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TRANSITIONING FROM JUNIOR HIGH TO MIDDLE SCHOOL: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS' AND ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS FROM ONE SUBURBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

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TRANSITIONING FROM JUNIOR HIGH TO MIDDLE SCHOOL:
A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS' AND ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS
FROM ONE SUBURBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP
AND POLICY STUDIES

BY

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DEDICATION

This dissertation I dedicate to my daughter, Amber Michelle Shelkett Mallow, 1979-2004. Amber enjoyed learning, earned a Bachelors and Masters Degree, and became a teacher to help others. Her memory has been an inspiration for me to finish this doctoral process. I would like to thank my wife and life's partner Sherry. You always believed in me, which made me consequently believe in myself. Through tragedy, sorrow, pain, and devotion, you would never allow me to falter when I was willing to give up. We have grown together and have tried to live a life of faith and commitment to our Lord, Jesus Christ.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to analyze through a set of interpretive and pragmatic theoretical lenses the perceptions of the middle school teachers, principals, and administrators of one school district's transition from junior high school to middle school. The junior high school was conceived primarily as a downward extension of secondary education organized by subjects and departments with a grade-level configuration that usually includes ninth grade. The middle school was conceived as a more child-centered institution with responsive practices and a more varied curriculum. Such practices address curriculum, pedagogy, social elements, emotional needs, physical needs, professional development, and interdisciplinary teaming. The theoretical framework of this study was the individual perception to understanding the effectiveness of transitioning from junior high schools to middle schools and generated the overall research question: In one suburban district, how did the teacher's, principal's, and central office administrators' perceptions of the organizational transition from junior high to middle school compare and contrast? A case study was chosen for this research that relied upon surveys, interviews, and document analysis to address the research question. The study showed there were many similarities in the perceptions of teachers, principals, and administrators with the implementation of middle school components. These include appropriate planning times, staff competency on middle school education, a teaching staff skilled in the ability to work with students, and parents receiving regular feedback regarding the student's progress. The results of the study also showed a difference in the perception of teacher involvement; staff moral; staff cooperation and support of each other; and use of the advisory component of the middle school concept.

CHAPTER I

Overview of the Study

Research Problem Introduction

Today, more than ever, educators, policymakers, parents, business leaders, community members, and other stakeholders look for data and evidence as a basis for making educational decisions. The growing interest in and need for research evidence remains significant and timely, especially when considering the most effective methods for educating young adolescents, the proposed benefits of the middle school concept, and the best groupings of grades for adolescents (National Middle School Association, 2010a). The middle school conceptual framework of: curriculum, pedagogy, social elements, emotional needs, physical needs, professional development, and interdisciplinary teaming (National Middle School Association, 2003), was used as a lens to view the educators' experiences. The theoretical framework of this study (Yin, 2003) is the individual perception to understanding the effectiveness of transitioning from junior high schools to middle schools in one suburban school district. This study looks through teacher, principal, and central office administrator interpretive lenses at each group's perceptions of this transitional process, and a pragmatic theoretical lens of the district's decision makers (Merriam, 2001) into the research of the developmental needs of pre-adolescents and an educational system's attempt to meet those needs by creating middle schools that work (ASCD, 1975; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 2003).

Statement of the Problem

Every school day across the nation, more than seven thousand students become dropouts (Alliance for Excellence, 2009). Annually, that adds up to about 1.3 million students who will not graduate with their peers as scheduled (Alliance for Excellence, 2009). Many high school dropouts said their problems started in the middle level grades. In a recent survey of high school dropouts (Bridgeland & Iulio, 2006), respondents indicated that they felt alienated at school and that no one noticed if they failed to show up for class. More than half of the respondents said that the major reason for dropping out of high school was that they felt their classes were uninteresting and irrelevant.

Middle school studies (Felner et al., 1997; Irvin, 1997; McEwin et al. 1995) showed that the establishment of effective curriculum, pedagogy, and programs of middle grades should be based upon the developmental readiness, needs, and interests of young adolescents. Although there was much research on the concept of junior high schools and middle schools, each school district and each school building created a unique culture and perception of the effectiveness of their curriculum, pedagogy, and programs for teaching young adolescents and preparing them for high school. Notably there was a lack of research on the educators' perceptions of the organizational transition from junior high to middle school. This lack of research is the focus of this study.

The problem was that the Lakewood School District (a pseudonym) had monitored their evolution of the transition from junior high schools to middle schools but had no data or analysis of the educators' perceptions of the transitional process. The planning and implementation of the middle school transition required a follow-up, inquiry-based use of data from the new middle schools (Lambert, 2003). The

stakeholders of the district wanted to know the teacher's, principal's, and central office administrators' perceptions of the organizational transition from junior high to middle school.

Historical Background

The Carnegie Corporation of New York established the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development in 1986 to place the compelling challenges of the adolescent years higher on the nation's agenda. In 1987, as its first major commitment, the Carnegie Council established the Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents. Members of the council were drawn from leadership positions in education, research, government, health, and other sectors. The Task Force commissioned specific research; interviewed experts in relevant fields; and met with teachers, principals, health professionals, and leaders of youth-serving community organizations (National Middle School Association, 2010b).

The result was a groundbreaking report, *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989). This report strengthened an emerging movement that was then unrecognized by policymakers, which was building support for educating young adolescents through relationships among schools, families, and community institutions. The report examined the education of America's young adolescents and how well schools, health institutions, and community organizations served their clients. The Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents made recommendations for moving from the junior high organization to the middle school structure. A middle school usually consisted of grades 6-8, but may also be comprised of grades 5-7, 6-7, 5-8, and 7-8. The recommendations of *Turning Points* called for action by people in several sectors of American society and at all levels of

government. The report showed how these groups, working together, could accomplish a fundamental upgrade of education to meet the needs of adolescent development (Jackson & Davis, 2000).

Although the leaders of schools, by ordinary logic, should want to meet the needs of their students by creating an environment of academic and developmental excellence, the evidence of reform in the middle level grades showed that schools were very slow to change. According to Capelluti and Stokes (1991), we are reminded that "although there is considerable knowledge about the characteristics and interests of early adolescents, this information has not at all times been reflected in what and how we teach these students" (p. iii).

The emphasis in education during the 1970's was on teaching. The theory was that if you taught well enough, then learning would occur (Payne, 1995). Good teaching must factor in the intellectual, social, emotional, moral, and physical needs of young adolescents, thus the movement for a better grouping of grades (Beane & Lipka, 1987; Clark & Clark, 1994; National Middle School Association, 1995). Middle school concepts were based on the social and academic developmental needs of young adolescents. When the middle school concept originated and gained momentum, the National Middle School Association was formed in 1973 to coordinate the efforts of newly formed middle schools (David, 1998).

These schools also had to address the emergence of the rapidly growing information age. Thornburg (1997) stated that the volume of information in the world doubled every 18 months and the communication revolution had drastically changed our education delivery systems. Thornburg also noted that children born in the 1990's and

into the 21st century were now products of "generation.com" (Thornburg, 1997). The effects of globalization can be seen in educational discourses where governments around the world discuss similar educational agendas and goals (Mertens, Anfara, & Roney, 2009). The most significant transformation would be to change from a teacher-centered world to a student-centered one.

For this study, the researcher used three interpretive lenses of teachers, building administrators, and central office administrators to understand the many components of the transitional process and a pragmatic theoretical lens (Merriam, 2001) to document the actions of the administration of Lakewood School District as they recognized that as communities and children changed, they must be open to ideas that might help them. As part of a search for new and innovative programs, the educational leaders of the district looked toward all facets of the district staff and the community for help and for new and fresh ideas. From a pragmatic view, they wanted to know if they should be doing things differently or doing different things. In this search for ways to improve the delivery of instruction to their adolescent students, the Lakewood school district leaders began a process of looking into changing the school organization to include middle schools. They gathered, investigated, and interpreted many articles, books, studies, and documents from other districts (Ames & Miller, 1994; Calweti, 1988; George, Stevenson, Thomason, & Beane, 1992).

The possibility of changing to middle schools produced a district vision in which all adolescent students could achieve success as they were taught and guided by a caring staff in a nurturing environment (Glickman, 1993). The development of emotional resources would also be crucial to student success. The greatest free emotional resource

available to schools was the role modeling provided by teachers, administrators, and staff (Payne, 1995). A vision was then developed before any action was taken to improve the education of adolescents within the district (Alexander & George, 1981).

There is an unattributed Japanese proverb that says, "Vision without action is nothing but a daydream; action without vision is a nightmare." This quotation accurately described the thoughts and feelings of the leadership of the Lakewood School District in the spring of 2002 when they carefully developed a phased-in plan of transition from junior high schools, (grades 7, 8, 9), to middle schools, (grades 6, 7, 8). In fact, the district's transition plan was presented in state workshops and national conferences as the ideal way to transition a district's junior high schools to middle schools. A leadership team of the National Middle School Association often referred to this district's plan as a positive transition model for other school districts across the nation. Even this positive plan and implementation faced many obstacles that necessitated mid-stream adjustments to maintain focus on the district's transitional goals.

Purpose of the Study

The national middle school movement and concepts were adopted by many school districts to address the developmental needs of adolescents (Irvin, 1997; McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins, 1995; Valentine, Clark, Hackmann, & Petzko, 2002). The data collected in this study documented the transition from junior high to middle schools as it was planned and implemented over a period of nine years in the Lakewood School District. This became a pluralistic study in which some parts were positivistic, in that knowledge claims were those founded directly on experience (Schwandt, 1997), and some parts used a set of pragmatic and interpretive theoretical lenses to understand the

perceptions of the school staff charged with the district's education of the adolescent students (Merriam, 1988).

The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of the middle school teachers, principals, and administrators of the Lakewood School District's transition from junior high to middle school. This case study explored the collaboration and complex process used with stakeholders in the community to determine if middle schools were feasible with the district's current facilities, staff, and resources. Kirst and Jung (1980) argued that short-term implementation studies magnify the proportions of failures and that researchers should study a policy implementation over the course of a decade (Kirst & Jung, 1980). This case study research looked at the development of a transition plan and implementation of this plan during a nine-year time span from 2002 to 2010. This transition plan was a complex undertaking which provided data that produced themes and created a pragmatic and interpretive case study. By revealing more about the perceptions of teachers, principals, and administrators, the results of this case study would then inform the current research and contribute a greater understanding of the thoughts of teachers and administrators on the transition process from junior high school to middle school.

The researcher administered a middle school survey given to all current teachers, building administrators (principals, assistant principals, and dean of students) of the four middle schools, and central office administration to seek their input related to this transition as suggested by Murphy (2001). Interviews were conducted with the administrators of each middle school, two teachers from each building, and three district administrators instrumental to the middle school transition process. Documents and

artifacts discussed in these interviews were also reviewed. An analysis of the collected data revealed similarities and differences as they pertained to the perceived successes and failures of the district's transition from junior high schools to middle schools (Creswell, 1994).

Research Question

Central to the problem statement, the framework of the study generated the overall research question: In one suburban district, how did the teacher's, principal's, and central office administrators' perceptions of the organizational transition from junior high to middle school compare and contrast?

Three sub-questions are also addressed:

a. How were teachers and principals involved in the transition?

b. How effective was the implementation of middle school concepts?

c. What were the major successes and challenges associated with the transition?

This study includes data collected from surveys, interviews, and documents. The teacher surveys included quantitative questions measured by a Likert scale and qualitative questions exploring emergent themes. The administrator surveys provided rich answers to open-ended questions. The interviews provided a holistic understanding of the interviewee's point of view (Patton, 1987). The use of both methodologies has the potential to answer the research questions with rich data sets.

Significance of the Study

This study looks into the perceptions of current middle school teachers, principals and central office administration as they reflected on the successes and failures of

transitioning from junior high to middle school within their school district. A triangulation of survey results, interviews, and document analysis reveals patterns and perceptions that could benefit this district and leaders from other school districts as they evaluate the effectiveness of the transition process from junior highs to middle schools (Patton, 1987).

Assumptions

1. It was assumed that people surveyed would be honest with their answers.
2. Transitions involving school restructuring was an on-going process, not an event.
3. Multiple variables allowed valid multiple observations and perceptions.

Definition of Terms

A *middle school* usually consists of grades 6-8 but may also contain grades 5-7, 6-7, 5-8, and 7-8. Middle schools are based on the developmental needs (social and academic) of young adolescents and provide:

- a curriculum that is challenging, integrative, and exploratory;
- varied teaching and learning approaches;
- assessment and evaluation that promotes learning;
- flexible organizational structures;
- programs and policies that foster health, wellness, and safety; and
- comprehensive guidance and support services (National Middle School Association, 2003).

Interdisciplinary team teaching is a way of organizing the faculty so a group of teachers share the following (George & Alexander, 1993, p. 249):

- the same group of students;

- the responsibility for planning, teaching, and evaluating curriculum and instruction in more than one academic area;
- the same schedule; and
- the same area of the building.

Junior high school usually consists of grades 7-9 but could also be comprised of grades 5-9, 6-9, and 8-9. The junior high school was conceived primarily as a downward extension of secondary education organized by subjects and departments with a grade-level configuration that usually includes ninth grade (Brimm, 1969; George, 1990; Lounsbury, 1960).

Summary

The first chapter of this study outlined the problem of educating young adolescents in our nation. It introduced a national study by the Carnegie Council, *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*, which made recommendations for moving from the junior high organization to the middle grade structure and to provide a fundamental upgrade of education to meet the needs of adolescent development. The problem was a lack of research on the educators' perceptions of the organizational transition from junior high schools to middle schools. The purpose of this study was intended to analyze through a set of theoretical interpretive and pragmatic lenses the perceptions of the middle school teachers, principals, and administrators of the Lakewood School District's transition from junior high schools to middle schools.

The chapter presents the research question: In one suburban district, how did the teacher's, principal's, and central office administrators' perceptions of the organizational

transition from junior high to middle school compare and contrast? It provides the significance of the study, assumptions, definition of terms, and an organization of the proposed study.

Organization of the Proposed Study

Chapter I presents the problem and the purpose of the study, as well as describing the significance of the study and introducing the plans and implementation efforts of the school district to transition from junior high schools to middle schools.

Chapter II presents the history of and the research related to the middle school movement, as well as delineating the differences between the concepts of junior high school and middle school. The review looks through a set of theoretical lenses into the components of middle school and identifies elements of educational change.

Chapter III describes quantitative and qualitative approaches into the research of a single study and presents the reasons a case study was used to research the perceptions of the subjects. This chapter presents data that were obtained by the use of surveys, interviews, and document analysis. These data were then analyzed to provide answers into the research question.

Chapter IV presents the history of one suburban district's actions to plan, study, implement, and revise the organizational transition from junior high schools to middle schools. This chapter provides an explanation of the process, committees that were formed, and the information they acquired.

Chapter V presents an analysis of the survey data and interview answers. The data were disaggregated by school and additional findings were developed from the transition process.

Chapter VI gives a summary of the study and findings of the research. Themes developed from the answers, open-ended survey analysis, and the interview responses all draw conclusions and offer suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER II

Theoretical Lenses

Introduction

This chapter will first explore the history of and the research related to the middle school movement, as well as delineating the differences between the concepts of junior high school and middle school. The review will then look through a set of theoretical lenses (Merriam, 2001) into the research of the developmental needs of pre-adolescents as it lays out the components of middle school: curriculum, pedagogy, social elements, emotional needs, physical needs, professional development, and interdisciplinary teaming. Each lens will shine a light on a critical piece of the middle school concept in a hope of understanding the overall transitional process from junior high schools to middle schools in a context of educators' perceptions. The review also identifies elements of educational change: planning and setting a vision, implementation, the roles of the central office, principal, and teacher in change, stakeholder perceptions, what researchers have discovered, and a summary.

Organization of Schools History

Trends. In the United States, beginning with the establishment of common schools, local communities have traditionally controlled their own schools (Nitta, 2008). The early 19th century history of public education in the United States showed an organizational structure of elementary schools, which had students from kindergarten through eighth grade, and secondary schools, which had students from ninth through twelfth grade (Eichhorn, 1966; Thorndike, 1939). This model survived for many years with little regard for a transition between the two levels. In 1893, a Committee of Ten

was created and chaired by President Charles Elliot of Harvard to review the state of secondary schools (Eichhorn, 1966). The committee decided the existing public education system was inadequate for the college-bound student. A system of six years of elementary and six years of high school was proposed (Hechinger, 1993). This stimulated interest in the downward extension of secondary education from the traditional organization of grades 9-12 and emphasized higher academics at a younger age in better preparation for college.

The Committee of Ten consisted of college-oriented members who were optimistic in the belief that if schools were open to all youth, then children would devote their lives to academics (Hechinger, 1993). However, results of this new structure proved otherwise, as masses of students dropped out without completing the eighth grade (Erickson, 1968). Consequently, many debates occurred regarding the proper education for pre-adolescents (Cuban, 1992).

In 1912, Thorndike studied the growing dropout trend. His study concluded that the largest number of students dropped out of school during the crucial seventh and eighth grade years (Thorndike, 1939). This increased dropout rate coincided with a change in the labor market. Researchers and educators agreed that pre-adolescents belonged in school, not in the work force (Hechinger, 1993).

The failure of the Committee of Ten's system led to the emergence of the junior high school. The first three junior high schools were founded in Columbus, Ohio, in 1909 (Cuban, 1992). The junior high school was to serve as preparation for high school by imitating the structure of departmentalized classes and uniform daily class periods. Junior highs were to prepare students for the vocational and academic subjects

experienced at the secondary high school level (Tye, 1985). The number of junior highs increased across the nation in the following decades.

The traditional concept of the junior high school was subject-centered and fostered competition and empowerment of administrators. According to Tye (1985), teachers used lecture styles a majority of the time with a high percentage of teacher talk time. Teaching focused on mastery of concepts and skills in separate disciplines, and required a regular six-period day of 50-55 minute periods. This method offered subjects for one semester or one year and depended on textbook-oriented instruction (Tye, 1985). The junior high organized teachers in departments with no common planning period and arranged work spaces of teachers according to disciplines taught. This method emphasized only cognitive development of a student and offered only study hall and access to a counselor upon request (Lounsbury, 1960). The junior high school also provided a highly structured activity program after school and organized athletics around an interscholastic concept.

In 1900, about eight percent of the population 14 through 17 years of age were in high school, but by 1920 that percentage increased to 24 (Connell, 1980). In 1920, eighty percent of high school graduates had attended a K-8 elementary and a 9-12 secondary high school. However, by 1960, eighty percent had attended elementary school, a three-year junior high, and a three-year high school (Alexander & McEwin, 1989). Junior highs continued to flourish until the early 1970's.

According to Manning (2000), the first middle school was created in Bay City, Michigan, in 1950. The intent behind the creation of this school, or middle schools in general, was to better meet the developmental needs of young adolescents in a school

setting separate from K-8 schools, K-5 elementary schools, and high schools. In a 1993 national study, 65% of principals reported that their schools had moved to a 5-8 or 6-8 grade configuration, as compared to 25% reporting such a change in 1981 (Valentine et al., 1993). A more recent national study (Valentine, et al., 2002) found that 76% of the middle level schools had made the transition to 5-8 or 6-8 grade configurations and that 45% of those middle level schools had made the transition during the 1990s.

The number of schools in the middle level grades in the United States is shown in Table 1. Over 55% of the schools were organized in grades six through eight. In 1995, these students went to schools with the following grade compositions (National Middle School Association, 1995):

Table 1

Number of Schools in the Middle Level Grades in 1995

Grade	Number of Schools	Percentages of Schools
Grades 5-8	1,223 schools	11%
Grades 6-8	6,155 schools	55%
Grades 7-8	2,412 schools	22%
Grades 7-9	1,425 schools	13%

The latest national study at the time reported that only five percent of the middle grades schools in 2000 were schools with seventh through ninth grades (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

Despite some diversity in grade configurations, a trend had emerged. The major changes in grade configuration in the 20th century (Appendix A) were clearly the rise and

decline of the junior high school (typically grades 7-9) and the rise of the middle school (typically grades 6-8).

Decline of junior high schools. The literature also suggested the importance of recalling and understanding the beginnings of the middle school movement. In 1963, Dr. William Alexander, a noted curriculum authority, spoke at a Cornell University conference convened to examine the status and future of the junior high school. In his presentation, "The Junior High School: A Changing View," he focused on curriculum and instruction, and provided participants with a thoughtful and challenging proposal to implement a new "middle school" taught by specifically prepared educators who would implement a relevant curriculum and essential learning processes that were developmentally appropriate for students within that age range (National Middle School Association, 2010a).

Trends over the next two decades indicated a shift from junior high schools, which included grades 7-9 to middle schools, which included grades 5-8 and grades 6-8 (National Middle School Association, 1999). Several national studies documented the growth in the percentage of schools organized in the 6-7-8 pattern from 15% (Valentine, Clark, Nickerson, & Keefe, 1981), to 40% (Alexander & McEwin, 1989) to 50% (Valentine, Clark, Irvin, Keefe, & Melton, 1993), to 55 % (McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins, 1995), and to 59% (Valentine, Clark, Hackmann, & Petzo, 2002).

The decline of the junior high coincided with the rise of the middle school, which came on the national scene in the 1960's (Digest of Education Statistics, 2009). Eventually, the middle school movement would grow to be characterized as "one of the largest and most comprehensive efforts to educational reorganization in the history of

American public schooling" (George & Oldaker, 1985, p. 1). Today, the middle school remains the dominate form of education for students in middle grades in terms of numbers of each type of school, showing 12,773 middle schools to 3,112 junior high schools (see Appendix A).

In some schools, the combination of grades was the result of administrative considerations such as building costs, enrollment trends, or distance from other schools. Most administrators considered the 6-8 grade configurations as ideal for developmentally appropriate middle-level programs. When principals were asked in 2000 to identify the ideal grade configuration, 65% chose the 6-8 configuration, 9% chose 5-8, 16% chose 7-8, and 3% chose the 7-9 configurations (Valentine et al., 2002).

Alexander and McEwin (1989) and McEwin, Dickinson, and Jenkins (1995) reported that the 6-8 grade configuration was most popular and that the middle school organization of grades 6-8 was most likely to provide the key characteristics of recommended practices and programs for young adolescents. However, they also found that schools with grades 5-8, although far less numerous, were about as likely to have these characteristics as ones with grades 6-8.

Middle school concept. Middle schools usually consisted of grades 6-8 but may also contain grades 5-7, 6-7, 5-8, and 7-8. Middle schools were based on the developmental needs (social and academic) of young adolescents and provided a curriculum that was challenging, integrative, and exploratory. Middle schools provided varied teaching and learning approaches; assessment and evaluation that promoted learning; flexible organizational structures; programs and policies that fostered health, wellness, and safety; and comprehensive guidance and support services (National Middle

School Association, 2003). Effective middle schools were based on a stated philosophy and goals that must be flexible and responsive to student needs (Morocco, Brigham, & Aguilar, 2006).

Theoretical Lenses

The middle school conceptual framework provides various theoretical lenses to view the individual components of the middle school concept. Each lens looks at a specific area of the middle school and focuses on the reasons that component is critical to the overall effectiveness on the middle school concept. These lenses include the National Middle School Association, benefits, curriculum, pedagogy, social elements, emotional needs, physical needs, professional development, interdisciplinary teaming, and transitional lenses.

National Middle School Association lens. When the middle school concept originated and gained momentum, the National Middle School Association (NMSA) was formed in 1973 to coordinate the efforts of newly formed middle schools (David, 1998). Since its inception, the National Middle School Association has been a voice for those committed to the educational and developmental needs of young adolescents. NMSA was dedicated exclusively to those students in the middle grades and in 2010 had more than 30,000 members in 48 countries.

The published NMSA mission statement was, “The National Middle School Association is dedicated to improving the educational experiences of young adolescents by providing vision, knowledge, and resources to all who serve them in order to develop healthy, productive, and ethical citizens” (National Middle School Association, 1982). The NMSA developed three goals to meet their mission statement:

Goal 1: Extend National Middle School Association's status as the leading organization supporting the education and well-being of young adolescents.

Goal 2: Provide professional development, resources, and services that engage and enhance the effectiveness of middle grades educators.

Goal 3: Ensure NMSA's stability, growth, and continued leadership in the field of middle grades education (NMSA, 1982).

The NMSA's advocacy was based exclusively on what research and experience have shown to be best for young adolescents (National Middle School Association, 2010a).

Benefits lens. In the early years of the middle school movement, educators implemented what were then perceived as middle school characteristics, such as advisory programs, teams, and exploratory offerings (Epstein & MacIver, 1990). The middle school was conceived as a child-centered institution with responsive practices and a varied curriculum. Such practices were designed to address social, personal, and academic development through strong advisory programs, activity periods, cooperative learning, interdisciplinary teaming, and exploratory classes (Lounsbury, 2001).

McEwin, Dickinson, and Jenkins (1995) found that middle grade practices most responsive to the needs of young adolescents were found in schools with configurations of 6-8 grades. Epstein and MacIver (1990) concluded that grade configuration made a real difference in the education of young adolescents because middle schools with 6-8 and 5-8 grade configurations implemented more of the recommended middle school practices than junior high schools did.

Felner et al. (1997) documented the benefits of implementing four structural changes for middle schools: (1) teaming with common planning time, (2) a small number

of students per team, (3) frequent advisory periods, and (4) appropriate educational practices for young adolescents. The results of their study of 31 Illinois middle schools indicated that students in schools with high levels of implementation of their suggestions had higher achievement scores than students in schools with partial implementation or low levels of implementation. Results also showed that schools with high levels of implementation of their suggestions experienced fewer behavior problems (e.g., aggression) and reported higher levels of self-esteem as well as less fear and worry (Felner et al., 1997).

Curriculum lens. Curriculum remained the primary vehicle for achieving goals and objectives of a school. In middle schools, which were developmentally responsive to the needs of their students, curriculum was an integral part of every planned aspect of the educational program. An effective middle school curriculum must be challenging, exploratory, integrative, and relevant from both the student's and the teacher's perspectives (National Middle School Association, 2010a).

In some exemplary middle schools, curriculum may be carried out in all-school themes or team units of study that involve all classes and subjects. This hidden curriculum provides a powerful influence on students' education as they "learn indirectly from people with whom they interact, the structure in which they work, and the issues that inevitably occur in human experience" (National Middle School Association, 2010a, p.18).

As a means of improving curriculum, organizations such as the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989) and the National Middle School Association (National Middle School Association, 1995, 2003) routinely stressed the importance of

creating smaller communities of learning by promoting the creation of teams. "Creating teams of teachers and students is a vital part in developing a middle grades learning community" (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 125). Because teachers shared the same students and had a common planning period, they were able to respond quickly to the needs of individual students through collaboration, meeting jointly with parents, and designing thematic units that fostered the transfer of curriculum among several disciplines and increased relevance.

Pedagogy lens. Pedagogy is defined as the function of a teacher, including the art or science of teaching, education, and instructional methods (Dictionary.com, 2010). Lusted (1986) highlighted the importance of pedagogy as a concept that "draws attention to the process through which knowledge is produced" (p.2). Lusted argued that "knowledge is produced in the process of interaction…between teacher and learner at the moment of classroom engagement…it is not the matter that is offered so much as the matter that is understood" (1986, p.4).

The concept of pedagogy in the middle school was to be student-centered instead of teacher-centered. Teachers use an understanding what students want and need to know and do, the questions and concerns that activate their minds, and the aspirations they have for their lives. Teachers use knowledge about the resources students bring to learning that can be a bridge to the valued curriculum (Lusted, 1986).

According to Young (2005), all teachers should advocate for students. Teachers and parents were the biggest advocates for children, yet sometimes the students were not aware of the huge amount of positive support behind them. Many teachers spent countless hours searching out the best books, improved learning conditions, and

improved teaching tools, in an effort to reach and teach students in the best possible way. They were continuously trying to find better ways to meet the needs of the students (Young, 2005).

The pedagogy described in the National Middle School Association's 2003 publication established the following practices: The learning environment is supportive and productive; the learning environment promotes independence, interdependence, and self-motivation; students' needs, backgrounds, perspectives, and interests are reflected in the learning program; students are challenged and supported to develop deep levels of thinking and application; assessment practices are an integral part of teaching and learning; and learning connects strongly with communities and practice beyond the classroom (National Middle School Association, 2003).

Social elements lens. Students in middle schools were taught in interdisciplinary teams by highly qualified teachers. Still, the students faced problems and had difficulties in their efforts to fit in. Akos (2002) surveyed sixth graders at midyear to determine what they perceived to be the most difficult aspects of middle school. Twenty-six percent of the participants responded with the fear of getting lost, and thirteen percent responded that making friends was difficult. Other answers included learning the class schedule and getting to class on time. Students also indicated in the survey results those who had helped them the most with the transition to middle school. The top response was friends, followed by teachers and parents (Akos, Queen, & Lineberry, 2005, p. 47).

Payne (1995) reported that students in middle schools were growing up in a dramatically different social context from what their teachers experienced during their adolescence because of changes in the world and the communities in which they live.

Students were surrounded by greater dangers in their lives, and so, more than ever, they needed safe classrooms in which to communicate, try new things, and grow up. Yet even in a changing social context, some factors remain the same. Cushman & Rogers (2008) stated the following:

> The developmental process remains the same as when we were their age, and so does the role of the teacher. Just as we did then, kids today want to learn, to love, to be accepted, and to be really good at something. They do not want to fail, and they do not want to feel ashamed (p. 196).

Emotional needs lens. In 2004, the RAND Corporation assessed the state of American middle schools and identified the schools' major challenges. The research team collected and synthesized literature and research from the last 20 years covering how well middle schools were serving our young adolescents. Unfortunately, the reputation of middle schools in the United States in that time left in doubt whether these schools served early teens well. Middle schools had been called the Bermuda Triangle of education and had been blamed for increases in behavior problems, teen alienation, disengagement from school, and low achievement. RAND (2004) undertook a comprehensive assessment of the American middle school to separate the rhetoric from the reality (2004).

Research suggested (Smialek, 2006) that the onset of puberty remained an especially poor reason for beginning a new phase of schooling, inasmuch as multiple simultaneous changes were stressful for young adolescents and sometimes had long-lasting negative effects. Most preteens want to fit in with their peer group (2006). They become more interested in activities with their friends rather than with their school

studies (2006). They seek social approval as a way of defining who they are and how they feel about themselves (2006). The opinions of friends at this stage seem to matter more than their parents' or teachers' advice (2006). They fear rejection of their peer group, and cliques (exclusive groups) usually form at this time (2006).

Physical needs lens. Young adolescents have unique physical characteristics and needs. They experience irregular growth spurts in physical development. They also experience fluctuations in basal metabolism, which causes restlessness and listlessness. Many young adolescents have ravenous appetites, mature at varying rates of speed, and are highly disturbed by body changes (Forte & Schurr, 1993).

There were several suggestions for facility requirements to meet the physical needs of middle school students. Forte & Schurr (1993) suggested placing team classrooms in proximity to one another. This proximity allows instant communication and will cut down on time required for students to travel from one classroom to another. These classrooms adapt easily for grouping and regrouping of students. It may be necessary to vary class size, learning experiences, and instructional delivery systems. The environment at all times should be safe and secure for students and staff. This issue remains of great concern to parents. The furniture and equipment in classrooms should be functional, movable, and size-appropriate (Forte & Schurr, 1993).

Forte and Schurr (1993) further explained that the building should be aesthetically pleasing and attractive, which would enhance the setting for learning. Effective traffic patterns were planned so that the minimum number of students would change classes at one time. The environment (both inside and outside of classrooms) reflected the physical needs of students. Height and size were considered when providing lockers. Lockers

were assigned to students whose team classrooms were in the same area (Forte & Schurr, 1993).

Professional development lens. Professional development for teachers (i.e., staff development, in-service education, continuing education, teacher training) includes the range of formal and informal processes and activities that teachers engage in both inside and outside of the school in order to improve their teaching knowledge and skills (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Professional development for middle grades teachers (Guskey, 2003) included three critical areas of knowledge:

- Content knowledge (deep understanding of their discipline),
- Pedagogical knowledge (instructional strategies), and
- Knowledge about the uniqueness of young adolescent learners.

Teachers who were well prepared and trained were more effective in the classroom and, therefore, had the greatest impact on student learning. Teachers themselves reported that the more time they spent in professional development activities, the more likely they were to indicate that it had improved their instruction (Killion, 1999; National Center for Education Statistics, 2001).

Professional development activities also can be linked to increased student achievement. The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) identified 26 staff development programs for middle grades teachers with documented evidence to demonstrate the link between staff development and student achievement (Killion, 1999). Further evidence linking professional development to student achievement can be found in a study (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 1998) involving a half million elementary and

middle grades students in 3,000 Texas schools. Researchers found the most important factor in student achievement was teacher quality (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 1998).

According to research (Flowers & Mertens, 2003), middle grades teachers were not getting balanced professional development. The most frequent types of professional development activities occurred within their own school. Professional development activities outside the school occurred much less frequently. In addition, middle grades teachers indicated a high level of need for additional professional development in multiple areas, not just one or two (Flowers & Mertens, 2003).

Interdisciplinary teaming lens. Interdisciplinary teaming was perhaps the foundation of the middle school concept. Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall (2003) reported:

> This large-scale research indicated the positive effect of interdisciplinary teaming and revealed (a) the critical nature of common planning time, (b) teaming improves school climate, (c) teaming increases parent communication, (d) teaming increases teachers' job satisfaction, and (e) teaming positively influences student achievement. (pp. 57-60)

The study in Gray (2004) addressed the following question on a small scale: What was the best way to educate the adolescent? Gray's study found that the modern-day middle school, especially middle schools that practiced the process of interdisciplinary teaming, remains a highly effective approach to educating the middle-level student. Interdisciplinary teaming best prepared students for the rigors of high school and beyond by nurturing and developing the early adolescent while encouraging independence and responsibility. Middle schools were an effective means for the successful transition of students to high school (Gray, 2004).

Gray's (2004) study was considered an ethnographic design because it studied one cultural group, middle-level students in one school district. The study explored the group's attitudes and shared beliefs, and attempted to reveal a detailed picture of the group. The study drew from information discovered through interviews, both structured and unstructured, to reveal more about the central phenomenon of interdisciplinary teaming. The researcher wanted students to openly share their feelings about the preparation they were given for their transition to high school. This study did not look at ways the district engaged teachers, parents, and the larger community in the transition process. Instead, it looked at the best way to educate the adolescent once he became placed in a middle school setting.

Forte and Schurr (1993) proposed that interdisciplinary teaming offered student advantages with improved student-teacher relationships through a sense of belonging to established team or school family with special identity, customs, and rituals. It increased motivation and enthusiasm for learning through varied instructional materials, techniques, and personalities. Student attendance and behavior improved because of being in a consistent environment with common rules, guidelines, and procedures. Interdisciplinary teaming provided opportunities for achievement through flexible grouping and scheduling options. Students improved their self-concept through team-initiated advisory groups. There were many chances for matching teaching styles with learning styles (Forte & Schurr, 1993).

Transitional lens. Many schools in the United States have transitioned from junior high schools to middle schools in the last fifty years. Some of these schools simply changed their names and grade configuration without changing much of anything

else. The vast majority of these schools had not seen much improvement in student achievement or behavior, and they had even changed back to a junior high school or moved to a K-8 setting (National Middle School Association, 2003). Other schools had recognized the developmental needs of young adolescents and had adopted the tenants of the National Middle Schools Association to change the pedagogy and learning environment as they transitioned from junior high to middle school.

Worley's (1992) inquiry focused on two school settings: one middle school that was previously organized as a junior high school and one junior high school that formally had been a middle school. Worley's specific aim was to determine why each change was initiated, the process used to achieve that change, and the differences, if any, that resulted from the change. The basic initial assumption of his study was that middle schools and junior high schools were more alike than different. A second basic assumption was that differences were essentially structural rather than philosophical or pedagogical in nature. Worley drew three conclusions from this study. First, little difference existed between the middle school and the junior high school studied in this project. In addition, little difference was apparent at either school compared to its previous organization. Second, the change processes utilized at these two schools had not led to real fundamental change at either setting. Third, all of the administrators interviewed were unanimous in their support for the middle school philosophy as best meeting the needs of early adolescent students. Worley found that the middle schools that had existed were middle schools in name only. Worley reported that none of the middle school philosophy was applied in the second district when middle schools consisted of the sixth and seventh grades. No

distinction in the programs offered to the students was made, and no curricular changes were suggested (Worley, 1992).

Although Worley found that little difference existed between the middle school and the junior high school in his study, continued research has found fundamental differences. The case study in Sayler-Mitchell (2002) attempted to differentiate between junior high schools and middle schools and to compare the differences between these two educational settings. Two key areas developed in the middle schools, advisement curriculum and instructional practices, were also reviewed.

The author studied only the junior high and middle schools in California. The study surveyed ten topics produced in a 1987 publication, *Caught in the Middle: Educational Reform for Young Adolescents in California Public Schools.* The problem addressed in this study was to determine to what extent California middle schools had implemented specific practices of advisement curriculum and instructional practices to achieve the recommendations outlined in *Caught in the Middle* (Middle Grades Task Force, 1987). Four research questions were examined: What was the origin of the traditional junior high school? What were the differences found between traditional junior high schools and modern middle schools? What advisement practices were being implemented in California middle schools? What instructional practices were being implemented in California middle schools?

The results of this study found that the origins of both the junior high school and the middle school were thought out and purposeful. These two educational settings evolved due to the desire to better educate preadolescent children. This study found that there were various reasons for establishing a middle school. These included the need to

eliminate crowded conditions in other schools, to provide a program specifically designed for children in their age group, and to bridge the gap between the elementary and high school better. Other reasons were to remedy the weakness of the junior high, to try out various innovations, to utilize a new school building, and to use plans that have been successfully implemented in other schools. This study further found that there were distinct differences between the junior high and the middle school (Mitchell, 2002).

Further research revealed that a modern day middle school was transformative and challenged the entrenched practices of many junior high schools. According to Gordon, Gravel, and Schifter (2009), research on the middle school concepts exposed several fundamental biases in a traditional curriculum based on the assumptions that print was the best medium for acquiring information and writing was the best means for expressing what one knows. Other biases were the ability to learn and engage in rich content that depended solely on mastering these particular media and "book smarts" were what mattered most to learning. Gordon, Gravel, and Schifter further noted that those students that found print inaccessible or difficult deserved a less challenging, less rich, and less stimulating curriculum. They added the following statement describing curriculum bias: "Driving these assumptions is another more harmful one: that some students simply will never learn as much or as well, and that is their problem, not a problem for the standard educational system" (Gordon, Gravel, & Schifter, 2009, pp. x, xi).

Table 2 delineates the differences in the concepts of junior high school and middle school (Forte & Schurr, 1993).

Table 2

Major Distinctions between the Middle School and the Junior High School

MIDDLE SCHOOL	JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL
Is student-centered	Is subject- centered
Fosters collaboration and empowerment of teachers and students	Fosters competition and empowerment of administrators
Focuses on creative exploration and experimentation of subject matter	Focuses on mastery of concepts and skills in separate disciplines
Allows for flexible scheduling with large blocks of time	Requires a regular six-period day of 50-55-minutes periods
Varies length of time students are in courses	Offers subjects for one semester or one year
Encourages multi-materials approach to instruction	Depends on textbook-oriented instruction
Organizes teachers on interdisciplinary teams with common planning period	Organizes teachers in departments with no common planning period
Arranges work spaces of teamed teachers adjacent to one another	Arranges work spaces of teachers according to disciplines taught
Emphasizes both affective and cognitive development of student	Emphasizes only cognitive development of student
Offers advisor/advisee teacher-oriented guidance program	Offers study hall and access to counselor upon request
Provides high-interest "mini-courses" during school day	Provide highly structured activity program after school
Uses varied delivery systems with high level of interaction among students and teachers	Uses lecture styles a majority of the time with high percentage of teacher talk time
Organizes athletics around intramural concept	Organizes athletics around interscholastic concept

Source: The Definitive Middle School Guide by I. Forte & S. Schurr, (1993, p. 31)

Shearer-Shineman (1996) analyzed the steps used to transition three North Dakota junior high schools, different in demographics, enrollment, and culture to middle schools. The teacher and parent relationships were close with a community atmosphere apparent

in all three schools, most noticeably in one school. In each of the three settings, the schools were quite literally in the center of the community (Shearer-Shineman, 1996). According to Shearer-Shineman (1996), the three schools implemented middle school components with varying frequency and success. Shearer-Shineman believed the distinction of middle schools stemmed from a program developed around the needs of the early adolescent students to improve their success and their learning experience. All three schools tried to engage teachers, parents, and the larger community in the transition process. Most of the middle grades teachers in the first school had active involvement in the middle school transition.

In the second and third schools, the decision to move to the middle school was a top-down process rather than the grassroots approach of the first school. While the principals of the second and third schools thought they solicited everyone's opinions, many of the faculty members felt left out of the process, and some became bitter (Shearer-Shineman, 1996). This study did use the perceptions of the participants to draw conclusions about the successes of the transition. These perceptions were well documented and analyzed.

Although Worley (1992) found few differences existed between the middle school and the junior high school in his study, Mitchell (2002) found there were distinct differences between the junior high and the middle school. Forte and Schurr (1993) delineated 13 major distinctions between the middle school and the junior high school in their definitive middle school guide. Shearer-Shineman (1996) studied the implementation of middle school components in three North Dakota schools and found

programs in all three schools developed around the needs of the early adolescent students to improve their success and their learning experience.

Educational Change

Planning and setting a vision. Albert Einstein was quoted as saying, "Today's problems cannot be solved if we still think the way we thought when we created them" (Calaprice, 1995). As long as our thinking is governed by habit, notably by industrial, machine age concepts such as control, predictability, standardization, and "faster is better," we will continue to recreate institutions as they have been, despite their disharmony with the larger world and the need of all living systems to evolve (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2005). Schlechty (2009) stated, "If we are serious about having great schools for every child, we begin by trying to understand the schools we have and the reasons they function as they do" (p. 38). Schlechty then stated, "Next, we try to imagine what schools would look like if they were to function as they need to for all children to learn at high levels" (p. 39).

The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development recognized the existing educational problems and presented a powerful vision for middle schools with its 1989 report, *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century.* This report emphasized both the perils educators faced and the potential they could reach. The council (Carnegie, 1989) concluded with the following:

> Middle grade schools, junior high, intermediate, or middle schools are potentially society's most powerful force to recapture millions of youth adrift. Yet too often they exacerbate the problems the youth face. A volatile mismatch exists between the organization and curriculum of

middle grades schools, and the intellectual, emotional, and interpersonal needs of young adolescents. (p. 32)

The National Middle School Association (2003) described its vision of a successful middle school with the following 14 characteristics. Eight were facets of the culture of schools. The remaining six were programmatic characteristics that can evolve in such a culture. All of these features or attributes of a successful middle school, while necessary as individual items, must work in harmony (Irvin, Valentine, & Clark, 1994). The vision for the culture of a school included: educators who value working with this age group and were prepared; courageous, collaborative leadership; a shared vision that guides decisions; an inviting, supportive, and safe environment; high expectations for every member of the learning community; students and teachers engaged in active learning; an adult advocate for every student; and school-initiated family and community partnerships (Anfara, Andrews, Hough, Mertens, Mizelle, & White, 2003). In addition, according to the National Middle Schools Association, schools would provide the following: curriculum that was relevant, challenging, and exploratory; multiple learning and teaching approaches that respond to their diversity; assessment and evaluation programs that promote quality learning; organizational structures that support meaningful relationships and learning; school-wide efforts and policies that foster health, wellness, and safety; and guidance and support services (pp. 6-7).

Although research and cumulative empirical evidence have confirmed that these characteristics led to higher levels of student achievement and were supportive of the middle school concept, they have limited value when implemented independently. Perhaps the most profound and enduring lesson learned in thirty years of active middle

school advocacy was that the several distinct elements of successful middle level schools work best as parts of the whole (Lounsbury & Brazee, 2004). Schools should not choose among characteristics by implementing only those that appear to be achievable or seem appropriate for a school or a particular situation. Rather, successful middle level schools recognize that the 14 characteristics described in National Middle Schools Association (2003) were interdependent and must be implemented in concert.

Implementation. Policy implementation within the local educational setting could bring a plethora of concerns involving personalities and politics. Wirt & Kirst (1997) defined politics as "a form of social conflict rooted in group differences over values about using public resources to meet private needs" (p. 4). According to Fowler (2000), "Implementation is the stage of the policy process in which a policy formally adopted by a government body is put into practice" (p. 270).

Policy in practice never turns out quite as politicians and policy-makers originally intended (Peck & Perri 6, 2006). This observation seems to be universal, as these researchers stated:

> In almost every country, there are periods during which politicians in the governing party bemoan what they see as the inadequacy of the efforts made by the central civil service and by the public sector professionals to implement their policies. (p.1)

A school policy did not mean that people would immediately execute new orders. Wirt and Kirst (1997) explained: "Programs approved within the political system are never self-executing and so must be implemented" (p. 20). "In fact, some school policies are never implemented at all, and many others are implemented only partially or incorrectly"

(Fowler, 2000, p.18). In public school settings, administrators, teachers, and staff implement change programs. Local politics surrounding the implementation can often shape the administration of school programs. In school districts, the local board of education adopts policies and expects the superintendent to implement them through his staff. Wirt and Kirst went on to suggest that school administrators were often told to simply adopt and implement new policies, and then they were held accountable for any failure and were looked upon as showing either a lack of skill or will to perform the necessary task. In today's society, developing ways forward from an impasse for frustrated politicians and school board members has challenged school administrators, concerned parents, and confused, defiant students.

Policy implementation required something more than setting targets and then attempting to coerce principals and teachers in order to make them comply with the instructions of the school board. Peck and Perri 6 (2006) argued that "implementation can only be cultivated successfully when institutional settlements are in place by which there can be conciliation between rival approaches to making sense of experience" (p. xviii). There was a much greater chance of continued success of implementing changes within a school when all stakeholders understood a new policy and agreed to implement and to modify procedures when needed.

Policy implementations face many obstacles. One of the biggest challenges in leading school change involved realistically determining the likely barriers and constraints. Reformers tended to be optimists and visionaries who were not aware enough at the outset about all the things that could go wrong or get in the way of their plans (Levin, 2008). The change of leadership in a school or district often weakened a

change initiative. State mandates and lack of funds funneled away money from newly established programs. Various interest groups could voice their support or opposition to proposed policies, thus magnifying the details of the implementation process. For many years, implementation of school policy was relegated to the professional school people, but today, laypersons and active interest groups are an integral part of policy change (Wirt & Kirst, 1997).

One of the most consistent findings and understanding about the change process in education is that all successful schools experience "implementation dips" as they move forward. Fullan's work, (as cited in Jossey-Bass Reader, 2007), shows the implementation dip is a dip in performance and confidence as one encounters an innovation that requires new skills and new understandings.

Most policy implementations failed because the policy makers did not consider the school culture. Gross's work, (as cited in Fowler, 2000), identified five barriers to effective implementation. The first four caused the last one to develop. According to Gross, they include the following:

1. The teachers never really understood the change.
2. The teachers did not know how to use the new pedagogy.
3. The materials needed to establish open classrooms were not available.
4. The culture and the institutional organization of the school were not consistent with the requirements of the new policy.
5. The teachers became discouraged and lost their motivation to implement (Fowler, 2000, p.273).

In some school settings, the implementation to a full-scale interdisciplinary

schedule could be challenging. Wirt and Kirst (1997) indicated that curriculum reform was difficult to implement due to the lack of motivation from school officials within the school:

> Added to this pressure was the unwillingness of teachers to accommodate to change, because after all, teachers feel most comfortable with what they have already done. Efforts to induce change, through such means as salary increases as incentives, to undergo course training in universities, often come up against the heavy pressure of inertia. (pp. 24-25)

Change brings discomfort to many individuals in a school organization. Principals are asked to step out of their comfort zone and lead middle-level teachers as they shift their focus from teaching to learning. Teachers are then asked to step out of their comfort zone and lead students to curriculum that is challenging, integrative, and exploratory. John Neal, an American author and critic, is quoted, "A certain amount of opposition is a great help to a man. Even kites rise against, not with, the wind" (Hall, 1898). Accordingly, change brings resistance, but a certain amount of resistance is good for an organization.

When people who have led a reform effort were asked what they would do differently if given the chance, perhaps the most popular answer according to Payne (2008) was,

> Take more time. Not more money, not more administrative support, not different teachers, although all of those come up, but more time: time for professional development, time for key relationships to develop, time to change teacher belief, and time for midcourse assessment (p. 172).

Central office's role in change. The role of the central office in supporting school improvement efforts has expanded as local, state, and national attention increasingly focused on school performance (Supovitz and Weinbaum, 2008). The central office administrators of a school district were given responsibilities to insure a safe, caring, nurturing environment with high expectations that allowed for student-centered exploratory learning. Supovitz and Weinbaum suggested all district decisions should be made in reference to what was best for the kids. Bolman and Deal (1997) presented four core assumptions for organizational leaders, including school district officials, to follow:

1. Organizations exist to serve human needs rather than the reverse.
2. People and organizations need each other: organizations need ideas, energy, and talent; people need careers, salaries, and opportunities.
3. When the fit between individual and system was poor, one or both suffer: individuals will be exploited or will exploit the organization—or both will become victims.
4. Good fit benefits both: individuals find meaningful and satisfying work, and organizations get the talent and energy they need to succeed. (pp. 102-103)

Educational organizations were essentially human organizations. Unlike industrial organizations where the main resources were raw materials, machinery, technology, and patents, the school's most important and expensive resources were its teachers, supervisors, and administrators. Traditionally, over 80% of a school district's budget was for staff salaries (Sergiovanni, 1984). The district administration supported

the teachers and principals by monitoring how policies and changes were being carried out and how effective such policies were. The administration continually studied the problems of the schools, and maintained a system of supervisory, guidance, health, research, and curriculum services to enable them to respond to school needs.

The central office's role in planning and implementing change where middle schools were concerned followed the recommendations for transforming middle-level schools in accordance with the Carnegie Report (1989). Eight recommendations were given: Create small communities for learning, teach a core academic program that results in students who were literate, ensure success for all students, empower teachers and administrators to make decisions about the experiences of middle grade students, staff middle grade schools with teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents, improve academic performance through fostering health and fitness, re-engage families in the education of young adolescents, and connect schools with communities.

Principal's role in change. The National Middle School Association's 2002 Position Statement on Curriculum Integration addresses the principal's role within the middle school. First and foremost, the role of the principal is to encourage teachers to be student-centered instead of teacher-centered by providing them with the same safe learning environment we seek for students: an environment in which experimentation and exploration are valued. The principal also needs to provide professional development training in integrated curriculum for teachers and provide discussion and planning time for teachers to design new integrated curriculum plans. The role of the principal is to look for ways to modify conventional schedules and facilities to increase flexibility to facilitate integrative plans developed with the staff. The principal needs to discuss and

design staff and curriculum assessment strategies that reflect a new emphasis on integrated teaching and learning and encourage ongoing development of increasingly sophisticated integrative strategies. The principal also has a role in community outreach and education: Inform the community; provide opportunities for parents and interested community members to learn about curriculum integration; and invite them to sit in on planning meetings, staff development sessions, and classrooms where curriculum integration is implemented (National Middle School Association, 2003).

The principal needs to recognize the range of possible responses to proposed change within a school: refusal to change, reluctance to change, and a passion to bring about the change. It is important to recognize and respect these different perspectives and responses. Principals who wish to be effective facilitators of change need to think carefully how to how to handle these reactions (Smith, 2008).

Cooper (2003) presented research that indicates the principal plays a pivotal role in facilitating school reform (Schwahn & Spady, 1998). This case examined the role of one middle school principal as he worked with his faculty and community to reform his school so that it aligned with widely accepted recommendations for middle level education (Cooper, 2003). This school started the transition to middle school by first adopting a schedule change that shortened each teaching period and added elective classes to expand the number of class offerings for students. Teachers were teaching more classes but still had the same planning period, which also was shortened. The teachers presented a proposal to the school board to be given a common team planning time along with their individual planning time. The principal and the superintendent decided to retire, and new leadership was hired to complete the transition to middle

school. The board did adopt a common team planning time along with an individual planning time for the teachers of the middle school.

At the beginning of this study, Cooper (2003) stated he expected to tell the story of a school that made a successful transformation from a junior high school to a middle school. As the story unfolded, it became apparent that this was not the case. Although the structures consistent with the middle school movement (Carnegie Council, 1989; National Middle School Association, 1995) were adopted, critical elements in both the implementation of these practices and the process to support continuous improvement were found to be missing (Cooper, 2003). Cooper's study found that the principal's leadership limited the success of the change to a middle school. The principal's unwillingness to address conflict in a productive manner or to share leadership hampered the success of his efforts over time. Several conclusions emerged from this study: vision needs to include current research and practices, a district needs to understand the culture of a community, transition and change should produce an expected amount of healthy conflict, and a change of leadership was critical in sustaining long-term change (Cooper, 2003).

According to Wiseman (2010), the principal needs to facilitate team development and acquire a theoretical understanding of group dynamics and the process necessary for building effective teams. Fostering effective teams takes diligent, purposeful work by the principal because group dynamics are complex and demand consistency. A principal should know that building knowledgeable and expert team leaders translates into effective teams (Wiseman, 2010).

Teacher's role in change. Once teachers are hired in a school that is experiencing change, they need to gain a better understanding of the school's goals and expectations. They need to learn their roles, how to work with their peers, and to continue to develop the skills and knowledge that will help them carry out their work (Hatch, 2009). Teachers should realize the classroom is the most proximal and powerful setting for influencing youth outcomes, and within the classrooms, students' social and instructional interactions with teachers either produce or inhibit achievement, behavior, and emotional health to engage and motivate youth. Classrooms are complicated social systems involving materials and physical arrangements, management of time, and interactions between and among students and teachers (Shinn & Yoshikawa, 2008).

The National Middle School Association's 2002 Position Statement on Curriculum Integration addresses the teacher's role within the middle school. It states that teachers need to reconsider the notion that skills and concepts on standardized tests can be mastered only through conventional curricula. Teachers need to begin curriculum conversations across disciplines to identify common standards and goals that can lead to a more coherent curriculum for their students. They should discuss ways to involve students in various phases of their education from planning to classroom implementation and assessment (National Middle School Association, 2003).

From these first actions, teachers need to develop curriculum concepts or integrated themes that students and teachers could explore, not as an add-on, but as replacements for conventional separate-subject-area units. Teachers need to discuss and design new assessment strategies that reflect students' accomplishments and performance beyond those measured by standardized tests. They should discuss and design new

assessment strategies that reflect the goals and accomplishments of the integrated curriculum methods used and that explore ways to improve and extend these integrative strategies. Teachers should have the results of their work with their local community and with the world (National Middle School Association, 2003).

Stakeholder perceptions. Murphy (2001) published a qualitative research case study that was conducted in a rural school district in Pennsylvania. Surveys and interviews revealed the perceptions of teachers and administrators about the transition from junior high school to middle school. The findings from the Murphy study concluded that teachers had high perceptions pertaining to the role of teachers, such as competency, cooperation, and support. They had low perceptions pertaining to teacher involvement in decision-making, morale, time, scheduling, and curriculum. This study revealed the need to keep teachers and principals involved in the change process (Murphy, 2001).

The superintendent and school board president interviews conducted by Murphy (2001) showed a history of discussions, visitations, and workshops. The school board minutes showed points of discussion of transitioning to a middle school when construction of school buildings was discussed. However, some current teachers were unaware of previous discussions and opportunities to attend workshops. Parents were not directly involved in the assimilation of information of proposed changes but were represented by their elected school board members. A newspaper article stated that parental concerns were expressed to the school board officials about the need for a new school facility that focused on a place of transition for young adolescents. This was the

extent of engaging teachers, parents, and the larger community in the transition process (Murphy, 2001).

Murphy's (2001) focus on the human factors provided an insight that was much needed in researching school transformations. Although Murphy did not note this, the survey results and interview answers seemed to reveal a need for better communication between the teachers and administrators. The survey and interview questions were very interesting to the researcher, as the survey and interview questions could be adapted to an urban or suburban setting to acquire perceptions of teachers, principals, and administrators.

Other stakeholders such as custodians, secretaries, cooks, teacher assistants, bus drivers, volunteers, and other staff members that interact with students on a daily basis are often overlooked in educational studies of student learning environments (Lenin, 2008). Although the support staff members serve an important role in the education of young adolescents, their opinions and perceptions of school change are not part of this study.

What the researchers have discovered. Akos, Queen, and Lineberry (2005) referred to the works of eight authors and their research as they summarized their findings (pp. 3-14). In examining the literature for the transition to or from middle school, the researchers have discovered the following: Children who do not make effective transitions will be less successful in school, have difficulties making friends, and may be vulnerable to mental health problems; a child's transition to school creates a foundation for future academic, social-emotional, and behavioral development; sixth graders show a statistically significant achievement loss after the transition to middle

school compared with sixth graders attending K-8 schools with no such transition; and ninth graders entering high school experience academic achievement losses regardless of whether they attend a middle or K-8 school; those who attend middle school, and thus experience two transitions within a three-year span, experience even more severe losses.

Akos et al. (2005) discovered the following about potential dropouts:

> Students who experience a higher number of transitions are more likely to drop out of high school; a large number of students who drop out of school are of average or above-average intelligence; and many of the factors associated with dropping out of college relate to transitions from a non-middle-class lifestyle to a university lifestyle (p. 3).

An equally important transition takes place between middle school and high school. From the conception of the middle school concept, districts assigned ninth grade students to high school campuses. Whereas middle school education attempted to create a different experience for those students housed in a 6-8 building, ninth graders were given the standard high school schedule and often were not successful in that model. Success was measured in terms of grade point average, retention and dropout rates, attendance and tardiness, as well as suspensions and expulsions (Merenbloom & Kalina, 2007).

Summary

This review of the literature explored the history and research related to the middle school movement and delineated the differences between the concepts of junior high school and middle school. The literature also suggested the importance of recalling and understanding the decline of the traditional junior high school and the beginnings of

the middle school movement. This review looked through a set of interpretive theoretical lenses into the research of the developmental needs of pre-adolescents as it described the components of middle school: curriculum, pedagogy, social elements, emotional needs, physical needs, professional development, and interdisciplinary teaming.

The literature contained extensive studies showing the benefits of using the middle school concepts (Alexander & McEwin, 1989; Epstein & MacIver, 1990; Felner et al., 1997; National Middle School Association, 1995). The literature also provided a comparison of grouping of grades of adolescents (Epstein & MacIver, 1990; McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins, 1995; Valentine, Clark, Hackmann, & Petzo, 2002). However, early adolescents' educational needs did not change because of the configuration of the grades attending their school according to the National Association of Secondary Schools Principal's Director of School Leadership Services John Nori. He stated, "Good middle level schools are about what goes on inside the classroom, not the grade levels housed in the school" (Nori, 2000, p. 61).

The incorporation of recommended practices for young adolescents remained the key to being effective with students that range from ten to fourteen years old. Regardless of grade configuration, principals rated their programs higher if they used such practices as interdisciplinary teams of teachers, common planning time, days with eight periods, flexible schedules, activity periods, and cooperative learning (National Middle School Association, 2003). The implementation of good practices and strong programs, not grade configuration, determined the effectiveness of schools for young adolescents (National Middle School Association, 1995).

The review of the literature revealed several case studies of schools or districts transitioning from junior high schools to middle schools. Cooper (2003) studied the principal's role in a school's organizational transition from junior high to middle school and found that the principal plays a pivotal role in facilitating school reform. Worley (1992) produced a comparative study of changes in middle level organization of middle schools and junior high schools and found that the middle schools that had existed were middle schools in name only. Shearer-Shineman (1996) studied the transition from junior highs to middle schools in North Dakota and found that the distinction of middle schools stemmed from a program developed around the needs of the early adolescent students to improve their success and their learning experience.

The gaps in the literature were how the educators' perceptions of the organizational transition from junior high to middle school compared and contrasted. Murphy (2001) conducted a study in a rural school district in Pennsylvania that addressed this question, but there was still a gap in the literature with a study of a larger district.

This case study addressed the gap in the literature of the study of a larger school district and specifically asked: In one suburban district, how did the teacher's, principal's, and central office administrators' perceptions of the organizational transition from junior high to middle school compare and contrast? This study looks through teacher, principal, and central office administrator interpretive lenses at each group's perceptions of this transitional process, and a pragmatic theoretical lens of the district's decision makers into the research of the developmental needs of pre-adolescents and an educational system's attempt to meet those needs by creating middle schools that work.

CHAPTER III

Methodology and Procedures

Research Design

This study involved looking at the data through two theoretical lenses; both quantitative and qualitative research methods (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). The advantage of the quantitative lens was that it measured the reaction of many people to a limited set of questions, thus facilitating comparison and statistical aggregation of data and providing a broad, generalized set of findings. In contrast, qualitative research refers to a study process that investigates a social human problem where the researcher conducts the study in a natural setting and builds a whole and complex representation by a rich description and explanation as well as a careful examination of participants' words and views (Creswell, 1998). The qualitative lens typically produced a wealth of detailed data about a much smaller number of people and cases (Patton, 1987).

The Research Question

The research question investigated in this study was the following:
In one suburban district, how did the teacher's, principal's, and central office administrators' perceptions of the organizational transition from junior high to middle school compare and contrast? The scope of this study would include the following:

a. How were teachers and principals involved in the transition?

b. How effective were the implementation of middle school concepts?

c. What had been the major successes and challenges associated with the transition?

Case Studies

A case study design was chosen because of the nature of the research problem and the questions being asked (Merriam, 1988). Case studies should "reveal how all the parts fit together to form a whole" (Merriam, 1988, p. 6) and should strive for a depth of understanding from the participants' experiences. The background for putting a framework together for this educational case study came from a documented national trend to transition the organizational structure of schools from junior high to middle school (Digest of Education Statistics, 2009).

Because expressed perceptions of teachers, principals, and central office administrators were being surveyed, recorded, and analyzed, the case study design became the most appropriate design for this research. Accordingly, a case study was chosen for this research that relied upon surveys, interviews, and document analysis to address the research question.

A case study offered a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding phenomena (Merriam, 2001). The case study by this researcher was offered individual perceptions from current teachers, principal, and administrators of a particular school district as it transitioned from four junior high schools to four middle schools. The study offered insights and illuminated meanings that expanded the possible improvement of educational practices (Yin, 2003).

The planning and implementation of the transition from junior high schools to middle schools required a follow-up assessment, which was conducted using inquiry-based data from the new middle schools. The Lakewood School District had monitored

the evolution of their transition to the middle school model, but had no data or analysis of the educators' perceptions of the transitional process. This study included an initial survey, followed by interviews and collection of documents to determine the effectiveness of transitioning from junior high schools to middle schools.

Location of the study

Located in the Midwest, Lakewood School District had three high schools, four junior high schools, twenty-nine elementary schools, and one alternative school. The student population was 16,700 and reflected 46 percent on free lunch and 12 percent on reduced cost lunch. Two of the four middle schools were designated Title I schools. The 2008 District Report provided by the Office of Accountability showed a district population of 89,160; 47% Caucasian, 32% Black, 11% Hispanic, 7% American Indian, and 2% Asian. Thirty-three percent of the students came from a single parent household. Twenty-six percent of the parents had a college degree, 60% had a high school diploma without a college degree, and 14% had less than a twelfth grade education. The district's report of professional qualifications of teachers in core academic subjects showed 65.4% with a bachelor's degree, 33.1% with a master's degree, and 0.3% with a post-masters or doctoral degree.

The U. S. Census Bureau 2007 Report for the community reflected a population of 65,323 people who were 16 years and over, and a civilian work force of 34,133. The percent unemployed was 9.4% and the number of households was 32,598. The median income was $43,025 with a median family income of $46,415. The per capita income was $19,925 with 17.7% of families below poverty and 20.7% of persons below poverty.

The percent of related children under 18 living below poverty was 30.6%, while the percent of people aged 65+ years below poverty was 29.7% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007).

Data Sources

Surveys. Surveys chosen for this study were a modification of the surveys conducted by Kathleen Rose Murphy in her 2001 dissertation, *Perceptions of the Transition from Junior High School to a Middle School: The Transformative Processes at a Rural School District*. This researcher contacted Dr. Murphy and received permission to use and modify the surveys in her dissertation. Because her study was directed at a rural school district, the researcher met with the district Executive Director of Middle Schools and together they extracted from these surveys what seemed appropriate for a larger school district, eliminated questions that were not relevant, and added questions that were of interest to the district. The researcher then met with the district's trainer for middle schools and further analyzed and edited the survey questions as needed.

The researcher met with the district's superintendent and discussed the two anonymous surveys, one for teachers and one for administrators. Approval was given by the superintendent to conduct the surveys. The administration of surveys began after project approval by the University's Institutional Review Board. All available middle school teachers, building administrators, and central office administrators would be surveyed about their perception of whether the district's transition from junior high to middle school was well planned and implemented. The teacher surveys first asked five demographic questions regarding grade level, gender, teaching experience, regular or alternative certification, and teaching years at their school.

The survey asked an open-ended question, "What is a middle school?" The survey then asked participants to rate thirteen areas of their current middle school on a Likert scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). These areas included addressing the developmental needs of the student, incorporating an interdisciplinary approach to teaching, providing enrichment opportunities, parents and students receiving feedback of student progress, and ensuring a skilled teaching staff to work with students of this age group.

Other areas to rate included appropriateness of planning times, level of staff morale, flexibility of teaching time blocks, cooperation and support of staff members, and involvement of teachers in decision making. The survey also asked respondents to rate the significance of integrated theme-based units, the extent the staff is competent and continues to grow and willing to learn about middle school education, and the extent the school encourages participation by parents and the community. The survey ended with four open-ended questions about curriculum changes, parental information, interdisciplinary units, and a choice of junior high or middle school (see Appendix B).

Teachers who responded to the survey were assured anonymity, with the only qualifier being which middle school they were assigned. Schools B, C, D were given the survey during a scheduled faculty meeting. School A had cancelled their faculty meeting and released their teachers early due to tornado weather activity. After trying to twice reschedule a time to administer the survey, the researcher allowed the principal to coordinate the disbursement of the surveys through the team leaders and return the survey anonymously to the principal in a basket marked "Anonymous Survey."

The researcher arranged to meet with the district's central office administrators during one of their regular meetings. The Administrator Surveys asked twelve questions about the administrator, his/her role in the transition process, and other evaluative questions about the success of the middle schools to help adolescent learning (Yin, 2003). The survey asked for years of experience in the field of education, why the district transitioned from junior high schools to middle schools, and their involvement in the decision making process. It also asked about opportunities to visit other middle schools, their reaction to the transition from junior high to middle school, and the teachers' reactions.

The Administrator Survey asked if the administrator had changed his/her position as a result of the transitional process and how successful this process was from their point of view. It also asked for improvements made and improvements still needed. It ended by asking what significant influences they saw in the next five years and a space for any additional comments (see Appendix C).

Interviews. The original project approved by the Institutional Review Board was designed to survey teachers, principals, and central office administrators. However, to understand the teacher, principal, and administrators' perceptions expressed in the survey results, it was necessary to conduct interviews with selected individuals. The interview questions were developed from the survey responses to glean a deeper and richer understanding of the perceptions of the respondents (Eisner, 1998). The interviews presented a picture of the transition process as it actually existed, and this study posed to capture the successes and challenges as seen from the eyes of those involved. Patton (1987) suggested the following:

> Interviewing allows the evaluator to enter another person's world, to understand that person's perspective. We also interview to learn about things we cannot directly observe. We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. (p. 109)

In-depth interviews began after project modification approval by the Institutional Review Board. Teacher, principal and administrator interviews asked follow-up questions to gain a deeper understanding of the survey results (Creswell, 1998).

The interview questions were developed from the survey responses. There would be a total of 15 interviews including the following:

- Three central office administrators instrumental in the transition from junior high school to middle school,
- The four middle school principals, and
- Two teachers from each of the four middle schools. The teachers had at least 10 years teaching experience in the district, taught at different grade levels in the school, and were randomly selected by the researcher.

The researcher would contact each person to request an interview and would set a time and place for the interview. The consent for interview form would be presented, discussed, and signed (see Appendix D). Permission would be asked to audio tape the interview for accurate transcribing.

The criteria for the interview sessions were first coordinated with a set of standard questions developed from the survey answers (see Appendix E).from which all interviews would be transcribed. The interview started by simply asking, "What is a middle

school?" This question allowed the respondent freedom of expression without providing any categorical limits. The interview questions would provide insight into why this district chose to transition from junior high schools to middle schools and the extent teachers and administrators were involved in the transition. Interview questions asked about the level of success of the transitional process and the major difficulties and challenges associated with the transition.

The interview addressed the teachers' reaction to the transition and the components of a middle school concept that are still needed. Other questions asked about changes to the curriculum, reasons some teachers want to return to junior high, the preparation of eighth grade students for ninth grade, the problems ninth grade students face, and their thoughts concerning a ninth grade center.

Participants in this study were asked to share their thoughts and opinions. They talked about their recollections and perceptions with enthusiasm. When interviews were conducted, careful attention was taken to only record the interviewees' information, as the recorder was concerned not to add to the data or intentionally leave something out. This attention to detail was what Merriam (1988) called the "ethics" of collecting the data and not filtering the information, and then removing any items of bias, or what she called "prejudices, viewpoints, or assumptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation" (p. 158).

Documents. The documents to be analyzed included the Lakewood School District's Policy and Procedure Handbook, the Middle School Feasibility Task Force Handbook, the Middle School Planning & Implementation Handbook, training materials, training calendars, and other books and articles used in the training process. Each

building schedule and staff development material would be reviewed for training and communication information. Various documents were then selected to support teacher, principal, and administrator themes that emerged from the interview data analysis and open-ended survey questions. Documents and artifacts provided evidence to support stated opinions and perceptions of teachers and principals in the buildings and the central office administrators. A triangulation of results from the surveys, interviews, and documents developed themes or common threads of information within each school and within the district.

Data Collection and Analysis

The research data ensued from the surveys, interviews, and documents, transcribed into a narrative form and then coded or labeled. This process, according to Boyatzis (1998), should be completed with "patience and determination," being extraordinarily careful to prevent premature theme identification. This information was grouped into nodes or "meaningful units" as Merriam (1988, p. 179) suggested.

The quantitative part of the teacher survey used a Likert scale, a method of ascribing quantitative value to qualitative data, to make it amenable to statistical analysis. The statistical method for testing the data used a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). For each of the 13 ANOVAs, the independent variable was the school. There were four levels of the independent variable, representing the four schools. The dependent variable was the item response. The purpose of the one-way ANOVA is to compare the means of two or more groups, in this case four schools and two administrator groups, to decide whether the observed differences between them represent a chance occurrence or a systemic effect (Shavelson, 1996).

The anonymous teacher survey was both quantitative and qualitative in nature. The survey for the building principals and the central office administrators was a qualitative design, asking twelve open-ended questions. This type of study lent itself well to sorting through the opinions and perceptions of the teachers, principals, and central office administrators as they reflected upon the transitional process of changing the organizational structure from junior high schools to middle schools. That information became what Patton (1987) suggested were "information-rich" studies used to uncover and illuminate a process. Patton added that "purposeful" samplings would establish the commonalities from a "unique" or atypical group (p. 58), in this case a group of teachers, principals, and administrators striving to meet the needs of adolescent students.

The sample population studied included current teachers and principals of the four Lakeside middle schools, known as Schools A, B, C, & D (pseudonyms) plus the central office administrators for the district. Some teachers and administrators had been employed at a junior high school and transitioned to middle school teachers and administrators. Some teachers were newly hired beginning teachers at the middle schools and others moved from the elementary to middle school. These teachers were unable to answer the comparative questions on junior high and middle schools.

Each middle school principal was be contacted by e-mail, and later in person, to set a date and time at an upcoming faculty meeting to have all present faculty members answer the survey questions. At that meeting, the researcher distributed and explained the consent form, then distributed and explained the survey. Pencils were provided and the surveys were collected as each person finished. The building principals were given the same consent form, but a different survey. The surveys took around 10-15 minutes to

complete. The researcher remained until all surveys were returned. The completion rate was recorded from each of the four schools, with an over-all completion rate calculated.

Triangulation

This study was conducted with careful triangulation of data to provide the validity and reliability that would be consistent and gain the confidence of other researchers. The reliability of the surveys started with the surveys already used in Murphy's (2001) dissertation. These surveys were reviewed, modified by the researcher, executive director of middle schools, and the district trainer to produce valid questions for the surveys. The answers to the surveys and the interviews were triangulated with the document analysis to test for validity. For internal validity, the researcher compared and contrasted the findings to ensure they matched reality, and for external validity, the data were analyzed to see how they could be applied to other situations. With this study, the researcher worked diligently to maintain both internal and external validity.

The demographic answers from the Middle School Anonymous Teacher Questionnaire were compared and contrasted for commonalities and patterns within the four middle schools. The answers to the13 questions using the Likert scale were analyzed using a one-way ANOVA test. Because there were 13 ANOVAs, there was a need to adjust the error rate to .05/13=.004. Only those ANOVAs with a significance of .004 or less would be significant. The ANOVA focuses on the comparison of the variability between groups (Schools A, B, C, D). The open-ended answers on the teacher questionnaire and the principals' and administrators' survey form would be analyzed, coded, and labeled. These results showed a frequency of answers and the development of common themes.

All interview data was transcribed, coded, and analyzed according to steps outlined by Merriam (1988):

1. Assemble the raw case data into categories and themes that captured recurring patterns.
2. Analyze the categories or themes that emerged from the case studies.
3. Synthesize information by writing organized theme narratives, providing a matrix of summary descriptions based on the qualitative data.
4. Link the categories and concepts from each of the studies, providing sources of qualitative data.

Research conclusions were recorded after the survey and the interviews had concluded. As the themes emerged, if they could not be corroborated with at least two sources of data, they would not be included. On the other hand, the use of documents and artifacts to support the evidence added a third source to provide triangulation of important themes and statements that might not have been included otherwise. The document analysis included the staff development materials and the agendas from faculty meetings and team training sessions, teacher handbooks, student handbooks, and staffing schedules from the four middle schools.

Researcher Reflexivity

As an educator well versed in the educational process for 38 years, the researcher felt he was well prepared for this study. The researcher reflexivity (Schwandt, 1997) shows the researcher was part of the setting and social phenomenon he was trying to understand. The potential for bias (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009) toward the middle school concept was constantly guarded against throughout the study by verifying the

accuracy of statements and facts with people not connected to the study and also with people instrumental in the transition from junior high schools to middle schools. The researcher taught junior high math and social studies for 22 years, grades 7-9, including regular, honors, and basic math. He taught summer school, night school, and was an adjunct professor at a local university, teaching U. S. History survey courses. Serving as the school district's night school coordinator for three years gave him the administrative experience to become a high school assistant principal for the next ten years. He watched with interest as the ninth grade students prepared for high school and worked with the problems the high school experienced with ninth grade credits earned at the junior high. It was during this time he served on the district's Middle School Feasibility Task Force. He then served as principal of one of the local junior high schools and led that school's three year transition from junior high to middle school. One of his assistant principals became the district's trainer for teaching the middle school concept and the developmental growth patterns of young adolescents to the teachers of all middle level schools. During this period, he served on the District's Middle School Planning and Implementation Committee.

He then returned to the same high school and served as principal for two years as the school transitioned to a high school, grades 9-12. This was the last high school in the district to make the transition, and the principal acquired a wealth of knowledge from the previous two high schools. The researcher is currently the Director of Career and College for the district where he coordinates the graduation coaches program with the district's three high schools. The emphasis is to keep students in school. The largest

dropout level is ninth grade, the grade level that was moved to high school during the transition from junior high school to middle schools in this district.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to explain the design of the study. A case study was chosen because of the nature of the research problem and the questions being asked (Merriam, 1988). It described the data sources which included both quantitative and qualitative surveys and qualitative interview questions that emerged from the survey answers. Documents and artifacts provided evidence to support stated opinions and perceptions of respondents. The chapter described the location of the study and presented a demographic snapshot of the schools and the community. It also presented an explanation of the researcher reflexivity which showed the researcher was part of the setting and social phenomenon he was trying to understand.

CHAPTER IV

Case History

Introduction

In 2001, there was a growing trend for school districts to transition from junior high schools to middle schools (Digest of Education Statistics, 2009). Many educators from the Lakewood School District had attended state, regional, and national staff development conferences where information was shared about the middle school concept. Various authors emphasized different elements of middle schools, including progress of middle schools across the nation, evidence to support the middle school concept, prospects for the future, and educating adolescents in the 21st century. As these teachers and administrators returned to the district and shared this middle school information with each other: teachers, parents and administrators began asking, "Should we also change our junior high schools to middle schools?"

Middle School Feasibility Task Force Committee

In 2002, the Lakewood Board of Education authorized the district to create a middle school feasibility task force to gather information to determine if the middle school concept could work in their community. The district first formed a steering committee, chaired by the executive director of secondary education. Six central office personnel composed the committee: Five executive directors from Educational Services, and an assistant superintendent. They brainstormed about areas of education that would be affected and what subcommittees should be formed to study each of these areas. Seven subcommittees were developed: Curriculum and Instruction, Facilities, Middle School Research, Public Relations, Rezoning and Transportation, Sports Issues, and

Student Records. The Lakewood School District Middle School Feasibility Task Force Committee was created and consisted of thirty-one members representing stakeholders from the central office, secondary and elementary schools, community, and parents. The Task Force identified and discussed the components of effective middle schools and determined the priority of implementation of these components, if any. Members volunteered for one or two of these subcommittees and were charged with researching and reporting their findings at future task force meetings.

The following goals were developed by the Task Force and presented to the committees: Research the curriculum and instruction for middle schools; make recommendations for course offerings to include electives; visit established middle schools in the state; explore professional development for teachers of grades 6-9; research the number of teachers moving up to high school; explore extracurricular activities; learn about adolescent social development; recommend a structure for the school day; and work with the Public Relations Committee to promote a middle school curriculum with the school community.

The Lakewood School District Middle School Feasibility Task Force Committee received written and oral presentations from all subcommittees over a ten-month period. The research subcommittee gathered national data on the history of the middle school concept and grade configuration. The curriculum and instruction subcommittee collected data on the philosophy and practices of traditional middle schools. They reported that the middle school concept would be a positive and increase flexibility with the middle school curriculum. The facilities subcommittee researched 13 areas of concern and possible issues to be addressed. They reported that moving the ninth grade up would produce the

largest impact, as there were concerns about adequate square footage of classroom space in the senior high schools. Adequate space would also be needed at the junior high and elementary levels. There also needed to be enough cafeteria space and possibly the development of three lunch periods, which could interfere with curriculum and instruction. Other areas of concern were office space, library space, additional science labs and computer labs, ADA compliant floor plans, and athletic locker rooms. This subcommittee also looked at the need for projecting future enrollment numbers. Possible courses of action included building a ninth grade center, building a sixth grade center, building additions at each high school, building a fourth high school, or doing nothing.

The transportation subcommittee studied a rezoning proposal that the district had received several years before. They researched the enrollment numbers for each school and numbers for students who ride the bus compared to those who walk. They looked at the possibility of a pilot school and considered where it might be located. They researched possible future school closings, overcrowding, and rezoning of elementary schools. Instead of riding with the senior high students, the middle school students would have their own bus schedule time. Their study showed that a carefully planned bus schedule would require purchasing of only four or five new busses.

The sports issues subcommittee reported that the overall sports structure was satisfactory at that point because high school coaches were involved with the junior high teams. The main concern was for sixth graders because the city's parks and recreation department handled sixth grade sports. The other concern was if the schools' enrollment numbers were evened out through rezoning, this would have three high schools competing at the top level of the state's activities association while being among the

level's smallest members. Facilities for all sports and overcrowding were another issues to be addressed.

The student records subcommittee research showed that there should have been no problems in this area. All records already included ninth through twelfth grades. The grade history for each student was already in place for each individual grade, and grade point averages were compiled for students in ninth through twelfth grades.

The public relations subcommittee decided to wait on any public relations activity until the school board was presented with the Task Force's findings. They did develop strategies to promote the transition from junior high schools to middle schools if the school board voted to proceed.

The Lakewood School District carefully crafted a plan to study research on middle schools and to evaluate their educational programs and facilities. The research showed that the developmental needs of young adolescents on local, state, and national levels might best be met within a middle school setting. In September 2003, the Middle School Feasibility Task Force presented its findings to the local school board. They proposed to transition the district's four junior high schools in phases over a four year timeline from 2004 to 2007.

At its January 2004 meeting, the school board gave approval to proceed with planning and implementation to transition the four junior high schools to middle schools. School B was designated the pilot school and would start the transition process the first year by moving the ninth grade to the high school and teaching only seventh and eighth graders. The district trainer would provide training on the middle school components, characteristics, and philosophy to the school's teachers and staff during this transitional

year. Schools A and C would start the second year. School D would start the transitional process the third year. Table 3 shows the following implementation timeline:

Table 3

Timeline for Implementing the Transition of the Four Junior High Schools to Middle Schools

School Year	School	Grade Levels	Action
2004-2005	School B	7th and 8th grades	9th grade to high school
2005-2006	School B	6th, 7th, & 8th grades	Middle School
2005-2006	School A	7th and 8th grades	9th grade to high school
2005-2006	School C	7th and 8th grades	9th grade to high school
2006-2007	School A	6th, 7th, & 8th grades	Middle School
2006-2007	School C	6th, 7th, & 8th grades	Middle School
2006-2007	School D	7th and 8th grades	9th grade to high school*
2007-2008	School D	6th, 7th, & 8th grades	Middle School*

*The Transition for School D was later postponed a full school year to allow the School D to construct a new classroom addition.

Middle School Planning and Implementation Committee

The district's Educational Services Committee met to develop a plan and initial timeline to start the transition process of moving from junior high schools to middle schools. The Educational Services Committee created the Middle School Planning and Implementation Committee consisting of the four junior high principals; four assistant principals (one from each junior high school); five executive directors from the central

office; teachers from sixth, seventh and eighth grades; parents; and the assistant superintendent.

The start-up phase of the Middle School Planning and Implementation Committee began in April 2004 when the superintendent met with the committee and met again with the four junior high principals. The full committee decided to proceed with the following actions: bring in students who had attended both middle schools and junior high; make visits to middle schools to find out exactly how they work; conduct video observations of other middle schools; ask a middle school advocate to come speak to the committee; hold public hearings with the assistance of the PTA; and plan to meet weekly during the summer of 2004.

Summer tasks included: update the middle school planning and implementation timeline; create the district middle school philosophy, mission, and goals; identify and define the district middle school components; plan 2004-2005 staff development activities; begin an outline of the district school handbook; prepare for a visit from a middle school consultant, John Lounsbury, often known as "the grandfather of middle schools;" sketch a public relations plan; and conduct a book study over *Turning Points 2000*.

The Middle School Planning and Implementation Committee formed a hub committee that met twice a week to work on the details of the steering committee's work. Decisions were made to send several administrators to the 2004 Institute for Middle Level Leadership and to send several teacher leaders to the Nuts and Bolts Symposium of Middle Level Education to learn more about the middle school components and to network with other middle school educators. The focal training year for each school

occurred when the school housed only seventh and eighth graders. The district provided two trainers from within the district to coordinate daily middle school training. This training involved creating teams of teachers from the same grade level but from different subject areas. Each team consisted of a teacher from English, math, reading social studies, and science. Teachers of elective courses were not placed on a team because they were needed to teach students during the other teachers' teaming time. Teams met daily during a designated teaming period for middle school training and staff development (see Appendix F).

The Middle School Planning and Implementation Committee decided to send teams of committee members to established middle schools to observe, interact, ask questions, and take notes. Altogether, the committee visited six middle schools. Teams brought back schedules, handbooks, parental notifications, mission statements, and other pertinent materials. The committee continued to research the middle school concept as they gathered new material.

Reports and presentations helped focus research and discussion to develop new questions to ask a middle school expert (Dickinson & Butler, 2001). A two-day visit in August by John H. Lounsbury provided a connection between this school district to the national vision of the middle school philosophy (National Middle School Association, 1982). Mr. Lounsbury agreed to be a consultant to the district during the transition process.

The committee researched, discussed, and developed the following middle school philosophy:

> The district believes in age-appropriate, highly challenging middle school curriculum and activities. A safe, caring, nurturing environment with high expectations allows for student-centered exploratory learning. The transition from dependent to independent thought and behavior is imperative for the success of our middle school students. Parent, faculty, administration, and community involvement is essential in developing life-long learners (Lakewood Middle School Planning and Implementation Handbook, 2004).

The Middle School Planning and Implementation Committee continued to meet throughout the 2004-2005 school year. They listened to several students who had attended both a junior high school and a middle school. The students were asked questions about the structure of the school day, teaming, lunch schedules, and other information for comparing junior high schools and middle schools. The perceptions of these students expanded the committee's knowledge of middle school and junior high school benefits for student learning (Covey, 1989).

The committee identified and discussed the components of effective middle schools and determined the priority of implementation. Building positive relationships with students and interdisciplinary teaming were two very important components of effective middle schools. The committee also researched parent involvement, community relations, flexible scheduling, student-led conferences, exploratory classes, and advisory and mentoring programs. School staff would have to be committed to the central work of self-renewing schools. This work would involve reflection, inquiry, conversations, research, and focused action on the transition (Lambert, 1998, pp. 81-85).

All four principals indicated they needed more professional literature for their facilities. They set up spaces in their libraries for parents to visit and find information on middle schools. They developed a list of books and resources to provide to parents and teachers. The building staff development committees worked diligently to empower teachers and administrators with knowledge of middle schools and best practices of teaching. The Middle School Planning and Implementation Committee invited Charlie Hollar, the founder of Great Expectations, a pedagogical teaching model, to present a program, "Great Expectations and the Middle School."

A phone conference was set up between Lounsbury and the Middle School Planning and Implementation Committee. The conference call provided an opportunity to ask specific questions to an expert middle school consultant. This conversation helped validate the district's implementation of middle school philosophy and practices.

Implementation

The administration of each junior high school prepared data and took a parental presentation to each of their elementary feeder schools during PTA meetings on different evenings. The information that was provided to parents of fifth graders helped alleviate many fears but produced other valid concerns. One parental concern was about the current fifth grade students who would attend the new middle school the following year and ride the same busses as high school students. Parents wanted to know about riding the same busses with high school seniors and waiting at bus stops with much older students. They also were concerned about the lack of extended day programs and younger siblings that depended on supervision. The district addressed these concerns by

changing the bus schedule to create a third bus round to pick up only middle school students, and creating more extended day programs.

Community meetings, newsletters, and open houses connected the middle school students and parents with the faculty and increased their understanding of the middle school components. Editorials and media coverage also supported the district's public relations effort. The transition of the four junior high schools to middle schools continued in a timely manner with plans to evaluate progress and meet unexpected problems with the help and advice of middle school leaders from across the nation.

CHAPTER V

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Introduction

This research study explored and analyzed the perceptions of teachers, principals, and central office administrators to questions that focused on the transition from junior high schools to middle schools. The middle school conceptual framework of: curriculum, pedagogy, social elements, emotional needs, physical needs, professional development, and interdisciplinary teaming (National Middle School Association, 2003), was used as a lens to view the educators' experiences. This chapter describes the findings from the following research question.

In one suburban district, how did the teacher's, principal's, and central office administrators' perceptions of the organizational transition from junior high to middle school compare and contrast?

a. How were teachers and principals involved in the transition?

b. How effective were the implementation of middle school concepts?

c. What had been the major successes and challenges associated with the transition?

By using a case study approach, this study explored the transitional process with an analysis of the data from three sources: anonymous surveys, selected interviews, and document analysis. The first section of this chapter contains the teacher, building administrator, and central office administrator survey results. The second section of this chapter describes the transition process of changing from junior high to middle schools as told in the words of the people interviewed. Proper names of participants were substituted with pseudonyms for confidentiality purposes. The third section of this

chapter is comprised of the artifacts analysis. Through a coding system and triangulation of data, the researcher identified patterns and trends in the data that presented a holistic picture of the perceived successes and failures of the district's transition from junior high school to middle schools. This chapter summarizes the research findings. In Chapter 6, the data is analyzed through the lens of the research questions and the review of the literature.

Teacher Survey Results

Survey rate of return. All four of the district's middle schools were chosen for this study. The schools are identified as schools A, B, C, D. Table 4 shows the percentage of completed surveys from teachers of the four schools.

Table 4

Summary of Return Rate

	School A	*School B*	*School C*	*School D*
Return rate	32%	83%	71%	79%

The total number of completed teacher surveys was 181 or 68%.

Demographic information. The first set of data collected were demographic information asking for grade levels taught, teacher gender, years of teaching experience, regular or alternative certification, and years teaching at this school. It is noteworthy that School C has the lowest number of male teachers, total teaching experience, and years at this school. School C also has the highest number of teachers with alternative certification. Results of the teacher demographic information are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Summary of Teacher Demographics

	School A	*School B*	*School C*	*School D*
Teaching multi-grades	13%	36%	36%	25%
Gender percentage	F 67; M 33	F 81; M 19	F 83; M 17	F 71; M29
Teaching experience	12.9 years	16.7 years	11.5 years	13.2 years
Alternative certification	13%	15%	31%	15%
Years at this school	6.8 years	6.4 years	5.9 years	6.6 years

Perceptions of a middle school. The first open-ended question was "What is a middle school?" This question allowed the respondent freedom of expression without providing any categorical limits. A teacher from School A said: "Middle school is a concept. It is a team approach to addressing the academic, social, and emotional needs of each student."

Teachers from School B provided various definitions for a middle school. A teacher from School B wrote "A team oriented learning environment." Another teacher explained, "It is student-based versus content-based. It is not just a place to get ready for high school. It is a place to develop during critical years of a student's life." Another teacher from School B defined a middle school as: "A place for students to be able to successfully transfer from a teacher-motivated to a student-motivated learning environment."

One teacher from School C said, "Middle school consists of a student centered school that targets building a child as a whole, and not just academic." A teacher from

School D said, “Its focus is more on personal growth with adolescents, whereas a junior high setting sets a higher priority on academic growth.” A male teacher with three years teaching experience from School D provided: “A magical land where tadpoles turn into frogs before they become princes and princesses.” A teacher from School A incorporated all three emerging themes in her answer as follows, “A middle school is a school designed to educate students in grades 6-8, an institution that provides learning activities based on the developmental needs of the students transitioning from elementary to high school.”

Themes for middle school definitions. The answers were analyzed and coded into themes. Three common themes or definitions emerged from this open question: A middle school was described as a school with specific grade levels, a place of transition from grade school to high school, a concept of meeting student needs, or this question was left blank. If the respondent’s answer described more than one of these themes, the researcher recorded the theme that was most emphasized in the answer. It is noteworthy that the pilot school, School B, had the highest percentage of defining a middle school as a concept, This school has been a middle school longer than the other schools. Also noteworthy is that School D, the newest school in this transitional process, had the highest percentage of defining a middle school with grade levels. These themes are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Summary of Middle School Definitions

	School A	*School B*	*School C*	*School D*
Grade level	17%	10%	21%	37%
Transition	40%	19%	26%	20%
Concept	26%	48%	30%	26%
Left blank	17%	23%	23%	17%

Likert scale results. The next section of the survey asked the teachers to rate 13 items on a scale of 1 to 5 to reflect their opinion of their school's implementation of middle school components (1 = Low … 5 = High). Scores are reported as mean scores with standard deviations for each exemplar. The mean is reported with the standard deviation in order to provide a better understanding of a distribution that can be established by considering only the mean. The mean score represents the average score for the exemplar, while the standard deviation is a measure of the variability of the scores in relation to the mean of the group. In other words, a larger standard deviation indicates greater differences between the individual scores and the mean of the scores.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to evaluate the relationship between the answers from each school. For each ANOVA, the independent variable was the school. There were four levels of the independent variable, representing the four schools. The dependent variable was the item response. Typically, if the p-value was equal to or less than a certain level (0.05 in this case), the conclusion was that there is a statistically significant difference between the four means, i.e., the lower the p-value the greater the evidence the difference is a significance. Because there were 13

ANOVAs, a Bonferroni adjustment (Shavelson, 1996) was used to adjust the error rate to .05/13=.004. Only those ANOVAs with a significance of .004 or less would be significant. Items 7 and 9 were the only two significant items, given this adjustment. Each question is followed by descriptive statistics that include the mean and standard deviation and the ANOVA results for each item.

1. The middle school provides a program centered on the developmental needs of the student rather than a traditional content-based program.

Table 7

Item 1 Descriptive and ANOVA Results

Program Centered on Developmental Needs

	School A	School B	School C	School D
Mean	4.09	4.06	3. 62	3.90
Std Dev	1.04	0.77	0.96	0.73

ANOVA Results

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	5.856	3	1.952	2.675	.49
Within Groups	129.149	177	.730		
Total	135.006	180			

**p < 0.004

2. The middle school incorporates an interdisciplinary approach to the teaching of basic skills courses such as coordinating English, math, science, reading, and social studies in grades 6, 7, and 8.

Table 8

Item 2 Descriptive and ANOVA Results

Interdisciplinary Approach to Teaching

	School A	*School B*	*School C*	*School D*
Mean	4.35	4.00	4.02	3.81
Std Dev	0.64	0.88	0.89	1.12

ANOVA Results

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4.833	3	1.952	2.675	.049
Within Groups	1590145	177	.899		
Total	163.978	180			

**p < 0.004

3. There is an opportunity provided for enrichment experiences for the students.

Table 9

Item 3 Descriptive and ANOVA Results

Enrichment Experiences for Students

	School A	*School B*	*School C*	*School D*
Mean	4.35	4.08	3.74	3.80
Std Dev	0.57	0.88	1.01	0.84

ANOVA Results

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	7.799	3	2.600	3.398	.019
Within Groups	135.405	177	.765		
Total	143.204	180			

**p < 0.004

4. Students and parents receive regular feedback regarding the student's progress.

Table 10

Item 4 Descriptive and ANOVA Results

Student Progress Reported to Students and Parents

	School A	*School B*	*School C*	*School D*
Mean	4.61	4.29	4.38	4.36
Std Dev	0.49	0.95	0.84	0.78

ANOVA Results

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.670	3	.557	.816	.487
Within Groups	120.783	177	.682		
Total	122.453	180			

**p < 0.004

5. The middle school provides a teaching staff skilled in the ability to understand, relate to, and work with students of this age group.

Table 11

Item 5 Descriptive and ANOVA Results

Teaching Staff Skilled in the Ability to Work with Students

	School A	*School B*	*School C*	*School D*
Mean	4.61	4.48	4.23	4.34
Std Dev	0.58	0.70	0.86	0.77

ANOVA Results

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.823	3	.941	1.631	.184
Within Groups	102.105	177	.577		
Total	104.928	180			

**p < 0.004

6. The middle school provides appropriate planning times for members of the teaching staff, including common planning times for teaching teams.

Table 12

Item 6 Descriptive and ANOVA Results

Appropriate Planning Times

	School A	*School B*	*School C*	*School D*
Mean	4.83	4.33	4.45	4.75
Std Dev	0.49	1.13	1.03	0.65

ANOVA Results

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	7.091	3	2.364	2.874	.038
Within Groups	145.550	177	.822		
Total	152.641	180			

**p < 0.004

7. A high level of staff morale exists at the middle school.

Table 13

Item 7 Descriptive and ANOVA Results

High Level of Staff Morale

	School A	*School B*	*School C*	*School D*
Mean	4.43	3.71	3.36	4.34
Std Dev	0.66	1.16	1.29	0.71

ANOVA Results

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	33.360	3	11.120	10.674	.000**
Within Groups	184.397	177	1.042		
Total	217.757	180			

**p < 0.004

8. A school-wide schedule is utilized which includes blocks of time within which teachers have the flexibility to group students in varied ways for specific instructional experiences.

Table 14

Item 8 Descriptive and ANOVA Results

Flexibility in School-wide Schedule

	School A	*School B*	*School C*	*School D*
Mean	3.83	3.60	3.30	3.90
Std Dev	1.46	1.17	1.19	1.07

ANOVA Results

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	10.327	3	3.442	2.427	.067
Within Groups	251.043	177	1.418		
Total	261.370	180			

**p < 0.004

9. Members of the school staff are cooperative and supportive of each other.

Table 15

Item 9 Descriptive and ANOVA Results

School Staff is Cooperative and Supportive of Each Other

	School A	*School B*	*School*	*School D*
Mean	4.48	4.06	3.87	4.44
Std Dev	0.51	0.97	1. 05	0.65

ANOVA Results

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	11.271	3	3.757	5.102	.002**
Within Groups	130.342	177	.736		
Total	141.613	180			

**p < 0.004

10. Teachers are involved more in decision making as a result of interdisciplinary teaming.

Table 16

Item 10 Descriptive and ANOVA Results

Increased Decision Making with Interdisciplinary Teaming

	School A	*School B*	*School C*	*School D*
Mean	4.35	3.77	3.64	4.07
Std Dev	0.71	0.98	1.22	0.86

ANOVA Results

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	10.375	3	3.458	3.538	.016
Within Groups	173.028	177	.978		
Total	183.403	180			

**p < 0.004

11. Integrated theme-based units are a significant aspect of the middle school curriculum.

Table 17

Item 11 Descriptive and ANOVA Results

Integrated Theme-based Units as Part of Curriculum

	School A	*School B*	*School C*	*School D*
Mean	4.04	3.37	3.49	3.37
Std Dev	0.82	1.04	0.99	1.09

ANOVA Results

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	8.660	3	2.887	2.739	.045
Within Groups	186.556	177	1.054		
Total	195.215	180			

**p < 0.004

12. The staff is competent and continues to grow and learn about middle school education.

Table 18

Item 12 Descriptive and ANOVA Results

Staff Competency on Middle School Education

	School A	*School B*	*School C*	*School D*
Mean	4.70	4.38	4.36	4.41
Std Dev	0.47	0.74	0.64	0.69

ANOVA Results

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.977	3	.659	1.454	.229
Within Groups	80.266	177	.453		
Total	82.243	180			

**p < 0.004

13. The middle school is open and encourages participation and involvement by parents and the community.

Table 19

Item 13 Descriptive and ANOVA Results

Open Participation and Involvement by Parents and Community

	School A	*School B*	*School C*	*School D*
Mean	4.70	4.19	4.36	4.15
Std Dev	0.47	0.81	0.67	0.82

ANOVA Results

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	5.636	3	1.879	3.345	.020
Within Groups	99.425	177	.562		
Total	105.061	180			

**p < 0.004

Items 7 and 9 produced statistically significant results. A Post Hoc comparison of means was conducted by using Tukey's HSD (honestly significant difference) test. Table 20 shows Tukey's HSD test for question 7. From reading the table, Schools A-B, A-C, B-D, and C-D were significantly different. Schools A-D and B-D were not different.

Question 7: A high level of staff morale exists at the middle school.

Table 20

Question 7 Tukey Post Hoc Test

Games-Howell

	School	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
School A	School B	.723*	.212	.006**	.16	1.28
	School C	1.073*	.234	.000**	.46	1.69
	School D	.096	.166	.939	-.35	.54
School B	School A	-.723*	.212	.006**	-1.28	-.16
	School C	.350	.248	.496	-.30	1.00
	School D	-.627*	.186	.006**	-1.11	-.14
School C	School A	-1.073*	.234	.000**	-1.69	-.46
	School B	-.350	.248	.496	-1.00	.30
	School D	-.977*	.210	.000**	-1.53	-.42
School D	School A	-.096	.166	.939	-.54	.35
	School B	.627*	.186	.006**	.14	1.11
	School C	.977*	.210	.000**	.42	1.53

**$p < 0.05$

Table 21 shows Tukey's HSD test for question 9. From reading the table, Schools A-C and C-D were significantly different.

Question 9: Members of the school staff are cooperative and supportive of each other.

Schools A-B, A-D, and B-C, and B-D were not different.

Table 21

Question 9 Tukey Post Hoc Test

Games-Howell

	School	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
School A	School B	.421	.172	.079	-.03	.87
	School C	.606*	.187	.010**	.11	1.10
	School D	.038	.136	.993	-.32	.40
School B	School A	-.421	.172	.079	-.87	.03
	School C	.185	.205	.803	-.35	.72
	School D	-.383	.160	.086	-.80	.04
School C	School A	-.606*	.187	.010**	-1.10	-.11
	School B	-.185	.205	.803	-.72	.35
	School D	-.568*	.176	.010**	-1.03	-.11
School D	School A	-.038	.136	.993	-.40	.32
	School B	.383	.160	.086	-.04	.80
	School C	.568*	.176	.010**	.11	1.03

**p < 0.05

Open-ended questions. The third section of the teacher survey asked four open-ended questions. Again, the answers were analyzed and coded into themes. A sampling of responses from all four schools brings a deeper and richer understanding of the perceptions of teachers involving the transition from junior high to middle school.

Change in curriculum. The first question asked: "How has the curriculum changed as a result of the transition from a junior high school to a middle school?"

One teacher from School A responded, "The curriculum is integrated across the content areas." A second teacher said, "I think we have a greater awareness of what each of us are teaching." A third teacher replied, "Curriculum has become more attentive to student needs, as opposed to content driven." A fourth teacher from School A said, "Not the curriculum, but the way we teach it has changed."

The teachers from school B also produced a variety of answers. One teacher replied, “Curriculum in some cases is more integrated. Teachers converse with each other and plan curriculum.” A second teacher added, “Yes, students are being given more exploratory choices, better teacher communication through a core of teachers, and less departmental alignment.” Another teacher from the same school disagreed and explained, “No, the curriculum has not changed, just the format on how we present it.”

An experienced teacher from School C explained, “The curriculum has become more integrated with the incorporation of the middle school concept. Teachers are able to do group planning and integrated units as a result.” However, a second teacher stated, “It is not as challenging.” A third teacher from School C responded, “It really has not changed much. There is more active communication between team teachers, but curriculum is being driven by testing.”

A seventh grade teacher from School D responded, “Curriculum at junior high is more focused on the subject matter and at the middle school it is focused on skill concepts.” Several teachers had not taught in a junior high and shared a common answer: “I do not know; I have never taught junior high.”

The first opened-ended question was, “How has the curriculum changed?” Five themes emerged from the data analyses: no change in curriculum, there is more interdisciplinary teaching, the curriculum is meeting the developmental needs of students, the curriculum is not as challenging, no junior high teaching experience, and do not know or left blank. The two highest percentages were: Meeting developmental needs from School B, and more interdisciplinary teaching from School A. Table 22 shows the five emergent themes on how the curriculum has changed.

Table 22

Summary of Curriculum Change

	School A	*School B*	*School C*	*School D*
No change in curriculum	17%	17%	9%	19%
More interdisciplinary teaching	35%	2%	17%	12%
Meeting developmental needs	22%	42%	28%	22%
Not as challenging	0%	8%	10%	5%
No junior high experience, Do not know, left blank	26%	31%	36%	42%

Information to parents. The second question asked, "Do middle school parents receive enough information to understand the middle school emphasis? Explain." A teacher from School D expressed what many teachers seemed to think when she explained, "I assume so." A teacher from School A said, "There is continuous information flow to parents including parent nights and workshops, online newsletters, and parent portal, which allows parents to check grades and student progress." One teacher from School A gave a different perspective when she replied, "At our school they are given the information. I am not sure they listen or read it. Another teacher went on to say, "No. The opportunity for the parents to get the information is ready to be presented and we are inviting them to participate, but the parents are not taking advantage of it."

Teachers from School B were divided in their answers. One teacher who teaches all three grades explained, "Yes! The middle school emphasis has opened the door for

extensive parental involvement, which has allowed parents to participate in their students' academic success in and out of the classroom." A seventh grade teacher stated, "This is our sixth year as a middle school. I believe a high percentage of our parents understand the concept." Another teacher from this school reflected, "It could be improved. I am not sure that parents are aware of what their child is going through, especially emotionally. Maybe we could provide more brain-based information through our school newsletter."

Teachers at School C were also divided in their responses. One teacher seemed to express her frustration with too much information provided to parents when she elaborated, "YES! All we do is to send information via e-mail, phone, written planner, correspondence, progress reports, Title I Parent Nights, and team conferences to explain and meet parents' needs." However, other teachers responded similar to a teacher of sixth and seventh grade students when she replied, "No! Being a parent of a middle schooler, the child and parents are thrust into this new world and dynamics of education and schedules without much tolerance."

The second question was: "Do middle school parents receive enough information to understand the middle school emphasis? Explain."

The three themes that emerged from asking question 2 were: Yes, No, or do not know/left blank. It is noteworthy that the last school in the transitional process, School D, had the lowest percentage of Yes answers. Table 23 shows the results if parents receive enough information to understand the middle school emphasis.

Table 23

Summary of Enough Information to Parents

	School A	*School B*	*School C*	*School D*
Yes	87%	71%	75%	46%
No	4%	15%	15%	28%
Do not know/blank	9%	14%	10%	26%

Integration of interdisciplinary units. The third question was: "Have you tried integrating your curriculum into interdisciplinary units commonly associated with the middle school curriculum? If yes, do you feel this is an effective way to teach in the middle school? Why or why not? If no, would you consider trying to integrate curriculum at your grade level? Why or why not?"

One teacher from School A replied, "Yes, we do interdisciplinary projects. This allows students to see how subjects are connected." Another teacher explained, "It is effective in that students at the higher levels get more well-rounded subjects that show relevance to their lives. It becomes ineffective with lower and middle of the road students who need basic facts drilled for them to grasp." Another teacher answered, "Yes, and it is fun, but not enough real learning takes place to make it worthwhile. Most of the curriculum is watered down and students do not carry it over and retain it."

A teacher from School B stated, "Yes, necessary strategies have been implemented to not only integrate an ideal middle school model, but to understand the development on new functional designs within the middle school format. A second teacher replied, "I have not tried it, but I would like to. I think if it is done correctly, it can be an effective way to build learning connections among students."

Teachers from School C shared similar answers. One teacher said, “It is an extremely effective way to teach.” Another teacher noted an additional advantage when she explained, “Yes, I feel the teaming encourages more success for students.” Another teacher replied, “We try to integrate as much as possible, but it is difficult with the different pacing calendars. Common topics are covered at different times.” Another teacher shared a different opinion when he stated, “I have tried it, but do not feel it is a good use of time.”

A teacher from School D explained, “We have not tried interdisciplinary units to the degree that we need to. I believe that we should try it at my grade level and that it would be a benefit to students and teachers.” Another teacher added, “Our team is still experimenting with this.” Another teacher replied, “No. Yes, I would. I am just trying to survive my first year.” Another teacher from this school stated, “No. No – my students must pass EOI in Algebra I to graduate. I do not have time for game playing!”

The analyses of these answers showed two levels of “yes” answers, four levels of “no” answers, and one level of N/A/blank answers. Table 24 shows the results of the percentage of teachers who have tried to integrate their curriculum into interdisciplinary units.

Table 24

Summary of Curriculum Integration

	School A	*School B*	*School C*	*School D*
Yes – effective	79%	66%	58%	44%
Yes – not effective	4%	2%	10%	5%
No, will in future	0%	8%	4%	3%
No, provide my own	0%	2%	7%	3%
No, other priorities	0%	8%	4%	10%
N/A, left blank	17%	14%	17%	24%

Middle school or junior high school. The last question on the teacher survey asked, "If you had a choice, would you rather see the existing school stay a junior high school or a middle school? Why?"

One of the teachers from School A said, "I prefer middle school. It is more of a family feel community established between the students and teachers." Another teacher explained, "Middle school teaming is proactive, otherwise teachers are reactive." Another teacher stated, "Keep middle school please. Team building allows for promotion of self esteem." One teacher answered, "I like the middle school philosophy. I feel like junior high treats students like young high schoolers when they are not even teenagers yet. Middle school focuses on their development." Another teacher answered, "Middle school gives security." Another teacher said, "I would prefer to remain as a middle school, especially with the rate of success we see."

A teacher from School A expressed a different opinion when he replied, “I prefer junior high, because by the time students reach ninth grade, they are totally unprepared for the demands of high school. Tardies, grades, and rules seem extremely lax at the middle school level.” Another teacher replied, “Teaming is time consuming. I would rather be a junior high and really prepare them for high school and concentrate completely on school.” Another teacher from School C answered, “I would like to go back to junior high. With the middle school, the students are babied too much. I feel we are not preparing our students for high school.” Another teacher stated, “Let us go back to junior high, we need the instruction time.”

Another teacher from School A simply answered, “No more change!” One teacher replied with a common answer, “I never taught at a junior high, so I cannot answer that question.”

An analysis of the answers produced three common themes: Go back to a junior high, stay a middle school, create other grade centers, and undecided/blank. All four schools provided a majority of teachers that desired to remain a middle school. Table 25 shows the percentage of teachers who want their school to be a junior high or a middle school.

Table 25

Preference for junior high or middle school

	School A	*School B*	*School C*	*School D*
Junior high	4%	14%	21%	24%
Middle school	70%	65%	55%	56%
Other grade centers	0%	0%	9%	6%
Undecided, blank	26%	21%	15%	14%

Building Administrators Survey Results

The building administrators' survey results produced a completion rate of 14 out of 16 building administrators with a return rate of 88%. There were twelve questions on this survey. This same survey was given to the central office administrators. The answers were analyzed and coded into themes. Each question had a number of emergent themes listed with the number of responses written to the left of each theme.

Table 26

Building Administrators Survey Results

Total 14 Respondents

1. Experience in education

   2 1) 12 – 20 years
   12 2) 21 – 31 years

2. Why did this district make the transition from junior high to middle school?

   8 1) Needs of the students
   1 2) Age difference
   1 3) Research
   2 4) Improve instruction
   0 5) Elementary school space
   1 6) Undecided / Blank

3. Were you involved in the decision making process for the transition?

   1 1) District committee
   3 2) Building level involvement
   10 3) No involvement

4. Did you visit other established middle schools?

   8 1) Yes
   6 2) No

5. What was your reaction to transitioning from junior high to a middle school?

   4 1) Great
   9 2) Positive
   1 3) Negative
   0 4) N/A

6. Were you required to change positions as a result of the transition?

   1 1) Yes
   13 2) No

Table 26 (cont.)

7. How successful was transition from junior high to middle school?

   10 1) Very successful
   3 2) Some success
   1 3) Blank

8. Are there any improvements you would like to see in the middle school?

   4 1) Continue current practices and growth
   2 2) Advisory
   0 3) Teaming period / continued finances
   1 4) Continued training
   0 5) Academic gaps of minorities
   0 6) Academic rigor
   0 7) More co-teaching
   1 8) Great Expectations
   1 9) More focus on curriculum
   1 10) Better transition
   1 11) Teachers more flexible
   1 12) Common goals for all sites
   2 13) None / Blank

9. What has changed that you would consider improvements?

   9 1) Teaming
   1 2) More child centered / Concepts
   1 3) Structure
   0 4) Professional training
   0 5) Student behavior
   2 6) N/A, Blank, None
   1 7) Instruction

Table 26 (cont.)

10. What have been the major difficulties and challenges with the transition?

_1_ 1) Funding
_0_ 2) 6th grade to middle school and 9th grade to high school
_3_ 3) Teacher resistance
_2_ 4) Training the teachers
_2_ 5) Finding correct teacher fit
_3_ 6) General middle school mindset
_1_ 7) 8th grade to middle school concepts
_0_ 8) Minority student leadership gap
_0_ 9) Time
_0_ 10) High school space
_2_ 11) Blank

11. What will be the major influence on this middle school in next five years?

_2_ 1) Lack of funding
_1_ 2) Better prepared students
_2_ 3) Continued middle school concepts
_0_ 4) Too much nurturing causes high school problems
_2_ 5) Lower dropout rate
_1_ 6) Teacher training
_2_ 7) District goals for all middle schools
_2_ 8) Instructional leadership
_1_ 9) Technology
_1_ 10) Blank

12. Additional comments

_0_ 1) Need to pass bond issue
_0_ 2) Great Expectations would be perfect
_0_ 3) Make students more responsible
_2_ 4) Our middle schools are terrific
12 5) Blank

Central Office Administrators Survey Results

All sixteen central office administrators responded to this survey with a 100% completion rate. This is the same survey given to the building administrators. The answers were analyzed and coded into themes. Each question had a number of emergent themes listed with the number of responses written to the left of each theme.

Table 27

Central Office Administrators Survey Results

Total 16 Respondents

1. Experience in education

   4 1) 31 – 35 years
   12 2) 36 – 39 years

2. Why did this district make the transition from junior high to middle school?

   7 1) Needs of the students
   2 2) Age difference
   1 3) Research
   3 4) Improve instruction
   2 5) Elementary school space
   1 6) Undecided / Blank

3. Were you involved in the decision making process for the transition?

   7 1) District committee
   0 2) Building level involvement
   9 3) No involvement

4. Did you visit other established middle schools?

   7 1) Yes
   9 2) No

5. What was your reaction to transitioning from junior high to a middle school?

   1 1) Great
   10 2) Positive
   4 3) Negative
   1 4) N/A

6. Were you required to change positions as a result of the transition?

   4 1) Yes
   12 2) No

Table 27 (cont.)

7. How successful was transition from junior high to middle school?

   12 1) Very successful
   3 2) Some success
   1 3) Blank

8. Are there any improvements you would like to see in the middle school?

   5 1) Continue current practices and growth
   1 2) Advisory
   1 3) Teaming period / continued finances
   1 4) Continued training
   1 5) Academic gaps of minorities
   1 6) Academic rigor
   1 7) More co-teaching
   0 8) Great Expectations
   0 9) More focus on curriculum
   0 10) Better transition
   0 11) Teachers more flexible
   1 12) Common goals for all sites
   4 13) None / Blank

9. What has changed that you would consider improvements?

   4 1) Teaming
   6 2) More child centered / Concepts
   1 3) Structure
   1 4) Professional training
   1 5) Student behavior
   3 6) N/A, Blank, None
   0 7) Instruction

Table 27 (cont.)

10. What have been the major difficulties and challenges with the transition?

2	1)	Funding
5	2)	6th grade to middle school and 9th grade to high school
2	3)	Teacher resistance
2	4)	Training the teachers
2	5)	Finding correct teacher fit
0	6)	General middle school mindset
0	7)	8th grade to middle school concepts
1	8)	Minority student leadership gap
1	9)	Time
1	10)	High school space
0	11)	Blank

11. What will be the major influence on this middle school in next five years?

3	1)	Lack of funding
1	2)	Better prepared students
5	3)	Continued middle school concepts
2	4)	Too much nurturing causes high school problems
1	5)	Lower dropout rate
2	6)	Teacher training
0	7)	District goals for all middle schools
1	8)	Instructional leadership
0	9)	Technology
1	10)	Blank

12. Additional comments

1	1)	Need to pass bond issue
1	2)	Great Expectations would be perfect
1	3)	Make students more responsible
1	4)	Our middle schools are terrific
12	5)	Blank

Several additional comments were given on the survey. One central office administrator said, “Our process worked. We think middle schools as we have them now are terrific. We just realize it is expensive to do it the way we have and hope we can continue despite the massive budget reductions.” Another administrator reflected, “I like

us having things for all the students. I like the character component of middle school. I like the teaming and I like the advisory." (Administrators Survey, 2010)

Interviews

Interview questions were developed from the data analysis and codifying of common, emerging themes from the teacher, building administrator, and central office administrator surveys. Pseudonyms were used for all persons interviewed. Ann and Bob were district administrators. Carl was the district trainer for middle schools. The four middle school principals were Jennifer, Steve, Allison, and Roger. The eight middle school teachers were Joe, Megan, Sarah, Tim, Carol, Alisha, Nick, and Jessica.

Perceptions of a middle school. The first interview question was, "What is a middle school?" This question allowed the respondent freedom of expression without providing any categorical limits. When asked this question, Ann, a central office administrator, reflected,

> A middle school is a philosophy, not a building, not a place, and not a site. The middle school philosophy is that which gives the student and their growth and development first priority in order to insure that we are not treating them as babies, but we are allowing them an opportunity to grow and spread their wings, which is a characteristic of a middle schooler. (Ann, Interview, 2010)

Bob, another central office administrator, responded, "The middle school is the middle grades of course, and it is also a concept on how you deal with kids." He went on to explain, "I think we have tried to do that, maybe with a little more of the elementary philosophy as far as caring for them as individuals, nurturing them and treating the whole

person, more so than putting them into classes and learning subject matter." (Bob, Interview, 2010)

Carl, the district trainer for middle schools, worked with the staff from all four middle schools and explained his opinion as follows:

> Middle school philosophy was pretty much stated by John Lounsbury back in the early sixties and said that if you focus on students and get the school culture going the right direction, you learn what middle students are able to do. Then you use the curriculum as a means of teaching them how to move forward in their lives and become productive citizens in the future. (Carl, Interview, 2010)

Steve, the principal from School B, paused and reflected before he explained that a middle school is a place that is developmentally appropriate for young adolescents. He said, "It is where people recognize the development of kids and are prepared to deal with kids and understand discipline and learning of kids in this age group. They understand that the kids' actions are appropriate for their age." Allison, the principal from School C, stated, "A middle school is a nurturing environment to help elementary students transition in a regular curriculum that will ultimately prepare them for high school and beyond." (Allison & Steve, Interviews, 2010)

Roger, the principal from School D, explained, "A middle school is basically a philosophy. I know the organizational structure is in place, but the configuration of a middle school has nothing to do with the middle school concept." After some discussion, he went on to explain that "people misunderstand the middle school concept because they look at a structural frame. It is all about a philosophy as outlined in *This We Believe*.

Look at advocacy, student-led conferences, and educating the whole child." (Roger, Interview, 2010)

Teachers from the four middle schools shared similar answers when asked, "What is a middle school?" Tim said, "The middle school is about kids connecting and being in teams and curriculum. There is a value of teaming, where students can connect to a group, and kids need to connect to something so they are not left out." Megan explained as follows:

> Middle school is a special place, in a good way, for young teens that are transitioning. They are not ready for high school, but they are way more mature than elementary kids. They still need a lot of nurturing, but they are beginning to think in individual ways and they are headed on the direction they are going to be as adults. (Megan, & Tim Interviews, 2010)

Carol stated, "Middle school is a specific group of kids and a teaming effort. Their physical growth spurts are about in the same range as their mental growth spurts." Nick and Jessica explained, "We are trying to get them to accept more responsibility but yet treating them like they are adolescents." (Carol, Jessica, & Nick, Interviews, 2010)

Transition from a junior high to a middle school. When asked, "Why did this school district make the transition from a junior high school to a middle school?" Ann explained,

> We changed primarily because we were not meeting the needs of 'tweeners.' We were losing students around the eighth grade, the pivot point…so we looked at how we could not have them drop out physically, emotionally, mentally, or academically.

Bob recalled, “We thought that middle school was something that was better for kids than junior high school and it needed to be done.” Bob went on to say,

> As an old high school person, I liked the idea that we had that ninth grade in high school because I always felt that when you had the junior high school, you split the kids. They started their first year of high school transcript at the junior high, and you had no control over what those kids were doing in ninth grade. (Bob, Interview, 2010)

Jennifer said she believed “the ninth graders needed to be away from the younger students. They were much more mature, socially as well as emotionally.” Alisha explained, “The elementary felt the sixth graders were getting harder to work with and needed to be with other emerging adolescents, not kindergarteners through fifth graders.” (Alisha & Jennifer, Interviews, 2010)

Allison explained, “They saw we were failing in some ways. If you looked at the junior highs, we were not meeting needs. Ultimately to help high schools with dropouts and scores, we have to start here.” Roger acknowledged that “This has been thought about for years in this district. The reason for transition I think was looking at what was best for the kids. Steve reported, “They made this transition because they knew it would be the best and most appropriate setting. Also, the district needed more room for full-day kindergarten. The transition was the most pragmatic move when it came to physical size of elementary schools.” (Allison, Roger, & Steve Interviews, 2010)

Tim answered, “I think they wanted to improve what we were doing. We were one of a few districts that still did not have ninth grade in the high school.” Joe noted, “I do not think they just on a whim wanted to do it. They had a task force that went out and

did a lot of leg work and found out how important it was. Oklahoma was changing to the middle school concept." This veteran teacher shed light on how sports were affected by the junior high organization of grade levels as he explained,

> As a long-time coach, we could not find very many people that would play us when we had ninth graders. We were having a very difficult time finding athletic events that would schedule us because we had ninth graders and everybody else was 6-8, so it was difficult for us to find games. (Joe & Tim, Interviews, 2010)

Involvement of teachers and administrators in the transition. When asked, "To what extent do you feel teachers and administrators were involved in the transition?" Ann replied, **"**I think everybody had an opportunity to be involved in the transition, by far. Even the teachers were involved before the training year in that they knew we were going to move toward the middle school philosophy." (Ann, Interview, 2010)

Bob, the central office administrator who chaired the district's middle school feasibility task force explained, "I think teachers and principals were heavily involved, probably more administrators than teachers to begin with because they had more time to observe and serve on committees, but we have had teachers and other people from across the district in it from the very beginning." (Bob, Interview, 2010)

Carl, the district's middle school trainer, explained, "Quite a few administrators were sent to national middle school association events early on in an effort to get them acclimated as to what a middle school would look like. A few teachers were sent to some national conferences fairly early on." (Carl, Interview, 2010)

Jennifer responded, “Our principal and assistant principal did attend several meetings and visited several middle schools. Later, some of us teachers went to visit middle schools and looked at teaming and that aspect.” Steve commented, “I think everybody was highly involved from the central office all the way down.” Roger stated, “We were all involved as we watched the other schools transition and be trained. We were ready.” (Jennifer, Roger, & Steve, Interviews, 2010)

Allison responded, “I felt we were definitely actively involved. I think we got to drive the decision making, that it was more collaborative.” After some discussion, she went on to explain,

> We certainly had the professional development we needed. The reason it was successful is because it was well planned, researched, one school at a time, and the community was involved. It was baby steps to provide a smooth transition. (Allison, Interview, 2010)

Nick stated, “I do not think teachers were involved much. Principals were involved. It was discussed with them for quite awhile. I do not remember any involvement of teachers.” Carol answered, “I do not think teachers were involved that much. I would say the administrators had some input as to what they thought. I think the principals went out and visited other schools to get ideas of what it is like and I really think they did their homework. (Carol & Nick, Interviews, 2010)

Success of the transition process. When asked, “How successful was the transition process from traditional junior high schools to middle schools in this district?” Ann replied, **“**I think it has been awesome. I keep the data, or look at the data on academics and work with principals on school improvement. I really do think that we

have better schools because [of the successful transition from junior high to middle schools.]" (Ann, Interview, 2010)

Bob commented, "I cannot imagine it being more successful. I think that we did it right, and it has been very expensive to do it the way we have done it." Carl provided insightful perceptions from leaders of other school districts when he explained, "I felt like it went very smoothly here. It was very well planned by talking to the National Middle School Association leadership. We basically said, 'If you made this transition, how would you do it?' and that is what we did; we followed it." (Bob & Carl, Interviews, 2010)

Jennifer said,

> For us, I think it was very successful, probably because of the people that we hired, and a lot of them came from elementary. So, it was a nice balance between secondary and elementary. And then we had a nice balance between veteran and new teachers. These balances are one reason we have been so successful. (Jennifer, Interview, 2010)

Allison explained, "I think it was very successful. I think the pilot school took some pains and hits for the rest of us, which was nice." Roger added, "Our transition was pretty successful because we got to wait and watch. Since we got to wait and watch, I could capitalize on everybody else's mistakes." (Allison & Roger, Interviews 2010)

Sarah expressed concern for the ninth graders in high school as she provided this explanation,

> I think it was a success except for maybe the parent aspect of it, especially with our ninth graders going to the high school. They were very

> apprehensive. I think maybe we did a better job with the sixth graders coming up here because of the orientation and the meetings. We did not do that so much with the ninth graders. They were just kind of thrown into the fire, and we had a lot of parents that were very concerned. (Sarah, Interview, 2010)

Megan said, "I think it was great. I think they did a really good job, whoever set it up and made those decisions on the training year and leaving sixth grade out until we had our training year." Jessica and Nick were happy that they were the last school to transition. Jessica explained, "It was a plus that we were the last because it gave us a heads up kind of warning about what was coming and kind of what to expect from other teachers that teach at other schools." Nick said, "As far as the transition for us, I thought it went pretty smooth. The district trainer came in and trained us for a year, the year we were just 7th and 8th grade. That helped a lot and maybe they got some of the kinks out at the other schools before they got to us." (Jessica, Megan, & Nick, Interviews, 2010)

Joe, a veteran teacher who is serving as a team leader, reflected on the success of the transition process and replied,

> I think the district took a good approach, starting with one school and then allowing that transition year to trickle down to another school and then to another school until they all were transitioned. With each transition year, we could learn from the previous year of the school that transitioned in, so I think they did it right. They took their time in implementing the program, and I think that each year we could learn from the previous school that

implemented it, and we could learn and we could become a better district year by year by implementing one school per year. (Joe, Interview, 2010)

Major difficulties and challenges. When Ann was asked, "What have been the major difficulties and challenges associated with the transition, she replied, "I think the greatest is keeping up with the information. The training does force you to learn and then practice new things, and keeping up with that new information sometimes forces you to try to do things differently." Bob recalled, **"** It has all turned out pretty positive I think, but it was not always easy to get the personnel right." (Ann & Bob, Interviews, 2010)

Roger commented, "The difficulties have really nothing to do with transition. The difficulties I think are that we put a lot of things in at once. For example, we started co-teaching at the same time we transitioned." Carl stated, "One of the things that happened at the same time as this transition, but was not part of the transition, was co-teaching. Trying to work that in at the same time has been quite a challenge." He went on to explain an additional challenge: "One of the biggest challenges is some people have worked alone for 25-30 years, and now they are being asked to be part of a team, and it is a challenge for them if they are not a team player." (Carl & Roger, Interviews, 2010)

Some building principals provided another perspective. Jennifer stated, "The greatest challenge was trying to get a schedule and getting everyone with teaming and planning." Steve said, "I think [the greatest challenge was] the scheduling and the way you really want to do it with competitive classes like band and vocal music. Those teachers really do not like scheduling by grade level." When asked what have been the major difficulties and challenges associated with the transition, Allison replied, "Staff.

Change is hard and moving a teacher out of his or her comfort zone is probably the toughest." (Allison, Jennifer, & Steve, Interviews, 2010)

Tim replied, "I think some difficulties for me was as team leader, you are still teaching five classes, your planning time is shortened, and you have to be organized as a team leader, but there is no monetary stipend for it." He went on to say, "It has increased the work load." Jessica explained, "Some parents wanted their child to have this teacher and that teacher, but they were on different teams. That would be cross-teaming and cause problems." Joe answered, "The greatest challenge probably concerns the parents. I think the sixth-grade parents were very concerned about their sixth graders being around eighth graders." Sarah explained "For people that have been here for a long time, it was hard to get used to. There was not a whole lot of that nurturing going on like there needs to be at this age level. I think that was the biggest thing." Megan stated, "I do not see any major difficulties. Everyone seems to work well together."(Jessica, Joe Megan, Sarah, & Tim, Interviews, 2010)

Teacher reaction to transition. When asked, "How do you think the teachers have reacted to this transition?" Ann replied, "They have been awesome. The change in classroom philosophy, classroom management, and simply teaching styles has made a huge difference in the achievement of our kids, and that is what basically this was all about." Bob commented, "Mostly very positive. I think they have adjusted pretty well." Carl reported, "Some teachers were a little apprehensive because they got put on a team with somebody that they did not agree with the teaching style of that teacher. And then there are a few teachers who wanted to do their own thing at their own pace in their own way." (Ann, Bob, & Carl, Interviews, 2010)

Jennifer said, “I think it went well here. Everyone that stayed here wanted to be part of the middle school.” Roger commented, “The teachers reacted to the transition really positively. The only thing you might look at on the negative side is that all the other stuff that came at the same time. Curriculum mapping, co-teaching, electronic lesson plans all came at once.” Allison replied, “Overall, the teachers’ reaction was very positive. Actually, I think co-teaching was tougher than the middle-school change. I think that teachers were being too overwhelmed with middle school, co-teaching, Chancery, Gradebook, and Curriculum Mapping. (Allison, Jennifer, & Roger, Interviews, 2010)

Tim responded, “Some do not like change and would probably like to stay doing what they were used to doing. I am one of the older teachers, but I still like to be innovative and try new things.” Carol said, “I think they were fine. I think they did very well.” Jessica explained, “We like the teaming. We can find out if the kids are doing something that is not quite right before it gets out of hand because we all talk every day during teaming.” (Carol, Jessica, & Tim, Interviews, 2010)

When asked how teachers have reacted to this transition, Joe said, “Those who knew that they were not going to be middle school material, they went on to the high school when we transitioned. Those who wanted to take on a challenge and learn a new philosophy and learn a new concept about this age group, they stayed.” Megan stated, “I think they embraced it. I think it was a great change. Our team has stayed intact, so we are getting a lot of benefits for a team that has been together for awhile.” (Joe & Megan, Interviews, 2010)

Needed areas of improvement. When asked, "What areas of an ideal middle school do we still need to address, respondents' answers revealed two common themes. Bob stated, "I think it is like anything. You have to keep your staff development running all the time just to keep your people trained and aware and knowledgeable." Joe suggested,

> I still think we need to get as much in-service training for new teachers as we can. Our professional development needs to always stay current as much as it can. If we cannot do it for career teachers, at least do it for new teachers. I think that is one thing we probably could improve on. (Bob & Joe, Interviews, 2010)

Jennifer identified a second theme as she replied, "Probably for us it would be our advisory. I think we still have some work to do there, but we have started it and it is working for us." Steve commented, "We still need to work on the advocacy area, advisory." Jessica explained, "We do not have advisory time to work with the kids. I do not know if we will ever. I guess we do not know how it works." Megan echoed these answers saying, "We do not do advisory yet. We are so test driven and our eye is on that test score all year." (Jennifer, Megan, & Steve, Interviews, 2010)

Curriculum changes. When Ann was asked, "How has the curriculum changed as a result of the transition from junior high school to middle school?" she replied, "I think the curriculum has become more stringent, but not because of the middle school movement so much, more because of curriculum alignment and the trend to look at curriculum in the classroom." Bob remarked, **"**I really do not think the basic curriculum has changed that much. I think it is more of the people-part that has changed. The way

we handle kids and the way we treat kids as middle-schoolers has changed." Carl answered, "What we have been pushing from the administration and from me as the trainer is to raise the bar. Do not just let kids exist, and do not be satisfied if you think enough of your kids are passing. Do not stop there. Raise the bar, keep pushing, and try to get more kids in that passing area." (Ann, Bob, & Carl Interviews, 2010)

Steve replied, "I do not think curriculum really has changed." Roger explained, "The PASS standards are the same. We still let PASS guide the curriculum. Right now I feel that with the teaming and the concept of middle school, we are educating the whole child." (Roger, & Steve, Interviews, 2010)

Jennifer gave a different opinion and stated, "Curriculum has definitely changed. You do not have people that teach just that one subject area and never meet with anyone else. Through teaming we have horizontal alignment and vertical alignment." Tim stated, "We integrated curriculum this year. We want them to learn skills they can take with them to high school. This would be any skill they need in high school. They will forget the knowledge, but they do not forget the skills." Allison said, "Curriculum is student driven. We are still not there, but with the student voice and definitely student engagement and active learning, we are still working on." (Allison, Jennifer, & Tim Interviews, 2010)

When discussing changes in curriculum, Megan reported, "We do a lot more co-curricular activities. We tried to do one thing together each nine weeks. Now we have very few things we do separately." Joe explained, "In junior high we just closed our doors and taught what we were supposed to teach, and that was it, as opposed to the

middle school concept, where we talk to each other every day at teaming. We collaborate; we share ideas." (Joe & Megan, Interviews, 2010)

Reasons to return to junior high school. When asked, "What are some reasons some teachers want to go back to junior high school and some teachers want to remain a middle school?" Ann responded,

> Those I have talked to are really proponents of middle school and love what we are doing and the way we do things. I would only think that if teachers want to return to junior high, it is because there is more autonomy and teachers can work by themselves, not having to yield and work with somebody else quite as closely. I cannot see any other real positive reason for going back other than personal reasons. (Ann, Interview, 2010)

Bob replied, "I haven't heard much of that. I guess it is out there, but I haven't heard much of it personally. I haven't talked to anybody that said, 'Boy, I wish we would go back to junior highs.' I suppose those would be people that are stuck in that secondary mode." Allison stated, "I think the teachers that want to remain at the middle school see the big picture, and they truly understand the research and the needs of this age group. It is because they have that drive and they have that vision. Those that want a junior high school like comfort; it is what they have known for a long time. (Allison & Bob, Interviews, 2010)

Jennifer explained, "That is more of your junior high mentality as far as departmental teaching. You teach only one thing, and you do not communicate with anyone else." Sarah stated, "They do not want to make that change because it is hard, and it is something they haven't done before." Joe speculated, "I think it would probably

be for accountability purposes. Usually the traditional teacher, the older teacher, is used to a student being completely accountable for their work, and it is just easier to not have to deal with other teachers." Steve said, "I do not think we have any teachers that would want to go back to junior high. We have been a middle school for five years now, and everyone that I know in this building like it, even the teachers who have been here for 20 to 30 years." (Jennifer, Joe, Sarah, & Steve, Interviews, 2010)

Preparation for high school. When asked, "Do our middle schools adequately prepare our eighth graders for a successful ninth grade year in high school?" Ann responded, "Yes, strongly, and I say that because our scores, our academics have increased, have improved." Ann further explained that the transition model did not fully prepare ninth graders to go into the high school. She stated,

> Working with new ninth-graders has its problems. The part that needs to be addressed is making sure they know what they are supposed to do and then expect them to do it without giving them the escape of, 'Well, you are just a ninth grader and do not know the ropes yet.' I just think the expectation is not where it should be. (Ann, Interview, 2010)

Carl responded, "I think the vast majority of our eighth grade students are prepared for high school." Jennifer replied, "We do [prepare our eighth graders for a successful ninth grade year]. We feel that curriculum-wise and academically, they are prepared. Our kids are in a highly structured environment, but when they go to high school they have many more freedoms and they go wild." (Carl & Jennifer, Interviews, 2010)

Megan remarked, “I sometimes hear from high school teachers that we baby our kids. Well, our kids are still playing with toys. Sometimes they are grownups, but sometimes they are babies. We do not treat them like 18-year olds; we treat them like 13, 14-year olds.” Tim suggested, “Maybe we need to be a little tougher. Maybe there is a time to do less nurturing.” Megan talked about what the emphases were for eighth grade teachers and said, “We have two goals and one of them is more important than getting them ready for ninth grade. One of them is getting the students ready for the CRT Tests.” She further explained, “We have our eyes on our own prize, and then we send them on.” (Megan, & Tim Interviews, 2010)

Roger provided some of his own research in answering the question about adequate preparation as he explained,

> I think so. PASS Standards are the same. The test scores are relatively the same, as a matter of fact though, ours came up. The research on the middle schools shows that there is a dip in transition, and then after that the scores come back up but I did not notice a dip in transition, probably because I had time to prepare. (Roger, Interview, 2010)

Problems in high school and a need for a ninth grade center. When asked, “What problems do the ninth graders present to the high schools, and should we have a ninth grade center?” Ann replied, “I think a ninth grade center is worth exploring.” I think that is where the largest chasm is right now, that the high school feels we need to prepare kids for high school.” Bob explained, “The biggest complaint I hear from high schools about behavior is ninth graders. I have never been in a high school when we

have had ninth graders, but I have been [in high school] when we had tenth graders and it seems the tenth graders were the problem then." (Ann & Bob, Interviews, 2010)

When asked, "Should we have a ninth grade center?" Carl responded, "Absolutely! In talking with teachers and administrators around the country, informally, most of them say nobody wants a ninth grade. The ninth graders are too old to stay with seventh and eighth graders, and they are too immature to be with the high school. They need a world of their own." (Carl, Interview, 2010)

Jennifer said, "I think a ninth grade center would be a nice answer for this. I think they need just concentrated efforts on ninth graders who go through that transition point." Steve stated, "I think they could have freshmen academies, where they have all freshmen together within the school and do some teaming within that academy." Allison responded, "I think ninth and tenth grade would be a good combination. We are close-knit with teaming. You really still get that underlying support. I wish we could get that in high school." Roger replied, "The answer to that is, "Yes, we need a ninth grade center." The problems are that the freshmen as well as sophomores are full blown adolescents by that time." (Allison, Jennifer, Roger, & Steve, Interviews, 2010)

Teachers presented their own ideas. Tim responded, "A ninth grade center is pretty isolated. I really like the idea of a 9-10 school. I think there could be more effort from the middle school eighth grade teachers. These are not little babies. They have grown and are a year or two from getting their driving permit." Jessica shared her ideas, "I think the high school thinks they are too immature. Here, we are ready for the ninth graders to go. I think a ninth grade center would be great. I like a center for ninth and tenth grade students." Joe explained the problems in the high school:

> I think the incoming ninth graders to the high school have been under the middle school concept for three years. They are going to leave here this year and go up there next year expecting the same type of nurturing environment from the beginning. They are not going to get that, so it will be difficult for them. (Jessica, Joe, & Tim, Interviews, 2010)

Additional comments. The last interview question was, "What other important questions should be asked, or are there any other thoughts you wanted to share?" Carl said, "Middle schools are a good transition if you take the best of high school and the best of elementary school and put it together. That is a really good middle school." Bob responded, "I think we did the right thing when we went to middle schools. I think we are doing as good a job as anybody that we have talked with."

Ann commented,

> I still think that we are not acknowledging teachers who are not fully immersed in the model. We have tried to address that by having the middle school summer institute during the summers. I think that for people who are coming into an already established model, they face two learning curves: one of being a new teacher; and the other of learning what the middle school model looks like because they were not fully prepared coming into it. (Ann, Bob, & Carl Interviews, 2010)

Jennifer replied, "I think the transition process that our district initiated was excellent. I think they thought about it and visited other schools. Also, giving us that year where we only had seventh and eighth grades and teaming with that year of training were probably the smartest things they could have done." Roger advised, "Just keep

monitoring. We have a trainer who makes sure that the concept stays intact at all four sites. Without him, in a period of five years we are a secondary model. I believe that." (Jennifer, & Roger, Interviews, 2010)

Joe replied, "Without the teaming time I do not feel we would be quite as effective because some kids need team supervision on a daily basis." Sarah stated, "I like the way we had a say-so from the beginning and helped develop this. That is a big thing right there, if you do not buy into it, you are going to struggle with it." Megan asked, "Are ninth grade teachers getting any training in how to transition these kids? We had a full year of training, but did they get any training?" (Joe, Megan, & Sarah, Interviews, 2010)

Document Analysis

The Lakewood *Middle School Feasibility Task Force Handbook* (2002) contained an accumulation of documents related to its entire two-year utilization. It listed the original 29 committee members and the committee assignments of each member. It also contained the minutes of the committee meetings and the minutes of the Feasibility Task Force meetings. Moreover, it contained research articles of interest to the committees and the reports of all sub-committees.

This handbook also contained the middle school research committee's report that provided 25 articles about the many aspects of the middle school concept. Their goal was to find both the pros and cons in the middle school research. They specifically looked at the following: curriculum and instruction considerations; financial considerations; sports; impact on students, staff, and parents; impact on facilities; and impact on transportation

and re-zoning. This handbook had several other valuable articles contributed by committee members as they searched for information to share with the committee.

The Lakewood *Middle School Planning & Implementation Handbook* (2004) was a working document for the district during the time of the transition from junior high to middle schools. It included a multi-year calendar of implementation strategies to meet the district's established timeline. It also contained material from selected articles, books, and middle school guides.

The Lakewood *Summer Institute Training Handbook* was used to train new middle school teachers each summer before school started. It provided the district's vision and philosophy statement for middle schools. It also contained information on publications: *This We Believe, Turning Points, and Breaking Ranks*. It included information on adolescent characteristics, team building, teaming, advisory and looping, differentiated instruction, student-led conferences, and curriculum integration. This handbook was updated each year to include the latest pertinent middle school information.

Training materials and training calendars used by the middle school district trainers were available for verification purposes. These handbooks and a vast selection of books and articles used by the trainers and books located in each middle school library were utilized to triangulate results from surveys and interview answers. Teacher handbooks, student handbooks, and staffing schedules from the four middle schools documented the changes as each school transitioned from a junior high to a middle school. Further documents included the staff development materials and the agendas from faculty meetings and team training sessions.

Summary

In this chapter the researcher presented the data analysis through the use of survey results, interviews, and document review. The following chapter will present a discussion of the findings in terms of the patterns and trends which emerged through a coding of themes and triangulation of data. Conclusions and recommendations for future research will be included as separate sections in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER VI

Conclusions and Recommendations

Review of the Study

This chapter reviews the purpose of the study, the methodology and procedures used to conduct the research, the research questions, and the findings that address each question. A summary of the major findings reported in Chapter 5 and an interpretation of the findings follow. Next, recommendations for practice and further research are made based on the result of this study. The contributions of the findings and conclusions of this study to the literature on the transition from junior high schools to middle schools are included. Finally, major findings reported in Chapter 5 and conclusions based on those findings are given.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze through a set of interpretive and pragmatic theoretical lens (Merriam, 2001) the perceptions of the middle school teachers, principals, and administrators of one school district's transition from junior high schools to middle schools. These theoretical lenses included the teachers' interpretive lens, the building administrators' interpretive lens, the central office administrators' interpretive lens, the district decision makers' pragmatic lens, and the lenses of the components of middle school that include curriculum, pedagogy, social elements, emotional needs, physical needs, professional development, and interdisciplinary teaming. This study led to a deeper understanding of the transitional process and the organizational implementation of middle schools in this suburban school district, and it added research to the current literature.

Methodology

This research became a pragmatic, pluralistic study where some parts were positivistic based upon actual experience and some used a pragmatic and interpretive theoretical lens to see what emerged. The research in this case study involved looking at the data through two theoretical lenses; both quantitative (teacher survey) and qualitative (surveys and interviews) methods (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). The advantage of the quantitative lens was that it measured the reaction of many people to a limited set of questions, thus facilitating comparison and statistical aggregation of data and providing a broad, generalized set of findings. In contrast, the qualitative lens typically produced a wealth of detailed data about a much smaller number of people and cases (Patton, 1987). This case study used both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to investigate how the teacher's, principal's, and central office administrators' perceptions of the organizational transition from junior high to middle school would compare and contrast. The use of both methodologies had the potential to answer the research questions with rich data sets. The population of this study was composed of teachers and building administrators of four middle schools and central office administrators in one suburban district. Data for the surveys were collected over one semester as the researcher attended school faculty meetings and a meeting of the district's central office administration. A total number of surveys included 181 teacher questionnaires; 14 building administrator (principals, assistant principals, and dean of students) surveys; and 16 central office administrator surveys. Interviews were conducted at a later date in the same semester at each school site. The interviewees included three central office administrators

instrumental in the transitional process, the four middle school principals, and eight middle school teachers (two from each school).

Research Questions

The theoretical framework of this study (Yin, 2003) is the individual perception to understanding the effectiveness of transitioning from junior high schools to middle schools in one suburban school district. The following research questions provided the structure for data collection and analysis.

In one suburban district, how did the teacher's, principal's, and central office administrators' perceptions of the organizational transition from junior high to middle school compare and contrast? Three questions guided this study:

a. How were teachers and principals involved in the transition?

b. How effective were the implementation of middle school concepts?

c. What had been the major successes and challenges associated with the transition?

Findings to the Research Questions

Involvement of teachers and principals in the transition. It seems to be important to have the teachers and principals involved in the transitional process (Shearer-Shineman, 1996). The survey answers from the central office administrators showed that seven of the sixteen administrators served on a district committee and visited other established middle schools, whereas nine administrators had no initial involvement in the transition nor visited any other established middle schools. The central office administrators that were interviewed replied they felt everybody had an opportunity to be

involved in the continuous transition. They stated that teachers and other people from across the district were involved from the very beginning.

The building administrators' survey answers showed that one person served on a district committee, three people served on a building committee, and ten people had no involvement in the initial decision making process for the transition. Eight building administrators replied they did visit other established middle schools, whereas seven did not visit. The four building principals were interviewed and stated the principal and an assistant principal from each building did attend district meetings and visited several middle schools. The principals also responded that the faculties from the other three junior high schools were involved as they observed the transition of the pilot school and the training year for teachers.

The survey answers from question ten of the teacher questionnaire showed teachers' involvement in the decision making with interdisciplinary teaming varied on the Likert scale with a mean score from each school of 3.64 to 3.77 to 4.07 to 4.35. Table 26, previously shown as Table 16, shows the mean score from each school for question 10.

Table 28

Increased Decision Making with Interdisciplinary Teaming

	School A	*School B*	*School C*	*School D*
Mean	4.35	3.77	3.64	4.07
Std Dev	0.71	0.98	1.22	0.86

The selected teacher interviews revealed that teachers thought that principals were involved in the decision making process but that teachers were not involved. District records showed that 80 percent of the junior high school administrators and 55 percent of elementary principals were sent to National Middle School Association events early in the transitional process in an effort to get them acclimated to what a middle school would look like (National Middle School Association, (2003). Twelve teachers were sent to some national conferences to also understand the middle school rationale. Building administrators and teachers also served on district committees. The Lakewood *Middle School Feasibility Task Force Handbook* (2002) contained a committee roster of ten principals and assistant principals and two teachers. The Lakewood *Middle School Planning & Implementation Handbook* (2004) contained a committee roster of nine principals and assistant principals and three teachers. Although these teachers and principals were representatives from their organizations, committee minutes revealed a request to not share information until the committee was ready to present information to the district. This lack of open communication led many teachers in the district to believe that teachers were not involved in the transition from junior highs to middle schools.

Effectiveness of the middle school concept implementation. The anonymous teacher questionnaire survey contained a section to rate 13 items on a scale of 1 to 5 for

teachers to reflect their opinion of their middle school. All 13 items describe components of an effective middle school (Murphy, 2001). Tables 27 through 31 describe the questions that produced the highest mean score with their rated answers.

Minutes from the Lakewood *Middle School Planning & Implementation Handbook* (2004) reported a unanimous agreement of wanting to provide a planning time for teams to meet but recorded a concern of funding an individual planning time and a team planning time for all middle school teachers. The decision was made to schedule a team planning time and an individual planning time for all core teachers, but only an individual planning time would be provided for all elective course teachers. The teachers rated this middle school component very high. Table 27, previously shown as Table 12, shows the mean from each school for question 6: "The middle school provides appropriate planning times for members of the teaching staff, including common planning times for teaching teams."

Table 29

Appropriate Planning Times

	School A	*School B*	*School C*	*School D*
Mean	4.83	4.33	4.45	4.75
Std Dev	0.49	1.13	1.03	0.65

Survey answers, interviews, and documentation show the district leadership provided many staff development and training opportunities to become acclimated to the middle school philosophy, concepts, and practices (National Middle School Association, 1999). Question 12 supports the idea that the district trainers provided staff development and training during the transitional process (Hatch, 2009). Teachers rated this middle

school component very high. Table 28, previously shown as Table 18, shows the mean from each school for question 12: "The staff is competent and continues to grow and learn about middle school education."

Table 30

Staff Competency on Middle School Education

	School A	*School B*	*School C*	*School D*
Mean	4.70	4.38	4.36	4.41
Std Dev	0.47	0.74	0.64	0.69

All teachers in the four middle schools were reported to be highly qualified in the district's 2009 state accreditation report. These teachers received training on the adolescent characteristics (Forte and Schurr, 1993) that the middle school pedagogical theoretical lens would address (see Appendix F). The initial year-long training focused through the theoretical lenses of social elements, emotional needs, and physical needs. The teachers rated this middle school component very high. Table 29, previously shown as Table 11, shows the mean from each school for question 5: "The middle school provides a teaching staff skilled in the ability to understand, to relate to, and work with students in this age group."

Table 31

Teaching Staff Skilled in the Ability to Work with Students

	School A	*School B*	*School C*	*School D*
Mean	4.61	4.48	4.23	4.34
Std Dev	0.58	0.70	0.86	0.77

The district's training agenda (see Appendix F) provided several sessions on establishing effective parental contact and sustained communication efforts (Epstein and MacIver, 1990). Interview responses also reflected an ongoing practice of communicating with students and parents regarding all aspects of the student's education. The teachers rated this middle school component very high. Table 30, previously shown as Table 10, shows the mean from each school for question 4: "Students and parents receive regular feedback regarding the student's progress."

Table 32

Student Progress Reported to Students and Parents

	School A	*School B*	*School C*	*School D*
Mean	4.61	4.29	4.38	4.36
Std Dev	0.49	0.95	0.84	0.78

Interview responses showed there was a continuous information flow to parents including parent nights and workshops, online newsletters, and a parent portal, which allowed parents to check grades and student progress. Other responses indicated the emphasis on the middle school concept (National Middle School Association, 2003) had opened the door for extensive parental involvement, which had allowed parents to participate in their students' academic success in and out of the classroom. The teachers rated this middle school component very high. Table 31, previously shown as Table 13, shows the mean for each school for question 13: "The middle school is open and encourages participation and involvement by parents and the community."

Table 33

School Encourages Involvement by Parents and Community

	School A	*School B*	*School C*	*School D*
Mean	4.70	4.19	4.36	4.15
Std Dev	0.47	0.81	0.67	0.82

Major successes and challenges associated with the transition.

Philosophy. A positive result in the findings showed that the transition from junior high schools to middle schools allowed the district leaders to realize that the middle school needed its own philosophy, which included age-appropriate, highly challenging middle school curriculum and activities (Jackson & Davis, 2000). It also included a safe, caring, nurturing environment with high expectations that allowed for student-centered exploratory learning. The transition from dependent to independent thought and behavior was imperative for the success of the middle school students (Lakewood Middle School Planning and Implementation Handbook, 2004). An emerging theme from survey and interview answers was that a middle school is a philosophy, not a building, not a place, and not a site.

***Curriculum*.** Another success associated with the transition from junior high schools to middle schools was the improvement in the curriculum delivery system. Survey responses to open-ended questions indicated curriculum had become more attentive to student needs, as opposed to being content-driven. The curriculum had become more integrated with the incorporation of the middle school concept (National Middle School Association, 2010a). One teacher stated, "I think we have a greater awareness of what each of us are teaching." When compared to the junior high school

curriculum, it was noted that curriculum at the junior high school was more focused on the subject matter, and that at the middle school, it was focused on skill concepts.

Answers to interview questions indicated that the basic curriculum had not changed that much. It was more of the people part that had changed, and teachers were now educating the whole child. The state's PASS standards were the same and still guided the curriculum. One central office administrator believed the curriculum had become more stringent because of curriculum alignment and the desire to look at curriculum in the classroom. Interview answers also suggested that the teachers did more co-curricular activities as a result of being in middle school. Some teachers tried to do one activity together every nine-week period. One teacher team discovered they did very few things separately. Not all teams had reached this level of proficiency. The incorporation of integrated theme-based units produced the lowest mean scores for School B and School D. Table 32, previously shown as Table 17, shows the mean from each school for question 11.

Question 11: Integrated themed-based units are a significant aspect of the middle school curriculum.

Table 34

Integrated Theme-based Units as Part of Curriculum

	School A	*School B*	*School C*	*School D*
Mean	4.04	3.37	3.49	3.37
Std Dev	0.82	1.04	0.99	1.09

The newly established middle schools incorporated an interdisciplinary approach to teaching (Gray, 2004). This process took time, and the teacher teams were allowed to

select what to teach in an interdisciplinary pedagogy. Some teachers in School D had recently started this component of the middle school practices (National Middle School Association, 2010a). Table 33, previously shown as Table 8, shows the mean from each school for question 2: "The middle school incorporates an interdisciplinary approach to the teaching of basic skills courses such as coordinating English, math, science, reading, and social studies in grades 6, 7, and 8."

Table 35

Interdisciplinary approach to teaching

	School A	*School B*	*School C*	*School D*
Mean	4.35	4.00	4.02	3.81
Std Dev	0.64	0.88	0.89	1.12

Another success that emerged from the interviews was that the district took an excellent approach to the transitional process, starting with a pilot school and then allowing that transition year to move to another school and then to another school until they all were transitioned (Lounsbury & Brazee, 2004). With each transition year, teachers from other schools learned from the school that transitioned to a middle school the previous year. The central office administrators and middle school principals expressed opinions that the district had better schools because of the successful transition from junior high schools to middle schools.

Scheduling with teaming. According to principals, a major difficulty and challenge to the transition from junior high schools to middle schools was building a class schedule that allowed a team of teachers to meet together daily as a team and still have an individual planning time (Supovitz and Weinbaum, 2008). A major scheduling

difficulty was with competitive classes like band and vocal music. Elective teachers did not want scheduling by grade level. They preferred grouping students by performance ability, which meant multi-grade classes. Another difficulty arose when some parents wanted their child to have a particular teacher, but they were on a different team. Cross-teaming would cause problems with keeping a team of students and teachers together to build team spirit and work together as one team.

Another major challenge that emerged from the survey questions and selected interviews was that the district administration implemented many things at once. Schools were introduced to co-teaching, an electronic grade book, electronic lesson plans, curriculum mapping, and student-led conferences. Several teachers felt overwhelmed and wanted things to stay the old way. Principals reported that the greatest difficulty was keeping up with the new information. The training did force teachers and principals to learn and then practice new things.

One of the biggest challenges discussed in the interviews was a small group of teachers who were set in their ways. These teachers had worked alone for many years, and now they were being asked to be part of a team. For teachers that were not comfortable with being on teams, being part of a team was a challenge. As one central office administrator reflected, “It has all turned out pretty positive, I think, but it was not always easy to get the personnel right.”

Summary of Findings

The district in the study implemented a systemic transition initiative to change the middle-level education of young adolescents by transitioning their four junior high schools to middle schools. The district did this by implementing the principles and

components of the middle school concept (Schlechty, 2009). The involvement, effectiveness, successes, and challenges of this transitional process are viewed through the middle teachers' interpretive theoretical lens, the building administrators' interpretive theoretical lens, and the central office administrators' interpretive theoretical lens to discern differences in the perceptions of each group of educators. The policy and implementation of the transitional process was viewed through the pragmatic lens of the district decision makers of the district. The middle school implementation was viewed through the theoretical lens of each component of the middle school concept. The data was viewed through the quantitative lens and qualitative lens of the methodology.

There are several items of note in the data displays. First, as stated earlier in this research project, the lower percentage of survey returns from School A is a result of a cancelled faculty meeting and the survey distribution and collection delegated to the school principal. This lower number of surveys should be noted when compared to the other schools.

A second item of note is the response from the teachers when they were asked, "What is a middle school?" Table 6 shows the pilot school, School B, had more teachers defining a middle school as a concept. This school had been a middle school longer than the other schools. Also noteworthy is that School D, the newest school in this transitional process, had the highest percentage of defining a middle school with grade levels.

A third item of note is the ANOVA results showed no significant difference in the following middle school component areas: a program centered on the developmental needs of the student rather than a traditional content-based program, an interdisciplinary approach to teaching, enrichment experiences for the students, regular feedback provided

to students and parents, teaching staff skilled in the ability to work with students, appropriate planning times, flexibility in school-wide schedule, increased decision making with interdisciplinary teaming, integrated theme-based units as part of curriculum, staff competency on middle school education, and open participation and involvement by parents and community.

The perceptions of teachers, building administrators, and central office administrators about the organizational transition from junior high schools to middle schools revealed several similar findings. When asked why the district decided to make the transition, the responses that emerged the most often were described to better meet the needs of the students and to improve instruction. All three groups believed the district took the appropriate steps to organize, study, and implement the transition from junior high schools to middle schools. All building administrators, central office administrators, and 55% to 70% of the teachers responded they wanted to remain a middle school and were not interested in returning to a junior high school. Table 25 shows only 4% to 24% of the teachers responded they would like to return to a junior high school setting.

An unexpected answer to this open-ended question was a suggestion from several teachers to create a ninth grade center. Table 25 shows 9% of the teachers from School C and 6% of the teachers from School D suggested the district create a ninth grade center. School C had the lowest percentage of teachers that wanted to remain a middle school. School D was the last junior high school to transition to a middle school and had the highest percentage of teachers who wanted to return to a junior high school setting.

Interpretation of Findings

One of the most favored components of middle school, according to the survey responses and interviews, was the teaming time. Administrators recognized the value of allowing teachers to plan as a team, to conduct parent and student conferences as a team, and to let the students discover the benefits of working as a team. Teachers appreciated the opportunity of having a teaming time and an individual planning time. They felt the teaming time also helped the individual students that were struggling with their school work and other adolescent pressures.

The data analysis shows the central office administrators and the building administrators believed that the transitional process included teachers. The teachers, for the most part, felt left out of the decision making process to transition from junior high schools to middle schools. They reported that principals were involved, but teachers were not involved.

The ANOVA results showed a significant difference in the areas of staff morale and the staff's willingness to be cooperative and supportive of other staff members. The ANOVA and the Tukey Post Hoc Test for both items revealed a significant difference when compared to the other schools. School C produced the lowest mean score in both of these questions. This may be attributed to the fact that School C had 31 percent of the teachers with an alternative certification. It may also be attributed to the fact that a perceived problem existed at this school with some of the school administrators and a change in two assistant principals occurred in the last two years. Also, the principals of School B and School C have a district reputation for being strict and no-nonsense when it comes to holding teachers and staff accountable for their actions and expected

performance. The significant difference with staff morale and the staff's willingness to be cooperative and supportive of other staff members may have little to do with implementing middle school components or transitioning from junior high school to middle school and have more to do with the general climate of the school.

Recommendations for Practice

Recommendations included in this section are based on the outcome of this study and review of the literature. This study's results documented several areas for improvement for the middle school principals in this district. Other school district leaders considering implementing a transition from junior high schools to middle schools could benefit from this research. The following implications for practice for this study include:

Recommendation #1. When a lower level of staff morale and the lack of staff cooperation and support of each other are noted in some schools, it is recommended that the principal at each school conduct a school climate survey and allow training in the areas of need suggested by the building's survey results. It is further recommended the teachers be allowed an opportunity to express their frustrations and concerns without worry of any negative repercussions.

Recommendation #2. The funding for the **"**extra" team planning time seems to be critical for continued success in the middle schools. If a district is experiencing financial problems and is looking for ways to cut expenses wherever possible to maintain a balanced budget, it is recommended that the team planning time continue to be funded to allow the best education for the middle school students. Teachers should be held accountable in the use of team planning time. It is further recommended that teams start

each agenda with curriculum and planning items before they address individual student behavior, which, if allowed, can use up the entire team planning time.

Recommendation #3. Administrators and teachers recognized the importance of staff development with their team and also within their individual curriculum subject departments. It is recommended that school districts schedule staff development with grade-level teachers for each department. This will allow the school's two or three teachers of one specific grade-level subject to meet with other teachers within the district to discuss problems of a similar nature and to propose solutions on which all may agree.

Recommendation #4. One of the major philosophical concepts of middle school is to address the intellectual, social, emotional, moral, and physical needs of young adolescents. It is recommended that the staff of the middle schools set high expectations for every member of the learning community and set as a priority to have students and teachers engaged in active learning activities instead of passive learning by listening and note taking. This active learning should keep the students engaged in beneficial learning activities the entire class time every day.

Recommendation #5. Effective teams offer students and teachers a dynamic structure for forging close relationships, yet even reasonably sized teams may not be able to meet all students' needs for individual attention. One of the major components of the middle school concept is the use of an advisory period (Jackson & Davis, 2000). An advisory period during the school day is potentially an important time for teachers and students to develop strong interpersonal bonds. It is recommended the middle schools continue to explore and implement an advisory program.

Suggestions for Further Research

This case study provides detailed descriptions of the experiences of central office administrators, building administrators, and classroom teachers as they transitioned from junior high schools to middle schools. The data provides information regarding the implementation of the transitional process and raises additional questions for further research. Questions for further study are recommended as follows:

Recommendation #1. Support staff and other stakeholders have an important role to play in helping to enhance student learning. Their involvement in building a positive relationship with students to help set a positive learning atmosphere is essential (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Traditionally, those exploring the best educational settings have focused only on teachers and school leaders. Further research on how support staff and other stakeholders affect student learning opportunities is warranted.

Recommendation #2. Another aspect for future research consideration is teacher and principal turnover rates and the adverse effects they have on quality team teaching. A study is recommended on how schools have maintained professional development sessions for those hired after the start of the school year.

Conclusions Based on Findings

This case study shows that the school district's administration played a key role in researching the best method of teaching young adolescent students. They formed the Middle School Feasibility Task Force Committee, which consisted of thirty-one members representing stakeholders from across the district. The Task Force identified and discussed the components of effective middle schools and determined the priority of implementation of these components. The Task Force carefully crafted a plan to study

research on middle schools and to evaluate their educational programs and facilities. The research showed that the developmental needs of young adolescents on local, state, and national levels might best be met within a middle school setting. The district in this case study began transitioning their four junior high schools to middle schools. They chose an administrator as a middle school trainer to work with teachers on a daily basis.

Each central office administrator had over 30 years of experience in education. The perceptions of the central office administrators were that all of the teachers and principals were involved in the transitional process. They believed the transition went extremely well and the implementation of the middle school concept was still ongoing but almost complete. They recognized challenges of staffing the teachers in the right schools and meeting the needs of students and parents. These administrators expressed their opinion that the transition from junior high schools to middle schools better met the needs of the students and improved instruction.

Ten of the fourteen building administrators (principals, assistant principals, and dean of students) of the four middle schools reported that they were not involved in the initial decision making process. However, documentation from the district's records (Lakewood Public Schools, 2004) shows that the principals were involved in the transitional process by serving on committees, introducing the components of the middle school to their faculty, and hiring teachers who were willing to work with other teachers in a team concept. They agreed the pedagogy in the middle school concept was now student-centered instead of teacher-centered. The building administrators believed the transitional process was a success and that the district leaders needed to continue funding the team planning time, the district middle school trainer, and professional development.

Teachers from the four middle schools expressed a mixed reaction to the effectiveness of the implementation of the middle school concept. The teachers felt they were not involved in the decision making process as much as the central office administrators and building administrators believed. The teachers perceived a lack of involvement of teachers in the decision to transition from junior high schools to middle schools. They felt their principal was involved and shared some information in faculty meetings. The principal from School D took the initiative to send teams of teachers from his building to the other middle schools that were in the process of the middle school transition. The teachers expressed high satisfaction with team planning time; staff competency about middle school education; and a teaching staff skilled in the ability to understand, to relate to, and work with students in this age group. The teachers also reported that students and parents receive regular feedback regarding the students' progress and that the middle school is open and encourages participation and involvement by parents and the community.

This research provides evidence that a district initiative to provide the most effective methods for educating young adolescents led to a district study of the proposed benefits of the middle school concept and the best groupings of grades for adolescents. This district study resulted in the decision to transition from junior high schools to middle schools over a period of four years. It was hoped that the number of students dropping out of school would steadily decline as a new approach of meeting the needs of adolescents was implemented.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Public elementary and secondary schools, by type of school: Selected years, 1967-68 through 2006-07

Year	Total, all public schools	Schools with reported grade spans						
		Total K-8	Elementary schools				Secondary schools	
			Total, 4-8	Middle schools	One-teacher schools	Other elementary schools	Total	Junior high
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1967-68	--	94,197	67,186		4,146	63,040	23,318	7,437
1970-71	--	89,372	64,020	2,080	1,815	60,125	23,572	7,750
1972-73	--	88,864	62,942	2,308	1,475	59,159	23,919	7,878
1974-75	--	87,456	61,759	3,224	1,247	57,288	23,837	7,690
1975-76	88,597	87,034	61,704	3,916	1,166	56,622	23,792	7,521
1976-77	--	86,501	61,123	4,180	1,111	55,832	23,857	7,434
1978-79	--	84,816	60,312	5,879	1,056	53,377	22,834	6,282
1980-81	85,982	83,688	59,326	6,003	921	52,402	22,619	5,890
1982-83	84,740	82,039	58,051	6,875	798	50,378	22,383	5,948
1983-84	84,178	81,418	57,471	6,885	838	49,748	22,336	5,936
1984-85	84,007	81,147	57,231	6,893	825	49,513	22,320	5,916
1986-87	83,455	82,190	58,801	7,452	763	50,586	21,406	5,142
1987-88	83,248	81,416	57,575	7,641	729	49,205	21,662	4,900
1988-89	83,165	81,579	57,941	7,957	583	49,401	21,403	4,687
1989-90	83,425	81,880	58,419	8,272	630	49,517	21,181	4,512
1990-91	84,538	82,475	59,015	8,545	617	49,853	21,135	4,561
1991-92	84,578	82,506	59,258	8,829	569	49,860	20,767	4,298
1992-93	84,497	82,896	59,676	9,152	430	50,094	20,671	4,115
1993-94	85,393	83,431	60,052	9,573	442	50,037	20,705	3,970
1994-95	86,221	84,476	60,808	9,954	458	50,396	20,904	3,859
1995-96	87,125	84,958	61,165	10,205	474	50,486	20,997	3,743
1996-97	88,223	86,092	61,805	10,499	487	50,819	21,307	3,707
1997-98	89,508	87,541	62,739	10,944	476	51,319	21,682	3,599
1998-99	90,874	89,259	63,462	11,202	463	51,797	22,076	3,607
1999-2000	92,012	90,538	64,131	11,521	423	52,187	22,365	3,566
2000-01	93,273	91,691	64,601	11,696	411	52,494	21,994	3,318
2001-02	94,112	92,696	65,228	11,983	408	52,837	22,180	3,285
2002-03	95,615	93,869	65,718	12,174	366	53,178	22,599	3,263
2003-04	95,726	93,977	65,758	12,341	376	53,041	22,782	3,251
2004-05	96,513	95,001	65,984	12,530	338	53,116	23,445	3,250
2005-06	97,382	96,798	67,291	12,545	335	54,411	23,800	3,249
2006-07	98,793	98,410	68,990	12,773	327	55,890	23,436	3,112

APPENDIX B

Middle School Anonymous Teacher Questionnaire

Check current grade level you are teaching ____6^{th} ____7^{th} ____8th

Gender ____ Male ____ Female

Total years teaching experience ____

Certification ____ Regular ____Alternative

How long have you been at this school? _____

What is a Middle School?

Directions: Rate the following items on a scale of 1 to 5 to reflect your opinion of your middle school (1 = Low … 5 = High)

	(Low)				(High)
1. The middle school provides a program centered around the developmental needs of the student rather than a traditional content-based program.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The middle school incorporates an interdisciplinary approach to the teaching of basic skills courses such as coordinating English, math, science, reading, and social studies in grades 6, 7, & 8.	1	2	3	4	5
3. There is an opportunity provided for enrichment Experiences for the students.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Students and parents receive regular feedback Regarding the student's progress.	1	2	3	4	5
5. The middle school provides a teaching staff skilled in the ability to understand, relate to, and work with students of this age group.	1	2	3	4	5

6. The middle school provides appropriate planning times for members of the teaching staff, including common planning times for teaching teams.	1	2	3	4	5
7. A high level of staff morale exists at the middle school.	1	2	3	4	5
8. A school-wide schedule is utilized which includes blocks of time within which teachers have the flexibility to group students in varied ways for specific instructional experiences.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Members of the school staff are cooperative and supportive of each other.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Teachers are involved more in decision making as a result of interdisciplinary teaming.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Integrated theme-based units are a significant aspect of the middle school curriculum.	1	2	3	4	5
12. The staff is competent and continues to grow and learn about middle school education.	1	2	3	4	5
13. The middle school is open and encourages participation and involvement by parents and the community.	1	2	3	4	5

Open-ended Questions

1. How has the curriculum changed as a result of the transition from a junior high school to a middle school?

2. Do middle school parents receive enough information to understand the middle school emphasis? Explain.

3. Have you tried integrating your curriculum into interdisciplinary units commonly associated with the middle school curriculum? If yes, do you feel this is an effective way to teach in the middle school? Why or why not? If no, would you consider trying to integrate curriculum at your grade level? Why or why not?

4. If you had a choice, would you rather see the existing school stay a junior high school or a middle school? Why?

APPENDIX C

Superintendent, Central Office Administrators, Principals, Assistant Principals Survey Form

1. How many years of experience in the field of education do you have?

2. In your opinion, why did this school district make the transition from a junior high school to a middle school?

3. Were you involved to any extent regarding the decision making process for the transition? If so, in what way?

4. Did you have the opportunity to visit other established middle schools during the transition process? If yes, what did you learn? If not, why?

5. What was your reaction to the transition from a junior high to a middle school? What about teachers' reactions in general?

6. As an administrator, were you required to change positions as a result of the transition process? Explain why the transition necessitated the change in your position.

7. In your opinion, how successful was the transition process from a traditional junior high school to a middle school in this school district?

8. Are there any improvements you would like to see in the middle school?

9. What has changed that you would consider improvements?

10. What have been the major difficulties and challenges associated with the transition?

11. What do you see as having a significant influence on this middle school in the next five years?

12. Any additional comments?

APPENDIX D

University of Oklahoma
Institutional Review Board
Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Project Title:	Teacher and Administrator Perceptions on Transitioning From Junior High to Middle School
Principal Investigator:	Gene Shelkett
Department:	EACS

You are being asked to volunteer for this research study. This study is being conducted at your work site. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a key administrator or teacher involved in the transitioned middle schools.

Please read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to take part in this study.

Purpose of the Research Study

The purpose of this study is to help determine how the transition from junior high to middle school enhanced or opposed the learning of adolescents within the school district.

Number of Participants

About sixteen people will be interviewed in this study.

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

Participants will be interviewed and asked questions about their perceptions and opinions on the district's transition from junior high to middle school. Transition topics will include the middle school concept, the reasons for the transition, teacher and administrator involvement, successes and challenges, teacher reaction, curriculum, and ninth grade concerns.

Length of Participation

The interview should last 20-30 minutes and will be audiotape recorded with permission. It will be conducted at the worksite of the participant at an agreed upon date and time.

This study has the following risks:

The only risk involved will be any discomfort that the participant may feel in participating in an interview. Breaks will be provided as needed. Participation may be discontinued at anytime without penalty.

Benefits of being in the study are

As a participant, you will have the opportunity of sharing your educational experiences in becoming a part of a doctoral study.

Confidentiality

In published reports, there will be no information included that will make it possible to identify you without your permission. Research records will be stored securely and only approved researchers will have access to the records.

There are organizations that may inspect and/or copy these research records for quality assurance and data analysis. These organizations include Dr. Gregg Garn and the OU Institutional Review Board.

Compensation

You will not be reimbursed for you time and participation in this study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you withdraw or decline participation, you will not be penalized or lose benefits or services unrelated to the study. If you decide to participate, you may decline to answer any question and may choose to withdraw at any time.

W**aivers of Elements of Confidentiality**

Your name will not be linked with your responses unless you specifically agree to be identified. Please select one of the following options

_____ I consent to being quoted directly.

_____ I do not consent to being quoted directly.

Audio Recording of Study Activities

To assist with accurate recording of participant responses, interviews may be recorded on an audio recording device. You have the right to refuse to allow such recording without penalty. Please select one of the following options.

I consent to audio recording. ___ Yes ___ No.

Contacts and Questions

If you have concerns or complaints about the research, the researcher(s) conducting this study can be contacted at Gene Shelkett gshelkett@lawtonps.org 512-0623 or. Dr. Garn garn@ou.edu 405 325-2228.
If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, concerns, or complaints about the research and wish to talk to someone other than individuals on the research team or if you cannot reach the research team, you may contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records. If you are not given a copy of this consent form, please request one.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received satisfactory answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature Date

APPENDIX E

Interview Questions

1. What is a middle school?

2. Why did this school district make the transition from a junior high school to a middle school?

3. To what extent were teachers and administrators involved in the transition?

4. How successful was the transition process from traditional junior high schools to middle schools in this district?

5. What have been the major difficulties and challenges associated with the transition?

6. How do you think the teachers have reacted to this transition?

7. What areas of an ideal middle school do we still need to address?

8. How has the curriculum changed as a result of the transition from junior high school to middle school?

9. What are some reasons some teachers want to go back to junior high school and some teachers want to remain a middle school?

10. Do our middle schools adequately prepare our eighth graders for a successful ninth grade in high school?

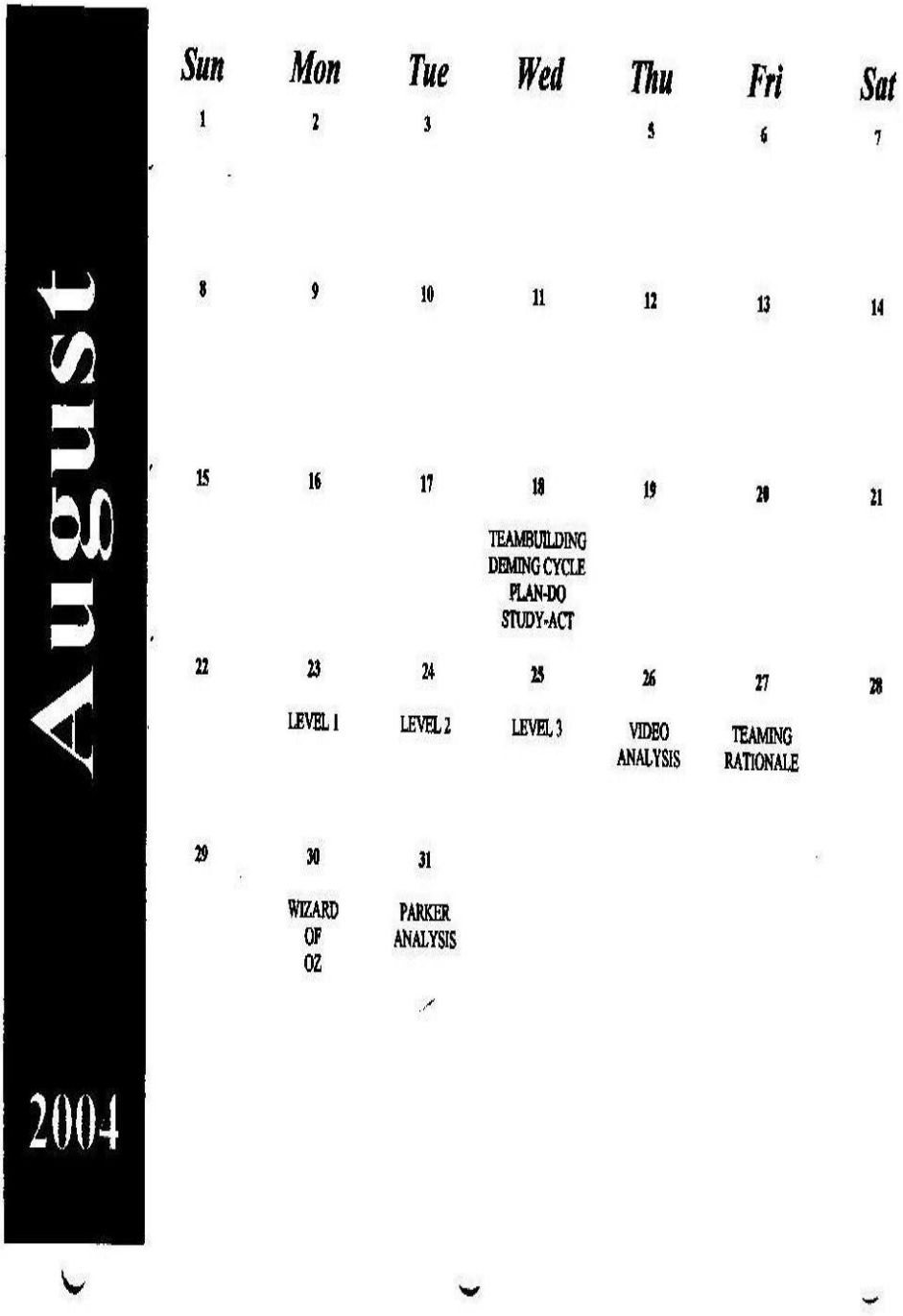
11. What problems do the ninth graders present to the high schools? Should we have a ninth grade center?

12. What other important questions should be asked?

APPENDIX F

Middle School Training Calendars 1 through 5

Training Calendar #1

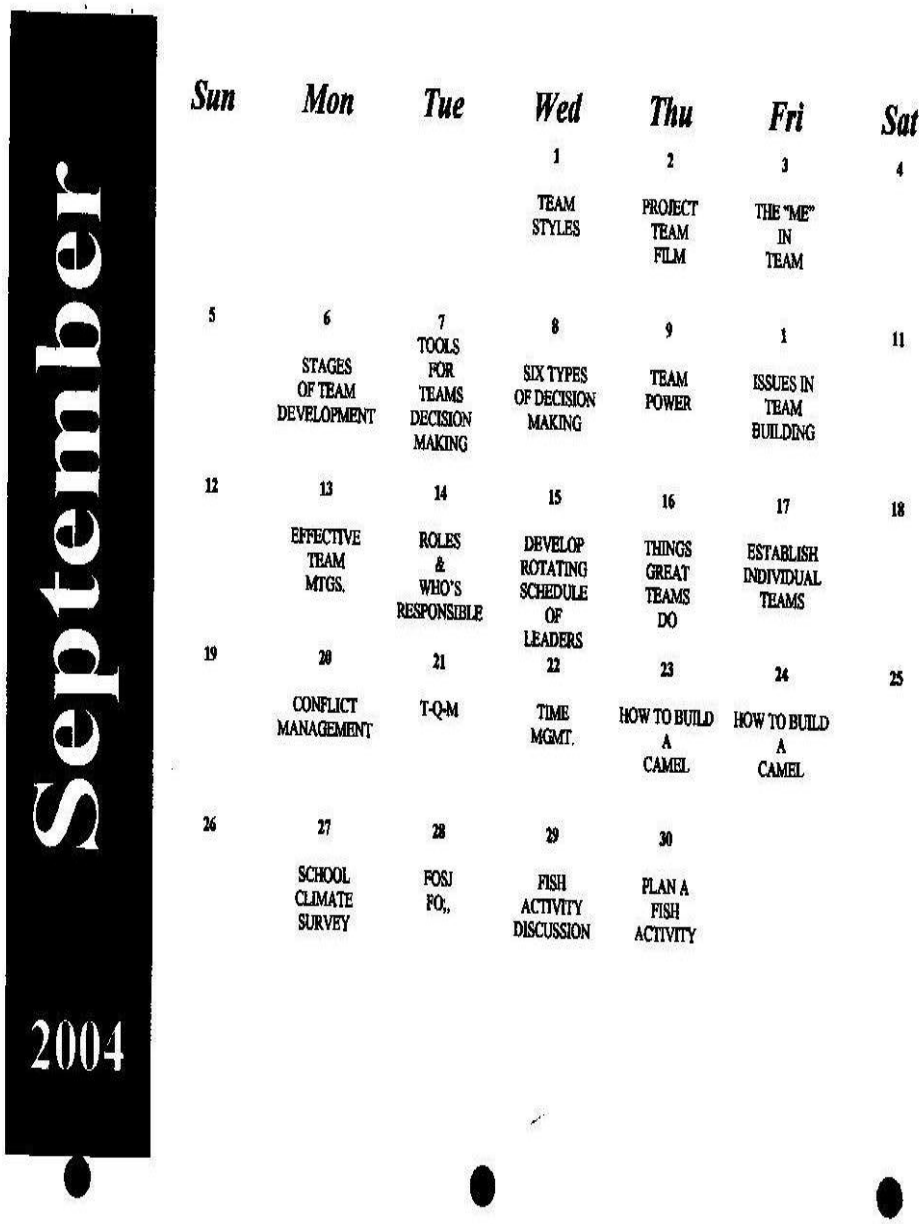


August

2004

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3		5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18 TEAMBUILDING DEMING CYCLE PLAN-DO STUDY-ACT	19	20	21
22	23 LEVEL 1	24 LEVEL 2	25 LEVEL 3	26 VIDEO ANALYSIS	27 TEAMING RATIONALE	28
29	30 WIZARD OF OZ	31 PARKER ANALYSIS				

Training Calendar #2

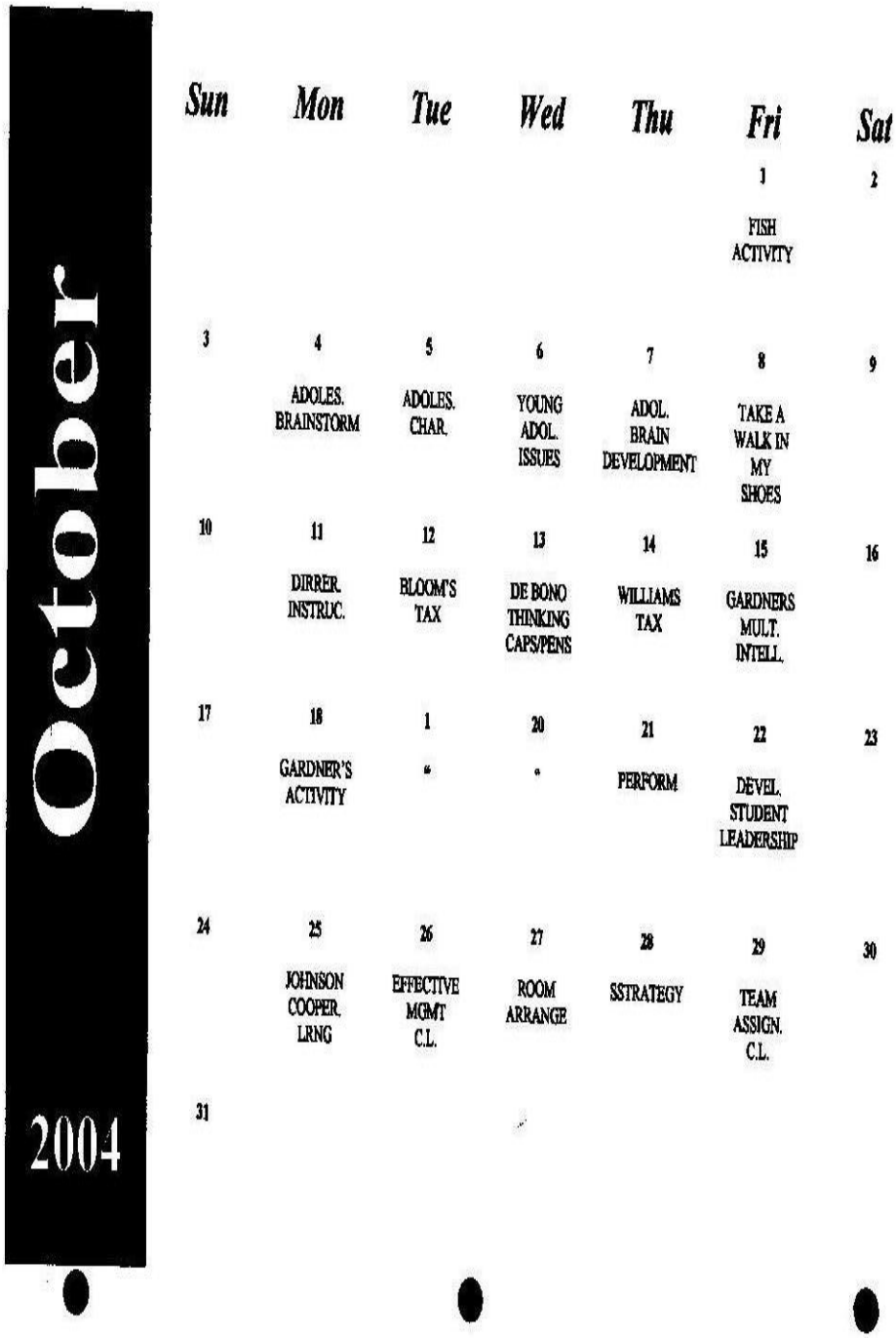


September

2004

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1 TEAM STYLES	2 PROJECT TEAM FILM	3 THE "ME" IN TEAM	4
5	6 STAGES OF TEAM DEVELOPMENT	7 TOOLS FOR TEAMS DECISION MAKING	8 SIX TYPES OF DECISION MAKING	9 TEAM POWER	1 ISSUES IN TEAM BUILDING	11
12	13 EFFECTIVE TEAM MTGS.	14 ROLES & WHO'S RESPONSIBLE	15 DEVELOP ROTATING SCHEDULE OF LEADERS	16 THINGS GREAT TEAMS DO	17 ESTABLISH INDIVIDUAL TEAMS	18
19	20 CONFLICT MANAGEMENT	21 T-Q-M	22 TIME MGMT.	23 HOW TO BUILD A CAMEL	24 HOW TO BUILD A CAMEL	25
26	27 SCHOOL CLIMATE SURVEY	28 FOSJ FO;,	29 FISH ACTIVITY DISCUSSION	30 PLAN A FISH ACTIVITY		

Training Calendar #3

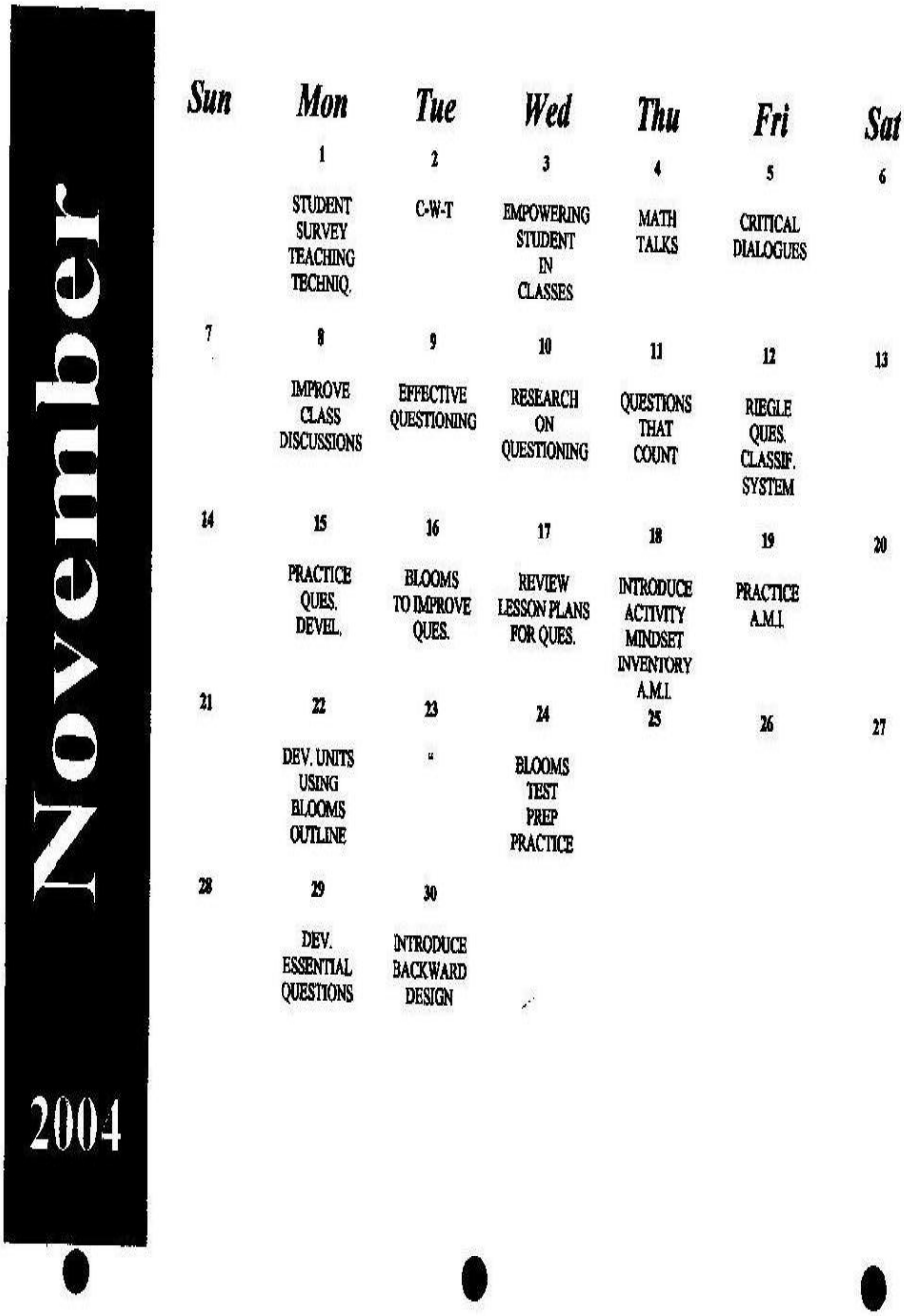


October

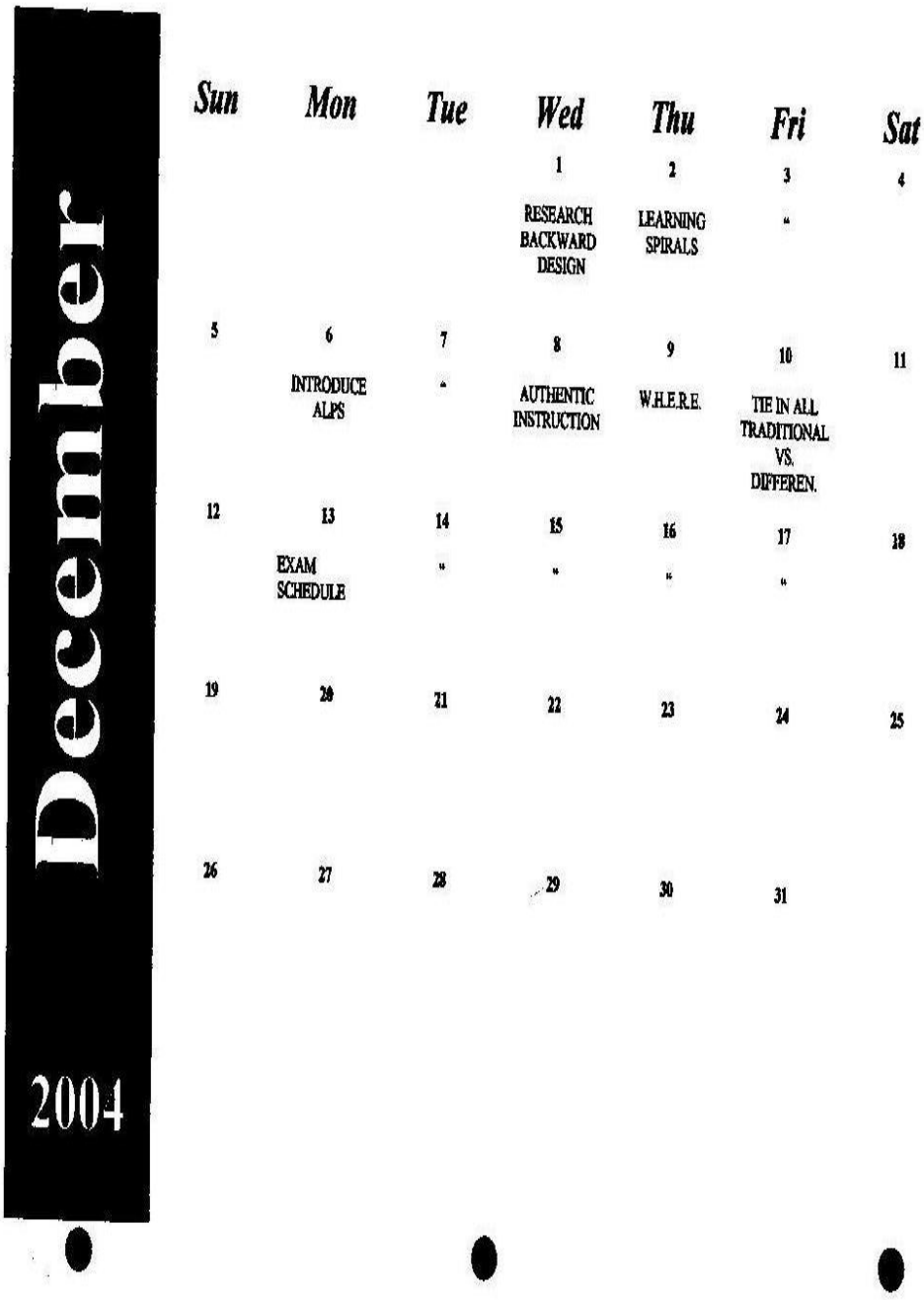
2004

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1 FISH ACTIVITY	2
3	4 ADOLES. BRAINSTORM	5 ADOLES. CHAR.	6 YOUNG ADOL. ISSUES	7 ADOL. BRAIN DEVELOPMENT	8 TAKE A WALK IN MY SHOES	9
10	11 DIRRER. INSTRUC.	12 BLOOM'S TAX	13 DE BONO THINKING CAPS/PENS	14 WILLIAMS TAX	15 GARDNERS MULT. INTELL.	16
17	18 GARDNER'S ACTIVITY	1 "	20 "	21 PERFORM	22 DEVEL. STUDENT LEADERSHIP	23
24	25 JOHNSON COOPER. LRNG	26 EFFECTIVE MGMT C.L.	27 ROOM ARRANGE	28 SSTRATEGY	29 TEAM ASSIGN. C.L.	30
31						

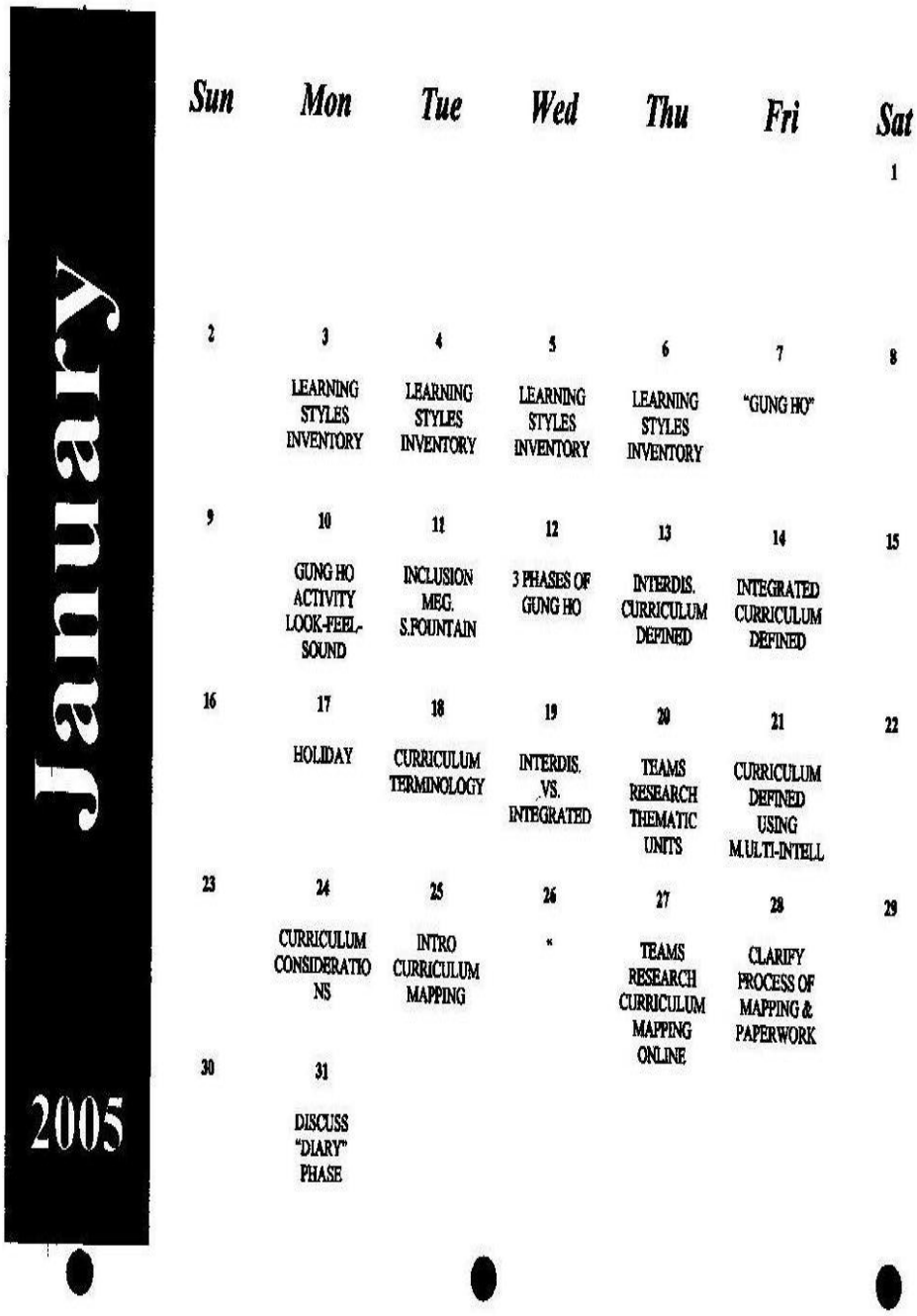
Training Calendar #4



Training Calendar #5



Training Calendar # 5



APPENDIX G

INFORMATION SHEET FOR CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

My name is Gene Shelkett, and I am a graduate student in Educational Leadership Policy Studies at the University of the Oklahoma. I am requesting that you volunteer to participate in a research study titled From Junior High to Middle School. You were selected as a possible participant because you currently work in a middle school. Please read this information sheet and contact me to ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to take part in this study.

Purpose of the Research Study: The purpose of this study is: To help determine how the transition from junior high school to middle school enhanced or opposed the learning of adolescents within the school district.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things: Complete a middle school questionnaire.

Alternative Procedures: N/A

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study: The study has the following risks N/A

Compensation: You will not be compensated for your time and participation in this study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not result in penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Length of Participation: 10 – 15 minutes
Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private and your supervisor will not have access to your responses. In published reports, there will be no information included that will make it possible to identify you as a research participant. Research records will be stored securely in a locked file cabinet until destroyed at end of study. Only approved researchers will have access to the records.

Contacts and Questions: If you have concerns or complaints about the research, the researcher(s) conducting this study can be contacted at Gene Shelkett gshelkett@lawtonps.org 512-0623 or Dr. Garn garn@ou.edu 405 325-1627 In the event of a research-related injury, contact the researcher(s). You are encouraged to contact the researcher(s) if you have any questions. If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research or about your rights and wish to talk to someone other than the individuals on the research team, or if you cannot reach the research team, you may contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at (405) 325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Contact the researcher(s) if you have questions or if you have experienced a research related injury.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, concerns, or complaints about the research and wish to talk to someone other than individuals on the research team or if you cannot reach the research team, you may contact the University of

Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records. If you are not given a copy of this consent form, please request one.

Statement of Consent
I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received satisfactory answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Please keep this information sheet for your records.