type of case study; establishing boundaries for the case; the knowledge and ability to collect data skillfully from multiple sources; the capacity to interpret, synthesize and recast information during data collection, and; expertise to triangulate multiple sources of information and place the findings into a context, supported by theoretical knowledge, which will enhance understanding (Anderson, 1998). Most case study research is interpretive and seeks to bring to life a case. Generally speaking, case studies are a useful way to systematically look at a specific case, collect data, analyze and interpret findings within their context and report results. The emphasis is on understanding and no value stance is assumed (Anderson, 1998). Case study is concerned with how things happen and why.

Location of the Study

The study involved a single case study and focused on the transition of eighth grade students in rural elementary school districts to the ninth grade of an independent school district. The districts involved in the study were from one county located in a south central mid-western state. The county encompasses nine rural elementary school districts and three independent school districts. One difference of the three independent school districts is that two are K-12 and one is a K-11. The K-11 district was a rural elementary school district until three years ago when it decided to add the four grades of high school and become an independent school district by the start of the 2004-05 school year. Since the majority of the eighth grade students in seven of the nine rural elementary

school districts choose to attend the largest of the independent school districts, the focus was on these seven districts. The rural elementary students choose to attend the independent school district for reasons that include living close to the independent school district, attending because friends or family attended or currently attend more academic or extracurricular options to choose from and the independent school was the choice of the parent. For the purpose of this study, the seven rural elementary school districts are named School A, B, C, D, E, F, and G. The independent school district's junior high is called Central City Junior High.

Data Collection and Sources

The study was qualitative in nature with interviews, observations, and a study of documents to create triangulation. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants in the study. "Purposive sampling is governed by emerging insights about what is relevant to the study and purposively seeks both the typical and the divergent data that these insights suggest" (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993, p. 33).

Institutional Review Board

I was required to provide to the university a framework of the proposed study and its purpose. Information required by the Institutional Review Board (Appendix B) was the subjects involved, steps for confidentiality, benefits of the study, the parental consent

form, the counselor consent form, the student assent form, and a copy of the protocol questions used to interview the counselors and students.

Interviews

The long interview method was the primary source used for collecting data. The “main purpose of an interview is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective; to obtain a special kind of information, and to find out what is going on in someone else’s mind” (Merriam, 1988, p. 72). Interviews were conducted with counselors and administrators at each of the seven rural elementary school districts and a counselor at Central City Junior High to determine the types of transition practices being used. A set of pre-determined questions was created to collect the thoughts and perspectives of each counselor and administrator (Appendix A). A pre-ethnography was conducted to help determine the questions to be used. This included interviewing counselors at a junior high site other than Central City that had to contend with the transition of ninth grade students to the tenth grade at a high school site.

For the study, I attempted to interview one male and one female ninth grade student who attended each of the seven rural elementary school districts to determine their thoughts and feelings about the transition practices used in preparing them to enter Central City Junior High. The counselors at Central City were asked to randomly select these students, who they considered to be mature, astute and of average academic ability. Each student interview was conducted in a private room at Central City Junior High. To prepare for these interviews, a set of pre-determined questions was created through a pre-

ethnography designed to collect the thoughts and perspectives of each student. One male and one female eighth grade student at a junior high in another district that transitions the students to the tenth grade at a high school site were interviewed. The interview questions for both the counselors and students were derived from the literature that focuses on middle level transition practices (Weldy, 1991; Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990) and a descriptive study on rural elementary school districts conducted by a state university (McBee & So, 1995).

Parents were not interviewed because the study specifically focused on the transition implementation practices used at both the rural elementary schools district and Central City's school district. The researcher focused on the thoughts and feelings of the students since they went through the transition and the thoughts and feelings of the counselors since they were responsible for the implementation of the transition practices.

The Central City Junior High administration and counselors agreed to help facilitate the selection of the students to be interviewed as well as assist in gaining parental permission for the students to participate in the study. The researcher provided the consent form for the parent's signature, allowing the student to participate in the study. Before being interviewed, the students were asked to sign a student assent form and the counselors signed an interview consent form.

Observations

An observation was conducted at each rural elementary school district site and at Central City Junior High to determine the type of climate and culture the students left and

entered respectively. I was a complete observer, meaning I entered the setting and remained physically detached from the activities with little or no social interactions (Anderson, 1998). Observations were conducted near the end of the spring semester and on average lasted around two hours. The observations allowed the researcher some perspective on the references made by the students during the interview process about their former rural elementary school district.

Reporting

“Many a researcher would like to tell the whole story but of course cannot; the whole story exceeds anyone’s knowing, and anyone’s telling” (Stake, 1996, p. 240). The choice about what to include, and of equal importance, what not to include is a major decision. A great deal of multiple source evidence must be organized, reduced, and only the most salient, descriptive examples reported. The content of the report and the presentation format will depend largely on the purpose of the study and the intended audience (Anderson, 1998).

Many critics of the case study method argue that it lacks reliability and that another researcher might come to a differing conclusion. In defense of this charge, good case studies create a database, which incorporates multiple data sources, and go beyond a single questionnaire or set of interviews. Triangulation was used to interpret findings, test alternative ideas, identify negative cases and point the analysis towards a clear conclusion based on the evidence collected. Findings based on conclusions suggested by different data sources are far stronger than those suggested by one alone (Anderson, 1998).

Triangulation for this study was conducted by using the same interview questions for both the students and the counselors. The series of questions allowed the researcher to validate and compare information provided by both populations. Observations were conducted at each site to better understand the responses made by each student and staff member that was interviewed. Additionally, the counselor at Central City shared the scheduled dates on his calendar that the rural elementary students toured or planned to tour during the spring semester as well as the date of the open house. The rural elementary staff shared their tour dates and information about the math placement exam that was conducted by Central City Junior High.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to study the transition practices of one county's rural elementary school districts and their receiving independent school district. For the purpose of the study, 11 ninth grade students and seven rural elementary and independent school district staff members were interviewed. They responded to questions that were derived from researched literature and a descriptive study about rural elementary school districts that was conducted at a university in the same state. Observations were also conducted to better understand the culture and environment of each district.

The districts involved in the study were from one county located in a south central mid-western state. This section defined and established the qualitative method of study, the population studied, and the methods of data collection.

CHAPTER IV

Presentation of the Data

This chapter describes the thoughts, feelings, impressions, comments, and observations about the transition implementation practices used by the seven rural elementary school districts and Central City Junior High in one rural county of a south central mid-western state. Information presented was collected through interviews with students who transitioned from rural elementary school districts to Central City Junior High. Other information was collected through interviews with the rural elementary school district staff and a Central City Junior High counselor. Additional information is presented based on observations that were conducted at both the rural elementary and independent school district sites. Descriptive data of the county, communities, and schools are provided.

Demographic and Descriptive Data

The following section provides a description of Cook County, Bay City, and Central City School District. Also, the Community Grouping Model will be explained as it relates to the study. And, descriptive information about the communities of the seven rural elementary school districts and the districts themselves will be provided.

Cook County

Cook County is located in the lake county in the middle-eastern part of the state. The county is well known for its rich heritage in Native American culture. It is also an area considered to be one of the more scenic parts of the state because of an abundance of lakes, rivers, and hills.

The county is considered a low socio-economic area with a median household income of \$26,536 (state median is \$33,400) and an unemployment rate of 8.2 percent (state rate is 3.3) (Frontier Department of Commerce, 2003). The county population is 45,822 with 57 percent classified as white, 37 percent as Native American, and 6 percent as other. The median age of the county citizens is 32 years (Frontier Department of Commerce, 2003).

Bay City

Bay City, located in Cook County, has a population of 14,458 (2000 Census). Approximately 34 percent of the population of Cook County resides in Bay City. The city is neither in nor near a Metropolitan Statistical Area, and is 1.5 hours away from the nearest metropolitan area. Much of the cultural and educational history of Bay City is directly related to its strong Native American population.

Located in the beautiful hill country in the eastern part of the state, Bay City has recently become one of the fastest growing communities in the state. Where the city lies is one of its more attractive features as well as being the host of a large regional

university. The city maintains a small-town atmosphere and has been recognized in the publication “The Best Small Towns in America” (Bay City Chamber of Commerce, 2003).

Community Grouping Model

The great diversity in the state’s communities, and the school districts that serve them, causes difficulty in contrasting district educational effectiveness. One way to make meaningful comparisons is to break up the communities into peer groups. In this way, the educational effectiveness of a school district serving its community can be compared to the educational effectiveness of districts serving similar communities.

The State Office of Accountability uses a “Community Grouping Model” that employs a district’s Average Daily Membership (ADM) and the percentage of students who are eligible to participate in the federally funded Free and Reduced Lunch Program to compare districts. The Free and Reduced Lunch Program, based on the income of the student’s parents, serves as a good measure of poverty within a district. The larger the percentage of students eligible for the program, the more impoverished the district’s community.

The model breaks the state’s 541 school districts into district communities which are categorized with a letter designation of A through H based upon district ADM (Table 1) and a numeric designation of 1 or 2 based upon the percentage of students eligible to participate in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program (Table 2). District communities with eligibility percentages above the state average (higher poverty) are given the designation

of 2 while the remaining districts are given the designation of 1. For example, if a district has a code of H1, that district has less than a 250 ADM (H) and is below the state average in students who are eligible to participate in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program (1). This combination of letters and numbers provides 16 community group designations, A1 through H2 (Frontier Office of Accountability, 2003). The Community Grouping Model will add to the descriptive data that will assist in painting a picture for each district.

Table 1

Size of District

Designation	ADM
A	25,000+
B	10,000-24,999
C	5,000-9,999
D	2,000-4,999
E	1,000-1,999
F	500-999
G	250-499
H	Less than 250

Table 2

Socioeconomics

<p>Percentage of students eligible to participate in the federally funded Free and Reduced Payment Lunch Program</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Below the state average = 1</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Above the state average = 2</p>
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Demographic Data and Parental Involvement

An important aspect of demographic information to consider pertaining to school transition is ethnicity and poverty rate. Regarding parental involvement, the value of parental participation in children's schooling has long been recognized by educators and researchers alike (Horn & West, 1992). The correlation between socioeconomic status (SES), parental involvement, and successful student transition needs to be considered in this study.

The interaction of key family background characteristics, notably SES, must be taken into consideration when examining the impact of parental involvement on student behavior and cognitive outcomes (Horn & West, 1992). Some researchers argue that parental involvement can be a powerful mitigator of the effects of low socioeconomic status (Clark, 1983). Despite the analytic complexities and varying definitions of parental involvement, research strongly supports its positive effect on student achievement (Hess & Holloway, 1984).

The ethnic demographics of this study revealed that Native Americans are the majority population in each rural elementary school district with an average of 72 percent. In addition, the poverty rate of the rural elementary schools is an average 20.5 percent. This information was not specifically discussed during the interview or observation process, but should be noted as a factor in student transition.

Descriptive Data

The following sections will describe the independent school district, the junior high, and the elementary school districts that are part of the study. At the beginning of each section, a general description of the school as well as school demographic information is provided. The latter part of each section describes the observations conducted by the researcher.

Central City Public Schools

Central City School District has a total of seven instructional sites: four elementary schools, one junior high school, one high school, and one alternative school. The district has a total student population of 3,731 with 65 percent of the students qualifying for the Free and Reduced Lunch Program (Frontier Office of Accountability, 2003). The state average of students qualifying for the Free and Reduced Lunch Program is 52 percent. According to the Community Grouping Model, it is a D2 district.

The ethnic makeup of the district is 57 percent Native American, 33 percent Caucasian, 7 percent Hispanic, 2 percent African American, and 1 percent other. Central City Schools has a poverty rate of 29 percent (state average of 15 percent) and an unemployment rate of 12 percent (state average of 5 percent). There is an average household income of \$32,451 (state average of \$44,370). The percentage of single parent families is 37 percent (state average of 29 percent). There are 209 regular classroom

teachers with 42.5 percent holding advanced degrees. The teacher student ratio for the district is 17.8 percent (Frontier Office of Accountability, 2003).

Its community, as evidenced by the passing of a \$2.4 million bond issue in 1997 and a \$4.8 million bond passed in 1999 by an 86 percent voter approval, supports Central City Schools. The community also supports a strong public school foundation for scholarships by raising \$15,000 annually (Bay City Chamber of Commerce, 2003).

Academically, the high school produced 12 National Merit Semi-Finalists between the years 1990 and 1999 with 12 Academic All-State students from 1985 to 1999. The school district is also the home of six National Board Certified Teachers.

Regarding student transportation, the district runs 23 bus routes for junior high and high school students covering 600 square miles each day. These routes cover all communities in Cook County including those containing rural elementary school districts.

Central City Junior High

Central City Junior High offers grades seven through nine with an ADM of 852 students. The ethnic make-up of the school is 59 percent Native American, 34 percent Caucasian, 5 percent Hispanic, and 2 percent African American. Sixty-four percent qualify for the Free and Reduced Lunch Program. The school has 38 full-time regular classroom teachers with 39.5 percent of those having an advanced degree (masters or above). Their average years of experience is 13. The student to teacher ratio is 22.4. The poverty rate for the district is 29 percent (Frontier Office of Accountability).

Central City's seventh and eighth grade class schedules equate to most of the rural elementary school schedules and there is a seven period day. Two exceptions are School C, which runs on a block schedule and School D, which runs on an eight period day. The Central City ninth grade operates on a block schedule, which means there are four 85-minute class periods instead of the more traditional seven period day. During the 2003-04 school year, 82 rural elementary school students transitioned into the ninth grade. This number is typical of most years. The influx requires the need for additional teaching staff in compared to the seventh and eighth grades.

The Central City staff consists of one principal, two assistant principals, two counselors, and 59 faculty members. A number of extracurricular activities are offered, including basketball, football, golf, softball, baseball, soccer, track, wrestling, cheerleading, pom squad, tennis, band, and choir. Students also have opportunities to participate in clubs such as student council, honor society, spirit club, and Indian heritage club.

Concerning transportation and academics, Central City Public Schools provides bussing to all communities containing rural elementary school districts and their surrounding areas. Academically, the school fell below the state standard in the eighth grade core curriculum test areas of math, history/government, geography, and the arts. They did meet the standard in science, reading, and writing. The seventh and ninth grade classes are not required to take these tests.

Observations of Central City Junior High

An observation was conducted to better understand comments and descriptions made by the students during the interview process. I observed the campus both during class hours and at breaks. Central City is a crowded facility when students are not in class. Movement of the students from classroom to classroom occurred with no incidents observed. Much ethnic diversity was evident with good interaction between the various ethnic groups. Students did group together, whether it was all females or all males or other groups such as athletes who were identifiable by carrying athletic type equipment. Each classroom teacher stood in the hallway to assist with supervising the students during breaks. The site administrators were visible in the hallways during breaks as well. During class hours, there was very little student movement and the movement that did occur were students going to either the administration or counseling offices. I spent most of my time near the counseling office and witnessed a few students coming in either getting their medication or visiting with a counselor about personal issues. During lunch most of the students chose to eat in the cafeteria, but some ate from the vending machines and sat outside. The school facility was very clean both inside and out as were the grounds outside.

Rural Elementary School Districts

Cook County contains nine rural elementary school districts. During telephone interviews with the counselor and/or administrator in each district, the researcher learned

that students at seven of the nine rural elementary school districts generally transferred and were encouraged to transfer to Central City Junior High. One of the two rural elementary districts not sending their students to Central City Junior High is a little over 20 miles away. The district is located on the opposite side of Cook County and nearer to another independent school district. The other rural elementary district is located near the third independent school district in Cook County and the majority of those eighth grade students transfer to that independent school district. The researcher narrowed the focus of the study to the seven schools that send and encourage their students to attend Central City Junior High.

The following section provides descriptive data and observations of each rural elementary school district. Observations of these schools provide a form of triangulation and assist with validating comments given by the students during the interview process pertaining to their experiences. The reader will notice that schools A and B offered grades K-8 grades while schools C through G offered PK-8 grades. In all schools, Native Americans were the majority. Caucasians made up a third to half as many as Native Americans. There were a few Hispanics, almost no Asians, and no African Americans.

School A

School A, with K-8 grades, had an average daily membership (ADM) of 141 students during the 2002-2003 school year. The ratio of regular classroom teachers to students was 1 to 12 with 15.5 years average experience for regular classroom teachers (state average of 12.8). The number of regular classroom teachers was 11.9 with 33.7

percent of those having advanced degrees (state average is 29). The ethnic makeup of the school was 65 percent Native American, 30 percent Caucasian, 4 percent Hispanic, and 1 percent Asian. Students who were eligible for the Free and Reduced Lunch Program were 65.1 percent as compared to the state average of 52.4 percent. According to the Community Grouping Model, it is an H2 district (Tables 1 & 2).

Community demographics consist of a district population of 1,025, a poverty rate of 18 percent, an unemployment rate of 5 percent, and a single parent family rate of 17 percent (Frontier Office of Accountability, 2003). The school is located 20 miles from Central City Junior High.

Observations of School A

School A consists of a block building and a newer pre-fabricated section that was added about 12 years ago. I observed both during class hours and breaks. Some of the time was spent in the administrative office, which is the only office on campus. While in the office, three male students came in to ask the secretary some questions. It was evident by the conversation that there is a good relationship with the students and staff. The secretary addressed all three by their name and was joking with them as the students joked back to her as she answered their questions. The secretary mentioned how close the staff is to the students more than once during the interview. A young female came in after the males left to get checked into school after arriving late. Again, the secretary addressed the student by her name, this time expressing concern for the student because she had not been feeling well. After spending time in the office, I walked the campus alone since the

office could not be left unattended. The superintendent had a family emergency arise and was trying to take care of some items before leaving campus. The secretary commented that it should not take too long to tour. The back door of the office went directly into the gymnasium. I began my tour in that direction, immediately noticing the athletic banners and pictures of athletes on the wall. As I walked into the concession area of the facility, there was an entire wall filled with athletic plaques for both basketball and track honors. I left the gymnasium and walked a short distance to a concrete block building that contains the library and lower grade level classrooms. I entered the library from the back door to find a very clean and well-kept room. I spoke with the librarian and she expressed great pride in the room and explained how things were organized. When I exited the library out the front door, it brought me to the front of the concrete building, which has a covered walkway from end to end. One of the teachers had her students outside on the walkway and was conducting class. The students were sitting in their chairs and working on a project as the teacher provided instruction. It was a beautiful day and pleasant scene to witness. As I made my way back to the office, a teacher had some of the older students assisting her with unloading tables and chairs for a Native American celebration that would include all the students on campus. This celebration was to happen during lunch, which I was not able to attend. The campus was well manicured, and it was observed that pride exists by whomever is responsible for those duties.

School B

School B's K-8 grades ADM was 370 students during the 2002-03 school year. The ratio of regular classroom teachers to students was 1 to 14 with an average of 11.8 years of experience for regular classroom teachers. There were 26 regular classroom teachers with 30.7 percent holding advanced degrees. The ethnic makeup of School B was 63 percent Native American, 34 percent Caucasian, 2 percent Hispanic, and 1 percent Asian. Students who were eligible for the Free and Reduced Lunch Program were 83.7 percent as compared to the state average of 52.4 percent. According to the Community Grouping Model, it is a G2 district. Community demographics consist of a district population of 3,775, a poverty rate of 28 percent, an unemployment rate of 8 percent, and a single parent family rate of 28 percent (Frontier Office of Accountability, 2003).

Observations of School B

School B is four miles from Cook City making it the closest rural elementary school district to Central City Junior High. I observed during class hours and during breaks. A female staff member that works with special needs students and fills the role of school counselor took me on a tour of the campus. We started in the main building of the school, which was very old, but in good condition. We moved to the newer pre-fabricated addition of the facility, which almost looks out- of- place compared to the main building. It was nice and the staff member expressed much appreciation for the facility. Our next

stop was the gymnasium, which was a pre-fabricated building as well. We observed a basketball class for a few minutes. There were 10 to 12 students and it was evident that the coach was in control of the group. School B is proud of its basketball gym and other athletic facilities. With each observation, it becomes more apparent how important athletics are to these rural elementary schools. We made our way back to the main building going through the kitchen and cafeteria area. This area revealed how dated the facility was with its small size and old equipment. Upon leaving the cafeteria, we visited a computer classroom and I met the teacher. All the students were on task and the classroom was quiet. Evidence seemed to show that this was a structured campus and my tour guide confirmed this. She mentioned that she thinks they are so structured it may actually hinder the students as they transition to Central City Junior High. With the students having more independence at Central City, she felt it takes their students time to adapt to that independence in becoming more independent thinkers. I did not see the administration during the tour nor did I see students in the hallways other than break.

School C

School C, an elementary school district that offered early childhood through eighth grade education with an ADM of 91.5 students during the 2002-03 school year, had a regular classroom teacher student ratio of 1 to 10. The number of regular classroom teachers was nine and they averaged 9.9 years of experience with 16.4 percent holding advanced degrees. The ethnic makeup of the district was 65 percent Native American, 33 percent Caucasian, and 2 percent Hispanic. Students eligible for the Free and Reduced

Lunch Program was 89.7 percent as compared to the state average of 52.4 percent. According to the Community Grouping Model, it is an H2 district. Community demographics consist of a district population of 720, a poverty rate of 24 percent, an unemployment rate of 8 percent, and a single parent family rate of 24 percent (Frontier Office of Accountability, 2003).

Observations of School C

School C is the smallest district in the county. The facility is an old Works Progress Administration building that was recently remodeled and upgraded. The technology of the site was impressive with the ability of distance learning. This is the ability to satellite feed a class from one school to another. The superintendent, who also fills the role of principal and counselor, is very proud of what has been accomplished with the limited resources over the past few years. Through a strong connection with the local Native American tribe, a fitness facility was developed inside one of the site buildings and is available at no cost to the community. Also, the tribe provided additional funding to assist with a Native American language immersion program. Everywhere on campus the language was spoken and the equipment, doors, windows and other items were labeled stating how the items are spelled in the language. The language immersion program has provided the school with national recognition as a school trying to keep vibrant the local Native American language. When I visited one of the classrooms, the children greeted me in their Native American language. The objective of the class is to only speak using the language that was being taught. The school received a grant to assist

with maintaining the local cemetery adjoining the school site. This project is to provide an avenue of creating community development skills within the students. No basketball facility existed, but the students do participate in track and field meets. With a small number of students per classroom, it was very quiet while taking a tour of the facility. In each classroom, the students were on task and would speak when spoken to. The superintendent expressed great concern for the students who transition to Central City Junior High because they are such a small school. She mentioned how she encourages the students to attend Central City due to her believing it is better than another independent district that is located a short distance away. School C is located 15 miles from Central City Junior High.

School D

School D consisted of early childhood through eighth grades with an ADM of 563 students during the 2002-03 school year. The 41.8 regular classroom teachers averaged 9.1 years teaching experience with 14.3 percent holding advanced degrees. The student teacher ratio was 1 to 14. The ethnic makeup of the district was 73 percent Native American, 18 percent Caucasian, and 9 percent Hispanic. Students eligible for the Free and Reduced lunch program was 93 percent compared to the state average of 52.4 percent. According to the Community Grouping Model, it is an F2 district. Community demographics consisted of a district population of 5,100, a poverty rate of 17 percent, an unemployment rate of 4 percent, and a single-parent rate of 28 percent (Frontier Office of Accountability, 2003).

Observations of School D

School D had both old and new facilities with the newer facilities housing the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programs and the cafeteria. An old basketball gym and a baseball field were near to the main building, which had a number of additions over the years. I did not spend much time at the front office, which is where I received my visitors badge and was given permission by the secretary to take a tour, but rather spent most of my time observing the campus. There were a number of students unsupervised in various parts of the campus. One female student, who looked like a second grade level student, was playing with a dog that was running free on the grounds as she was making her way from a portable building to the main building. Others similar in age followed the same path stopping and playing with whatever they could find on the ground as they made their way from one building to the next. The buildings were close enough to have covered walkways, but there were no adults checking to see if the students were coming or going. While students in the In-School Suspension Program (ISS) went from one building to another, they wore very large, orange tee shirts with the letters ISS in big, black letters on the front of the shirts. These students were marched in single file with the ISS instructor following behind. Later, while visiting with a first grade teacher as she lined up the students returning from recess, I observed her dealing aggressively with the students. After she asked the students to be quiet while they stood in line, one of them began talking with another. The teacher reminded the student that he had already received one paddling that day and, if he did not listen to her, he would receive another. As the teacher resumed the discussion with the researcher, a number of the students began talking, and

this time the teacher ordered all of the students to “shut-up” or they would stand in line all day. As the discussion continued, the teacher repeatedly used the term “shut-up” as a means of attempting to get the students to be quiet. I visited a computer classroom and spent time talking with the teacher. When I told her about my study, she expressed concern for the difficult transition for their students when they begin attending Central City Junior High. The superintendent, who is the only administrator at the district, was off campus at a meeting. The school does have a counselor, but she was not on campus either.

The observation revealed a perception that supervision is lax, with pockets of students unsupervised on campus, especially when they move from building to building. One teacher seemed punitive in her disciplinary methods, but this approach was not observed with other teachers. The students and teachers were cordial when spoken to and seemed to be comfortable with the environment. Students were on task in classrooms observed. School D is located 10 miles from Central City Junior High.

School E

School E was a rural elementary school district that offered early childhood through eighth grade education and had an ADM of 251 students during the 2002-03 school year. There were 13.4 regular classroom teachers with a student teacher ratio of 1 to 18.7. The regular classroom teachers averaged 12.1 years of experience with 33 percent holding an advanced degree. The ethnic makeup of the district was 88 percent Native American and 12 percent Caucasian. The percent of students eligible for the Free

and Reduced Lunch Program was 78.5 as compared to the state average of 52.4. According to the Community Grouping Model, it is a G2 district. Community demographics consisted of a district population of 1,495, a poverty rate of 18 percent, an unemployment rate of 6 percent, and a single parent family rate of 24 percent (Frontier Office of Accountability, 2003).

Observations of School E

School E was located in a wooded area, which created a pleasant setting for a school. The counselor at the school offered to give me a tour of the campus. While touring, he described his great concern for the transition of students from his school to Central City. He believed their school prepared the students by the time they completed the eighth grade, but he also thought there has been little to make the transition a smooth one. As we were leaving the main office, the site of his office and the superintendent's, he pointed out pictures of students who had been all-state athletes and valedictorians at Central City. Just outside the door of the office sits the trophy case, containing pictures and accomplishments of former School E students. The facility was an older pre-fabricated facility, but in good condition. The counselor took me outside to look at the playground areas, located in a slightly wooded area at the edge of a densely wooded area. It was a pretty setting for students to play. I observed no students who had isolated themselves from the group. All students were either playing in small or large groups. There was a closeness or family type atmosphere evident as the students left the playground and returned to class. We continued to another building housing the upper

level grades and the counselor's classroom. He wears many hats including teacher, school psychologist, and principal, if needed. As we continued the tour, he showed me the baseball field and took me to the gymnasium and cafeteria, both areas were clean and in good condition. The grounds were very clean, and he said those who worked at the school put a strong emphasis on students assisting in keeping the grounds clean. School E was located 16 miles from Central City Junior High.

School F

School F was an elementary school district that offered early childhood through eighth grade education with an ADM of 301.3 students during the 2002-03 school year. The number of regular classroom teachers was 22.4 with a student teacher ratio 1 to 13.2. The average years of experience for regular classroom teachers was 12.9 with 42.3 percent holding an advanced degree. The ethnic makeup of the district was 77 percent Native American and 23 percent Caucasian. Students eligible for the Free and Reduced Lunch Program was 84.3 percent as compared to the state average of 52.4 percent. According to the Community Grouping Model, it is a G2 district. Community demographics consisted of a district population of 1,405, a poverty rate of 22 percent, an unemployment rate of 9 percent, and a single parent family rate of 33 percent (Frontier Office of Accountability, 2003).

Observations of School F

School F was located 23 miles from Central City Junior High in an isolated rural and scenic setting. The counselor who participated in the interview gave me a tour of the campus. She acts as the counselor and the art teacher. The campus has three buildings with classrooms that are located one behind the other. We were in the third building from the front of the campus. This is where the counselor has her office. When we began the tour, the students were on break. There seventh and eighth grade students were very loud and boisterous. A male teacher came out of his classroom and asked a group of male students to keep the noise down. As the students were making their way to class, we exited that building to visit another. The second building was attached to the gymnasium. The school had a quality gymnasium containing a fully equipped fitness facility available free to the public, a nice way of getting the community on the campus. The concession area of the building revealed the importance of athletics at the school. There were many trophies and plaques displayed in this area. We made our way to the front building where the lower grade levels are assigned and visited the newly built cafeteria. It was impressive and something she was very proud to discuss. The superintendent was the only administrator on campus and I witnessed him moving about campus a few times during our tour. The students I observed in class were usually on task. They had a new computer lab that was impressive. During our tour, there were very few students in the hallways and I had very little interaction with any students. The interior of the facilities was not kept as clean as most of the other districts I had observed, but I observed the grounds to be clean and well kept.

School G

School G was an elementary school district that offered early childhood through eighth grade education with an ADM of 524 students during the 2002-03 school year. There were 29.5 regular classroom teachers with a teacher to student ratio of 1 to 17.7. The average years of experience for regular classroom teachers was 10.5 years with 25.4 percent holding advanced degrees. The ethnic makeup of the district was 71 percent Native American, 27 percent Caucasian, and 2 percent Hispanic. Students eligible for the Free and Reduced Lunch Program were 83.1 percent as compared to the state average of 52.4 percent. According to the Community Grouping Model, it is an F2 district. Community demographics consist of a district population of 1,315, a poverty rate of 17 percent, an unemployment rate of 7 percent, and a single parent family rate of 22 percent (Frontier Office of Accountability, 2003).

Observations of School G

School G had the nicest facilities of the seven rural elementary school districts. The campus consisted of three classroom buildings, a cafeteria, and a gymnasium. I reported to the principal's office and, since he was having a busy day, he allowed me to tour the campus alone. Since my arrival to the district was during lunch, my first visit was to the cafeteria. It was an older, metal pre-fabricated building, but in good condition. The kindergarten classes were eating when I entered and each teacher was with her respective class. It was noisy and entertaining at the same time as I observed the students eating

their lunch. Each teacher seemed to provide constant reinforcement to the students as a means of being positive in correcting their manners at the table. I exited the cafeteria with the last group of students and followed them to the playground. Some of the older students were already on the playground. As the students played, I spoke with one of the teachers about the transition that took place to Central City with their eighth grade students. She felt that it has always been a difficult process for the students and said she was unaware of any practices that were being done to assist with the problem. Another teacher joined our conversation and agreed with her colleague. I then went into a classroom building that also contained the office of the principal and counselor. As I went through the facility, I stopped to observe a classroom from the doorway. All students were on task as the teacher worked at her desk. There were no students in the hallways. I walked through each classroom building on campus with similar observations. As I toured, I saw the principal once, but did not see the superintendent. The school counselor had been on medical leave for much of the year. I ended my tour at the principal's office for an interview. As I waited, he had four students in his office. When he allowed me to enter, he was still dealing with multiple issues, but was generous enough to spend time with me. The superintendent stopped by his office soon after my arrival. He introduced himself and said "research should be done in a conversation out in the pasture after five o'clock." I could tell he did not approve of the principal spending time with me and it was evident the principal was annoyed with the superintendent's statement.

The districts, older brick buildings, were in excellent condition and uniform in design and color. They had a nice gymnasium and nice baseball field. It was evident that

athletics was a prominent part of the school culture. The learning environment seemed to be structured and professional. The students moved about comfortably during lunch and recess while traveling throughout the campus. School G is very proud of their athletic ties to other rural elementary school districts and how they have become a more competitive school in recent years. The district is located nine miles from Central City Junior High.

Illustration and Explanation of Student and Community Demographics

Table 3 illustrates student and community demographics of each rural elementary school district in the study. It includes Grades (GR), Average Daily Membership (ADM), Teacher Student Ratio (T/S), Average Years of Teaching Experience (AYE), Percentage of Teachers with Advanced Degrees (AD), Percentage of Students that Qualify for the Free and Reduced Lunch Program (F&R), Poverty Rate of the District (PR), and where each school district falls on the Community Grouping Model (CGM). The last two schools in the table are Central City Junior High (CCJH) and Central City School District (CCSD).

Table 4 shows the percentages of student ethnicity for each rural elementary school district. Ethnic categories include Native American (NA), Caucasian (CA), Hispanic (HP), Asian, and African American (AA). The state average (SAvg) is listed in the table on the last line.

Table 3

School and Community Demographics

School	GR	ADM	T/S (Ratio)	AYE	AD (Percent)	F&R (Percent)	PR (Percent)	CGM
A	K-8	141	1:12	15.5	33.7	65.1	18	H2
B	K-8	370	1:14	11.8	30.7	83	28	G2
C	PK-8	91	1:10	9.9	16.4	89.7	24	H2
D	PK-8	563	1:13	9.1	14.3	93	17	F2
E	PK-8	251	1:18	12.1	33	78.5	18	G2
F	PK-8	301	1:13	12.9	42.3	84.3	22	G2
G	PK-8	524	1:17	10.5	25.4	83.1	17	F2
CCJH	7-9	852	1:22	13	39.5	64	29	D2
CCSD	PK-12	3,731	1:18	12.9	42.5	65	29	D2

Table 4

Student Ethnicity Percentage Composition

School	Native American.	Caucasian	Hispanic	Asian	African American
A	65	30	4	1	0
B	63	34	2	1	0
C	65	33	2	0	0
D	73	18	9	0	0
E	88	12	0	0	0
F	77	23	0	0	0
G	71	27	2	0	0
CCJH	60	33	5	0	2
CCSD	57	34	7	0	2
SAvg	18	62	7	2	11

Viewing the demographics of Table 3, a higher teacher/student ratio existed at Central City Junior High than all of the rural elementary school districts. School C has the lowest ratio at 1:10 with School A at 1:12. This is in comparison to the 1:22 ratio at

Central City. An assumption would be that the larger class size the rural elementary students must contend with upon their arrival to Central City adds to the difficult process of transition. Looking at the average years of experience for regular classroom teachers, School C and D are both under 10 years as compared to an average of 13 years at Central City Junior High. Additionally, both Schools C and D have the lowest percentage of teachers with advanced degrees. School C is at 16 percent and School D at 14 percent as compared to 40 percent at Central City. Both schools also have the highest percentage of students on the Free and Reduced Lunch Program with School C at 90 and School D at 93, but School A at 65.1 is the only school comparable to the junior high's 64. One item to note with this information is that School D has the highest percentage of students on the Free and Reduced Lunch Program, but along with School G, has the lowest community poverty rate at 17 percent. It would be assumed that the lower the poverty rate in an area would mean a lower number of students on free and reduced lunches. The poverty rate of Schools D and G are well below the 29 percent at Central City.

Interpreting Table 4, all rural elementary schools are similar in their ethnic makeup. School D has the highest percentage of Hispanics with Schools A and B possessing the only representation of the Asian population. There was no representation of African Americans in any of the rural elementary schools, meaning that when students transition to Central City they attend classes for the first time with this minority population. It is evident that the minority population of Native Americans was the majority in all rural elementary schools and Central City. The state average of 18 percent is opposite to that of each school in the county. School E contains the highest number of Native Americans with 88 percent.

Transitioned Students of Central City Junior High

Interviews were conducted with ninth grade students who had attended one of the seven rural elementary school districts included in the study. The interview consisted of 19 questions and was conducted on two consecutive days during the first week of May (Appendix A). By conducting the interviews near the end of the school year, the students had an opportunity to develop a more complete perspective about the first year and the process of transitioning from a rural elementary school district to an independent school district.

Anderman and Midgley (1996) reported significant changes in adolescent adjustment following middle school transition. Both boys and girls showed an increase in psychological distress with girls being significantly higher. “Girls showed more psychological distress, as assessed by physical symptoms associated with stress, than did boys. This finding suggests greater vulnerability among girls during transition (p.97).”

The goal of the researcher was to interview 14 students, one male and one female student who had attended each rural elementary school district the prior school year. The Central City Junior High counseling staff determined that School C had no students currently enrolled and that School A had only male students currently enrolled. School C had one student enroll at Central City to begin the school year, but the student left in December to enroll at an independent school district that was closer to his former school. The counselors were unable to solicit another male student from School A and there were no females enrolled from that school to participate in the study. In addition, School E had one male student and multiple female students, but the male student chose not to

participate so two female students participated. The total number of students interviewed was 11 with six females and five males participating. Of the students who participated, five attended the same rural elementary school district their entire career while six were more transient and attended multiple rural elementary districts as well as elementary schools in larger K-12 districts before attending Central City Junior High.

It should be noted that the participants in the study referred to the rural elementary school districts as “country schools” and Central City School District as the “city school.” The participants were as follows: Student 8 (male) was from School A and the only student participating from that school, Students 10 (male) and 11 (female) were from School B, School C had no students currently enrolled at Central City Junior High from the previous school year, Students 1 (female) and 7 (male) were from School D, Students 3 (female) and 4 (female) were from School E, Students 2 (female) and 9 (male) were from School F, and Students 5 (male) and 6 (female) were from School G. Table 5 illustrates the number of male and female participants from each district.

Table 5

Number of male and female students in study		
School	Male	Female
A	1	0
B	1	1
C	0	0
D	1	1
E	0	2
F	1	1
G	1	1

The following descriptions provide general information about each student who participated in the study.

Student 1 had attended more than one of the county rural elementary school districts before completing her eighth grade requirements at School D. She lived in the northern section of Bay City and chose to attend the Central City district because the school was close to her home and there are more options in the Central City district than the other independent school districts she could have attended.

Student 2 went to School F from head start to second grade, moved with her family about 25 miles away and attended an elementary school in a larger independent school district, then moved back and attended School F from sixth through the eighth grade. Upon completing School F, she chose to attend the Central City district because they had the “stuff” she wanted, which consisted primarily of a choir program.

Student 3 attended School E her entire rural elementary career. Her mother took her to Central City Junior High in the mornings and she rode the bus home, about a 30-minute ride. She chose to attend the Central City district for multiple reasons. Her mother worked in Bay City, she had a brother who attended the Central City district upon his completion of School E, and she had friends coming to the district. Student 3 stated that she had connections, which helped to influence her decision.

Student 4 also attended School E. Like Student 3, she attended School E her entire K-8 career. Her mother was a teacher at School E, which would explain why she stayed in the same district. She lived near Bay City, which is one of the primary reasons she chose to attend the Central City district upon completing the eighth grade. In addition, she had friends who were going to the Central City district.

Student 5 attended School G for one year prior to transitioning to the Central City district. From Mexico, he was the only English As a Second Language (ESL) student who participated in the study. Student 5 attended the Central City district because he had a brother who had attended the district. In addition, Central City Junior High had an interpreter on staff, who rotated through most of his classes with him.

Student 6 attended School G, School B, and School D during her rural elementary career. She completed her eighth grade year at School G. Since she lived near Central City Junior High, she chose to attend that school. In addition, when School G took the eighth grade students on a tour of Central City Junior High, she thought, “the teachers were nice.”

Student 7 spent his entire rural elementary career at School D. He had lived in School D’s community his whole life and rode the bus to and from Central City Junior High. He said it was about a 30-minute bus ride one-way. The reason Student 7 chose to attend Central City Junior High was because that is where his parents chose to send him.

Student 8 went to School B through grades K-5 and completed his K-8 career at School A. He lived five miles north of Bay City, toward the direction of School A’s location. His response was not unlike Student 7 as to why he chose to attend the Central City district instead of other independent school districts; it was his parents’ decision. Another reason was that he knew students who were already at Central City Junior High, which he felt helped with his transition to the school.

Student 9 attended School F his entire K-8 career with the exception of a brief stint at Central City Junior High at the start of his eighth grade school year. The size of the junior high and the large number of students were too overwhelming so he chose to

return to School F until the completion of his eighth grade year. He lived in the community of School F and rode the bus to and from Central City Junior High. He said, “The bus ride coming to school takes two hours, which requires me to get up at 5:00 a.m. and the ride home takes one and a half hours.” Student 9 chose to attend Central City Junior High because he had siblings who attended prior to him as well as the school has a choir program. He likes being a part of a district that is large and well known even though it was a difficult transition for him to make. This student was very eager to provide information during the interview, and he provided many interesting statements.

Student 10 attended School B from grades K-3, then, due to his family moving, attended an elementary school in the Central City district his fourth grade year. He then returned to School B and finished his K-8 education. He said he liked School B better than the elementary school in the Central City district. Student 10 chose to attend Central City Junior High because he lived near the school.

Student 11 went to School B her entire K-8 career. She lived just south of Bay City, which is one reason she chose to attend the Central City district. The other reason was due to her interest in playing softball and wanting to play for a school she felt had a quality program.

Describing the School Districts

When the students were asked to describe the rural elementary school district they had previously attended, eight of the students echoed the notion they enjoyed the small school setting. Five of the students said that, “everyone knew everyone,” which was

comforting to them. Other comments were that it was a good school, it was easy to make friends, teachers helped the students, and there were no fights or trouble. Student 10 said the class schedule at his elementary school was boring because it was the same classes all year long. He liked the variety of the trimester schedule of Central City Junior High.

When asked to describe Central City Junior High, there were various responses. Five of the students mentioned how big the school was and how there were so many people. Students 2, 10, and 11 mentioned how many classes there were to choose from and the faster pace of the trimester schedule. Students 1 and 10 liked having more activities to choose from such as athletics and choir. Other comments ranged from everything is harder, the teachers seem to be the same as at the rural elementary school, nervous on the first day, it's okay but I prefer the rural elementary setting, there are a lot of fights, the teachers are harder, it is more stressful, there are no free lunches (according to some of the students, the rural elementary schools provided totally free lunches for those who qualified), and it is too crowded.

Rumors and Concerns about Central City Junior High

The students told of various things they had heard during their eighth grade year about Central City Junior High. Students 1, 4, 7, 9, and 11 mentioned either siblings or friends who had attended the junior high in previous years. Each of the five felt that knowing someone prior to attending the junior high helped them know a little more about the school they would be attending. Student 1 had heard the school was a good school and that it was fun. She states, "I had cousins who came here and they told me some

things about the school.” Students 4 and 9 had also heard that the junior high was a good school. Student 4 said, “I knew some student before coming to Central City. This helped in coming here. I had some friends from School E.” Student 7 said he heard that Central City was stricter than the rural elementary school he had attended, but he did not find that to be true. He had also heard that it was a much harder school and he felt that was true. Student 11 was told that there were a lot of fights in the halls, which he said was true.

Additional comments by those who did not mention receiving feedback from siblings or friends were that you could get lost in the halls, the trimester schedule was hard to get used to, the agriculture education class was fun, the school had vending machines, there were more food items to choose from in the cafeteria, there was a lot of trouble on the bus, hard to get around in the building, a lot of fights, and the school had good football.

The concerns, to an extent, varied from the rumors the students had heard before starting classes at the junior high. A number of concerns were mentioned, but the concerns varied from student to student with no common theme. Concerns were that it would be hard to get around the school, there would be all new people, harder classes resulting in lower grades (mentioned by 3 students), the trimester schedule, classes now count towards graduation, it would be a bigger school with a larger number of students (mentioned by 3 students), just different, no concerns, wondered what it would be like, harder to get one-to-one instruction, not fitting in, not many friends, and living too far away to participate in activities after school. Student 6 said, “I thought I would always be getting into trouble because I knew some people who didn’t like me, but everything has been okay.”

Extracurricular Participation

The students were asked to name those extracurricular activities in which they participated at the rural elementary school district and during their first year at Central City Junior High. The activities students participated in at the rural elementary districts were 4-H, basketball, softball, volleyball, track, football, baseball, choir, and cheer. Each student interviewed participated in at least one of the activities listed for 100 percent participation. The extracurricular activities that students participated in during their first year at Central City Junior High were basketball, track, choir, junior ROTC, baseball and softball. Of the 11 students who interviewed, six participated in one of the activities. Students 3 and 6 said they might participate next year when they know more people. Student 7 stated he might play athletics next year, but wants to be more comfortable in the school system. Student 10 said he did not know why he did not participate this school year, but wishes he would have played. He would have liked to come to Central City Junior High in the seventh grade, but his mother was worried about the environment of the school. When asked what he meant by this statement, he said his mom “worried about things that moms worry about.” Student 5 did not participate because he had no transportation home after school.

Academic and Social Preparation

Students were asked how prepared academically and socially they were coming from the rural elementary school districts. Seven of the 11 students felt they were

prepared academically upon entering Central City Junior High. Student 1 said she was an “A” student at School D and she is an “A” student at the junior high. Students 2 and 6 said the core classes were especially helpful in their academic preparation for the junior high. Student 7 did not feel the classes at School D helped prepare him academically for the junior high and he has struggled in his ninth grade academics. Student 9 said some of the classes helped and some did not. He stated that English was easier at School F and is much harder at the junior high. Student 10 felt the classes at the junior high are easier, which he attributes to the academic preparation received at School B.

As far as social preparation is concerned, 9 of the 11 students felt they were adequately prepared upon their arrival at Central City Junior High. The reason most of them felt good in this area was due to having a social “tie” or connection. Students 1, 2, 10, and 11 had friends or cousins already attending Central City when they arrived. Students 1 and 10 had played athletics against many of the students, which is what helped them in making a social connection. Student 10 said, “knowing some of the students before coming helped.” Student 3 said she was scared at first, but knew she had to do it. Students 4, 5, 6, and 8 felt “okay” about their social transition with no major issues. Student 7 said it was hard to “integrate and fit it” and mentioned the friends that came with him from School D felt the same way. He went on to say that the Central City students were accepting of him and his friends. Student 9 said it was really hard when he first arrived and he was “blown away” about how many people were at the school. He said it was very overwhelming and never thought there would be so many kids at one school. Student 9 said he then got to know some people and it opened up some doors for him socially. He stated that it has taken him one school year to adapt. He attended the

junior high as an eighth grader, but went back to School F because it was so overwhelming.

Transition Implementation Practices by the Rural Elementary School Districts

The students were asked about the types of activities, events, or programs that were provided by the rural elementary school district to assist them with transitioning to Central City Junior High. All 11 students mentioned taking a tour of the junior high during the latter part of their eighth grade spring semester. The rural elementary district bussed the students to the junior high, split the students up in small groups, and tried to assign a ninth grade student who had attended the same rural elementary school the year before as the tour guide. During the tour, the students attended class and, in most cases, ate lunch at the junior high before boarding the bus to leave. Each student interviewed agreed, to a certain extent, that they felt like the tour helped them to make the transition the following school year. Student 2 said it helped her to know where to go in the building. Student 3 said it showed her the number of students who attended and to see how a day went. Student 4 said it helped her know where the classes would be. Student 6 would like to have stayed the entire day in order to get more familiar with the surroundings. Student 7 said it helped a little. Student 9 wanted more time to talk with the teachers instead of just being shown around. The other students stated that it helped.

Another effort to assist with transition mentioned by the students was the help of the rural elementary staff (counselor, principal, or secretary) putting together paper work that was needed by the junior high. The paperwork consisted of transfer papers, student

demographic information forms, and transcript information. Five of the students mentioned this was helpful to them. Students 1 and 9 mentioned their rural elementary teachers telling them general information on how different things would be at the junior high.

Transition Implementation Practices by Central City Junior High

The students were asked what types of activities, events, or programs that Central City Junior High provided to assist with making their transition easier. Students 1 and 9 stated that, nothing more than the tour was provided. Student 6 said a guy came to help with enrollment forms, which she felt was helpful. Students 8 and 9 said they could not remember any activities or events that were offered. Student 7 said someone from Central City Junior High came to tell the students about the junior high, but he was not sure whom the person was. Student 10 said the junior high had an “Open House” at the end of spring semester for parents and students, but he did not attend. Students 6, 8, and 11 said the junior high held a dance in the spring semester and invited the “country schools” eighth grade students to attend as a means of interacting with the junior high students. Student 6 and 8 said they did not attend the dance. Student 11 attended the dance and said the experience was “okay,” but she did not consider it helpful to her transition. No other students made a reference about the dance. The other 5 students said nothing was offered from the junior high to assist them with their transition.

Problems or Issues Encountered After Transition

The students were asked about the problems or issues they had encountered since being at the junior high. Every student, but one, stated having no major problems since their arrival. Student 9 was the exception to the group and mentioned that the amount of homework has been difficult for him. He added, “No one taught me how to do an essay or showed me how to write.” In addition, the amount of outside reading that is required in his English class has been a challenge. He said at School F that any or all reading was done within the classroom. This was an area academically that has caused him some problems.

The only other comment was made from Student 1 who said she prefers the trimester schedule in lieu of the eight period schedule she had at School D.

Adapting to the Junior High

The students were asked how well they had adapted and become integrated into the junior high. Every student stated that they believed they had adapted well, but two students were specific that it took them longer to feel that way. Student 6 said, “It took me two months to adapt, but then it started feeling like my regular school.” Student 9 said he feels he has adapted well, but that it has taken a full school year. He once again mentioned that it has been an overwhelming experience for him due to the size and the number of students at the school. Student 9 has a strong interest in choir and has learned how to read music, but says he is behind the other students who were already here. He

considers this one of the disadvantages of moving from a “country school” to Central City. Student 1 said she adapted well due to having friends at the school upon her arrival.

Recommended Improvements for Rural Elementary Transition

After providing questions that gained responses about their experiences with transition, the students were asked what should be done differently to get rural elementary students ready for making the transition to the junior high. Six of the 11 students responded by saying they could not think of anything, that it was okay, or they were not sure. Student 1 was one of the six. She said, “I don’t know what else could be done to prepare someone for that.” The other 5 students did have suggestions for improvement. Student 2 said that more Central City people should visit the rural elementary schools to provide them with information and that the tour should last longer. Student 6 said students should be provided a map of the junior high to help find the classes. Student 7 was like Student 2 in that she recommended that more people from Central City visit her former school since the staff at School D did not tell her much about the junior high. Student 8 said the junior high has a Gear Up Program and he wished School A would have had one since it prepares you for college. Student 9 suggested that School F offer a class to eighth grade students near the end of the year that focused on growing up and provided more information about what to expect at Central City Junior High. He continued by saying the junior high was “not sunshine and candy” and that you have to keep up your grades, do essays, understand the heartbreak of dating, and understand it takes time to fit in. High school students typically have more

assignments, and there are more distractions due to the increasing complexity of peer relations (Newman et al., 2000). Student 10 wished he had transferred to Central City at the start of his seventh grade year for the purpose of entering the athletics program. He feels he would have a better chance to playing this year if the coaches knew him. He stated that, “You have to work a lot harder if you move in and start playing as a ninth grader.” Student 10 participated in basketball and track during the school year.

In addition to being asked about recommended improvements to the transition process, the students were asked to provide one or two things they would like to have been told before attending Central City Junior High. Four of the 11 students responded that they did not know, could not think of anything, or were not sure. The rest of the students had various responses. Student 2 would like to have had a better description of the classes, especially the elective classes. She also would like to have known more about all the responsibilities like the folders that must be kept in class. Student 3 would like to have known what took place during lunch and the different daily class schedule. She said the trimester schedule was a difficult adjustment because it was so different than the schedule at School E. Student 6 would like to have been told how many people were in the school and how many people would be in her grade and classes. She mentioned her classes were really full and if she would have known this information this would have helped her prepare mentally. Student 7 would like to have been told “overall” what the junior high would be like. General information like the size of the classes, the class schedule, and the number of activities and organizations offered to students. Student 8 wished it were easier and smaller. He stated, “You go from 10 students in class to many.” Student 9 said there should have been more emphasis made to students at School F about

the importance of grades because of how easy it is to get behind and how hard it is to pull your grades up. Student 9 also suggested that students take the classes you are interested in taking. He was not aware that students were required to take a fine arts class. Student 11 would like to have known that the teachers at the junior high do not seem to take as much time to help students as they did at School B. Even though she understands there are more students, it is different and it has been hard to adjust.

Overall Preparedness in Making the Transition

The students were asked on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being very well prepared, how prepared overall were they to make the transition to Central City Junior High. The breakdown of responses are as follows: Student 4 said 10, Student 1 said 9, Students 3, 5, and 10 said 8, Students 2, 6, 8, and 11 said 7, Student 9 said 3, and Student 7 said 2. Some of the students elaborated on their choice of numbers. Student 1 felt good. Student 10 felt okay. Student 2 had attended a school district of similar size to that of Central City and she believed that may have helped her understanding of what the junior high would be like before attending. Student 7 did not feel good about his preparation overall. Student 9 did not know about ISS and how you need folders for the classes. He added that his brothers, who had previously attended the school, did not say much other than to have fun and do well.

Level of Comfort about Attending the First Day

The students were asked on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being extremely comfortable, how comfortable did they feel on the first day of school? The breakdown of responses are as follows: Students 2 and 5 said 8, Student 4 said 7, Students 1, 8, and 11 said 6, Students 3 and 7 said 5, Students 9 and 10 said 4, and Students 6 said 3. The majority of the students had additional comments. Student 1 was very nervous, but felt it was a pretty easy transition. Student 2 felt okay. Student 3 felt nervous, but got better after one week. She stated that, "The teachers are different at Central City Junior High. The teachers knew me at School E, but they don't know me here and I'm not used to that." She liked the small size of School E. Student 4 was a little nervous from being new. Student 5 was okay. Student 6 didn't know too many people when she arrived. She preferred a smaller school with smaller crowds primarily because she had always lived in the country and away from people. Student 7 said the teachers do not know you as well as at School D. Student 8 said he was shy on the first day and only knew a few people, but that he does like the junior high a lot. Student 9 is usually comfortable because people are people, but not the large number of people at the junior high. Student 10 was nervous the first day. He is not sure if anything can help prepare a student for the first day. Student 10 was also worried about the transition to the high school next school year. If he had a choice between staying at a smaller school or a larger school, he would choose the smaller school, if they had football. Student 11 was a little nervous on the first day and it took her one semester to feel good. She is a little scared about moving to the high school next year and that the junior high has done nothing this year to help with the transition.

Rural Elementary and Independent School Staff Perspectives
Concerning Student Transition

To gain a perspective, in addition to that of the students, concerning the transition of rural elementary school students to an independent school district, it was necessary to interview a staff member of each school district that was involved in the study. The interview was to help gain the thoughts and opinions of those who were involved in the process of transitioning the students to the independent school district. By conducting telephone interviews at the beginning of the study, the researcher learned that seven of the nine schools encouraged the students to attend the Central City School District upon completion of the eighth grade. In-person interviews were conducted with a staff member of each rural elementary school district and one counselor at the independent school district to gain their thoughts and opinions about the transition of students from rural elementary schools to the Central City School District.

Rural Elementary Administrative Staffs

The varying size of the rural elementary districts resulted in not every school having the same number and positions of administrative staff. From the 2003-04 State Directory of Education and conducting site observations, the following is known about the administrative staff of each rural elementary district in the study. An analysis of the student to administrative staff ratio was possible by using data from the 2002-03 ADM numbers from the Frontier Office of Accountability.

School A had a superintendent and no principal or site counselor. The school had an ADM of 141, which was the sixth largest number of students of the seven rural elementary districts in this study. School B had a superintendent, principal, and a person who assisted as a counselor, if needed. The school had an ADM of 370, the third largest number of students of the rural elementary school districts. School C had a superintendent with no principal or site counselor. The school's ADM of 91 was the smallest number of students of the rural elementary districts. School D had a superintendent, administrative assistant, and a counselor. Its ADM of 563 was the largest number of students of the rural elementary districts. School E had a superintendent, no principal, and a site counselor. The school's ADM of 251 was the fifth largest number of the rural elementary districts. School F had a superintendent, principal, and a site counselor. The school had an ADM of 301, which was the fourth largest number of the rural elementary districts. School G had a superintendent, principal, and a site counselor. The school had an ADM of 524, which was the second largest number of students in the rural elementary districts. Table 6 illustrates the number of superintendents, principals, and counselors in relation to the ADM at each rural elementary school district.

Table 6

Student to Administration Ratio

School	Supt.	Prin.	Counselor	ADM	Ratio
A	X			141	1:141
B	X	X		370	1:185
C	X			91	1:91
D	X		X	563	1:281
E	X		X	251	1:125
F	X	X	X	301	1:100
G	X	X	X	524	1:175

One of the researcher's goals was to interview the site counselor at each rural elementary school district and a counselor at the independent school district. In the three districts without a site counselor, the researcher interviewed the person determined to be most knowledgeable to respond to the interview questions. Those non-counselors interviewed were a superintendent, a secretary/registrar, and a principal.

The interview consisted of 17 questions and all questions were the same as the questions used with the students (Appendix A) with the exception of numbers 10 and 13. Question number 10 inquired about the perceptions of problems that the rural elementary staff members had heard from students after they had made the transition to the independent school district. This question is based on feedback the staff members may have received from students who had returned to visit the rural school. Question number 13 was asked as a curiosity question on the part of the researcher, but not a question that will provide relevant data to the study.

Rural Elementary Staff Participants

Those rural elementary staff members interviewed varied since not all were site counselors. Following is an identification and description of the person interviewed in each district. Their responses about their own districts and the perception of the Central City School District are included.

School A had a superintendent with no additional certified administrative staff. The participant interviewed acted as the secretary/registrar for the district. In this study, she will be referred to as Sally.

Sally had worked in her current position for seven years. The researcher was scheduled to interview the superintendent of the district, but the day of the interview he had a family emergency. He expressed his apologies and said, after previewing the interview questions; he thought Sally would be a better source of information since she specifically worked with the students during the transitioning process. Part of her role at School A was to handle the paperwork process of transferring student records to Central City Junior High. When Sally was asked to describe School A, she made reference to how “tight knit” the students were as well as the school in general. She said the school was out by itself and away from everything. When she was asked to describe Central City Junior High, she said it was a good school, but that it was such a shock to the students when they make the transition because of the larger size and the loss of the closeness the students are used to at School A. Sally mentioned that “everybody knows everybody” at School A and that each teacher knows the students individually. She said the situation is not the same at Central City Junior High and it is difficult for students to adapt.

School B had a superintendent and a principal. The school did not have a site counselor; it did receive the services of a person who worked for the county Native American Interlocal program. For the purpose of this study, I will call her Sara.

As part of a Native American Interlocal, Sara provided counseling services for special needs students in four of the county rural elementary school districts. She had worked at School B for six years, but worked at Central City Junior High earlier in her career for eight years. She chose to describe first her experience at the junior high. The superintendent obtained a grant that allowed Sara to work specifically with the rural elementary students who were transferring into the Central City district. When she was employed at Central City they created a positive experience with the rural elementary students who transitioned into the system. The teachers worked well with the students and tried to include them in all aspects of the school. She did not feel the same type of effort was currently being exercised by the Central City School District.

She mentioned how important the “social” aspect of transition was for the rural elementary students and how students needed a “hook” or “connection” to make the transition easier. Sara mentioned how important communication between the rural elementary school staff and Central City staff was as a means of gaining a better understanding about the students who have transitioned. When she worked in the Central City district, the superintendent made it a priority to encourage the staff to do what they could to make the transition easier for the rural elementary students. She said the administrative leadership makes a difference. Sara mentioned having cookouts at the junior high for the rural elementary students and making frequent visits to see the students during their eighth grade school year as examples of making a connection. When

asked to describe School B, she mentioned the slower pace the environment provided versus the faster pace at the junior high. She made reference to the smaller classes and environment at School B being a plus for the students. While taking a tour of the campus, she exhibited pride in what the school had to offer in athletics and academics. When asked to describe Central City Junior High, she said it was a good school, but that the district needed to do more to with the transitioning of the rural elementary students. Sara's name was mentioned by staff members at most of the rural elementary districts and she seemed to have the respect of those who mentioned her name for the efforts of working with the rural elementary students when she was in the Central City District.

School C had a superintendent who also acted as principal, counselor, bus driver and any other role necessary. She was the participant interviewed and will be known as Sandy.

Sandy had been the superintendent at School C for seven years. She took great pride in the improvements made during her tenure. School C was the smallest rural elementary district in the study with an ADM of 91 students. When asked to describe School C, Sandy said the enrollment at the school had fluctuated over the years with a high of 142 students and a low of 89. She said the district had a high mobility rate and a low socio-economic community. When she was hired, the academics were poor. As a means of trying to enhance the academics of the school, she incorporated a year-around school calendar. The philosophy was to eliminate students being away from school during the long summer. With a year-around schedule, the students got two six-week breaks instead of the whole summer. Sandy believed the schedule was working. In addition to a year-around school calendar, she had implemented a block schedule for

grades 5-8. Sandy felt the block schedule better prepared the students academically for when they arrived at the junior high and were subjected to its trimester schedule. Both the block schedule and the trimester schedule allowed for longer periods of learning. Sandy's philosophy was to simulate a setting at School C that would better prepare the students for the transition to the junior high.

When asked to describe Central City Junior High, she said there are things they could do better to assist with student transition. She did encourage the students and parents to attend Central City rather than other nearby independent school districts. Sandy felt overall that the Central City School District was a good one.

School D had a superintendent, an administrative assistant, and a fulltime counselor. The counselor was not available for an interview because she was on leave. School D's superintendent recommended the researcher visit with Sara (School B) because of her past experience helping rural elementary students with transition. School D was one of the county districts Sara works with in the Native American Interlocal. When asked to describe School D, Sara said the school had the largest ADM of the rural elementary districts. Also, they had the highest percentage (93) of students on the Free and Reduced Lunch Program. Sara feels that not enough is being done to help the students with transition. She said the only transition practice in place was the tour of Central City Junior High.

School E had a superintendent and a counselor. Sam, the counselor, was the participant for the interview. He grew up in this community and had been employed by the district for 19 years. Besides serving as the school counselor for the past 14 years, he was the school psychologist. When interviewing Sam, it was easy to detect his strong

passion for wanting to do what was best for the students. The topic of students transitioning to Central City showed he was truly concerned that the process was not good for students. He described School E as one of low socio-economic students with a high rate of them on the Free and Reduced Lunch Program. He said the average class size was around 25 students with one class per grade. When asked to describe Central City Junior High, he talked about the large number of students in the ninth grade due to the influx of students coming in from all of the rural elementary districts. He said that Central City ran a school bus to their community with the morning run around 6:00 and the evening run around 5:30 or later. Sam saw time on the bus as one of the problems of students leaving the community of School E to complete their public school education at Central City.

School F had a superintendent and a counselor. The counselor, Sonja, participated in the interview. Sonja had been employed at School F for 14 years. She had been the school counselor for 10 years. Also, she taught fine arts. When asked to describe School F, Sonja said they had a large percentage of Native American students. She said that it was a low-income area and that most of the students were on the Free and Reduced Lunch Program. Sonja mentioned the school was started in the 1950's and was a consolidation of many schools that once existed in the area. When asked to describe Central City Junior High, she said she had two children in the Central City School District and they had done well. She had been very pleased with the district both as a parent and a counselor.

School G had a superintendent, a principal, and a counselor. Because the counselor was absent on extended leave, the principal participated in the interview. He will be known as Sid.

Sid had been an employee at School G for 20 years. When asked to describe School G, he said it was a school with a high percentage of Native American students and a high percentage falling into the category of low socio-economic status. He felt like the school had a lot to offer students, including extracurricular activities. Sid was proud of the facilities and felt like they were some of the best school facilities in the county.

When asked to describe Central City Junior High, he said they did a good job. He said from a student's perspective, he felt they would not get a fair chance. Sid believed that it was difficult for them to make the academic or athletic teams even though they did have students who were good athletes. He concluded by saying his perception of the students was that they felt they were not accepted and were considered outsiders.

Central City Junior High

Central City Junior High had a principal, two assistant principals, and two counselors. One of the counselors participated in the study and will be known as Larry. The other counselor had been at the junior high less time than Larry, for a period of one and a half years. When asked to describe the junior high, he said at one time it had a bad reputation for student behavior and other issues. He felt this had been corrected with the current principal who was in the process of completing his first year at the site. The administration seemed to have developed a more positive focus within the school. When

asked to give his perspective on the rural elementary school districts, Larry said to keep in mind that he was still relatively new. He gave an individual description of each school.

Larry described School F as a great school that had good rapport with their students and involved parents. The students were prepared academically, but had a hard time adjusting to a larger school. Larry mentioned how the rural elementary students not only transitioned to the junior high, but they turned around in one year and transitioned to the high school. It had been mentioned to him that Central City was looking to put the ninth grade class with the high school, which would create only one transition period for the rural elementary students.

Larry said School G had a difficult school year. The school counselor went on leave for some reason and it left a void in their enrollment processes. They had difficulties getting their enrollment forms in for the coming school year. He said their students were scheduled to tour the junior high the day before, but had to cancel due to lack of staff to assist with the process.

According to Larry, School C currently did not have any students enrolled at the junior high. He did say that the school had strong leadership and that the students were encouraged by the administration to attend Central City.

Larry said School B students do well academically and come from a very structured environment. This environment of being “guided and led” at School B seemed to hinder the students’ ability to adapt to Central City’s structure of making decisions and being more self-sufficient.

When describing School E, Larry said the students seemed to take pride in the school. He thought athletics were a priority at the school and that they generally had

pretty good athletes. When the students left School E, most of them came to Central City, but some attended one of two other independent school districts. He had heard students mention throughout the school year how much they missed their former classmates. This seemed to bother School E students more than the other rural elementary district students.

Larry said the School D students seemed to stay within their own group more than the other rural elementary schools. The social skills of the students were lacking and they liked to intimidate the other non-School D students. The junior high had more behavior issues with School D students than any of the other rural elementary schools. Larry assumed it was because of the less structured environment of School D. School D students had a reputation with the Central City staff as not being very well prepared academically.

Larry did not have much to say about School A. This was the school he knew the least about. He got the impression they were more independent from the other county schools. Larry believed they are not very well respected, but did not elaborate as to why. He did not describe a typical School A student.

Why Students Attend Central City Junior High

The staff members were asked why the majority of rural elementary students chose to attend Central City Junior High since the students have multiple independent school district options. The responses from Schools A, B, and D were that those schools were in the Central City School District attendance area and Central City was where they must attend upon completion of the eighth grade. If the students chose to attend another

independent school district, they would have to request a transfer from the school they wished to attend. Other than the Central City School District, each rural elementary district in the study had no less than two additional independent school district options. The total number of independent school district options for the rural elementary schools, not including Central City, was eight.

Another response as to why students choose to attend Central City was that Central City school busses run to their respective communities. Sonja mentioned a school district in the county that was in the process of becoming an independent school district (they were currently a K-11 district, but will add grade twelve next school year) did not send a bus into the School F community, which is why students rarely attended that school. Sonja's perception on why that district was not trying to get the School F students was because the school did not want to increase its enrollment. It was a district that wanted to be an independent school district, but in the process did not want to outgrow the facilities or increase in class size.

School E's response was that Central City was where most of the students' parents attended school. The connection was comfortable to the parents and the parents felt they knew the system their child would be attending. School E said the students attended Central City because there were more class offerings and that most of the parents of School E students worked in Central City. The response from School C was that the Central City School District was where the administration encouraged the students to attend.

Larry felt the rural elementary students attended Central City because they had a good bus system, their friends were going to attend, and they had good athletic programs.

He added that the rural elementary schools did a lot in athletics and, since Central City competes well in athletics, the students wanted to attend.

Concerns about Students Making the Transition

When the staff members were asked about the concerns they had when students arrived at Central City Junior High, there were many. Staff members had their own sets of concerns with a few of the schools sharing some of the same concerns.

Sid's concerns for students going to the junior high were making friends, fitting in with a group, and students getting frustrated and dropping out. He did not have any hard data about the number of students who had dropped out at Central City, but he said there had been several. When asked how these issues could be addressed, he said this had been discussed at his school many times over the years. Sid's best suggestion was to encourage students to get involved in extracurricular activities. The more involved a student was the better because they were a part of something. Sid also mentioned that Central City should do more recruiting trips to the rural elementary schools as a means of informing and connecting to students.

Sonja said her biggest concerns were students that would not participate in school activities and would let other students run over them. When listening to Sonja, it was obvious she cared about what happened to the students when they left School F. As referenced by a former School F student who was interviewed for this study, he referred to her as a "caring mother." Another concern of Sonja was that students would fall behind academically because of the different class schedule and faster pace at Central City.

When asked how the concerns could be addressed, she did not have a solution for students entering a school with a large student population. She knew that School F students were not going to get the individual attention they had normally received. Sonja did not always encourage students to attend Central City because some of the students would not be able to adapt so she recommends that they attend one of the smaller independent school districts.

Sam listed the social aspect of going to a much larger school as his biggest concern. He said the social setting was in place by the Central City students and that the rural elementary students had to come in and find where they belong. Due to School E having the ability to provide more individual attention to students, Sam feared too many had a difficult time making the adjustment. He used the term “bonding” saying that bonding to teachers and students was a big obstacle. Coleman & Collinge (1991) call the students’ positive attitudes toward school bonding. These are times when it is most critical to bond students to the school level where they will spend the next few years (Odegaard & Heath, 1992). The students miss the individual attention and this unfortunately helps them fall through the cracks. Other concerns Sam had were the difficulty students in athletics had in trying to make the teams at Central City. They had to work much harder than the students who had been in the system. He was aware of former School E students getting discouraged because they were not given an equal opportunity to compete, causing them to quit. Sam said discouragement such as a student quitting a sport only added to the chance it would negatively affect their academics and further enhance their negative outcome toward being successful in school. The eighth grade students who were involved in athletics at School E were typically not made aware

of summer camps and activities such as two-a-day practices This missed opportunity made them feel left out or forgotten.

When Sam was asked how these concerns could be addressed, he said communication between Central City and the rural elementary districts could be improved. It would help everyone and opportunities would present themselves naturally. Sam mentioned how he once had a close relationship with the former administration at Central City. At that time, Central City had a grant that allowed a person to be highly communicative with all the rural elementary districts in the county. In addition to the person on the grant, Sam said the Central City people backed up what they said because they wanted the rural elementary students and wanted them to have a smooth transition. He said during that time the Central City staff had a plan.

Other ways he mentioned to address the concerns was to take the rural elementary students to Central City two or three times per school year. The more visits, the more comfortable the students would be upon their arrival to the ninth grade. Sam also said that the Central City counselors needed to visit the rural elementary districts more often. The students need to know someone when they arrive at the junior high. Additionally, Sam said it would help if Central City students would come and visit with the eighth grade students about school organizations and other opportunities that would engage them upon their arrival. This would be a way of facilitating better communication between the students at both school sites, which could help eliminate some of the division that exists for the “country school” versus the “city school” students.

Sandy said her biggest concern was that students would immediately “fall through the cracks.” She said that kids were generally carrying a lot of baggage socially and when

you add that with the stress of transition it made for a difficult time in their lives. Sandy added that she was concerned with the amount of time students spent on the bus each day. When asked how she would address the concerns of transition, she said Central City should assign someone to track the rural elementary students throughout the school year and meet with them weekly if it is noticed they were having issues. This would be one method of trying to prevent the students from falling through the cracks.

Sally had similar concerns to Sandy. She did not want the students to fall through the cracks when they transitioned to Central City. Sally felt the students at School A were spoiled with the individual attention they received. When the students arrived at Central City, the small class setting and the individual attention will come to an end. When asked how transitional concerns could be addressed, she said students needed to be involved in activities at the rural elementary schools. If they are involved in activities, it helps them interact and get to know the kids at the other rural elementary schools. If the students will continue to stay involved in activities at the junior high, it should give them a connection when they arrive. She stated numerous times during the interview how difficult the transition was for the School A students.

Sara, who worked with multiple rural elementary schools, said the students trying to adapt to a larger student population was always a concern. You can tell them about the size of the school to prepare them, but it is still difficult. The students need to get involved with a group of kids in order to gain a connection and feel accepted. An additional concern when she worked in the Central City district was the perception that the junior high teachers had a “college mentality” of teaching the students. She felt many of the teachers taught above the level of the students and felt it was not fair. When the

students arrive to the junior high and find some type of social acceptance it will be easier for them to adapt. The students needed to find a “hook” that would enable them to fit in and be successful.

When Sara was asked how transitional concerns could be addressed, she responded by saying how she tried to assist the rural elementary students with transition while working in the Central City district. Her approach was to contact every student from the rural elementary schools upon entering the junior high. She would meet with the students at four and nine weeks to see how they were doing and would counsel with those making D’s or F’s. She remembered that several of the rural elementary students had various discipline issues, but did not mention why.

Larry had several concerns about the rural elementary students during their transition to Central City. He thought the students had been encouraged to be frightened of coming to the junior high, which set up a negative feeling before they attend. He said many students were led to believe that the junior high was more difficult both socially and academically, which in his eyes was not totally true. Larry wished the rural elementary staff members would tell the students that there were caring adults at the junior high who were interested in their well being. An additional concern was how difficult the rural elementary student parents were to access in comparison to the Central City students. He mentioned how they rarely heard from the rural elementary parents and how hard it was to get accurate phone numbers and addresses, thus hurting the communication process. Larry would somehow like to honor the traditions of the rural elementary schools at the junior high. Whether it was hanging flags or banners in the school or providing an area to display some of the history of each rural elementary

school. He thought this would help the students feel more connected if they felt Central City was an extension of their former school.

Larry was asked about his ideas on how to address transitional concerns. He said Central City staff should visit the rural elementary schools as a way to get more connected. They should look at ways to better improve the touring process, whether it is with better information or more time. When addressing the lack of rural elementary parent contact, Larry said it would help if they had four or five ways in which to contact the parent.

Academic Preparation

The staff members were asked how well prepared the students were academically when they arrived at the junior high. The transition into the new academic environment of high school may have negative consequences for some adolescents (Newman et al, 2000). The responses reflect that six of the seven rural elementary schools felt the students were academically sound upon completing their curriculum.

Sid said the standards set forth by the State Department of Education required the rural elementary schools to better prepare the students for the next level. He thought School G students were more prepared than Central City students in some areas, but did not elaborate on which areas.

Sonja said the math placement test provided by Central City will be helpful for the students their first year. She said School F had high expectations and they would

sometimes get students who transferred into the school who had a difficult time with their curriculum.

Sam believes School E students worked hard academically during their time at the school. The staff stressed to them the need to be as prepared as possible before they transferred to another school. Sam mentioned how hard the school worked on reading and math skills at every level. He also talked about the student involvement in academic team competition. In addition, Sam said they have an academic alternative education program and with a small school there is more individual assistance.

“School C has the best possible curriculum and I would compare it to any urban school in the state,” was the response by Sandy. She felt strongly about the good instruction that was provided at her school. The teachers got to choose the subject they wanted to teach and they were “looping” with the students. Looping means they have the same students consecutive years, allowing them to “max out” instructional time with each student. Mizelle (1995) found that students who stayed together with the same teachers through sixth, seventh, and eighth grades and experienced more hands-on, life-related learning activities, integrated instruction, and cooperative learning groups were more successful in their transition to high school than were students from the same school who had a more traditional middle school experience. Sandy felt the year around school concept was also an academic advantage to the students.

Sally thought the instruction students received at School A was wonderful. She mentioned how the school had many students who did well when they attended Central City. Sally said her daughter went through School A, attended Central City district, and then attended Cornell University.

Since Sara was assisted with providing responses from not only School B, but School D as well she said the two schools were a little different when it came to academics. She said School B did a good job in preparing the students for the next level whereas the School D students were not as well prepared. Sara felt the lower achievement of academics at School D was due to the community culture and low economic status. She said that School B students always did well in academics.

Larry was asked how he would assess the academic preparation of students upon entering the junior high. He stated that his responses were based more on perception than hard data. His assessment follows: School G – about half the students were prepared; School C – he was not sure since they did not currently have any students from that school; School B – better than most of the rural elementary schools; School E – about 50 percent are prepared; School D – not as well as the other rural elementary schools; School A – not as well as other rural elementary schools; School F – about half are prepared.

Social Preparation

For some students, difficulties associated with the transition to high school are tied to feelings of alienation and the lack of social acceptance in the new school environment. Students who are successful in gaining social acceptance in a new school environment were found to have experienced a smoother transition into high school (Schmidt, 1993). When asked how well prepared the students were socially, the answers varied more than they did on the academic question.

Sid said every school has non-social students who do not do well at School G and will not do well at Central City Junior High. He mentioned how some are popular, well-known people on the rural elementary campus, but will not be at the junior high.

Sonja's response was similar to Sid's in that some of the students are outgoing, while some are not. Summer activities like softball and baseball help students meet other students as well as hangout places like the skating rink. She thinks there are more activities and events today than in the past to help students do more interacting before they come together at Central City.

Sam said the system of social interaction could use more help at both School E and Central City. He feels like there is some interaction with athletics, but thinks there needs to be more meaningful interaction. He would like to see more structured events of interaction for the purpose of assisting with social assimilation. The students who are good athletically at School E will "wash out" at Central City, which will lower their self-esteem thus having an affect on their social and academic behavior.

Sandy feels the students at School C are "way above" the students at Central City as well as the other rural elementary districts. She defends her statement by saying that School C is a big proponent of character education. This is a strategy used to assist eighth grade students to act as role models to all grade levels in the school. There are responsibilities placed upon the eighth grade students where they are required to interact and be leaders to the lower grades. Sandy feels the role model approach works and prepares the students for the next level.

Sally did not elaborate about the social preparedness of the students at School A, but she did say that they are as prepared as they can be.

Sara thinks the students at School B are well prepared socially due to activities like ROTC and drama. In addition, School B students adapt well socially because of the strict approach to behavior and discipline with few incidents. On the other hand, Sara feels the culture of the community and the low socioeconomic area contribute to low social skills of the students at School D. She pointed out that School D has a larger number of students with less administrative supervision (a superintendent) as compared to a lesser number of students with more administrative supervision (a superintendent and a principal at School B). Sara noted that School D usually has many students in alternative education and night school who do not make it to an independent school district because they do not see the importance of an education or the need for going to school.

Larry provides his responses about each rural elementary district based on how he sees the students interact with others as well as from a behavior standpoint. The following are his responses: School F – no problems stand out, seem to do okay socially; School G – 50-50, some do well, some seem to look for trouble; School C – no students to assess; School B – do well, the school is close enough to the junior high that they meet some of the students before attending; School E – struggle a little, lose friends in the transition due to friends going to another independent school district; School D – come ready to fight and seem to have difficulty with authority; School A – seem okay, but not sure.

Problems Observed After the Transition

The staff members were asked what problems they have observed with students over the years after they make the transition to Central City.

Sid said in the past that athletic coaches at Central City would not give the rural elementary students a fair chance to compete with the Central City students for team positions. He now feels the students at School G have a better opportunity to compete because School G has a better athletic program. School G moved the athletic programs from the school day to after school, which helps students and parents understand and adjust to what is expected at Central City.

Sonja said consistent feedback she receives from parents and students is that “Central City doesn’t seem to care for the students like they do at the rural elementary schools.” As far as adjusting to the transition, Sonja thinks most of the students find their niche and settle in after a short period of time.

Sam said he has had a few students that got discouraged and dropped out. He pointed out that due to the class structure of the Central City School District, the rural elementary students arrive to the district in ninth grade at the junior high building and the next year transition to the tenth grade at the high school building. Sam noted that School E has had highly successful students in all aspects at Central City. He proudly pointed out pictures of students on the wall of the school office and trophy case that have been successful at Central City.

Sandy did not mention any major problems with students of School C. She said it is difficult for the students because they are outsiders who are not a part of the Central

City School District or the community. Sandy said the system does not provide the caring environment that School C provides. An example of the significance of this issue is Worthington Kilbourne High School's freshmen transition program. It is based on the idea that all learners are capable of success, and that their success is in large part based on how welcome they feel entering their new school (Lindsay, 1998).

Sally's response was similar to Sandy's in that the students have grown up being in small groups and they lose the individual attention due to the larger number of students. She said, "It is just a different environment."

Sara said, "If the students don't get connected, the school will lose the student." "They must find a hook to keep them there." She said the School D students have a difficult time being a part of extracurricular activities because they have no after school transportation. Since the commute to the School D community is so far, they must ride the bus home at the end of the school day. Sara said this does not allow the student a chance to participate in activities such as drill team, cheerleading, pom squad, and athletics. This provides one less "hook" in making their transition smoother. She said School B does not contend with the same issue since they are only four miles away.

Larry had a different view on the question as compared to the rural elementary staff. He said "Central City seems to give up on rural elementary students before they give up on Central City students if it doesn't seem they are going to make it." He continued by saying, "It may stem from the lack of interaction or communication with the rural elementary parents as compared to the more frequent communication with the Central City parents." Larry provided an example by saying that the school lost three students that he knew who did not want to attend Central City Schools. He is not sure, as

a school, that they did everything possible to keep them in the system. This is speculation on his part, but he thinks this is what happened. He said, “The three students did not complete the school year and he’s not sure where they went.”

Transition Implementation Practices Used to Assist Students

The staff members were asked about the activities, events, or programs that are in place at both the rural elementary districts and Central City Junior High to assist students with the transition. The staff members were also asked if they feel the practices that are in place help prepare the students for the transition.

Sid said his school takes the students who enroll at Central City to tour the campus around the end of the spring semester. Central City will have former School G students conduct the tour and answer any curiosity questions. The tour consists of the rural elementary students following the student tour guide to their classes during the first half of the day, which gives the students an opportunity to see the class sizes, the pace of the classes, the number of students in the halls during break, and usually they stay and eat lunch in the cafeteria. From the standpoint of School G, the tour is the only event to assist students with transitioning to Central City Junior High. Sid said that Central City had counselors that came to the school and did a presentation about the junior high to the students. A counselor recently came to conduct a math placement test with the students. Sid believed this was a good idea and that he thought it was the first time it had ever been done. Central City had an open house in order for students to meet the staff and enroll for the fall semester. At this event, it is the responsibility of the parents to get the students to

the junior high. Sid was not sure how many students attended. The last event Sid mentioned was a basketball tournament hosted by Central City. Central City invited all the rural elementary districts as a way for students to see the facilities and be exposed to other rural elementary students

When asked if these activities helped prepare the students for the transition to the junior high, Sid said, “As well as can be expected, but I can’t think of anything more to help.” He continued, “I don’t think it helps a whole lot because they are still scared.” He said it takes time for the students to make friends. Sid thinks the students who play athletics have a head start on those who do not because they will know some of the other rural elementary students at the junior high, which creates a connection.

School F takes their students who plan to attend Central City to tour the campus, which is similar in format to that of School G. In addition, Sonja starts a folder on each student in January that includes all the paperwork that will be needed at Central City. This helps the parents, students, and staff at Central City. She also assists with the transfer paperwork that is required by the Central City School District.

As far as transition practices from Central City, she mentioned they had an open house/enrollment night for the parents and students. According to some of the students who attend, Sonja said the open house was a positive experience. She also mentioned the counselor who came and conducted a math placement test. Sonja feels this was a good idea and should assist in properly placing the students.

When asked if the activities and events she mentioned helped in preparing the students for the transition, she did not really know. She feels the students are ready for a change when they complete the eighth grade. The students have come back to her over

the years and say that “Central City does not care about us like you do,” but she tells them they do care they just have more students. She believes they are ready to make the move, but there will always be some that are not ready. In answering the question, she did say that the open house/enrollment night made the students who attended feel good with some of them saying they could not wait to attend the ninth grade. All the students who were planning to attend the Central City open house did with the exception of two.

Sam believes that School E provides “direct’ and “in-direct” services to the students when it comes to the discussion of transition. He said School E works hard at the beginning of the school year teaching the eighth grade students about graduation requirements, the OHLAP scholarship (a state funded scholarship program), and any other topics the students will encounter throughout high school. The staff tries to stress what to expect regarding teacher personalities, having a good work ethic, and getting assignments in on time. Sam classifies this type of information as direct services. He said in-direct services that students receive are when they participate in extracurricular activities. Sam said extracurricular activities such as athletics, the academic team, and 4-H forces the students to interact with students from other rural elementary schools. The students who are involved in these types of activities start building a social advantage over those who do not. Central City does little to interact with School E, but have done a few athletic scrimmages in the past. Central City will sometimes invite the School E students to attend a ball game at the junior high free of charge as well as invite them to a ninth grade dance. He was not sure how many students have participated in those activities. In addition to what has been mentioned, School E takes the students on a tour of the junior high as part of the transition process.

When addressing the transition practices provided by Central City, Sam mentioned a counselor conducting a math placement test and bringing out enrollment packets. The students went to Central City one evening to submit the enrollment packet information, which was the same evening as the open house. Sam feels the enrollment process is one that needs more consistency. He said Central City changes the process each year and the rural elementary schools are not made aware of the changes, which makes it difficult and confusing for the staff and students. Sam believes much of the transition process depends on the administration at the junior high or the superintendent position in the school district. He mentioned a program they had in the past that was funded by a grant where a counselor from Central City worked with all the rural elementary districts and visited the schools once per month. This helped the students know someone at the junior high when they made the transition.

Sam was asked how well the activities or programs helped prepare the students in transitioning to the junior high. He did not state one way or the other whether the transition practices were helpful. He once again stated that transition practices at Central City depend upon the priority it is given by the school administration. If there is a strong effort to make the transition smooth for students, there must be a plan for the process. Sam continued by saying that students who participate in activities have a smoother transition. The students will get to know some of the students from other rural elementary schools, which gives them more of a social connection. He said the non-participating students would have a difficult time in transition due to the lack of a social connection.

Sandy seemed confident in the activities her school provides in preparing students for making the transition to the junior high. She implemented a block schedule delivery

system in grades five through eight. With the junior high having a trimester schedule, she said this helps School C students adapt better academically. In addition to the schedule, the curriculum in the school is departmentalized, which means one teacher per subject. Once again, she feels the simulation of what the students will encounter at the junior high will better assist them academically. Sandy also takes the students on a tour of the junior high. Since she is all administrative positions wrapped into one, she drives the bus that takes them to the tour. Once they are at the school, she does her best to find the students a mentor or contact person. She wants the students to have someone they can turn to and talk with if they need help. It may be a counselor, an assistant principal, or the principal. Sandy stated that, "I take it personal that these are my children and I want them to be taken care of." Another practice she uses is to make sure the students have all the enrollment data and paperwork that will be needed at the junior high. When asked the transition practices used by the junior high, she said that a counselor brings out enrollment information. She mentioned they offered a night activity, but did not specify the type of activity. Sandy said the enrollment process was better this past year, but in the past the junior high was very strict about the paperwork and would turn students away if it were not done correctly. This was not only frustrating to the parents and students, but it created a poor first impression and did not make the students feel welcome.

When asked if the practices she mentioned prepared students for the transition, she said, "Central City has a lot of room for improvement." She mentioned how the enrollment process was not "user friendly." Sandy calls the Central City superintendent directly if there are problems. She said that Central City should want the rural elementary

students and has a difficult time understanding why more effort is not put forth to help transition the kids.

Sally said School A takes the students on a tour of the junior high as a method of helping students with transition. When asked what the junior high did to help with transition she mentioned a counselor conducting a math placement test and the open house/pre-enrollment night. When asked if these methods helped prepare the students with making the transition she was not sure they did, but said it probably helps some.

Since Sara works with Schools B and D, her response pertained to both schools. She said School B had taken a tour of the junior high, but was not sure if School D had taken their tour. Sara did not mention any other practices used by Schools B and D, but rather spoke of the things she did while working at the junior high to help students with transition. She mentioned cookouts the junior high had for the incoming rural elementary students and how she would bring out the enrollment packets and spend time with the students. During that period, the junior high and the rural elementary schools worked as a team and met to discuss enrollment. Sara did say the junior high made a visit to the classrooms at School B this year.

When asked if the practices used to help with transition prepares the students, she said more should have been done this year on the part of the rural elementary schools and the junior high. She said the junior high has a new principal this year and relatively new counselors, which has probably not helped matters. Things like ice cream socials and cookouts were effective methods of helping student transition. The parents liked it as well. It showed the parents and students that the junior high cared, but this has not been

done in a long time. Sara mentioned how students need to make a connection for a more successful transition.

Ideas for Improving Transition

Those interviewed were asked what should be done differently to assist students with the transition. Sid feels there needs to be more parental involvement during the transition process. He thinks it is the way society is in general with drug and alcohol issues, the Internet, and television.

Sonja would like to see more “peer shadowing” activities and find ways to make the “country kids” feel like they are part of the junior high. She mentioned at some point that Central City is planning to move the ninth grade to the high school building, which will eliminate the students transitioning two years in a row.

Sam said there needs to be more involvement and communication between the rural elementary schools and Central City. He added the communication needs to begin before the end of the school year. The past administration at Central City was on the right track by making it a priority to help rural elementary students with a smoother transition. Sam feels the rural elementary schools need to do their part and not wait on Central City to do all the work.

Sandy’s ideas were centered more around looking at student interaction concepts. She believes in the “school within a school” concept as a way of making a larger school smaller. The idea of “grouping” students of all ages assists with maturity, growth, and development. Sandy believes by practicing grouping at the rural elementary schools,

which is practiced at School C, before putting them together at the high school level will help with social adaptation. She feels Central City needs to configure their style and approach to instruction in order to better assist students from the rural elementary schools.

Sally would like to see Central City send more people to visit with the students. In the past, athletic coaches from Central City would visit and speak to the students as a way of helping them understand what to expect. She said this has not happened in a long time. Additionally, the students should shadow the junior high more than one day. One day helps, but the more time spent at the school before attending the better.

Sara did not provide much feedback on this question. She said the rural elementary schools and the junior high need to stay actively involved and that the process depends on the people.

Larry provided his perspective for the junior high. He believes one more visit from Central City to the rural elementary districts with the parents present would help in starting the relationship. Larry pointed out the difficulty rural elementary students have when trying to come in and play athletics. He said students would not participate at Central City because someone told them it would be hard to make the team. If students participated at the rural elementary school and do not participate at Central City, it hurts their grades and self-esteem. He wishes there was some way to include the rural elementary athletes earlier to provide them a fair chance of competing with the Central City athletes. Larry thinks an intramural program would be beneficial to provide those who competed at the rural elementary schools a chance to continue competing in another format. This concept might help the students get noticed by the athletic coaches. Larry

said the competition overall is tough, even in academics. If a student is the top speller at a rural elementary school, they may not be the top speller at Central City.

Information Students Need to Know

School staff was asked what the students needed to know before making the transition to a larger independent district school. Sid wants the students to know they need to be at school every day, follow the rules, and be involved in activities. Sonja wants the students to make the right academic choices and be in the appropriate classes for their academic level. She tells them they can be successful no matter where they go. Sam said the students should know what is expected in the educational process in conjunction with academic credits, transcripts, college entrance requirements and any other items that are pertinent for completing high school. He wants them to understand where the process leads. Sam tells the students that School E prepares them for Central City and that Central City prepares them for bigger things.

Additional perspectives were offered by the other schools' staffs. Sandy wants the students to know they can always call her and she will do what she can to help. She feels the students leave School C with a good plan of study that will help them through graduation. Sally does not want other students to pressure them into doing something they do not want to do. She hopes they keep their morals and stay focused. Sara responded with a list of items on behalf of both School B and D. She wants the students to know that Central City has a large number of students, to be disciplined when working

with different people, to be at school on time, get to class early, be responsible, and have some awareness of the trimester schedule.

Larry brought a different perspective on what he would like for the rural elementary students to know before coming to the junior high. He wants them to know that, “We are nice people, we will take care of them, and they don’t have to be scared.” From an academic standpoint Larry feels the rural elementary students need to have stronger math and reading skills. He said the rural elementary schools seem to be out of class a lot over the course of a school year because of athletics and “fun trips.” When the students miss class, it is hard for them to keep up academically.

How Well Prepared for the Transition

The final interview question asked the school staff on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being very well prepared, how well prepared the rural elementary students are upon entering the ninth grade. Sid ranked preparation at an 8. He feels overall that School G does a pretty good job. He added they are fourth in the county on the state exams. Sonja ranked her school at a 9. She feels if they have 15 students going to Central City 12 are going to be a 10 while 2 are not. Sam ranked his school at an 8. He feels they can prepare them academically, but there are some areas that students and parents must address. Sandy feels her school is at a 10. The administrators and counselors from the rural elementary schools and junior high need to focus on transition to improve the process for the sake of the students. She added, “I don’t really know the Central City counselors, but they need to do a better job of planning and communication.” She suggests that the

Central City counselors should assign the incoming rural elementary students to a specific counselor so they will have a connection and better guidance during the ninth grade year. Sally did not elaborate on this topic other than to rank School A as an 8 or 9.

When providing her ranking, Sara did not distinguish between School B and D. The ranking she provided was an 8. She said, “Most students are going to have a difficult time with transition no matter what you do.” Sara again emphasized that the students must find a way to be engaged in activities, to find a “hook”. Larry did not rank each school individually on this question; his ranking of all the rural elementary students coming to Central City was a 7.5.

CHAPTER V

Analysis of the Data

Several components might comprise the discussion about the plan for analyzing the data. The process of data analysis is eclectic; there is not a right way (Tesch, 1990). In qualitative analysis, several simultaneous activities engage the attention of the researcher: collecting information from the field, sorting the information into categories, formatting the information into a story or picture, and actually writing the qualitative text. These activities, especially for an experienced researcher, proceed simultaneously, though beginning researchers may want to treat them separately (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

The data presented in Chapter Four were analyzed through the lens of the Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools (CREMS: Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990) and supported by the National Middle School Association (NMSA, Mac Iver & Epstein, 1991). In addition, the data were analyzed using the theoretical framework of perpetuation theory (Braddock, 1980; McPartland & Braddock, 1981) and Network Analysis (Granovetter, 1973).

The interview questions, the basis for data collection and analysis, were designed from common themes in the literature pertaining to student transition and from a descriptive study conducted on rural elementary schools in the state of Frontier.

Additionally, the questions were designed to investigate the “ties” that existed for students to Central City Junior High.

Data were analyzed to provide information based on Granovetter’s (1973) theory of strong and weak ties. Strong ties are those, which have high emotional intensity and a mutual commitment to the continuation (time) of the relationship. These ties indicate a shared common knowledge (intimacy) and will ensure that the interaction is rewarding to both partners (reciprocity). Weak ties, on the other hand, lack these features. There would be low emotional intensity and commitment to the relationship and the individuals would lack a common knowledge base (Smith, 1999). The long interview process and site observations enabled the researcher to analyze the data to determine the strength of ties that rural county eighth grade students have with Central City Junior High School during their ninth grade year.

Transition Implementation

Transitions are both difficult and exciting as they mark points of risk and opportunity for student development. Some suggest that students have serious problems making multiple, simultaneous transitions (Simmons, Blyth, Van Cleave, and Bush, 1979).

Two common transitions in early adolescence come when children move from elementary to middle grades and from middle grades to high school. There are several purposes for articulation activities to ease transitions to and from the middle grades. They are: 1) to assure that children and families are better informed about the school programs,

requirements, procedures, opportunities, and about students' and parents' responsibilities at the new level of schools; 2) to assure that children are better prepared for the curricular and social demands at the new level of schooling; 3) to assure that middle grade educators are better informed of the connections between their programs and those of the elementary schools that their children come from, and those of the high schools that their students will attend; and to help elementary and high school educators understand their connections with the middle grades; and 4) to assure that middle grade educators are better prepared to help students adjust to and succeed in a new school environment (Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990).

Hertzog and Morgan (1998) state that, "Programs to assist students in moving from the middle level school to the high school are all but nonexistent." They believe that transitional studies have finally begun to gain more attention, especially from organizations such as the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), the National Middle School Association (NMSA), and the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development.

In the spring of 1988, the Johns Hopkins Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools (CREMS) conducted a national survey of principals in 2,400 public middle grade schools. Principals in schools that contain grade seven reported on ten practices they use with students, parents, teachers, and other school staff to ease the transition of students in the middle grades and to help students move to high school. Table 7 summarizes the list of 10 practices and the percent that are practiced by the CREMS respondents.

Table 7

Transition Practices

Middle grade students visit the high school for an assembly	52%
Middle grade counselors meet with high school counselors or staff	52%
High School administrators meet together on articulation and programs	48%
Parents visit the high school while children are in the lower grades	39%
High school student's present information at middle grade schools	36%
Middle and high school teachers meet together about courses and requirements	35%
Parents visit high school for orientation after classes have begun	31%
Middle grade students attend regular classes at the high school	16%
Summer meetings at the high school for parents and students	13%
Buddy or big brother/sister programs pair new students with older students	4%

Network Analysis

Braddock's theory of perpetual segregation was expanded to include network analysis, or the more structural argument that segregation is perpetuated across generations because African-Americans and Latinos lack access to informal networks that provide information about, and entrance to, desegregated institutions and employment. In applying network analysis to perpetuation theory, we draw from Granovetter's (1973, 1983, 1986) work, which shows the strong impact of weak ties, or less interpersonal networks, that is, acquaintances or friends of friends, on the diffusion of influence, information, and mobility opportunities. According to Granovetter (1973), there exist two types of ties, strong ties and weak ties.

Strong ties exist between individuals who have established close relationships and reflect similar thoughts, beliefs, and interests. These ties would most typically occur between family members and close friends. “The more frequently people interact with one another, the stronger their sentiments of friendship for one another are apt to be” (Homans, 1950, p. 133), therefore creating a strong tie.

Weak ties exist between acquaintances or friends of friends, through an individual’s less formal interpersonal networks. “Weak ties are more likely to link members of different small groups...” (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1376), providing access to different information. Weak ties provide a bridge to new, socially distant ideas. Granovetter (1973) stated that, “the strength of a tie is a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding) and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie. Each of these is somewhat dependent on the other though the set is obviously highly intracorrelated” (p. 1361).

Data Analysis

The transition to high school received little attention from educational researchers before the 1980’s, possibly because it was not viewed as a problem for either students or schools (Schiller, 1999). Cicourel and Kitsuse (1963) described this transition as a routinized process in which counselors provide prospective freshmen with information and allocate them to courses. This view of the transition to high school as normative or routine is gradually being challenged by recognition that high schools are in a state of

flux as they absorb freshmen classes (Delany, 1991; Felner, Ginter, and Primavera, 1982; Gamoran, 1992; Riehl, Pallas, and Natriello, 1999).

Based on the data collected during this study, the above statements provide an accurate analysis of the current state of the Central City Junior High transition program. Central City Junior High does not have a structured transition program in place and offers no practices deemed effective by Epstein and Mac Iver (1990). Of the ten practices listed in the CREMS report, the practice “middle grade students attend regular classes at the high school” is the closest practice being used because the tour that the junior high provides does allow the rural elementary students an opportunity to spend one half of the day in regular classes, but this is a one-time event that does not consistently happen for every rural elementary school because of cancellations and scheduling conflicts.

Rural Elementary and Independent School District Transition Practices

According to the students in the study, there were two consistent practices provided by the rural elementary school districts during their transition to the junior high. The practices consisted of a tour and assistance with paperwork. During the interviews, the students made responses to the practices they encountered during the spring semester of the 2002-2003 school year.

Arrangements for the tour were: the rural elementary school district bussed the students to the junior high where they were split up in small groups, attempts were made to assign a ninth grade student who had attended the same rural elementary school the year before as the tour guide. During the tour, the students attended class and, in most

cases, ate lunch at the junior high before returning home. All 11 students interviewed mentioned the tour and each student agreed, to an extent, that the tour was helpful. Student 2 said it helped her know where to go in the building. Student 3 said it showed her the number of students who attended and how a day went. Student 4 said it helped her know where the classes would be. Student 6 would like to have stayed the entire day to get more familiar with the surroundings. Student 7 said it helped a little. Student 9 wanted time to talk with the teachers instead of just being shown around. The other students only stated “it helped.”

The students were then asked what types of activities, events, or programs that Central City Junior High provided to assist with transition. Students 1 and 9 stated that nothing more than the tour was provided. Student 6 said a guy came to help with enrollment forms, which she felt was helpful. Students 8 and 9 said they could not remember any activities or events that were offered. Student 7 said someone from the junior high came to tell the students about the junior high, but he was not sure who the person was. Student 10 said the junior high had an “Open House” at the end of the spring semester for parents and students, but he did not attend. Students 6, 8, and 11 said the junior high held a dance in the spring semester and invited the “country schools” eighth grade students. Students 6 and 8 did not attend the dance. Student 11 attended the dance and said the experience was “okay,” but she did not consider it helpful to her transition. The other five students said nothing was offered from the junior high to assist them with their transition.

The staff members of the rural elementary districts and the junior high were asked about the transition practices that are used in assisting students. The staff made various

comments about different practices that were provided over the past few years, but the responses in the data refer to the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years.

In addition to the tour and assisting with paperwork, each member stated the junior high conducted a math placement test with the eighth grade students during the 2003-2004 school year. Sid, from School G, said this is the first year he is aware of this happening and it was a good idea. Sonja made the same statement.

Another practice mentioned by the rural elementary staff was an open house/enrollment night at the junior high that was offered in the later part of the 2003-2004 spring semester. This was conducted in the evening and was the responsibility of the rural elementary parents in getting the students to the event. The open house allows the students and parents an opportunity to see the building and pre-enroll for the fall semester. According to Sonja, who is the counselor at School F, many of the students had positive comments about the open house and could not wait to start the ninth grade. Sid mentioned the open house, but was unsure how many School G students attended.

The second practice mentioned was getting paper work together before transferring the students to Central City. The paper work consists of transfer papers, student demographic information forms, transcript information, and anything else needed by the junior high. Five of the eleven students mentioned this was helpful.

Concerns about Transition

Young adolescents entering high school look forward to having more choices and making new and more friends; however, they also are concerned about being picked on

and teased by older students, having harder work, and making lower grades, and getting lost in a larger, unfamiliar school (Mizelle, 1995; Phelan, Yu, & Davidson, 1994).

A number of concerns were mentioned, but the responses varied from student to student with no common theme. Concerns mentioned by the students were: it would be hard to get around the school, there would be all new people, there would be harder classes resulting in lower grades (mentioned by 3 students), the trimester schedule, classes now count towards graduation, it would be a bigger school with a larger number of students (mentioned by 3 students), just different, harder to get individual instruction, not fitting in, not too many friends, and living too far away to participate in activities after school.

The staff members had a number of concerns as well. An obvious concern by both students and staff members was the lack of student involvement in extracurricular activities. A noticeable theme during data analysis emerged showing that most of the rural elementary districts put a strong emphasis on students to participate in extracurricular activities. Sid, Sonja, Sam, Sally, and Larry made statements relating to the need for students to be involved in extracurricular activities at the rural elementary school. This would enable the student to meet kids from other schools during competition, which would help for a social connection upon arriving at the junior high. With extracurricular emphasis being made at the rural elementary districts, the data revealed that 100 percent of the students interviewed participated in at least one extracurricular activity while attending their respective rural elementary district. When asked about their participation at the junior high, only 55 percent of the students stated they had participated in at least one extracurricular activity. For these students, their ninth

grade was at a junior high school. Many ninth grade students today attend high school. The high school is a more anonymous setting than is the middle school. Some students experience role loss, such as no longer being among the top athletes or scholars. Research has shown that participation in extracurricular activities significantly declines in the first year of high school (Seidman et al, 1996; Gifford & Dean, 1990). Students 3 and 6 stated they might participate next year when they know more people. Student 7 stated he might play athletics next year, but wants to be more comfortable in the school system. Student 10 said he did not know why he did not participate, but wishes he would have played. Sam's statement relative to this topic addressed the difficulty for students to make the teams. He said they have to work much harder than the students who have been in the system. Sam said discouragement such as a student quitting a sport only adds to the chance it will negatively affect his/her academics and further enhance problems with transition. Additionally, lack of transportation after school was another reason given why students are unable to participate.

The social aspect of transition was another major concern for the staff members. For some students, difficulties associated with the transition to high school are tied to feelings of alienation and the lack of social acceptance in the new environment. Students who are successful in gaining social acceptance in a new school environment were found to have experienced a smoother transition into high school (Schmidt, 1993).

Sam said the social setting is in place by the Central City students and that the rural elementary students have to come in and find where they belong. He thinks the system of social interaction could use more help at both School E and the junior high. Sam would like to see more events of interaction for the purpose of assisting with social

assimilation. Sid agrees by saying he is concerned about the students making friends and fitting in with a group. He said several School G students have dropped out over the years because of the frustration of transition. Sid mentioned how some are “big” people on the rural elementary campus, but will not be at the junior high. Sara said when the students arrive at the junior high and find some type of social acceptance it will be easier for them to adapt. The students need to find a “hook” or connection that will enable them to fit in and be successful. According to Sara, School D probably has the most difficult time adapting socially because of the culture of the community and the low socioeconomic status. Larry agrees with Sara that the students from School D come to the junior high “ready to fight.” Larry said many students are led to believe that the junior high is more difficult both socially and academically, which is not necessarily true. He wishes the rural elementary staff members would tell the students that there are caring adults at the junior high who are interested in their well being.

As far as the social aspect for students, nine of the 11 interviewed thought they were adequately prepared socially for the transition. Two students did express some concern socially. Student 7 said it was hard to integrate and fit in. Student 9 said it was really hard and he was “blown away” when he first arrived due to how many people were at the school. He said after he got to know some people it opened up some doors for him, but it took him one school year to adapt.

Perpetuation Theory

Those students who have attended a rural elementary school district all of their lives and then transition to an independent school district in another community have basically been segregated from that community and school population. Students have a fear of the unknown when they began attending the new school, which in this case is Central City Junior High. To support this notion, Braddock (1980) notes that minority students who have not regularly experienced the realities of desegregation may overestimate the degree of overt hostility they will encounter or underestimate their skill at coping with strains in interracial situations. These segregated students will, in most instances, make choices that maintain physical segregation when they become adults because they have never tested their racial beliefs. The difference in Braddock's theory versus rural elementary students transitioning into an independent district is not racial, but may be considered institutional. An example in this study of what the researcher will call "perpetual institutional segregation" is School D. Larry said the School D students seem to stay within their own group more than the other rural elementary students. He said the social skills of the students are lacking and they like to intimidate the other non-School D students. The junior high has more behavior issues with School D students than any of the other rural elementary students. Larry assumes School D students are this way because their former environment was less structured. When describing School D socially, Sara believes the culture of the community and the low socioeconomic area contribute to the low social skills of the students. It is a school where 93 percent of the students qualify for the Free and Reduced Lunch Program. It seems that School D

students “overestimate the degree of overt hostility they will encounter and underestimate their skill at coping with the transition into a new school setting.” Student 7, from School D, said it was hard to “integrate and fit in” and mentioned his friends from School D felt the same way.

Braddock’s focus on how individual agents adjust their behavior to accommodate, and thus perpetuate, these constraints, and how exposure to integrated settings can change this behavior should be noted by the leaders in the rural elementary and independent school districts. If the rural elementary students were exposed (time) to the junior high through a structured transition program where they could physically visit the school, the students, and staff (intimacy) their feelings may reveal being less intimidated (intensity) when they actually arrive. Thus, they would experience a smoother adaptation to the environment.

Social Networks

Braddock’s theory of perpetual segregation was expanded alongside Network Analysis or the more structural argument that segregation is perpetuated across generations because various cultures lack access to informal networks that provide information about and entrance to desegregated institutions and employment (Wells & Crain, 1994). In comparison, rural elementary students lack access to the independent district to generate informal networks due in part to the lack of a structured transitional program.

In applying Network Analysis to perpetuation theory, we draw from Granovetter's (1973, 1983, 1986) work, which shows the strong impact of weak ties, or less formal interpersonal networks—that is, acquaintances or friends of friends—on the diffusion of influence, information, and mobility opportunities. Strong ties to the rural elementary school district are established and in place before the students transition to the junior high. These ties are formed through parents, teachers, siblings, and friends. Most of the students attending the same school for the first eight years of their lives have formed relationships that reflect the strength of these ties. In most cases, strong ties will not exist with the rural elementary students upon their arrival to the independent school district. This increases the stress level for the rural elementary student during transition because they must then rely on weak ties for social assimilation. In other instances, there may be students who feel they have strong ties to the independent school district that helps with a smoother transition. For example, Student 3 choose to attend Central City Schools because her mother worked in Bay City (time), she had a brother who attended Central City prior to her attending (intimacy), and she had friends coming to the district (intensity). She stated that she had connections, which helped to influence her decision to attend.

Students 1, 4, 7, 9, and 11 mentioned either siblings or friends who had attended the junior high in previous years. Five of the students believed that knowing someone prior to attending the junior high helped them know a little more about the school they would be attending. Students 1, 2, 10, and 11 had friends or cousins already attending the junior high when they arrived. Students 1 and 10 had played athletics against many of the students, which is what helped them in making a social connection. Student 10 said,

“Knowing some of the students before coming helped.” Student 1 said she adapted well due to having friends at the school upon her arrival. Being involved in extracurricular activities as a way for the students to develop social networks was frequently mentioned by the rural elementary staff members. “The more frequently persons interact with one another, the stronger their sentiments of friendship for one another are apt to be” (Homans, 1950, p.133). As Sid mentioned, his best suggestion to assist students with transition was to encourage them to get involved in extracurricular activities. If the students develop a weak tie (acquaintance) by competing against other rural elementary students, then a strong tie can develop upon the arrival at the junior high to assist with a more successful, comfortable transition. If the Central City School District developed a program of more extracurricular interaction (time) with the rural elementary school districts (intensity), this could create more weak ties (intimacy) for the elementary school district students thus creating strong ties (reciprocity) upon their transition to Central City Junior High.

Summary

Central City Junior High currently does not have a structured transition implementation program and implements none of the activities recommended by the CREMS report in their transitional processes. Research has shown that an extensive articulation program may be beneficial and will “increase the likelihood that students will succeed in their first year in the new school” (Mac Iver & Epstein, 1990, p. 17). Siehl &

Gentry (1990) also support this idea, but take it one step further. They believe transition being more than a program, is a process that needs to be ongoing.

The few, somewhat inconsistent transition practices implemented by Central City Junior High impact the transition process positively to some extent. The tour of the junior high, actually a joint practice by Central City and the rural elementary districts, does not always occur for various reasons. When a tour is cancelled, it is generally because of a scheduling conflict and may not be re-scheduled. The tour provides students a brief glimpse of the setting, but students would like to stay longer or make additional visits. Another item to point out is the recent change in site administration and counseling staff. The principal and both counselors were completing their first year in those roles. This alone would create inconsistencies until they have been allowed time to establish a more credible, consistent transition program.

CHAPTER VI

Summary, Conclusions, Recommendations, and Commentary

This chapter includes a summary of the study, conclusions, recommendations, and implications from the data collected in the study. A commentary will be included that reflects the opinion and vision of the researcher for the rural elementary school districts as well as Central City Junior High.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to research the transition implementation experienced by students moving from rural elementary school districts to an independent school district. This purpose was accomplished by data collection from seven rural elementary school district staff members, a staff member from one independent school district, 11 ninth grade students through the long interview method, and site observations. The data were then presented based on the interview questions that were relative to the transition implementation process. Data analysis was provided from two perspectives: (1) Epstein and Mac Iver's (1990) Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools, and (2) Granovetter's (1973) Network Analysis and McPartland and Braddock's (1981) Perpetuation Theory.

Data Needs

Data from seven rural elementary school districts and one independent school district and the transition practices used by each were needed to achieve the purpose of this study. These methods were used to gather data on the beliefs about the transitioning activities that are being practiced.

Data Sources

Data were collected from seven rural elementary school districts and one independent school district in a county located in the middle-eastern part of a mid-western state. Of the county's nine rural elementary school districts, seven encouraged their students to attend the independent district focused in the study.

Data Collection

Data were collected using two sources: the long interview method and site observations. Eleven students were interviewed at the independent school district. The students had attended one of the seven rural elementary school districts in the study the previous school year. The goal of the researcher was to interview one male and one female from the rural elementary districts. For various reasons this did not happen, resulting in 11 participating instead of 14. The gender split was six females and five males. In addition to gaining the student's perspectives through interviews, it was

imperative to gain the perspective from a staff member at each rural elementary district and one staff member at the independent district. Observations were conducted at each rural elementary district and the independent district to gain an understanding of the climate and culture at each site.

Data Presentation

A review of literature was conducted before the collection of the data. Data were compared to the literature through out the research process. Data were presented as they correlated with the interview questions relating to the transition process.

Transition Implementation

The purpose of transition implementation is to ease the transition of the student's passage throughout all levels of schooling. This is accomplished through orientation programs designed to help alleviate problems associated with entering a new environment (Smith, 1999). Educators at both levels of schooling need to be instrumental in helping eighth graders prepare for ninth grade, the time when "most American youth begin playing high school hardball, with its emphasis on specialization and the accompanying pressures" (Lounsbury & Clark, 1990, p. 1).

Central City Junior High does not have a structured transition implementation program for the rural elementary school district students. The most consistent transition practice, a tour of the junior high, is a joint effort by the junior high and the rural

elementary schools. Unfortunately, some rural elementary schools have missed out on that opportunity. All the students interviewed agreed to some extent that the tour was helpful with regards of knowing where the building is, how many students are at the school, how a day goes, and how the classes would be. One student would like to have stayed all day and another would like to have talked with teachers instead of just being shown around. Underlying successful high school transition programs are activities that bring middle school and high school administrators, counselors, and teachers together to learn about the programs, courses, curriculum, and requirements, of their respective schools (Hertzog et al., 1996; Vars, 1998). By adopting some additional transition strategies, educators will find their ninth graders more productive and, ultimately, more successful (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999).

Concerns During Transition

Young adolescents entering high school look forward to having more choices and making new and more friends; however, they also are concerned about being picked on and teased by older students, having harder work, making lower grades, and getting lost in a larger, unfamiliar school (Mizelle, 1995; Phelan, Yu, & Davidson, 1994).

The concerns of the students varied from one to the other. Their concerns consisted of the following: will it be hard to get around the school, all new people, are the classes harder, a new class schedule, classes now count towards graduation, a bigger school, less individual instruction, not fitting in, not many friends, and the inability to stay after school and participate in extracurricular activities. The last student concern was

also a concern for many of the staff members who feel students need to be involved in extracurricular activities to help with a smoother transition. Research has shown that participation in extracurricular activities significantly declines in the first year of high school (Seidman et al., 1996; Gifford & Dean, 1990). In this study, it was revealed that 100 percent of the students participated in at least one extracurricular activity at the rural elementary school, but only 55 percent chose to participate at the independent school their first year.

The social aspect was another concern mentioned by the staff members. For some students, difficulties associated with the transition to high school are tied to feelings of alienation and the lack of social acceptance in the new environment. Students who are successful in gaining social acceptance in a new school environment were found to have experienced a smoother transition into high school (Schmidt, 1993). One of the rural elementary school district counselors mentioned how the social setting is already in place at the independent school district site and the rural elementary students have to come in and find where they belong. Nine of the eleven students felt they were adequately prepared socially when they arrived at Central City Junior High.

Analysis

Data were analyzed through the lens of the Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools (CREMS; Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990) and through the lenses of Network Analysis (Granovetter, 1973) and perpetuation theory (Braddock, 1980; McPartland & Braddock, 1981). The interview questions were designed from common

themes in researched literature pertaining to student transition and a descriptive study that was conducted on rural elementary schools in the same state as well as questions designed to investigate the “ties” that existed for students at the independent school district site.

In qualitative analysis, several simultaneous activities engage the attention of the researcher: collecting information from the field, sorting the information into categories, formatting the information into a story or picture, and actually writing the qualitative text (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The long interview process and site observations enabled the researcher to analyze the data to determine the strength of ties that rural elementary students have with the independent school district they are attending.

Transition Implementation

Central City Junior High does not currently have a structured transition implementation program to assist rural elementary school district students. The only consistent transition practice being used is a tour, which is a joint effort between the rural elementary schools and the junior high. This practice has been inconsistent due to tour dates sometimes being cancelled because of scheduling conflicts or lack of staff. Other transition practices that have been attempted by the independent school district is conducting a math placement test at the rural elementary schools and having an open house/enrollment night. The math placement test was not conducted with the students who were interviewed. This was a practice started during the 2003-2004 school year, but would seem like a practice that will assist students being placed in the appropriate

classes. The open house/enrollment night takes place at the end of the spring semester. Of the students who were interviewed for this study, very few attended the open house night. Since it is the responsibility of the rural elementary parent to transport the student to the open house, it is an assumption of the researcher that many of the parents of the rural elementary communities after getting off work may lack the time due to the distance from the independent school or have difficulty with transportation to make the trip.

Social Networks

Attending the same elementary school for eight years (time), establishing and maintaining peer relationships (intensity and intimacy) and developing a bond with the teachers (reciprocity), enhances the opportunity for eighth grade students transitioning into Central City Junior High, to bring strong ties firmly established in the culture of their rural elementary school district. The bond established, though is variable or fluid, changing as the child changes (Smith, 1999). Not all students hang on to the ties established in the rural elementary school. Some have developed new or weak ties to middle school and some are in a transition phase moving from one culture to other.

Conclusions

Central City Junior High does not have a structured transition implementation program in place to assist rural elementary school students. The one thing every rural elementary and independent school district staff member agreed on was that the transition

process for the rural elementary students needs drastic improvement. Transition is transition regardless if students are moving from an elementary school to a middle school or a middle school to a high school all within the same school district, but rural elementary school districts do offer a different scenario. Upon the completion of their eighth grade curriculum, these rural elementary students must be transported daily, in some cases many miles, to attend another school in another community to meet high school graduation requirements. They must enter an environment that is foreign and do their best to fit into the social setting that is already established. Thus, if these students have no “strong ties” to the school, the transition is even more difficult. In most cases at this age the social aspect is far more important than focusing on academics. At a time when friendships and social interaction are particularly important for young adolescents, the normative transition into high school often serves to disrupt friendship networks and, thereby, interferes with students’ success in high school (Barone et al., 1991). Thus, it is vital for transition programs to include activities that will provide incoming students social support activities that give students opportunities to get to know and develop positive relationships with older students and other incoming students (Hertzog et al., 1996; Mac Iver, 1990).

Something else to consider is how many of these students are unable to participate in after school activities due to no transportation. This was a concern of more than one student in the study and, even though it was not the only reason the extracurricular participation rate dropped from 100 percent in the rural elementary school to 55 percent at the junior high, it was part of the reason. Research has shown that participation in extracurricular activities significantly declines in the first year of high school (Seidman et

al., 1996; Gifford & Dean, 1990). In addition to those who do not get to participate, those who do participate in athletics have a difficult transition because of being behind and trying to compete with more students and stronger competition. This has an affect on their social assimilation and self-esteem. The rural elementary students also become frustrated with coming into a program, such as choir, far behind the junior high students because the rural elementary school was unable to offer that curriculum. Thus, the structure of Central City Junior High, the travel distance, and the lack of bussing mitigate against participation in extracurricular activities.

In support of Central City Junior High, the school has had a recent turnover in administrative staff with the principal and two counselors on the verge of completing their first year. Each of the three understands that there is work to be done in finding ways to make the transition smoother for these incoming students.

Transition implementation was examined through the lenses of Epstein and Mac Iver's (1990) Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools, McPartland and Braddock's (1981) perpetuation theory, and Granovetter's (1973) Social Networks. The data and findings of this case study resulted in the following additional specific conclusions:

1. Transition implementation activities are necessary to assist rural elementary students with a smooth transition.
2. Transition activities help establish positive beliefs by the students about the new environment they will be entering.

3. The process of transition is the responsibility of both the rural elementary districts and independent school district, but for success needs to be driven by the independent school district.
4. Rural elementary students who participate in extracurricular activities in their elementary schools generally develop weak ties that turn into strong ties upon transitioning to the junior high and participating in similar activities.
5. Perpetuation theory can explain the perpetual “institutional” segregation that tends to exist with some of the rural elementary students who cling to their strong ties instead of developing new or weak ties at the junior high.

Recommendations

The sparsity of data about student transition from middle school to the high school suggests that this area is rich in its unexplored vastness (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999). The findings of this study are significant to educational practice because they allow independent school districts that transition rural elementary school district students to reflect on their transition implementation practices. This section will make recommendations for further research and practice.

Research

Transition is recognized as a vital element in educational program planning affecting the student’s passage throughout all levels of schooling (Carpenter & Gardner,

1984). There is limited research on transition implementation practices used to assist students transitioning from a rural elementary school district to an independent school district. There is little doubt that transition from a rural elementary school district to an independent school district is a traumatic event for students especially when it requires the student to spend more time on the bus, adapt to a larger student population, lose the comfort of strong ties to develop new ties, adjust to a new class schedule and curriculum, try to integrate into the extracurricular programs, and adapt to teachers that provide less individual attention.

Further research might entail how to maintain a consistent transition implementation program when staff members come and go within a school system. The impact of a successful transition program is the responsibility of both the rural elementary school district and the independent school district, but the program should be driven by the independent school district since the students are enrolling into their system. Rural elementary school district staff cannot dictate to the independent school district which transition practices they will use within their organization no matter how concerned the rural elementary staff is about the students making a smooth transition. Further research might also entail how a teachers-as-advisors program could be used as a means of providing an ongoing method of orientation for the students during their first year of transition. The program puts the students in small groups and assigns a teacher to act as their advisor throughout the school year. According to Siehl and Gentry (1990), “each school system should survey their incoming students to discover what their anxieties are and then build an orientation program around those concerns (p. 20).” A teachers-as-advisors program may be a method of providing this type of program.

Practice

When asked what ideas the rural elementary and independent school district staff members had for improving transition, there were several responses: more parental involvement during transition, more peer shadowing activities, moving the ninth grade class to the high school building to eliminate students from making two transitions in two years, involvement and communication between the rural elementary schools and the junior high, do not wait until the end of the school year to begin transition activities, using “school within a school” concepts to make the junior high smaller, Central City configuring their style and approach to instruction to better assist the rural elementary students, more visits from Central City staff and students to the rural elementary schools, structured social interaction programs with the rural elementary and independent school district students, and developing an intramural program for the students who are unable to compete in activities at the independent school district level. Additionally, the researcher makes three recommendations for practice based on the data collected: 1) transition activities must be ongoing and begin in the fall semester of the eighth grade year; 2) the staff at both the rural elementary districts and independent school district emphasized the need for communication to develop quality articulation; and 3) a person or persons, whether administration or staff, must drive the initiative of developing and maintaining a consistent, quality transition implementation program. A final recommendation would be for Central City Junior High to review the ten practices presented in the report provided by the Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools (CREMS, Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990) for consideration of implementation.

The transition implementation practices being recommended need to be considered and implemented within every rural elementary school district and the independent school districts that receive students from these schools. A committee involving administrators, counselors, teachers, parents, and students should be established to maintain and refine a consistent transition process (Smith, 1999). Additionally, the recommended practices would apply to larger public school districts that transition elementary students to a middle school and middle school students to a high school.

Theory

The social aspect of transition is vitally important to a smooth transition as well. Using Granovetter's (1973) strong and weak ties, research on the development of weak ties to other rural elementary schools and the independent school district that can turn into strong ties after making the transition needs to be considered. The data in this study revealed that the development of weak ties through the participation in rural elementary school extracurricular activities seemed to develop into strong ties for the students upon their arrival to the junior high thus assisting with a smoother transition. In addition to Granovetter's strong and weak ties, McPartland and Braddock's perpetuation theory (1981) helped support the notion of perpetual "institutional" segregation. Because of the unique nature of rural elementary school students transitioning to a new school district in a new community, the aspect of rural elementary students perpetually segregating themselves from the non-rural elementary school district students may occur. Research to

assist in eliminating this type of segregation and division before these students arrive to the independent school district needs to be considered.

Commentary

In light of the research that supports multiple transition implementation activities for student success, it is troublesome that many schools choose to do very little to support students in transition. It is assumed this anomaly exists for various reasons including the lack of leadership to support the implementation of transitional programs, the time constraints of planning and implementing such programs, the lack of staff to help in carrying out the initiative, and the determination that no problem exists. This was the assumption the researcher developed before the data was collected. To some extent, the assumptions were found to be true.

Concerning lack of leadership, it was mentioned by two of the rural elementary staff members that prior leadership in the independent school district made transitioning the rural elementary students a priority and found a way to have a credible transition program by funding staff through a grant. Once the leadership changed, the priority seemed to fade away.

Concerning time constraints, it was mentioned by both the rural elementary and independent school district staff that day-to-day duties made developing a program to assist students with transitioning become a secondary activity. That was the reason the grant program at the independent school district in previous years was beneficial; at least one person was focused on assisting the students with transition.

Concerning staff, the rural elementary districts have limited staff who do not need or can assume additional duties. Similar is the situation for the independent district. Something that was once deemed effective in assisting students with transition revolved around finding a way to fund at least one person to focus and coordinate all rural elementary to independent school district transitional activities.

Concerning the determination that no problem exists, that assumption was not true. Every staff member that was interviewed stated in some manner that lack of transition practices was a problem and more attention needs to be focused on transition to better assist the students.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Interview Questions for Students

1. Tell me your name and a little bit about yourself.
2. Tell me about the school you attended last year.
3. Tell me about the school you attend this year.
4. What had you heard about this school before attending (friends or family that may have attended)? (ties)
5. Why did you decide to attend this school upon completing the eighth grade? (ties)
6. What type of extra-curricular activities did you participate in at your former school? What type of extra-curricular activities do you currently participate in at this school? (ties)
7. What types of activities, events, or programs did your former school do to help in making your move easier to this school?
8. Please explain if you feel these activities, events, or programs did or did not help you prepare to move to this school?
9. What types of activities, events, or programs did this school do to make your move easier?
10. Please explain if you feel these activities, events, or programs did or did not help prepare you to move to this school?
11. What were your concerns about starting the ninth grade at this school?
12. What problems or issues have you encountered since being at this school?
13. Explain how well prepared academically you felt coming to this school.
14. Explain how well prepared socially you felt coming to this school.
15. How well do you feel you have integrated or adapted to this school? (ties)
16. What do you think should be done differently to get students ready to move from the K-8 school to the K-12 school?

17. What are the top one or two things you have liked to have been told before you came to this school?
18. On a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being very well prepared, how prepared overall do you feel you were to move from your former school to this school?
19. On a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being extremely comfortable, how comfortable did you feel on the first day of attending this school?

Interview Questions for Counselors

1. Tell me your name and how long you have worked in this district.
2. Tell me about the district in which you work.
3. What can you tell me about the K-12 school the students attend?
4. Why do the students attend this particular K-12 school?
5. What types of activities, events, or programs does this school provide to help the students to make the move easier upon entering the K-12 school?
6. What is your assessment on how well these activities, events, or programs help prepare students to move to the K-12 school?
7. What types of activities, events, or programs does the K-12 school do to help the students to make the move easier to their school?
8. What is your assessment on how well these activities, events, or programs help prepare students in moving to the K-12 school?
9. What are your concerns about students starting the K-12 school? Do you have any ideas in how to address these concerns?
10. What problems have you encountered or observed over the years with students after they make the move to the K-12 school?
11. Please explain how well prepared you feel students are academically when they begin at the K-12 school?
12. Please explain how well prepared you feel the students are socially when they begin at the K-12 school?
13. What kind of parent contact/communication is there after students move to the new school since it is in a different community and location? Is there any difference in the level of contact/communication?
14. How well do you feel the students integrate into and adapt to the K-12 school? .
15. What do you think should be done differently to get students ready for moving from a K-8 elementary school to the K-12 school?
16. What are the top one or two items you would like for the students to know before making the move to the K-12 school?

17. On a scale from 1 to 10 with 10 being very well prepared, how prepared overall do you feel the students are upon entering the ninth grade?

Appendix B

Institutional Review Board Approval

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Protocol Expires: 3/31/2005

Date: Thursday, April 01, 2004

IRB Application No ED0496

Proposal Title: **The Transition of K-8 Dependent Elementary School District Students to a K-12 Independent School District in Oklahoma**

Principal Investigator(s):

Stephen Smith
1908 E. Sunrise
Stillwater, OK 74075

Ken Stern
311 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74078

Reviewed and
Processed as: Expedited (Spec Pop)

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

Dear PI :

Your IRB application referenced above has been approved for one calendar year. Please make note of the expiration date indicated above. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact me in 415 Whitehurst (phone: 405-744-5700, ccolson@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Carol Olson, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

STEPHEN EDWARD SMITH

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: THE TRANSITION PRACTICES OF ONE COUNTY'S RURAL
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND THEIR RECEIVING
INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Major Field: Educational Leadership

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Muskogee, Oklahoma

Education: Graduated from Quinton High School, Quinton, Oklahoma, May 1986; received Bachelor of Science degree in Education with a major in health and physical education and a minor in social studies, Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, May 1991; awarded a Master of Education degree with an emphasis in school administration, Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, August 1995; completed the requirements for a Specialist in Education degree Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, December 1999; completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma May 2005.

Experience: Teacher, assistant principal, and athletics coach at Stigler High School, Stigler, Oklahoma for six years; assistant principal at Stillwater High School, Stillwater, Oklahoma for four years; Director of Full Time Programs at Meridian Technology Center, Stillwater, Oklahoma since 2001.

Professional Memberships: National Association of Secondary School Principals, Oklahoma Association of Secondary School Principals, National Association of Career and Technology Education, Oklahoma Association of Career and Technology Education, Stillwater Public Education Foundation Board Member, Northeastern State University Administrators Association.