Middle and High School Transitions as Viewed by Students, Parents, and Teachers

Respondents to a questionnaire about the elementary-middle and middle-high school transition experience respectively were 173 sixth grade students, 83 parents, and 12 teachers, and 320 ninth grade students, 61 parents and 17 teachers. Results revealed that school transitions posed both challenges and opportunities for students. Parents and teachers appeared to have a reasonably good appreciation of how these developmental experiences were perceived by students. Results from this study and from previous research suggest that distinct types of transition programming and a different temporal sequence may be needed in order to facilitate successful adjustment to three components--academic, procedural, and social--of a school transition. Suggestions about elective transition programming for each of the components are provided.

School transitions have been a frequent topic in both the research and practice literature in recent years (e.g., Alspaugh, 1998; Chung, Elias, & Schneider, 1998; Eccles et al., 1993; Felner et al., 1993; Mizelle & Irvin, 2000; Perkins, & Gelfer, 1995; Weldy, 1991). For a number of students, these transitions apparently are difficult to negotiate. For example, the elementary to middle/junior high school transition has been found to be associated with a variety of negative effects on adolescents including declines in achievement (Alspaugh), decreased motivation (Anderman, Maehr, & Midgley, 1999), lowered self-esteem (Eccles et al.; Wigfield, Eccles, Mac Iver, Reuman, & Midgley, 1991), and increased psychological distress (Chung et al.; Crockett, Peterson, Graber, Schulenberg, & Ebata, 1989). Similarly, the transition to high school has also been accompanied by negative consequences for some students including achievement loss (Alspaugh) and dropping out shortly after they enter high school or failing behind and failing to graduate on time (Mizelle & Irvin). In fact, British researchers (Youngman, 1986), estimate that 10% of students suffered serious problems after the transfer to secondary school.

It is surprising, however, that, in most of the transition research, the voices of those who are most directly involved--the students along with their parents and teachers--have been heard only infrequently. How do students view school transitions? What aspects of these transitions do they worry about or find difficult? Are there aspects of school transitions to which they look forward? What and whom do they find helpful in these transitions? What additional assistance might they have liked to have had during the transition? How do teacher and parent perceptions of school transitions compare to student perceptions? These teacher and parent perceptions may be especially revealing as research has demonstrated that parents and teachers can be a significant source of help during the transition (Akos, 2002), yet a child's view is not always perceived accurately by people in the child's environment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

STUDENT TRANSITION PERCEPTIONS

Research about student perceptions of transitions has been most prevalent in the literature and has demonstrated both low (Mitman & Packer, 1982) and high intensity concern about the transition (Arowosafe & Irvin, 1998) as well as diverse perspectives about which transition issues are most important. For example, academic concerns (Mitman & Packer) and social concerns (Diemert, 1992) have both been identified as the primary concern in transition studies. Getting lost, older students and bullies, too much homework, school rules, making friends, and lockers have all been commonly cited student concerns in the transition to middle school (Akos, 2002; Arth, 1990; Diemert; Mitman & Packer; Odegaard & Heath, 1992).

In addition to concerns, two studies (Akos, 2002; Odegaard & Heath, 1992) found that there are aspects of the middle/junior high school transition that are attractive to students. The attractive features include meeting new peers and increased freedom (Akos) as well as having their own lockers (although one third of the students worried about that), having different teachers for several subjects, moving to different rooms for various classes, eating in the cafeteria, participating in the sports program, and the opportunity to make new friends (Odegaard & Heath). Finally, studies have found that significant others can both assist and impede the middle/junior high school transition. Arowosafe and Irvin (1992) reported that parents and siblings or peers often communicated warnings or sensationalized information (e.g., fighting or violence) about middle school. In the Akos study, friends followed by parents and teachers were the most helpful to students in navigating the middle school transition.

Research about student perceptions of the transition to high school is more limited, and developmentally

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this transition does elicit some distinct concerns. Two studies (Maute, 1991; Mizelle, 1995) identified some concerns similar to those of the middle school transition (grades, friends, bullies, getting lost) as well as some unique concerns (preparing for college/life, parent expectations, and math class in particular). Mizelle also found optimism about more freedom, choices, and sports.

In summary, the limited research on student perceptions suggests that students approach normative school transitions with both concern and excitement as they are presented with challenges as well as opportunities. The specific transition concerns they experience as well as the intensity of their concerns may well vary as a function of the timing of the transition (i.e., middle or high school) and other variables such as the contextual aspects and characteristics of the sending and receiving school.

PARENT TRANSITION PERCEPTIONS
Baker and Stevenson (1986) and Paulson (1994) demonstrated that parental involvement (e.g., interest in grades, achievement values) in the transition process contributes to and impacts ninth grade achievement. Even though parents are important in the transition, it was difficult to locate published research about parent perceptions of the transition process. Research from England (Bastiani, 1986; Worsley, 1986) found parents concerned about the difficulty of the classes and the amount of homework; however, the contextual differences between the English and American educational systems make it difficult to apply their results directly to school transitions in this country.

TEACHER TRANSITION PERCEPTIONS
Similarly, teachers play a critical role in school transitions. If they are knowledgeable and sensitive to potential stumbling blocks for students and parents, they are in a pivotal position to provide the necessary academic and social support that is essential to addressing these challenges successfully. Unfortunately, only limited data about teachers' perceptions of student transition needs are currently available. Weldy (1991) reported on seven sites that were involved in a 3-year school transitions demonstration project. Five "small groups of teachers" in Warren Township, Indianapolis, identified 20 challenges faced by students making a transition from a sixth-grade elementary school to a middle school. Unfortunately, no information was provided about the frequency or the prevalence of these concerns and that makes it difficult to know how to prioritize the concerns in transition programming. Finally, a study of students in London who transferred from junior to secondary school revealed that teachers' perceptions of student transfer worries were not significantly correlated with student worries (Brown & Armstrong, 1982). Once again however, contextual differences between the English and American educational systems make it difficult to know whether this finding generalizes to school transitions in this country.

THE CURRENT STUDY
The purpose of the current study was to compare the perceptions of students, parents, and teachers involved in middle and high school transitions. Such information should be extremely useful to school counselors, school psychologists, and other school personnel. It can assist them in developing proactive interventions that enable students and their families to negotiate the new school environment successfully and to forestall or minimize problems that may arise from their changing circumstances.

METHOD Participants
For the middle school transition, the participants included 173 sixth-grade students (72% of the sixth grade students), 83 of their parents, and 12 of their teachers. The student sample consisted of 83 boys (48%), 86 (49.7%) girls, and 4 students (2.3%) who neglected to provide information about gender. By race, the student sample was composed as follows: 57.2% (n = 99) Caucasian, 19.7% (n = 34) African American, 8.7% (n = 15) Asian, 8.1% (n = 14) Hispanic, 4% (n = 7) multiracial, and 2.3% (n = 4) who did not specify race.

The high school transition participants included 320 ninth-grade students (approximately 71% of the ninth grade class) in a single high school, 61 parents, and 17 teachers. The student sample consisted of 47.8% boys (n = 153), 50.3% (n = 161) girls, and 1.9% (n = 6) who did not specify gender. The racial composition of the student sample was 76.3% (n = 244) Caucasian, 10.3% (n = 33) African American, 5.6% (n = 18) Asian, 3.4% (n = 11) Hispanic, 2.2% (n = 7) multiracial, and 1.9% (n = 6) that did not specify race.

Both the middle school and the high school are part of a medium size southern school district that includes eight elementary schools, four middle schools, and two high schools. The middle school was newly constructed and in its first year of operation. The middle school draws students primarily from two of the elementary schools, while the high school draws its students primarily from two of the middle schools. The schools are located in a university community. Overall the school district can be characterized as high performing, with over 90% of the students attending post secondary education on a regular basis.

Instruments
Student questionnaires. The items for the student questionnaires were developed based on previous transition research (e.g., Akos, 2002), local transition programming, and stakeholder feedback. Using the high school questionnaire as an example, students were asked in a checklist format what things they looked forward to and were concerned about when they were in middle school regarding the move to high school. The checklist choices were drawn from previous transition research and students could add items unique to their situation. The middle school student transition questionnaire was similar in content to the high school transition questionnaire, but was tailored to specifics of the elementary-middle school transition (e.g., 15 middle school transition concerns versus 14 high school concerns and 18 positive middle school aspects versus 17 for the high school transition). Another question asked students to rate the difficulty of the move to the high school (four-point Likert scale from difficult to easy).

Finally, we requested that the students respond to a series of open-ended, short-answer questions. These questions asked: (a) what teachers, parents, and friends in middle school had told them about high school; (b) what the best and most difficult aspects of being in high school were; (c) what they had done to feel comfortable in high school; (d) what can be done in middle school to help eighth graders with the move to high school; and (e) what can be done in high school to help ninth graders with their move from the middle school. A copy of the questionnaires is available from the first author.

Parent questionnaires. Due to limited previous research, items for the parent questionnaires were developed based on the experiences of counselors, teachers, and administrators with parents of students involved in school transitions. Using the high school questionnaire as an example, parents were asked in a checklist format about the aspects of the move to high school they looked forward to and were concerned about for their child when he or she was in middle school. In addition to the choices listed, the parents could add items unique to their situation. Parents rated the difficulty of the move from middle school to high school for their child on a four-point Likert scale from difficult to easy.

A series of short-answer, open-ended questions were also posed to the parents. These questions asked: (a) what they said or did to help their child with the move; (b) how long it took for the child to get adjusted to the high school; (c) what was most helpful to their child in making the transition; (d) what was the best part of being in high school for their child; (e) what was the most difficult part about being in high school for their child; (f) what they had done to help with these difficulties; (g) what the school can do to help; (h) what can be done in middle school to help eighth graders with their move to high school; and (i) what can be done to help with the transition once the eighth graders have become ninth graders. Again, questionnaires for the middle school parents mirrored the high school version.

Teacher questionnaires. Similar to parent questionnaires, teacher questionnaires were developed based on stakeholder feedback. Using the high school questionnaire as an example once again, the teachers of ninth grade students were asked in a checklist format what they thought the most positive and negative aspects of the move to high school were for students. In addition to the choices listed, the teachers could add items unique to their situation. Teachers rated the difficulty of the move from middle school to high school for ninth graders on a four-point Likert scale from difficult to easy.

Once again, we posed a series of open-ended, short-answer questions about school transitions. The questions asked: (a) about the types of transition activities and programming that should be provided at various times--in eighth grade, during the summer for rising ninth graders, during the first few days of high school, and during the fall semester of high school--for students and their families; (b) who should provide this programming; and (c) when it should be provided.

Procedure
Homeroom or home base teachers administered the questionnaires to students on a volunteer basis during mid-October. Each questionnaire was pre-numbered for tracking purposes but school personnel were unable to connect the questionnaire number with the specific student who had completed it. Completed questionnaires were collected by a school counselor on site and delivered directly to the researchers. Pre-numbered parent questionnaires were sent home in sealed envelopes with the students. When the parents had completed the questionnaires, the students returned them to the school counseling office. Teachers completed their version of the questionnaire during a faculty meeting. No incentives were given for student participation in the study, although individual prizes were distributed randomly to students who returned parent questionnaires.

Data Analysis
Data for the Likert items were analyzed with inferential statistics. Because many of the other items (e.g., checklist items) involved multiple response options, these data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. For the open-ended questions, a school counseling faculty member and master's level counseling students
coded responses to all open-ended questions into categories. The counseling students were instructed in content analysis and observed a sample coding process by the faculty member. Two master's-level students crosschecked data coding, and the faculty member reviewed all coding. Most of the content analysis involved recording verbatim responses, so interpretation about the possible meaning of these responses was kept to a minimum. Coding was used primarily for classifying recommended transition interventions. In this case, sample transition programming employed in the research literature (e.g., Felner et al., 1993; MacIver & Epstein, 1991) and programming at the participating schools was used for coding category guidelines. These data were then analyzed qualitatively and/or with descriptive statistics.

**RESULTS**

The results—a comparison of the school transition perceptions of students, parents, and teachers—are organized into five sections. The sections are transition concerns, the positive aspects of transitions, difficulty of the transition, adjusting to the new school, and transition programming.

**Transition Concerns**

As can be seen from Table 1, students and parents were in remarkably close agreement, especially for the middle school transition, about the top student transition concerns. For both transitions, they agreed that the amount of homework (academic) and getting lost (procedural) were top concerns. In addition, middle school students were concerned about getting to class on time, while, in contrast, parents believed that fitting in/making new friends and dealing with pressures were top concerns. At the high school level, student and parent top concerns focused on academic performance (homework, hard classes, pressure to do well).

Middle school teachers, in contrast, appeared to have somewhat different perceptions from parents and students about the principal student transition concerns. They focused more on students' ability to navigate the school's physical (getting lost and having lockers) and social (fitting in/making new friends and getting along with other students) environment. At the high school level, teachers seemed to have more of an appreciation of students' academic concerns as reflected by their choices of hard classes and pressure to do well. At the same time, they also viewed social adjustment, fitting in/making new friends as a top student concern.

**Positive Aspects of Transition**

The three groups had rather similar perceptions of the aspects of middle school to which students look forward (see Table 2). All three viewed choosing classes and making new friends as top choices. Both parents and teachers thought that participating in sports was one of the top attractions of the transition for students, while students identified having lockers as the other top choice. At the high school level, all three groups saw making new friends as one of the top attractions of the transition. Students identified more freedom and attending school events as other positive aspects, while parents and teachers thought participating in sports would be an attractive aspect. Parents also identified choosing classes, while teachers identified PE class as what they perceived to be the other top aspect of high school.

Students identified friends (28%), more freedom (18%), changing classes (18%), and electives (15%) as the best parts of actually being in the middle school. Parents, on the other hand, identified greater academic choices (52%) as well as friends and increased personal and social freedom (39%) as the best aspects of the new school for their children. High school students identified freedom (30%), meeting new people/more people (24%), and lunch/extracurricular options (24%) as the best aspects of the new school, while their parents specified new friends (27%), a bigger environment (21%), and sports/clubs (15%).

**Difficulty of the Transition**

Results of a one-way analysis of variance indicated significant differences among the groups in their mean ratings of the difficulty of the middle school transition, F(2,260) = 6.77, p < .001. Post-hoc comparisons at the .05 level using Tukey's HSD test indicated that both students (M = 2.00, SD = 0.96) and parents (M = 2.00, SD = 0.87) rated the middle school transition as "somewhat easy" and significantly easier than teachers (M = 3.00, SD = 0.60) did.

For students, the most difficult parts of actually being at the middle school were classes (35%), good grades/homework (25%), and teachers (10%). Parents, on the other hand, identified change in responsibilities/expectations (52%) and other students (27%) as the most difficult aspects of the middle school for their students.

For the high school sample, the three groups also differed significantly in the perceptions of the difficulty of the transition, F(2,382) = 6.83, p < .001. In contrast to the middle school data, post-hoc comparisons revealed that high school students (M = 1.88, SD = 0.86) viewed the transition as "somewhat easy" and significantly easier than both parents (M = 2.22, SD = 0.92) and teachers (M = 2.50, SD = 0.73), and that
this time the parents did not rate the transition as significantly easier than the teachers rated it. At the high school level, students identified homework (35%), a variety of social and organizational changes (e.g., not having their friends in class, riding the school bus, getting around the school; 25%), and grades (16%) as the most difficult aspects of actually being in the high school, and parents identified homework (24%), academics (20%), and time management (16%).

**Adapting to the New School**

Almost two thirds (66%) of the middle school parents stated that their student adjusted to the new school relatively quickly (i.e., 4 weeks or less); another 27% indicated that it took their child longer to make the adjustment. More than half (51%) of high school parents suggested that their child adjusted in less than 4 weeks, while 38% indicated it took longer (and 10% indicated that the student was still not adjusted). In order to get adjusted to or feel comfortable in the new school, middle school students said that they hung out with friends (47%), tried to fit in (14%), and ignored people who pick on them (13%), while high school students spent time with old and new friends (43%), focused on completing school work (26%), and participated in clubs or sports (16%).

Parents of middle school students attempted to facilitate the move from elementary school for their children by discussing ways to be successful (46%) and relaying school information (37%). Talking about academics (31%) and personal/social issues (31%), providing general encouragement (18%), and visiting the school (13%) were the primary ways that parents attempted to help with the move to the high school.

From their perspective, middle school teachers identified maturity (e.g., asking for help, being responsible, focusing on work; 25%), cooperation/ flexibility (25%), success in the classroom (25%), and initiative/motivation (17%) as the most outstanding characteristics of sixth graders who appeared to be adjusting well to the middle school; whereas maturity (35%), good study skills (24%), and an active and balanced social life (24%) were the characteristics that teachers noted in ninth graders who were adjusting well to the high school. With respect to coping with actual difficulties that their children experienced in the new school, parents of middle schoolers attempted to help by communicating with their child and with teachers (40%) and providing support outside of school (e.g., helping with organization, homework, and reviewing for classes; 30%). They saw the school's role with transition difficulties as providing support and structure for students (e.g., being patient, promoting community, supporting kids individually and in groups, enforcing rules; 43%) and communicating with parents (15%). Parents of high school students employed interventions that had a more academic flavor such as helping with study skills, encouraging time management (28%), talking with teachers (10%) as well as having talks with their children that involved listening, providing support, and encouragement (10%). In their view, the school could help by placing less focus on academics (i.e., grades, tests, and homework; 23%), by greater accessibility of teachers and counselors (20%), and by more communication about the work (12%).

**Transition Programming**

**Before the transition.** With respect to what could be done before the move to the new school in order to facilitate the transition, middle school students recommended more discussions about middle school during elementary school (25%), especially about the positive aspects of middle school (16%), better preparation (e.g., talk more about doing homework, emphasize organizational skills; 13%), and a tour (11%, [note that a tour was precluded for these students due to the construction schedule for this school]), while their parents suggested orientation (35%) and tours/visits (27%) during elementary school. Teachers' recommendations were similar to those of the parents--tour/small group visits to the middle school during elementary school (42%) and an orientation session (33%).

High school students suggested providing information and insight (e.g., "tell them don't stress, it is not too bad," "tell them the myths and truth about high school," "tell them what it will really be like"); (64%), better tours of the school so that students know exactly where classes are located (15%), and sending high school students to the middle school for discussions about the high school (8%). The parents listed a better tour (26%), more middle school-high school interaction (25%), and small group orientation (13%), while the teachers suggested a harder middle school curriculum (29%), more help with study skills at the middle school level (24%), and meetings about the new career/pathways curricula that the state had recently adopted (24%).

**After the transition.** Middle school students recommended that, once they have moved to the new school, personnel in the new school should be welcoming (13%) and encouraging (11%). They also recommended that students should have an opportunity to talk about the transition (13%), tours should be given (10%), and teachers should make it easy in the beginning (9%). Their parents stressed the importance of an
orientation (45%) and school personnel communicating support and expectations (21%) to students. Teachers recommended orientation activities (50%) and enrichment/remedial work (33%) during the summer of the transition. During the first few days at the new school, teachers recommended team-building activities (42%), orientation (33%), discussing expectations (17%), and a hot line for questions (8%). Opportunities for self-improvement/development (e.g., sessions on making friends and doing homework, buddy/mentor programs, computer use; 42%), parent night conferences (25%), and additional orientation activities (17%) comprised the majority of teacher suggestions for transition activities for the fall semester of students' move to the middle school.

High school students offered fewer suggestions than middle school students for what can be done once the move has occurred. These included focusing on personal adjustment (e.g., be nice, don't scare kids, have a practice day, have less work initially; 34%), better orientation (8%), and showing students where classes were before they got to school (8%). Their parents recommended communication with other students and teachers (26%), more middle-high school interaction (15%), interaction with upper class students (13%), and a tour (10%). During the transition summer, teachers suggested academic remediation (24%), opening school so that students could learn the layout of the campus (18%), and having social activities on campus (12%). For the first few days of school, their recommendations included a ninth grade orientation (29%), getting parents involved (18%), and reviewing rules, regulations, and school policies (18%). Increasing parent involvement (18%), teaching study skills (12%), and informing students about extracurricular activities (12%) were their major suggestions for transition programming during students' first fall semester at the high school.

DISCUSSION Relation to Previous Research

Similar to previous research (Akos, 2002; Odegaard & Heath, 1992), our findings revealed that, in addition to having concerns, students looked forward to certain aspects of the middle and high school transition such as the opportunities to choose classes, make new friends, and have more freedom. Taken together, the findings from these three studies provide a more balanced picture of the school transition experience than much of previous transition research that focused only on the negative aspects and effects of the experience. School transitions involve both challenges and opportunities for students.

Our findings indicated that parents, especially at the middle school level, were in close agreement with their students about the difficulty level of the transition and about the top student transition concern (academic--amount of homework) and the overall difficulty of the transition. Middle school parents and students were also in close agreement about the top positive aspects of the middle school transition for students, while high school parents and students once again shared a lesser degree of agreement about the positive aspects of this school transition.

As with parents, the views of teachers about school transitions have not been systematically investigated in the past and only rarely have been compared to those of students (Brown & Armstrong, 1982). Unlike students and parents, teachers at the middle school level, tended to focus more on the challenges presented by social and procedural rather than academic issues, while teachers at the high school level were aware of the academic concerns that the transition presented for students. Overall, however, the implication of our findings is that parents and teachers, the significant others in students' lives, appear to have a reasonably good appreciation of what students perceive to be the specific challenges and opportunities that these school transitions present to them. At the same time, their views are by no means identical which most likely reflects their different vantage points on the school transition experience and the different roles that they play in it.

The three groups, however, did not perceive the transitions as equally difficult for students. In both instances, teachers perceived it as significantly more difficult than students did. Interestingly, students in this study perceived both transitions as somewhat easy. Previous research (Arowosafe & Irvin, 1992; Mitman & Packer, 1982; Youngman, 1986) has failed to reveal an unequivocal picture of the level of difficulty that school transitions pose for students. Student ratings of school transition difficulty (i.e., somewhat easy) in this study may well have reflected the fact that both the middle school and the high school had already implemented substantial programming to facilitate these transitions.

Transition Programming

Perhaps reflecting their different vantage points and roles, the three groups of participants in this study supplied myriad suggestions for programming designed to facilitate the transition experience both before and after the transition has taken place. The question then arises as which student concerns to address, which of these suggested interventions to implement, and in what order. In this regard, an organizational approach for transition programming may be extrapolated from the existing research.
In our review of previous research at both the middle and high school level (e.g., Akos, 2002; Maute, 1991; Mizelle, 1995; Odgaard & Heath, 1992), we concluded that students appear to identify three primary categories of school transition concerns—academic, procedural, and social. Academic concerns focus on coping with increased homework and more difficult courses. Procedural concerns involve navigating around and dealing with the complexities of a larger school environment including multiple classes taught by different teachers, while social concerns include fitting in and making new friends, getting along with peers, and coping with bullies or older students. Which of these categories is most salient to students has varied across studies (e.g., Diemert, 1992; Mitman & Packer, 1982).

As school counselors, school psychologists, and other school personnel plan programs to assist students in negotiating these transitions, student procedural concerns should routinely be anticipated as virtually all of these transitions involve a move from simpler to more complex school environments. Similarly, social and academic concerns should also be anticipated due to the more complex social environments into which students are moving and to the increased academic demands that naturally occur as students move up the educational ladder. Whether academic or social concerns will predominate for students in the transition is undoubtedly influenced by the climate of the new school. Schools that are perceived as being characterized by student violence or student cliques should be expected to increase the likelihood of student social transition concerns, whereas schools that are perceived as having a great deal of academic pressure (as in the current study) will tend to exacerbate academic transition concerns. This hypothesis is reflected in the divergent findings in the research on the effects of school transitions on students and points towards the need for contextually sensitive transition programming.

Transition programming also may have played a role in what parents perceived as students' relatively quick adjustment (one month or less for the majority of students) to the new school in the current study. Once again, previous research (Arowosafe & Irvin, 1992; Mitman & Packer, 1982; Youngman, 1986) has provided widely different estimates of the length of time that it takes to adjust to a school transition. However, research by Brown (Brown & Armstrong, 1982; Brown & Armstrong, 1986) may provide a possible explanation for these divergent estimates. Brown and Armstrong (1982) found that student concerns following a school transition varied by term with worries about making and/or keeping friends predominating in the first term and worries about school work and routines being salient in the second term. Similarly, Brown and Armstrong (1986) noted that students enduring worries following the transition relate to class work, homework, and strict teachers. Of course, it is difficult to know the extent to which the findings are applicable to school transitions in this country, but the divergent estimates of the time it takes to adjust to a school transition in previous research may be due, in part, to treating school transition as a global phenomenon rather than investigating adjustment to the three different aspects of the transition, e.g., academic adjustment. For example, student academic adjustment seems to recover during the transition year, as declines typically improve to previous achievement levels near the end of the transition year (yet not to the original levels; Alspaugh, 1998; Crockett et al., 1989).

As we review our findings coupled with those of previous transition research, it appears that, for both research and practice, school transitions can be most usefully conceptualized as temporal phenomena that pose both challenges and opportunities to students in three major areas--academic, social, and procedural. Adjustment to a school transition is affected not only by a variety of individual (student) and contextual (e.g., the sending and receiving school, the level of the school) considerations, but also by the focus (i.e., academic, social, procedural) of the transition. Thus, most students will probably adjust much more quickly to the procedural aspects (e.g., finding their way around the more complex physical environment of the new school) of a school transition than to its academic (e.g., more homework and greater academic pressure) or social aspects (e.g., fitting in or making new friends).

Similarly, when conceptualizing programming to facilitate school transitions, it is important to take into account the focus of the programming (i.e., academic, social, procedural); the temporal sequence that most students will need in order to negotiate the academic, social, and procedural aspects of the transition successfully; and the level of the transition (i.e., middle or high school). As such, different kinds of interventions of different durations may be required to assist students to cope successfully with the three aspects of the transition. For example, it is likely that programming to help students negotiate the procedural aspects of transitions (e.g., finding their way around the school) successfully can be both relatively simple and short-term for both the middle and high school transition. A guided tour of the building in the spring prior to the transition, self-guided tours for students and families in the summer, a scavenger hunt in the building for small groups of the students during an orientation, and a dry-run walkthrough of student class schedules prior to the opening day of classes are simple, short-term interventions...
that should facilitate adjustment to the procedural aspects of the transition for most middle and high school students.

Facilitating successful negotiation of the academic and social aspects of the transition as compared with the procedural aspects would seem to involve different types of interventions and a different timetable. Some of the interventions suggested by participants in this study are as follows: (a) teaching study skills and time management both prior to and following the transition, (b) discussing academic expectations with students, (c) increasing communication between teachers at the sending and receiving schools about curriculum and academic expectations at the receiving school (vertical teaming), (d) implementing a hotline and/or website for parents and students for homework and other questions, (e) providing academic tutors, and (f) increasing direct contact and communication between parents and teachers in order to assist students with homework, the academic demands of the new school, and to prevent and/or remediate academic problems. Implementing these types of interventions involves conceptualizing school transition as a process that is completed over time rather than as a simple orientation event.

Adjusting to the social aspects of a school transition may be equally as important as adjusting to its academic demands. In addition, these two aspects may well be intertwined. For example, although the top transition concerns in this study were academic at both the middle and high school levels, students said that their primary method of adjusting to or getting comfortable in the new school was spending time with friends. Similarly, both the middle and high school teachers identified fitting in/making new friends as primary challenges and opportunities for students involved in school transitions. Previous research (see Osterman, 2000, for a review) has identified a positive relationship between students' need for belonging and peer acceptance in school on the one hand and academic achievement, a positive orientation toward school, class work, and teachers on the other hand. At the same time, Osterman noted that typically there are few opportunities for interaction among students during the school day. As such, building students' sense of community through interventions such as small group activities during orientation, team building, cooperative learning, and other modifications that result in smaller and more intimate learning environments would appear to hold promise as methods for helping students to negotiate both the social and academic aspects of school transitions successfully. These types of reforms are evident in the movement to smaller learning communities, with academy, schools within a school, and house structures for ninth grade (Paige, Neuman, & D'Amico, 2001). Moreover, initial research by Felner et al. (1993) reported that students had more positive middle and high school transition experiences as reflected by academic, socio-emotional, and behavioral measures in schools that had modified their social environments to increase a sense of belonging than in schools that had not.

Limitations of the Study
The present study is of course not without limitations. Principal among these is the fact that it employed a retrospective, cross-sectional design. With this the type of design, the participants' pre transition recollections could have been influenced either by their post-transition experiences or by forgetting given that they were surveyed in October, approximately 2 months after the students had entered their new schools. A longitudinal design that assessed participants' perceptions both pre- and post-transition would have minimized this limitation and is recommended for use in future school transition research. Also, the study was conducted with students in a high-performing school district, and, as such, academic concerns may have taken on greater importance in the transition for the three groups of participants as compared to procedural and social concerns.

SUMMARY
In summary, this study investigated the perceptions of students, parents, and teachers of the middle and high school transition experience and of programming designed to facilitate those transitions. The results revealed that the three groups of participants had somewhat similar views of the challenges and opportunities posed by these transitions. The participants provided useful transition suggestions which, when combined with findings from previous research, have led us to conceptualize adjustment to school transitions as a temporal process with three separate, but interrelated components--academic, procedural, and social. Different types of transition programming and a different temporal sequence may be needed in order to facilitate successful adjustment to each of these components of a school transition.

The authors thank the Research Triangle Schools Partnership and the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools for financial assistance with this research. We appreciate the assistance of Pat Harris, Victoria Lunetta, and Annie Reed in refining the questionnaires and in data collection and of Laura Blake, Sarah Doherty, Kelley Dull, and Jessica Thompson in coding the data.