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The purpose of this study was to examine structural, academic, and personal factors affecting the transition of African American males to high school by giving voice to the participants.

A qualitative dominant explanatory mixed methods design (Creswell, 2005) was used to collect data. In the qualitative phase, a questionnaire was administered to 16 African American male students who had completed the first semester of their freshman year. For the qualitative phase of the study, eight of the 16 participants were chosen to participate in individual and focus group interviews. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the quantitative data. Analysis of the questionnaire data informed development of the individual interview protocol; analysis of data from the individual interviews informed development of the focus group interview protocol.

Qualitative data were analyzed using Creswell's (2005) content analysis coding procedures. Eight themes related to structural, academic, and personal factors emerged; (a) School Size Is Not A Problem, But . . . (physical structure), (b) Hangin' With My Friends In Class: Missing the Interdisciplinary Team Structure (academic structure), (c) Teachers Think We Can't Do the Work (teacher expectations), (d) This Is Harder Than I Thought It Would Be (academic expectations and academic assistance), (e) My Friends Save Me: Camaraderie of the "Brothers" at School (relationships with peers), (f) Teachers: Friend or Foe? (relationships with teachers), (g) You're Not There to Take Up Space: Great Expectations of Parents/Guardians and Community (home and community

relationships), and (h) Plight of the Young Black Male—The Saga Continues (sociopsychological issues).

AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES' PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS AFFECTING  
THEIR TRANSITION FROM MIDDLE SCHOOL TO HIGH SCHOOL

by

Anissia Jimmetra Jenkins

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Approved by

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Committee Chair

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To Janie Coaxum Jenkins and Patricia Jenkins-Wallace,  
both of whom have been my inspiration.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of  
The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Members \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Acceptance by Committee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Final Oral Examination

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Over the years, there has been a decline in student achievement during the middle to high school transition period (Forgan & Vaughn, 2000; Somers, Owens, & Piliawsky, 2009). More specifically, while the transition from middle school to high school is difficult for many students, African American males are more significantly affected during this crucial transition (Bailey & Paisley, 2004; Graham, Taylor, & Hudley, 1998). In fact, according to Pluviose (2008), less than 50% of African American males graduate from high school. The transition from middle school to high school has been noted as one roadblock to high school graduation for African American males (Somers et al., 2009).

Dropout research indicates that students, especially African American males, tend to drop out of high school either during or shortly after the ninth grade (Hymel, Comfort, Schonert-Reichl, & McDougall, 1996; Smith 1997; Somers et al., 2009; Wyatt, 2009). This dropout rate for African American males has more serious ramifications, in that it “only feeds the violent crime rate; in some cases eighty percent of the state prison population is African American males” (Pluviose, 2008, p. 5). These statistics are alarming. Dropout prevention research and programs are critical because the costs socially and monetarily are great for American society if the programs are not instituted. It is estimated that the monetary costs for students who drop out of high school range into

billions of dollars (Somers et al., 2009). Taken together, these staggering statistics should act as a catalyst for researchers to examine more closely why African American males are dropping out of high school.

Although there have been several studies conducted on transition programs and interventions (e.g., Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Lindsay, 1997; McIntosh & White, 2006; Potter, Schlisky, Stevenson, & Drawdy, 2001), the actual evidence and results of implementation are scarce in schools with a high population of transitioning African American males. If the schools do not implement the effective transition interventions/strategies that are needed, these students will be in immediate peril. Researchers found that “academic failure during the transition to high school is directly linked to the probability of dropping out [of high school]” (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006, p. 32).

As a middle school teacher, I remember “preparing” my students and sending them off to high school in hopes that they would continue the track to success that they had started at the middle school level. When my students would return to the middle school for sporting events or to visit a sibling they would inform me of their progress in high school. I noticed that my White students and my female students were coming back to me bringing wonderful news. In contrast, my African American male students would come sharing tales of woe. Initially, I thought that it was just one particular high school but as I began to pay close attention I realized that it was more than just this one high school. African American male students from various high schools were informing me of their hardships and troubles at the high school level. This puzzled me because in middle

school these students had been successful students for the most part. Hearing these stories from my former students inspired me to want to investigate this notion of transition from middle school to high school more thoroughly.

Most middle schools and high schools are eager to find a remedy or at least develop a plan that will help their students successfully get through this difficult period (McIntosh & White, 2006). Early research studies (Alspaugh, 1998; Eccles, Lord, & Midgely, 1991) focused on overall or general student transition. As time and research have progressed, researchers have identified successful transition strategies (Capstick, 2008; Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Cushman, 2006; Mizelle, 2005) and there has been a shift in conducting more research studies on middle school/high school transition through the lens of gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Heck & Mahoe, 2006). Although the lens of researchers may be shifting, it is important to recognize that there remains a gap in the transition literature with regard to African American males and how they perceive they are affected during the transition to high school.

The literature on middle school to high school transition names three main aspects that affect student transition: the structural domain, the academic domain, and the personal domain (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Chmelynski, 2003). Within each domain are several factors that contribute to successful/and or unsuccessful transitions to high school. The structural domain contains the physical environment, discipline procedures, and the absence of teaming. The academic domain includes curricular issues, teacher/school expectations, and student attendance. Last, the personal domain consists of social interactions, motivation, and identity. One drawback of the transition literature

is most of the transition research speaks to academic factors—curricular issues, teacher/school expectations, and attendance (Capstick 2008; Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Heller, Calderon, & Medrich, 2003) and structural factors—physical environment, discipline procedures, and the absence of teaming (McIntosh & White, 2006; Morgan & Hertzog, 2001) affecting successful transitions for students from the perspectives of the researchers (as opposed to the perspectives of the students themselves). Another deficiency in the literature lies in examining personal factors affecting successful transitions for African American males. Currently, there is not a wealth of knowledge in the area of middle school to high school transition and successful transition facilitators for African American males. The need for more effective strategies and interventions to help African American males successfully transition to high school initiated my study.

In this study, I explored the structural, academic, and personal factors affecting the transition of African American males from middle school to high school. My aim was to determine if the conclusions and results from existing research are validated. Most importantly, I wanted the perceptions of the students to be affirmed.

### **Theoretical Orientation**

The theoretical perspective that informed my inquiry regarding successful transition of African American males from middle school to high school was critical race theory (CRT). Critical Race Theory (CRT) is the lens being used to view the transition of African American males from middle school to high school because it speaks to the power and oppression of structural institutions like schools. It also looks at the intersections of race and gender. CRT fosters an understanding of hegemony in

American education. Gause (2008) goes further to explain that “the educational process in which African American children engage is hegemonic at its best and catastrophic at its worst and it reflects European cultural and educative hegemony” (p. 70).

According to Sleeter and Bernal (2003), critical race theory was “developed to address social justice and racial oppression in U.S. society and speaks to the barriers of oppression such as racism, classism, etc. in institutions like schools” (p. 247). In a historic sense, the CRT perspective originated with two legal scholars, Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, who had become discontented with the slow pace of racial reform in the United States. In their definitive work, *Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education*, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) adapted CRT to educational research and practice. There are four tenets of CRT: counterstorytelling, permanence of race, interest convergence, and social construction of race—challenge to dominant society. I have focused on three of the tenets (a) counterstorytelling, (b) racism is normal, ordinary in American society, and (c) the concept of interest convergence—when a society’s elites allow or encourage advances by a subordinated group only when such advances also promote the self-interest of the elites (Sleeter & Bernal, 2003). I am focusing on these three tenets because they provide support for the lens I am using in my study. These tenets also align nicely with the three domains of factors affecting middle school to high school transition: structural, academic, and personal.

Counterstorytelling was pertinent in this study, as I ventured to explore the successful high school transitions of African American males from their perspectives. Typically, transition is viewed through the eyes of teachers, administrators, and other



school personnel. In this study, the stories were told by African American males who experienced the transition. This is pivotal because the stories and/or responses from the students in their own voices can re-tell and reconstruct reality from an often silenced voice in the research literature—African American males. For this reason, counterstorytelling fits nicely with the personal domain/factors affecting middle school to high school transition.

Personal factors affecting the transition consist of social interactions, motivation, and identity. There are three major social interactions during this transition period. The three interactions that undergo change are the interactions between the students and the teachers, between the students and their peers, and between the students and their parents. In high school students do not receive the same type of attention from their teachers that they received from middle school teachers because classroom instruction is often subject-centered as opposed to student-centered. The result of the change in teaching style is limited teacher/student interaction as compared to middle school (Forgan & Vaughn, 2000). Lower (grade) level teachers tend to make instruction student-centered, thus more interactions between teachers and students—and high levels of dialogue among students (Capstick, 2008; Morgan & Hertzog, 2001).

Once students have moved from one school to another often times they do not have the same circle of friends and their social networks are disrupted. Students then have to forge new friendships and other interpersonal relationships. This is difficult for adolescents because they are very self-conscious and do not want to take any risks that might cause them to be looked at negatively in the eyes of their peers (or others).

Schiller (1999), in his study on middle and high school academic achievement, discovered that the constancy of peers had an affect on the academic achievement of [transitioning] students (as cited in Heller et al., 2003). Those students who continued on to high school with their middle school peers received better grades than those who did not (as cited in Heller et al., 2003).

Additionally, students also tend to be uncomfortable and have difficulties with transition because they are striving for independence from their families. In this transition period students want to be more independent. They are seeking autonomy and want to experience things without the oversight of parents, teachers, or other adults (Letrello & Miles, 2003).

In addition to social interactions, motivation is another personal factor affecting transition. Studies have been performed that focus on adolescent development and its contribution(s) to student transition (e.g. Eccles et al., 1991; La Guardia & Ryan, 2002). From these studies researchers have found that one of the most important factors affecting academic achievement of students is motivation. More specifically, motivation has been identified as a critical component in academic achievement for African American students (Graham et al., 1998; Somers et al., 2009). African American students, especially boys, become unmotivated and disengaged in school at a fairly young age (Wyatt, 2009). Because these students become disengaged in school at such an early age, it is not difficult to see how adolescents, African American boys, in particular, struggle to transition from middle school to high school.

Last, the identities (e.g., racial/ethnic, gender) of African American boys are multifaceted. Not only are African American boys dealing with being African American in our society, they are simultaneously dealing with issues of gender and battling stereotypes and other misjudgments. “Identity formation is crucial to the development of the adolescent” (Cooper, 1995, p. 8). Further, a critical time for identity formation is during the transition period from middle school to high school. Given the history of education and its importance in the African American community, it is crucial that opportunities for development and growth of these identities be accessible to African American students. “Because schooling is such a substantial process in identity formation, educational leaders must exercise courage in making educational decisions that promote social justice” (Gause, 2008, p. 56). The two forms of identity that I focused on in this study are racial/ethnic identity and gender identity both of which pose great difficulties for the full development of African American males.

For African American males the formation of racial/ethnic identity may be difficult for several reasons. According to Ogbu (1999), because of the history of Blacks in America, students reject the values and morals of the mainstream population because they feel as if they are compromising who they are as African Americans to conform to what the mainstream deem as correct and acceptable. The students want to “remain bona fide members of their community” (Ogbu, 1999, p. 179). Another challenge to the formation of racial/ethnic identity for African American males is the impact of popular culture and media representation. “The only representation often presented of black males is the duffle bag boy—drug runner and money carrier, the thug—an aggressive no-

holds-barred bad boy; and the convict—a prison lifer, always in and out of jail” (Gause, 2008, p. 55). As African American males form their racial/ethnic identities, although it is an individual experience, teachers need to acknowledge the process and be aware of the development and facilitate it rather than impede it (Baber, 1992; Baber & Cooper, 2005).

Banks and Banks (2005) refer to gender identity as “an individual’s view of the gender to which he or she belongs and his or her shared sense of group attachment to other males or females” (p. 450). Similar to racial/ethnic identity, gender identity can be difficult for African American males. Weaver-Hightower (2003) speaks to the concept of multiple masculinities: “Ideals of masculinity are historically and contextually dependent, making a nearly infinite number of masculinities possible” (p. 479). In other words, if this idea holds true, there could be different conceptions of what it means to be masculine within different groups (e.g. cultural, religious) in society. Another complex piece of gender identity for African American males who are in the transition stage is the absence of positive role models (within and beyond the school). There are not many African American men in the classrooms and schools in positions of power. The absence of role models led some researchers to the conclusion, “young Black boys are not taught the positive aspects of Black manhood and Afrikan responsibility” (Madhubuti, 1991, p. 62). Other researchers (Bailey & Paisley, 2009; Wyatt, 2009) agree that developing a mentoring group within the school with explicitly expressed criteria will act as a facilitator to academic and social success for African American males during the transition period. Gause (2008) agrees but extends the responsibility to not only increasing mentor opportunities but he also suggests that Black males engage in job

shadowing opportunities to assist young African American males in their educational and overall success.

In summary, counterstorytelling is a means for African American males to explicitly express the personal factors affecting their transitions from middle school to high school.

The CRT tenet of racism as normal or commonplace in the United States speaks to the deep structure of our society. The United States views overt racism as problematic; however subtle, institutionalized racism is overlooked and in some cases simply ignored (Bailey & Paisley, 2004; Uwah, McMahon, & Furlow, 2008). For example, it is considered inappropriate to maintain separate restroom facilities for African Americans and Whites but it is acceptable to maintain schools that are, in a manner of speaking, segregated.

Another example of the subtle approach to racism is during the transition from middle school to high school. There is a disproportionate number of African American male students who do not make the transition successfully, hence the higher rate of African American males dropping out of high school (Somers et al., 2009; Uwah et al., 2008). The structure of America and America's schools is so that those who are not in positions of power are fighting an uphill battle. It is as if African American male students must validate their right to be in school. This tenet aligns well with the academic domain/factors affecting transition from middle to high school.

The academic factors affecting transition include curricular issues, teacher/school expectation(s), and student attendance. Curricula in middle schools and high schools are

different. First of all, in high school the curriculum tends to be more rigorous, multifaceted, and complex. In addition to rigor, there is also evidence of curriculum misalignment from middle school to high school (Heller et al., 2003). Secondly, the expectations of teachers and administrators at the high school level are more stringent than their middle school counterparts. High school teachers and administrators expect their students to be self-motivated and generally contain self-discipline. Finally, the improvement of student attendance is important for students during the transition period (Capstick, 2008; Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). The more days that are missed of instruction, the more behind the students will become. The missing instruction will be reflected in student learning and grades.

Permanence of race and the academic domain aligns well in that there are schools in districts where the demographics are majority/minority resulting in major within school disparities. The schools are staffed with many inexperienced teachers; numerous schools have limited resources which have an impact on the academic achievement of students, specifically African American males.

The attempts by school districts to create a comprehensive transition plan are positive steps in the right direction (Capstick, 2008; McIntosh & White, 2006). In fact, teachers, principals, and other school district personnel are aware of the difficulties and problems with and during the transition of students from middle school to high school. As a result, districts are using their resources in hopes of producing successful transition programs for their students. Students who are in the most danger during this transition period are African American males (Uwah et al., 2008; Wyatt, 2009). Consequently,

these students have greater risks of dropping out of high school due to an unsuccessful transition (Herlithy, 2007; Smith, 1997; Somers et al., 2009).

Interest convergence or the uplifting or supporting of other groups in order to strengthen or encourage the agendas of the mainstream group is also a part of the transition puzzle. Interest convergence aligns well with the structural domain/factors.

Structural factors include the physical environment, discipline procedures, and the absence of teaming. One of the major structural factors affecting transition is the change in physical environment. The change in physical environment is one of the largest adjustments that students have to make. The school or building structure itself can be very difficult to navigate. Moving from middle school to high school requires moving from a small building to a much larger building(s). The layouts of some high schools intimidate ninth graders because of their massive size and location of buildings. Classes may be spread out from one end of the campus to the other requiring students to create a plan to get to where they should be in the allotted time (time management). Another structural factor affecting the transition to ninth grade is the new discipline procedures introduced in high school. African American males tend to have difficulties adapting to high school procedures which hold them more accountable for their behaviors (Potter et al., 2001).

In addition, unlike middle schools, high schools are organized by departments rather than by interdisciplinary teams. Students have trouble adapting to this type of schedule because they are accustomed to being in a smaller setting with usually no more than four academic (core) teachers (Lampert, 2005). Their “team” teachers know a lot

about who they are individually. In the high school, teachers have more students and usually can not form the kinds of bonds and relationships middle school teachers can (Cushman, 2006).

One example of interest convergence within the structural domain is ninth-grade academies. These academies were established to help students transition from middle school to high school by addressing the overwhelming physical environment, individual accountability in discipline procedures, and the absence of teaming in high schools. However, what has happened in some high schools as a result is student isolation (Capstick, 2008). School districts have supported ninth grade academies as a strategy for helping students transition successfully. However, the creation of the academies is not solely for the benefits of the students. In some ways the success of such an intervention would benefit the school district as well. School districts look to implement successful transition strategies in order to ameliorate or improve the dropout rates among African American males. By improving the dropout rates of these students, school districts may be able to attract more resources and gain more support from various institutions/agencies and recognition.

It is important to remember and understand that CRT is not just a theory about racial injustice or (in)equity, but it also recognizes inequities generated by the intersections of race/ethnicity and gender (Sleeter, 2003). The premises of CRT align well with looking at the transition of racial/ethnic minority students, more specifically African American males from middle school to high school in that it speaks to barriers of oppression related to these intersections. According to Gause (2008), “public schools are



microcosmic representations of our society” (p. 22). In other words, American schools mirror the images, beliefs, and values set forth by American society.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this modified explanatory mixed methods study was to examine structural, academic, and personal factors affecting the transition of African American males to high school.

### **Research Questions**

The central question of the study was: what are African American males’ perceptions of factors affecting transition from middle school to high school? The following related questions guided the study:

1. What do they describe as academic, structural, and personal barriers related to their transition?
2. What do they describe as academic, structural, and personal facilitators of their transition?
3. How do they explain the impact of these barriers and facilitators on their transition?

### **Definitions of Terms**

*Successful Transition:* Given the design of this study, successful transition will be defined as successfully completing the first semester of the ninth grade. The limitations of this definition will be discussed in the next section.

*Academic Factors:* Academic factors are curricular issues. This includes issues of rigor, curriculum alignment, teacher/school expectations, and student attendance (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Heller et al., 2003).

*Structural Factors:* Structural factors refer to the actual structure of the facility, school size, and class size (Morgan & Hertzog, 2001).

*Personal Factors:* Personal factors are being defined in this study as social interactions, motivation, and personal identity (Cushman, 2006; Forgan & Vaughn, 2000; Potter et al., 2001).

*Transition Barrier:* Refers to elements that block or hinder the students from making a successful transition.

*Transition Facilitator:* Refers to those mechanisms, people, or factors that support a successful transition.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The definition of successful transition used in this study results in a limitation. This definition is narrow and limited to academic success. In most of the middle school to high school transition literature, a successful transition is defined as the completion of the ninth grade (McIntosh & White, 2006; National High School Center, 2007). Researchers have found that if African American males successfully complete the ninth grade, there is a greater chance of high school graduation/completion (McIntosh & White, 2006; Heck & Mahoe, 2006; Pluviose, 2008).

However, in addition to the “academic” definition(s) of success, there are alternate definitions of success as well that are not measured by or confined to academic

years or school timelines. Success outside of school can mean different things. “A college education is not the only definition of success in life” (Cooper, Denner, & Lopez, 1999, p. 51). Success can be defined by the reputation or credibility one has within the neighborhood (Gause, 2008). For instance, success could be measured by one’s ability to move out of the neighborhood and advance not necessarily because of school/academic excellence but via other avenues such as musical talents, mechanical/technical talents, etc. However, because of the focus of this study, the definition of successful transition is successfully completing the first semester of the ninth grade.

Another limitation is the number of participants in the study. Letters were sent to 128 African American males in the ninth grade at Meadowview High School in January (the beginning of the second semester). As a result of the low number of consent forms returned, in February the guidance counselor called each student who received the information via postal mail. If necessary, more forms were sent by postal mail to students and parents. Despite all efforts, only 16 consent forms were returned. The low response rate made the quantitative portion of the design more challenging.

Finally, this study was done at one school in a single school district in the southeastern region of the United States. The results are not generalizable to all African American male students.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study should be valuable for students, parents, school personnel, and teacher educators. All stakeholders can gain insight into what African American males see as factors affecting the transition to high school.

Being aware of these many factors may have a beneficial impact on other students and how they prepare for and navigate within the high school environment. The counterstories of the participants may prove to be the first-hand experiences that researchers have been looking for to get students to understand the realities of high school and the transition from middle school to high school.

Parents/guardians also can benefit from the findings of this study. Parents/guardians play a major role in the educational lives and careers of their children. If parents/guardians are informed about the barriers and facilitators of middle school to high school transition, I think they will possess lesser levels of concern about the issue. Also, giving parents/guardians some strategies/interventions that will help facilitate their children's successful transitions will put both the children and parents/guardians at greater ease.

Middle school and high school administrators can use this research to design a comprehensive intervention framework or program for their students who are going through the transition. In addition to a transition framework or plan, administrators could offer professional development that explains the importance of a successful transition and how to facilitate a successful transition. Effective professional development should (a) explain issues/barriers of successful student transitions, (b) explain the importance of race/ethnic/gender/cultural factors of successful student transition, (c) explain the teachers' role in student transition, and (d) ask how (above and beyond the basics) teachers plan to help the students transition successfully. It is pertinent that new and

veteran teachers are aware of the issues surrounding transition before they step into the classroom. Otherwise, they could become a part of the problem and not the solution.

Teacher educators can also benefit from this study. Those professors who teach middle school and high school aspiring teachers should make sure that their future teachers are prepared for student transition, especially those students who will teach eighth and/or ninth grades. One way to get the students prepared is to help them understand the transition from middle school to high school. Here teacher educators should discuss the barriers to a successful transition, and how to overcome these barriers through teaching, etc. In addition to understanding the transition, an explanation of the importance of race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status is also important in teaching during the transition period. Last but not least, aspiring teachers should also know their students. Being mindful of the attributes of adolescence is vital. Therefore, acknowledging and understanding student motivation and how the students are thinking and working developmentally make a difference.

Finally, the findings will provide all stakeholders with data that can be used to more strategically plan and implement transition strategies for students during their navigation of the transition from middle school to high school.

### **Summary**

This chapter served as an introduction to the research study. The background of the study, theoretical framework, purpose of the study, and research questions have been identified. In addition, significant terms have been explained/defined.

Chapter II includes a review of the literature regarding this research study. The chapter discusses adolescent development, including related issues of identity development as related to African American males, ninth grade transition in relation to academic, structural, and personal factors, motivation and achievement, and ninth-grade academies.

Chapter III chronicles the methodology of the study. It explains the design of the study, selection of the participants, and the context of the study. In addition, this section also describes the data collection procedures (both quantitative and qualitative), data analysis procedures, the role of the researcher, and trustworthiness of the study.

Chapter IV presents the results of the data analysis explained in Chapter III. These results are discussed in further detail in Chapter V.

Chapter V is where the connections are made between the actual outcomes of the research study and the related literature. Implications for teacher education, school district personnel, and classroom teachers are shared. Suggestions for future research are also given in this section.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter reviews the literature concerning the research topic and the central question. The first segment of this chapter looks at the many facets of adolescent development. The second portion explores ninth grade transition through examining the structural factors, academic factors, and personal factors affecting transition. The third segment examines the research on transition strategies and looks at the benefits and drawbacks of ninth grade academies. The final section includes the research and theory on motivation and academic achievement.

#### **Adolescent Development**

Before examining the transition of adolescents it is important to understand the complexity of the people who are involved in this undertaking. Adolescence is a very challenging period. It is vital that researchers as well as teachers, parents, and administrators be aware of the critical development that is taking place during this time. First I review research studies related to adolescent development and then I describe two major theories related to adolescent development.

#### **Research Studies**

Researchers have examined adolescent development through many lenses over the years. Studies have focused on physical, emotional, social, and intellectual changes

of adolescents (Hidi & Ainley, 2002; La Guardia & Ryan, 2002). In addition to these changes taking place, identity development is also beginning.

During adolescence many physical changes occur. To begin with, there is a rapid increase in growth and development. Different parts of the body become larger than other parts and this creates a feeling of awkwardness and discomfort for students (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Mizelle, 2005; Strahan, 1997). In addition to rapid growth and development, puberty begins and the release of new hormones makes way for more physical changes including the growing of mustaches and changes in voice, skin problems, and attention to physical hygiene. Furthermore, the release of these particular hormones and the amount released also initiate mood swings (Strahan, 1997).

Along with mood swings, the emotional state of adolescents may be challenging. During this period, students are striving to be independent while simultaneously wanting to belong to particular group(s) (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). Potter et al. (2001) note:

Prior to adolescence, our identity is an extension of our parents. During adolescence, young people begin to recognize their uniqueness and separation from their parents, yet they may yearn to keep that safe, secure, supportive, dependent relationship. Adolescents may vacillate between their desire for dependence and their need to be independent. (p. 53)

Additionally, adolescents are striving to develop a sense of self and need their parents/families to facilitate and foster their identity development. According to La Guardia and Ryan (2002):

In adolescence, however, although the provision of structure and involvement of parents continues to be important, adolescents begin to develop the cognitive and emotional capacities to increasingly self-regulate their own behaviors. They also



spend less time in the presence of their parents, developing much of their interests and forming their identities in the context of new relationships with peers and other adults. (p. 196)

Other attributes of adolescents as they develop emotionally are concern with many major societal issues as personal value systems develop; belief that personal problems, feelings, and experiences are unique to themselves; psychological at riskness because they are likely to encounter many differences between themselves and others (Potter et al., 2001).

In addition to physical and emotional changes, adolescents also face challenges as they develop socially (Ryan & Patrick, 2001). Social relationships and interactions are complex. The interpersonal relationships that are built during adolescence are different from the relationships formed prior to this time. As mentioned before, relationships with adults (parents in particular) tend to change during adolescence. Peer interactions change as well. Mizelle (2005) acknowledged that “at a time when friendships and social interaction are particularly important for young adolescents, the transition into high school often disrupts friendship networks” (p. 59). Thus, especially during adolescence, belonging to a peer group(s) is an integral part of the school experience. As indicated by Isakson and Jarvis (1999):

Not only may some friends move away to a different school, but as students move to larger school environments, they tend to label each other based on affiliations, such as “preppie,” “brain,” or “burnout.” As such, a preppie and a brain who were friends in junior high school may not be able to successfully cross these relational lines once they enter high school where labels and cliques may be more dominant. (p. 24)

Navigating these various relationships and interactions can be challenging and may be an overwhelming task for adolescents.

Concurrently, adolescents also have to contend with intellectual development. Adults (teachers and parents) expect adolescents to begin to be more responsible (Cushman, 2006; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999). They anticipate that adolescents will take ownership of their own thoughts and actions. As students transition to high school, they are expected to think and perform at a higher intellectual and academic level, though not all of them reach the can make such an intellectual transition at the same time.

As a normal part of the maturing process, adolescents are able to recognize, understand, and think in abstractions. Because not all adolescents make the intellectual transition at the same rate, students who have not developed their ability to think abstractly may be frustrated by the demands in the classroom. [In addition], as adolescents mature intellectually, and as they prepare for adult roles, they must develop new and better verbal skills to express more complex concepts and tasks. Some adolescents may appear less competent because of their inability to express themselves clearly. (Potter et al., 2001, p. 53)

### **Adolescent Development Theory**

In addition to the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual changes experienced by adolescents, Erik Erikson (1963, 1972) created a psychosocial developmental stage theory that chronicles the tasks and periods of an individual's development. At each stage of development, there is a critical goal or task that must be realized by the individual (Ormrod, 2000). He created eight psychosocial developmental stages:

1. Trust versus Mistrust (Infancy)
2. Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt (Toddler Years)
3. Initiative versus Guilt (Preschool Years)
4. Industry versus Inferiority (Elementary School Years)

5. Identity versus Role Confusion (Adolescence)
6. Intimacy versus Isolation (Young Adulthood)
7. Generativity versus Stagnation (Middle Age)
8. Integrity versus Despair (Retirement Years)

The main task for adolescence in relation to Erikson's theory is identity development.

Adolescents may try many different things before they commit to a sense of self. This is a time for exploration and experimentation. Therefore, by the end of adolescence, an individual should have developed an identity and a more solid sense of self.

Self Determination Theory offers another lens for examining adolescent development. SDT has several assumptions:

1. People are active agents in the tasks of development.
2. Humans are liberally endowed with intrinsic and spontaneous tendency to be curious and interested in exploring novelty and tackling new challenges.
3. Humans have an assimilative tendency to internalize and integrate social norms and practices. (La Guardia & Ryan, 2002, p. 195)

This theory requires that the three pertinent components—*intrinsic motivation, internalization, and integration*—be supported by “*basic psychological needs*” (LaGuardia & Ryan, 2002, p. 197). The three basic psychological needs are *relatedness, competence, and autonomy*. *Relatedness* refers to the sense of belonging. More specifically, *relatedness* is about how and to what extent an individual connects to things, places, or other people. *Competence* refers to having the intellectual ability to be successful in decision-making. Last, *autonomy* refers to an individual being able to make his or her own decisions without being controlled by exterior sources.

Both of these developmental theories offer unique insights into the development of adolescents. These observations can be used to help better understand the transition of students from middle school to high school.

### **Ninth-Grade Transition**

According to the Southern Regional Education Board (2002), “the passage of students from the middle grades to high school is the most difficult point in education. The failure rate in grade nine is three to five times higher than that of any other grade.” Much of the research that has been done on middle school to high school transition (a) examines the causes or barriers to a successful transition, (b) observes the outcomes of unsuccessful student transition, and/or (c) explores strategies and interventions to implement in hopes of ensuring successful transitions for students (Bunting, 2004; Letrello & Miles, 2003; Stone, 2003). Within this body of research, three significant factors of student transition emerge: structural factors, academic factors, and personal factors.

#### **Structural Factors**

The change in environment is one of the largest adjustments that students have to make. Schlossberg’s (1995) transition theory is a way to view the physical transition from middle school to high school. This model “represents a framework in which transitions of all kinds—positive and negative, dramatic and ordinary—can be analyzed, and possible interventions formulated” (Schlossberg, 1995, p. 3). According to Schlossberg, there are three major components that influence adaptation to transition:

1. the characteristics of the particular transition,

2. the characteristics of the pre-and post-transition environment, and
3. the characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition.

To examine the structural factors of the transition, I will use one of Schlossberg's three components, pre- and post-transition environment.

First, the model presupposes that there are three characteristics of the pre-and post-transition environment: interpersonal support systems, institutional supports, and physical setting. The component that will take precedence here is the physical setting.

Schlossberg speaks to the structural environment via the physical setting component. Physical setting includes climate and weather, urban or rural location, neighborhood, living arrangements, and school structure (Schlossberg, 1995). One characteristic of the school structure is the building size itself. High schools, more than middle schools, are built to accommodate fairly large numbers of students. This structural change is a major challenge for students who have not experienced such an environment previously. Also, classrooms are situated differently in high school. In middle school, classrooms and teachers are arranged into teams which allow for easy mobility, whereas in high school, teachers and classrooms are more spread out and more effort and independence are required to navigate the school.

### **Academic Factors**

Much of the middle school to high school transition research began in the mid 1980s. At this time, researchers, school officials, and parents began to notice a decline in student academic achievement (of ninth graders) (Heller et al., 2003). Not only was there

a decline in academic achievement, conversely there was also a rise in the high school dropout rates with most of the students leaving school during the ninth grade.

There are many factors contributing to this decline of student academic achievement. One of the most important factors of the academic decline was the changes taking place within the students themselves (Chapman & Sawyer, 2001). In other words, during this time students are experiencing many different and conflicting emotions. For example, they want to be autonomous and do things on their own and, simultaneously, they would like for their teachers to be very hands-on learning-oriented, perhaps, in part, because students tend to yearn for adult approval (teacher, parent). Researchers point out that students who are transitioning at this time must primarily have their developmental needs met in order for them to experience a successful transition to high school (Heller et al., 2003).

Transitioning from a middle school to a high school is sometimes difficult because the middle school is structured around the developmental needs of adolescents. Middle school is designed to facilitate an environment in which students feel safe, as if they belong, and have something to contribute to the group/school. The taking away of this safe haven (the middle school concept-interdisciplinary teaming, etc.) and the transition to something new is where researchers find that students are not coping effectively (Gutman & Midgley, 2000; Seidman, Aber, Allen, & French, 1996).

Researchers have found that there are several variables to be considered when examining transition success (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Morgan & Hertzog, 2001). One variable to be considered is (the change in) expectation(s). The expectations of

teachers and administrators at the high school level are more stringent than their middle school counterparts. High school teachers and administrators expect their students to be self-motivated and generally contain self-discipline. Additionally, the expectations of high school teachers as it relates to curriculum (academic coursework) change as well. The high school curriculum is more in depth, multifaceted, and rigorous (Heller et al., 2003). In addition, school attendance tends to be an issue during the transition period. If students are not attending classes regularly, important instruction is lost. When instruction is lost, grades and test scores suffer.

### **Personal Factors**

Personal/social factors also play a role in the transition environment. Within this social structure are three major interactions. The three interactions that undergo change are: (a) the interactions between the students and the teachers; (b) between the students and their peers; and (c) between the students and their parents. In secondary schools, “teachers are less likely to form interpersonal relationships with students. Students are likely to receive whole-class instruction, with little small-group or individualized instruction in secondary classrooms, whereas students in the lower grade levels receive individualized instruction, hence increasing interpersonal relationships” (Forgan & Vaughn, 2000, p. 33). Lower (grade) level teachers tend to make instruction student-centered thus more interactions between teachers and students—and high levels of dialogue among students. High school teachers often make instruction subject-centered which lessens the amount of teacher and student interaction and student to student dialogue (Cushman, 2006; Morgan & Hertzog, 2001).

Once students have physically transitioned from one school to another, often times they do not have the same circle of friends and their social networks are disrupted (Potter et al., 2001). Hence they have to forge new friendships and other interpersonal relationships. This is difficult for some adolescents because they are very self-conscious and do not want to take any risks that might cause them to be looked upon negatively in the eyes of their peers (or others). Schiller (1999) in his study on middle and high school academic achievement discovered that the constancy of peers had an affect on the academic achievement of [transitioning] students. Those students who continued on to high school with their middle school peers received better grades than those who did not (as cited in Heller et al., 2003).

Students also tend to be uncomfortable and have difficulties with transition because they are striving for independence from their families. At this point, students want to be more independent. They want to experience things without the oversight of parents, teachers, or other adults (Letrello & Miles, 2003).

### **Personal Identity**

According to Liebman (2003), “Gender is a primary category in which individuals both identify themselves and are identified by others. Gender is not a set of binary categories, but rather a spectrum” (p. 24). Gause (2008) echoes this assertion of gender not being a fixed or stagnant construction. Children begin to construct gender identities at an early age. By the time students reach adolescence, society’s views of how males and females should act and the roles each should play have been established. Although



individual gender identity is fluid, norms and expectations have been set by society for collective gender identity.

While the norms and expectations of collective gender identity have been set by society, expectations and depictions of African American males have also been created by society. “Schools play an important role in identity construction” (Gause, 2008, p. 20). As mentioned before, schools are mini-representations of the society at large. The attitudes society hold about African American males is reflected in the attitudes the schools hold about African American males.

Masculinity and black masculinity in particular, is not a compilation of lifestyles; although popular culture seeks to construct black masculinity from a pattern of consumption. Black masculinity is constituted and constructed in relation to other gender identities. (Gause, 2008, p. 42)

African American males are faced with challenges daily in schools. Because many of the teachers in American public schools are middle class, White women, the foundation for understanding the complexities of the Black male, more specifically, the adolescent Black male is absent or not well-grounded (Gause, 2008). Moreover, the convictions, values, and ideas that teachers, administrators, and other school personnel bring to the classrooms can be detrimental to the performance and development of African American males. According to Gordon (1999),

It is not intended to suggest that the extension of known techniques to these previously neglected populations is entirely negative. Humanitarian concern calls for the use of all possible resources to relieve human suffering. However, there may be vast differences between what we feel we know how to do and that which must be done. (Gordon, 1999, p. 69)

The implication is not that school personnel are intentionally unprepared to help African American males. In fact in some cases, teachers, counselors, and administrators believe they are doing what is best for their students. However as Gordon indicates, there may be differences in what one thinks he is doing and what is actually being done. If public school personnel are unprepared to teach and motivate African American males, how can we expect African American males to be (academically) successful? The Black male is portrayed by the media, as a person who is violent, ignorant, poor (unless he's a drug dealer), aggressive, and hypersexual (Gause, 2008). In addition, adolescent Black males are depicted in a similar manner but because they are younger, they are also thought of as defiant, hyperactive, and slow learners (Bailey & Paisley, 2004). If these are the images being brought to the classroom by the teachers or if these are the gender identity norms being set forth by the school and society for African American males, how can students overcome these preconceived notions?

African American males must deconstruct the popular assumptions and norms and re-create gender identities that portray who they really are. Unfortunately, with the additional developmental changes taking place during adolescence, it is difficult to deconstruct and construct an identity during this critical time.

The construction of gender identity and the construction of racial/ethnic identity are similar. Like gender, children become aware of ethnicity (or race) during early childhood (Bernal & Knight, 1993). In addition, ethnic identity, like gender identity is defined by or with physical traits and characteristics (Sheets & Hollins, 1999). Of course, there are some physical attributes for race/ethnicity and gender, but racial/ethnic

and gender identity are more than just physical characteristics. Identity, according to Ormrod (2000), is “a self-constructed definition of who adolescents are, what things they find important, and what goals they want to accomplish in life” (p. 80). Erikson (1963) takes it a step further and posits that identity is not just about an individual knowing who he or she is but also about reconciling that with how others perceive him or her and what others expect of him or her. According to Bernal and Knight (1993), during late childhood (while approaching adolescence) some minority children show a preference for the mainstream group. This partiality may be a direct result of the negative portrayals of minority youth and adults in popular culture. As mentioned in the gender identity section, the media depicts the ideologies and beliefs of the dominant culture. For adolescent Black males, this is critical. If what others perceive of them is one of the ingredients for racial/ethnic identity, the decisions and assertions that popular culture have made about Black males is contaminating the racial/ethnic identities of Black males on a daily basis.

Recognizing that the odds are stacked against them, young black males continue to disengage from formal schooling processes to engage in the underground economy. Instead of resisting the nihilistic messages of mass media, young black males continue to immerse themselves in black masculinity that is patriarchal, misogynistic, and destructive. (Gause, 2008, p. 70)

In terms of schools and schooling, students are supposed to be learning and acquiring the skills and knowledge they need to be successful in the global economy not just in American society. But as Gause (2008) points out, “power and how it benefits those in the majority continues to define the curriculum of American public schools” (p. 19).

Transition literature speaks to curricular mismatches as one of the barriers to successful transition from middle school to high school for African American males. Such literature was examining curricular issues from an academic standpoint. However, Gause's assertion draws a link to curricular issues from a cultural/ethnic standpoint. According to the Brenner and Graham (2009) study on ethnic minority youth, specifically African American students "did more poorly in high school on virtually every indicator examined." Their study focused on the middle school to high school transition experiences of adolescents from various racial/ethnic groups. There were two cohorts of students for a total of 1,979 participants. The students attended one of 11 middle schools in the metropolitan Los Angeles area. All schools in the study were qualified to receive Title I services and funding. As reported by this study, African American students "struggled more academically" than any other racial/ethnic group in the study.

The structural and academic factors affecting student transition from middle school to high school are fairly straightforward and direct. The more complex piece of the equation is the personal factors (including social interactions and identity formation) affecting African American males as they move from middle school to high school.

### **Transition Strategies**

Researchers have conducted studies to explore many of the variables and the processes of middle school to high school transition. When creating an effective transition program, there are many factors to consider.

According to Cauley and Jovanovich (2006), for any student of any cultural or ethnic background their transition framework should consist of four activities: (a)

students visit the new school—meetings; (b) comprehensive and target activities for students, parents, and teachers; (c) continuous planning among teams of teachers and school leaders; and (d) attend to students who are most likely to have the greatest difficulty with systemic transitions: girls, students with behavior problems, minority, or low socioeconomic status students, and low achievers.

First, in-coming freshmen should visit the school in order to gain a visual (physically) of the school and understand how to navigate the buildings. In addition, visiting the school and attending informational sessions with teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators may help the transitioning students to know what services, programs, or extracurricular activities are available for them during the school year. Cushman (2006) interviewed 16 students from Indianapolis, Indiana prior to the beginning of their ninth grade year. The students commented on activities they felt would help them make the transition to high school successfully. The most important strategy (in their opinions) was to “start our year with a ninth grade orientation period” (p. 51). Being able to navigate their new environment and become familiar with their new surroundings was paramount for those students.

Effective transition programs are comprehensive and target activities to students, parents, and teachers. Because parents and teachers are part of the transition support system for students, they should also be informed of the same information that is being given to the in-coming freshmen. Explaining to parents school procedures (discipline, academic, social) and inviting them into the school for various school/community events is a means to build a positive support network.

Third, in order for a transition program to be effective, there should be continuous planning among teams of teachers and school leaders. Middle school and high school personnel (teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators) should communicate and work closely together to help students and parents with the transition. The strategies used in the transition program should be revisited and revised regularly.

Finally, an effective transition program should attend to students who are most likely to have the greatest difficulty with systemic transitions: girls, students with behavior problems, minority, or low socioeconomic status students and low achievers. Some girls tend to have trouble transitioning to high school due to the change in social networks. At this time new friendships may be created and old friendships may be disrupted resulting in an unstable social environment. The instability of the social environment may reflect negatively on the transition process for adolescent girls. Similarly, students with behavior problems also have difficulty transitioning to high school. In the high school environment there are various procedures and expectations that are put forth by the school (and district). Students who do not possess the self-control, maturity, or social skills needed for the transition to high school generally continue to exhibit inappropriate behavior. It is believed that minority and low socioeconomic status students may also experience more difficulty during the transition to high school because of low parental involvement. Last, low achieving students also experience difficulties during the transition to high school. Low achieving students similar to the students with behavior issues may experience challenges because of new expectations and procedures of the high school environment.

Although I do agree with many of the aspects or concepts put forth in the transition framework of Cauley and Jovanovich, I believe there should be a larger allowance for race, culture, ethnicity, and gender within the comprehensive transition plan. This is where I think a number of the transition studies fall short. As noted earlier, there are not many research studies that focus primarily on African American students, especially not males transitioning from middle school to high school. Most of the research, as I have presented, speaks to general structural factors (school building, expectations) and academic factors (curriculum, grades) affecting successful transitions for students from the perspectives of the researchers (as opposed to the perspectives of the students themselves). The deficiency in the literature lies in the personal factors affecting successful transitions for African American males. Although there is research that speaks to ethnic identity, social identity, and gender identity, these constructs in relation to middle school to high school transition needs more defining. Nevertheless, it is my hope that contemporary transition researchers will work diligently to discover more data reflecting the personal factors affecting transition. While there are still areas to be explored within middle school to high school transition, there are some steps that administrators and teacher educators can take to help in this process.

### **Ninth-Grade Academies**

In efforts to cope with the decline in academic achievement among ninth grade students, several high schools have implemented ninth grade academies for their incoming freshmen. At present, ninth-grade academies are very popular in high schools. The structural designs of most of the academies are similar in that they (the academies)

are usually separated from the general school population and consist of interdisciplinary teams with four or five teachers and about 140 to 150 students (Chmelynski, 2003). In description, ninth grade academies appear to be an extension of the middle school. Overall freshmen academies have several benefits for students. The students are in a more contained environment, have fewer classes, and are able to receive more one-on-one instruction from the teacher(s).

The research shows that discipline referrals have decreased dramatically since the opening of the ninth grade academies within the high schools (McIntosh & White, 2006). From most of the data it seems that those schools that have implemented ninth-grade academies are doing well and are prospering (Chmelynski, 2003; Reetz, 2002). One school in particular, Findlay High School, located in Findlay, Ohio, instituted the Freshman Wing. The Freshman Wing is their school within a school to help their freshmen to transition successfully from middle school to high school. The total freshman population is 500 students. Findlay High school had a total population of 2,100 students. According to the study's data, parents, students, and teachers reported better grades, improved student attendance, and a decrease in the school dropout rate since instituting the Freshman Wing (McIntosh & White, 2006).

The central question is, are the ninth-grade academies beneficial for African American students, specifically males? The answer depends on the particular school and the underlying reasons for that school or school's implementation of freshman academies. If the reasons for implementing the academies include student achievement, student encouragement, student engagement, transition ease, and other student-centered motives,



the ninth-grade academies may contribute to the positive development of African American students. In this case, African American students will be able to work in cooperative groups, share in small group discussions, and participate in more hands-on activities. This student-centered response may result in the student feeling that he or she has experienced some academic success, hence positively affecting their academic identities. Such a school environment must be one where all ninth-grade students are participating in the academies as opposed to specific sub-groups of ninth-grade participation.

On the contrary, the separation of ninth graders from the rest of the student population could be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, students are in clusters and are receiving individualized instruction. But on the other hand, students are being isolated and secluded from the rest of the school population. Some schools only require students considered “at risk,” (usually African American students, other ethnic minority students, and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds), to participate in the academies. In this way, the “problems” are not directly affecting the rest of the student population. Ninth graders, especially those considered to be problematic where behavior is concerned are located in another wing or building where no one can see or associate with them. This feeling of isolation or being cut-off from everyone else can have a detrimental affect on adolescents who are very impressionable. Students in an environment such as this will realize that all ninth graders are not in this program, deliberately separated from the rest of the school. They may begin to question what is so wrong or different about them that administrators and teachers would place them in the

academy. Such beliefs could potentially lead to the development of negative academic identities or no academic identities at all for African American students.

The implementation of ninth-grade academies by schools could be viewed as an example of the interest convergence premise of Critical Race Theory. Schools assert that the academies are to help students to transition from one grade to the next smoothly. Although that may be the case, schools are also benefiting from the academies. The school (administrators and teachers) does not have to deal with as many discipline referrals/issues, teachers have smaller class sizes, and all of the “at risk” ninth-grade students are in a central location where they can be closely monitored. The academies appear to be a constructive intervention or strategy for students. However, like the concept implies, these advances by the students in the academies are accompanied by advances of and benefits for the elite or for the institution.

Like any other academic phenomenon, ninth-grade academies have both negative and positive manifestations. Nevertheless, in order for African American males to achieve academically and experience a successful transition from eighth grade to ninth grade, there are some major elements that must be present in the academy (transition) framework. The academy framework must pay close attention to the cultural, socioeconomic, and gender aspects of students and examine how they relate to the explicit and implicit curricula being taught.

Related to the formation of an oppositional identity, according to Graham et al. (1998), because of the history of Blacks in America, students do not want to align how they act and what they think with what the mainstream population deems as appropriate.

Therefore, the academy will need to foster an environment where ninth-grade African American students, male or female, wealthy or not will feel a connection with the school and with the academy environment. If students feel connected to the environment, teachers, administrators, and other students, they will be more apt to focus on academic tasks and activities. Being comfortable in their new environment, feeling as if who they are matters in their classroom settings, and being able to focus on their academic tasks will help them be more motivated to achieve and ultimately lead to a successful transition for African American students.

### **Motivation and Achievement**

Studies have been performed that focus on adolescent development and its contribution(s) to student transition (Isakson & Jarvis 1999; Morgan & Hertzog, 2001; Potter et al., 2001; Smith, 1997). From these studies, researchers have found that one of the most important factors affecting academic achievement of students is motivation. More specifically, motivation has been identified as a critical component in academic achievement for African American students (Graham et al., 1998). African American students, especially boys, become unmotivated and disengaged in school at a fairly young age (Bailey & Paisley, 2004; Wyatt, 2009). Because these students become disengaged in school at such an early age, it is not difficult to see how adolescents, African American adolescents in particular, struggle to transition from middle school to high school.

Although there are not many studies that yield direct results of successful transition interventions for African American (or other ethnic minority) males (Gutman & Midgley, 2000; Reyes, Gillock, & Kobus, 1994), there is much research on African

American (ethnic minority) student motivation, student (dis)engagement and academic achievement. Researchers have found that African American students, particularly African American males, as a group tend to fall behind in education as early as elementary school (Graham et al., 1998; Somers et al., 2009; Wyatt, 2009). There are many reasons for this “lack of progression” (La Guardia & Ryan, 2002, p. 197) of the students. A large part of the disconnection between Black students and school is schools’ relatedness or relevance in their personal and academic lives (La Guardia & Ryan, 2002; Gause, 2008). Some believe that because of economic and social disadvantages, many African American students feel there is no need to try hard or work hard because there will be no reward (Ford & Harris, 1997). “The perceived barriers imposed by a society that perpetuates inequality along race and class lines communicate to minority youngsters that there is little relationship between their efforts and eventual outcomes” (Graham et al., 1998, p. 607). In other words, African American males have difficulties relating or identifying with the construct of school and so their motivation to succeed academically may not be their top priority. School does not represent a positive picture for many of them. For some of these students school represents failure, isolation, intimidation, and irrelevance (Gause, 2008). This is the representation of school that produce negative attitudes toward school in general which results in student disengagement and may directly affect the students’ attitudes and performance during the transition period.

### **Summary**

The function of this chapter was to review the literature and theories relevant to the research topic and questions that were established. The first section discussed

adolescent development. The physical, emotional, social, and intellectual aspects of adolescent development were examined in relation to the transition from middle school to high school. Next, ninth-grade transition was explored. There are three factors affecting successful transition to high school: structural, academic, and personal factors. Within the structural component, Schlossberg's transition theory was used as a lens for examining the physical setting and the physical movement from one environment to another. In addition, within the academic component, academic factors- curricular issues, expectations, and attendance were examined. Furthermore, within the personal component, three major social interactions were explored and gender and ethnic identity were analyzed. Third, transition strategies, including the purpose and functionality of ninth grade academies were discussed. The last section focused on motivation and achievement.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

The function of this chapter is to explain the mixed methods methodology that was selected for this study. The first section includes a description of the design of the study. The next section describes the context of the study and the participants. Then I discuss the role of the researcher followed by trustworthiness of the study. Lastly, I chronicle the data collection procedures and data analysis procedures.

#### **Design of the Study**

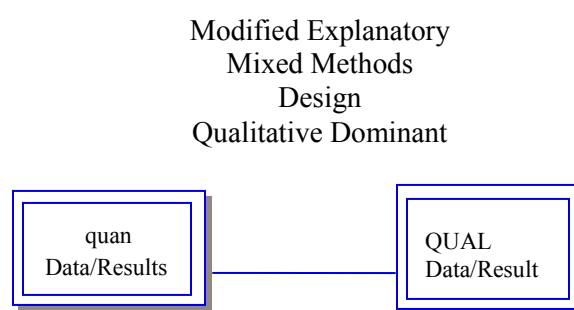
In this study I used a mixed methods approach or paradigm. In order to understand a mixed methods research design I think it is imperative to recognize the differences between quantitative and qualitative research approaches. Researchers who use a quantitative research methodology tend to focus more on specific, narrow research questions, collect numeric data, and employ inferential statistics to analyze the data in an objective, unbiased manner (Creswell, 2005; Stake 1995). In contrast, researchers who use a qualitative research design concentrate on broader, more general questions, as well as on the participants and their experiences. In addition, qualitative researchers collect data largely consisting of text and analyze this data by looking for themes that develop throughout the analysis process. Qualitative researchers also unmask their subjectivities at the forefront of the study (Creswell, 2005; Maxwell, 2005).

Both of these methodologies are rigorous and require a great amount of effort. The information that is gained from both quantitative and qualitative research is valuable. The data that is collected and analyzed from both approaches can be used to further explain and clarify results found in the study. When both the quantitative and qualitative research methodologies are incorporated into one study, it becomes a mixed methods study.

“A mixed methods research design is a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and ‘mixing’ both qualitative and quantitative data in a single study to understand a research problem” (Creswell, 2005, p. 510). Using a mixed methods design is a relatively new approach and many researchers are finding this design very useful. A mixed methods design can be used to validate the findings of one approach in relation to the other. For example, qualitative interviews can be used to gain more insight into data that was collected using a quantitative survey. In addition, researchers can use this method simply to have a more comprehensive and complete study. Neither quantitative nor qualitative designs can tell the entire story alone. When both designs are used, the holes that appear in the quantitative data can be filled by the data from the qualitative phase and vice versa.

Although there are many benefits to a mixed methods design it is important to remember that a mixed methods design consists of a both a quantitative and qualitative phase. This means the researcher will have to collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data. As mentioned earlier, it does provide the researcher with a more inclusive and complete analysis; however, it requires a lot more effort and time.

In this study, I used a modified explanatory mixed methods design. The justification for this approach is that it makes the study more valid and complete in that the qualitative data (from phase two of data analysis) is used to further examine and understand the quantitative findings (from phase one of data analysis). The first phase of data collection in this study was a questionnaire. The second phase of data collection was individual interviews and a focus group interview. Although I collected the quantitative data first, more emphasis was placed on the qualitative data (Creswell, 2005). Therefore, I rely heavily on the qualitative data to explain themes and conclusions that emerged from the data analysis.



Adapted from Creswell (2003)

**Figure 1. *Modified Explanatory Mixed Methods Design—Qualitative Dominant***

The modified explanatory mixed methods design is most appropriate for this study because using a quantitative or qualitative methodology alone would not tell the entire story of successful middle school to high school transition. Using this approach, I will be able to better understand the participants' perceptions of their transition



experiences, quantitatively and qualitatively. Looking at both quantitative and qualitative data will ensure a more comprehensive and inclusive study.

### **Context of the Study**

Meadowview High School was chosen as the study site because it has a large population of African American males in the ninth grade. Meadowview has four grade levels: ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades. Of the 1431 students, 394 students are African American males spanning over grades 9, 10, 11, and 12. There are 128 African American males in the ninth grade. Meadowview is on a 4-period block schedule with classes meeting for ninety (90) minutes daily. The school environment is inviting (hallways are well-lit, staff members are friendly, and there are samples of student work at the entrance) and the faculty and staff aim for the students to do well academically through the accomplishment of short term and long term goals.

For many years, Meadowview High School had carried a reputation of academic excellence and high athletic distinction. In each graduating class, Meadowview High had over half of its graduates who were leaving to attend reputable colleges/universities, trade schools, and technical institutions. Additionally, the athletic program at Meadowview High School was ranked very high in the district. Typically, this secondary education institution had above average seasons in boys' football and boys' basketball. In fact, almost every year the teams participated in post-season playoff games. The athletic teams were frequently featured in the local newspaper or newscasts because of their winning records.

Within the last ten years, there has been a change in the level of academics at the high school. According to the state assessment data, the academic achievement levels of Meadowview have declined. There are many theories for why the change in academic achievement has occurred. Some attribute the decline to shifting demographics and the prevalence of gang activity within the school. Others attribute the academic deterioration to the lack of student and parent accountability. Yet, some believe that the decline in academic success is due to teacher preparation and accountability.

In response to the downward spiral of academic achievement, Meadowview High added a new component to the academic structure of the school. It acquired magnet school status. The magnet program focused on the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme. The IB program was instituted in an attempt to attract and retain students who will take advantage of the opportunities the program provided. In addition, the IB program was designed in part to raise the academic expectations of teachers, students, and parents. The IB Diploma Program takes place during the eleventh and twelfth grade, with ninth- and tenth-grade courses providing the foundations necessary for success in the program. The rigorous course of study provides a liberal arts curriculum from a global perspective, with university-level work and required examinations that are developed and marked on an international standard (school website).

### **Participants**

The participants in this study are ninth-grade African American males. They attend the same urban school, Meadowview High School, in the southeastern region of

the United States. This group was targeted for this study because unlike the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth graders, they have recently experienced the transition from middle school to high school.

The participants lived on three distinct sides of the county: southwestern, southeastern, and the northeastern sections. Each sector of the county was very similar in that all three portions of the county included rural communities, urban communities, and suburban communities.

The ninth-grade guidance counselor was instrumental in helping with the selection of participants for the study. The guidance counselor provided me with the names and addresses of all of the ninth-grade African American males attending Meadowview High School. Letters containing an explanation of the study and parental and student consent forms were sent to 128 African American ninth grade males (the total population) and their parents or guardians via postal mail. Parental and student consent forms were returned by 16 African American males permitting them to participate in the study. Several additional invitations to participate in the study were sent by the guidance counselor; however, only 16 permissions were obtained. Due to the low return rate of consent forms, students' participation became a convenience sample.

For the first phase of the study (quantitative), 16 participants completed the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of questions from each domain—structural, academic, and personal. For the qualitative phase of the study, eight of the 16 participants were chosen: four respondents whose questionnaire results were extremely positive and four respondents whose questionnaire results were extremely negative.

Instead of using all responses from the questionnaire, the extremes in responses might give a more complete and precise profile of factors affecting the middle school to high school transition. The ages of all participants (quantitative and qualitative phases) ranged from 14-16 years old. After viewing progress reports and attendance records of each participant, academically, two students were considered above average (3.0 or higher), four students were average (2.0 to 2.9), and two students experienced difficulty (1.9 and below) in academic courses.

### **Brandon**

Brandon was 14 years of age and lived with his mother, father, and grandmother, of whom he is very fond. He was a pleasant, polite, and courteous young man and had many older siblings. Brandon has had some difficulty with academics, but overall, he was an average student. While he had not had any serious discipline referrals, Brandon was fairly talkative and playful in class on occasion but could easily be redirected by his teachers. A lot of Brandon's time was spent playing basketball after school. During this school year, Brandon lost a very close friend. Brandon's friend died suddenly while playing in a junior varsity basketball game. This event had a major impact on Brandon's life. He experienced declines in his academic progress because he was trying to cope with the loss he had suffered. He and his school counselor both shared this difficult experience with me.

### **Brian**

Brian was 14 years old and lived on the southwestern end of the county with his mother and father. His older sister was away at college. Brian was a comical, gregarious

young man. He did well in school until he reached middle school. In middle school, Brian's grades began to decline; his behavior deteriorated as well. Brian was "written up" on discipline referrals and sent to the office several times in middle school. Though since arriving at Meadowview High, there had not been as many disciplinary incidents. In fact, he was suspended only once at the beginning of the school year for fighting. His teachers believed he was a good young man; according to them, he just needed to focus on his work and stop striving to be the class clown. He participated in and was extremely proud of being a member of Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC). Brian was also a very active member of his church. He enjoyed church activities and looked forward to attending services and activities there weekly.

### **Christopher**

Christopher was 14 years old and lived in the southeastern section of the city with his aunt. At the time of the study, Christopher's father was deceased and his older brother was incarcerated. Christopher was outgoing, energetic, and lighthearted. He had some academic and behavioral struggles during his school career that he attributed to his attitude. He was working to change or adjust his attitude so that he would be able to handle stressful situations without thoughtless reactions. Since arriving at Meadowview High, he was suspended for fighting at the beginning of the school year. His teachers felt that he was capable of doing the assigned work, but he was too playful and too social during academic time.

**John**

Fourteen-year-old John was shy, quiet, and reserved. He was meticulous about what he said during the interviews, almost like he did not want to say something wrong. He lived with his grandmother on the northeast side of the county. His grandmother drove him and picked him up from school each day. John had been suspended from school on a couple of occasions. He had experienced many difficulties in his home life as well. He spent some time in a group home but was returned to his maternal grandmother, who at the time of the study was recovering from a traumatic bout with cancer. John was trying to get his grades and his behavior on track for the upcoming school year. He explained that he knew education was important and he was determined to focus more in class so that he could get better grades. Throughout his school career, he had academic difficulty. His teachers believed he had the potential to do well but he needed to apply himself more and remain in a stable home environment. John felt that church was very important and he enjoyed attending services every Sunday.

**Darius**

Darius was a 16-year-old who lived on the southeastern side of the county with his maternal grandmother. His older brother was completing his first year of college. Darius was an outgoing and outspoken person and therefore, he was very popular with his classmates. His teachers believed he was smart and capable of great things but they wanted to see him put forth more effort into his academic school work. He wanted to be in the classroom spotlight but for the wrong reasons. He desired to be noticed by his peers. Darius' school attendance record was excellent and he had not had any serious

discipline referrals (that would result in suspension) since arriving to high school. He earned above average grades in elementary school, though his grades began to decline as he progressed in each grade level. During the time of the study, he had earned average grades. He attended church every Sunday and was a member of the usher board and youth choir. He also played football for the school.

### **Marcus**

Marcus was a jovial 14-year-old who at first was a little apprehensive during the interviews. He lived with his mom, dad, and brother on the southwestern end of town. In fact, Marcus' parents and grandparents were very involved in his education. Marcus had been relatively successful throughout his school career. He did not have any major discipline issues and had a good attendance record. Academically, he was an average to above average student. Most of his teachers thought he was a good student and wanted him to continue to do more. They did not want him to settle for the status quo. More specifically, they thought he should have used his social skills to help him to continue to excel academically. Marcus had many friends and enjoyed spending time with them outside of school.

### **Matthew**

Matthew was 14 years old and lived with his mom, dad, and sister in the southwestern part of the school district. Matthew's parents were very supportive and always looked for ways to be involved in his academics and extracurricular activities. He was an above average student. He had been successful academically and behaviorally throughout his school career. He had little to no discipline referrals. He was neat, fun-

loving, and respectful. Matthew was in ROTC and was very involved in several of the ROTC teams. Matthew competed in ROTC competitions district and statewide. His teachers felt that he was a joy to have in class. He was a hard worker and he took pride in his work and performance.

### **Troy**

Troy was 16 years old and lived with his mother in the southeastern part of the city. Troy was shy but very thoughtful; he thought carefully and deliberately before he spoke. He had some difficulties during his school career. He struggled academically, particularly in math. Troy attended school consistently and had two jobs he worked weekly. He had not had any discipline issues this school year but he has had a few in previous years. A loner, Troy did not have many friends at school. His teachers felt that he was a responsible young man but they wanted him to focus more on his academics and be more vocal about his thoughts and feelings.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Stake (1995) asserts that there are many roles that researchers may choose to play. The role that was most fitting for me is the role of researcher as teacher. “The intention of research is to inform, to sophisticate, to assist the increase of competence and maturity, to socialize, and to liberate” (Stake, 1995, p. 91). As a researcher-teacher studying African American young men, it is important that I maintain the division between teacher and researcher. The purpose for this research is to provide a figurative megaphone to this group. I want to ensure that their perceptions of the factors affecting their middle school to high school transition emerge and are made public. As a teacher and in my current



position as curriculum coordinator, I tried to prepare my students for the upcoming high school transition they would soon face. Prior to this research, I had my own notions and ideas about the transition from middle school to high school and the difficulties and factors that are presented at this time. I understood that many students (regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, etc.) struggled with the transition from middle school to high school. From a teacher/coordinator aspect, I initially thought it was just an academic issue. However, as I stepped out of the teacher role and moved more into the researcher role, I saw that it is much more than academics. After examining the literature, I realized that research studies have been conducted on middle school to high school transition but from the perspectives of district personnel, principals, teachers, and social workers. From my new standpoint, one major piece of the puzzle was missing—the voice of the students. I wanted to know how the students felt about this major change in their lives.

According to the descriptions of case researchers given by Robert Stake (1995), I am now assuming the role of researcher as advocate. In the discussion of advocacy, Stake draws on Jonathan Kozol, who is speaking to a different case but has a similar attitude to mine, “the voices of children have been missing from the discussion” (Kozol, 1991, pp. 4-5). It is my hope that by hearing and understanding how students feel about their transition from middle school to high school, better interventions and strategies can be put in place to afford students more help at this crucial time in their lives.

### **Trustworthiness of the Study**

Trustworthiness is a critical aspect of any research study. Trustworthiness speaks to the validity of the findings. In other words, “trustworthiness suggests whether the

findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of the account” (Creswell, 2003, p. 195). There are several ways to establish trustworthiness within a study. I have chosen three of Creswell’s (2003) eight primary strategies for establishing trustworthiness: triangulation, member-checking, and bias clarification.

Three different types of data were used in order to protect the integrity of the study. The idea of using three data sources to gain a clearer more comprehensible understanding of the information is triangulation. Using triangulation helps to view the data and the study from various ways and allow meanings and themes to emerge. “Collecting information using a variety of sources and methods is one aspect of what is called triangulation” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 92). The sources of data that were examined in this study were the questionnaire, two individual interviews, one focus group interview, researcher’s journal, and archival data which included progress report, attendance, and discipline data. These sources were used to help validate my findings.

In addition, member-checking was also used in order to determine the accuracy of my results. Member checking included reporting back to the participants the biographies (what was written about them). Each participant was given the opportunity to agree, clarify, or object to what was written about him. In addition to reviewing the information for accuracy, participants were encouraged to give constructive feedback, alternative language or interpretation (Stake, 1995).

Last, I will clarify the biases by including a self reflective narrative that shares my subjectivities (Creswell, 2003). These subjectivities will consist of my personal

experiences and viewpoints in relation to the study and participants. It is important for me to disclose that I am a former middle school teacher who is currently a middle school curriculum coordinator. I have taught many eighth-grade African American males and speculated on the problems or situations they would face during their transitions to high school. I believe there are important academic and personal aspects that need to be explored and investigated in order for African American males to be able to successfully transition to high school, and ultimately graduate.

Although I did not teach any of the participants in this study, I was the curriculum coordinator at the middle school several of them attended. We did not have any direct contact but those who attended the middle school where I worked remembered me from the hallways. Initially, I was concerned that being familiar with me would result in the participants not sharing as much in fear that I would share what they said with my colleagues. However, the participants shared that the fact that some of the participants were familiar with me actually made them more comfortable, which made them speak more open and freely.

I have chosen to use three approaches to trustworthiness to ensure readers that what they are reading and what I have examined and reported is accurate and valid.

### **Data Collection**

Because this is a modified explanatory mixed methods study, data was collected in two phases: quantitative and qualitative. During the first phase of data collection, the data source used was a questionnaire (see Appendix C for a copy of the questionnaire). The questionnaire contained item responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly

disagree. In phase two, data was collected using (a) two individual interviews; (b) one focus group interview; and (c) notes from the researcher's journal. Interview protocols were created for the individual interview and the focus group interview (See Appendix E and Appendix F for copies of the individual and focus group interview protocols). All data were collected between January 2009 and June 2009.

### **Quantitative Stage**

A questionnaire was created to administer to the participants. To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was piloted with five African American males in the eighth grade. Additional content validity was established by using a panel of experts that included teacher educators, middle school teachers, and high school teachers. The questionnaire consisted of twenty-eight items. Every effort was made to keep the number of questions to a minimum because of the population that was being surveyed. Lengthy questionnaires may result in apathy and frustration for the participants (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). Continuous scaled data was used and the item responses ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

There are a few advantages to using a questionnaire. First, with a questionnaire, respondents feel free to answer the questions honestly without any fear of repercussions for answering one way or another. A second advantage to using a questionnaire is the simplicity of the answer choices. Finally, using a questionnaire is not as time stringent as other data collection processes. Conversely, a drawback of using a questionnaire is the lack of depth and elaboration of the response. Another disadvantage of using a questionnaire is all participants may not answer the questionnaire in its entirety which

results in skewed data if not detected early. Finally, when using a questionnaire, large numbers of respondents are desired; it is difficult to get an overall representation of the data if not enough responses are received.

Administration of the questionnaire took place in the student cafeteria after school. The only people occupying the space were the participants, the guidance counselor, and the researcher. The questionnaire was passed out and read aloud to the sixteen participants. The questionnaire was read aloud in its entirety because a few of the participants have individual education plans (IEPs) that specify that they be given the read aloud accommodation. Instead of separating the group, the questionnaire was read to the group. Once the questionnaires were collected, the researcher informed the participants that if they had any questions or concerns to please inform her or the guidance counselor.

### **Qualitative Stage**

In this phase of data collection, several data sources were used. The sources included two individual interviews per participant and one focus group interview, a researcher's journal, and archival data which included academic, attendance, and discipline records.

Because a major aim of my study was to hear the voices of the participants, interviewing is an appropriate vehicle for being able to do that. Like the questionnaire, there are advantages and disadvantages to using the interviews. A benefit in using an interview as a data source is the amount of information, knowledge, and elaboration gained from the one on one interaction and discussion. Another advantage to the

interview is it is more personal or one-on-one. Connections can be made and the participant will feel more relaxed with the researcher. A shortcoming of the interview is the danger of the line between researcher and participant being crossed. The researcher will have to make the effort to keep the interview on track and focused and make sure the divisions are clear.

The first individual interview took place immediately after the questionnaire was administered and the questionnaire data were analyzed. The questionnaire results were used to inform the development of the first individual semi-structured interview protocol. The next individual interview took place two weeks later. Two weeks after all individual interviews were conducted, the focus group interview was conducted. The focus group interview protocol was developed after the analysis of the questionnaire data and modified after the analysis of the individual interview data.

I kept a reflective journal throughout the study. Each time I met with the participants I made notes about each interview. In addition to what the participants stated explicitly, I made notes about the manner in which the participants spoke and their demeanors before, during, and after the interview. Additionally, I also noted the connections, similarities, and differences between and among the participants and recorded their personal information, information about their families, hobbies, extracurricular, community activities, and archival data.

The journal served as my personal reflective process as well. It helped me to make sense of my own thoughts about what the participants were telling me. It also helped me to see my thought progression as the study advanced.

Academic, attendance, and discipline records were also used to help find out more about the participants. Looking at the participants' personal records helped me to gain more insight into who they were as students.

### **Data Analysis**

Similar to data collection, data analysis was also carried out in two phases: quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative analysis was completed by using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. The qualitative analysis included coding the data from each individual interview and the focus group interview and identifying and interpreting overall emerging themes.

#### **Quantitative Stage**

The questionnaire results were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. The transition questionnaire consisted of twenty-eight items with continuous scaled data ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The questionnaire was divided into subgroups of questions that focused on structural, academic, and personal factors affecting transition. The participants were asked how they felt about (a) the size of their school, (b) discipline expectations, (c) academic expectations, (d) teacher relationships, and (e) family/community relationships.

The computer software program SPSS was used to group the responses in each category. In addition the mean and range was calculated. The reliability of the items overall was very good (.89). However, since the items were categorized into three scales of structural, academic, and personal, I focused more on the reliability of each of the subscales instead of the overall reliabilities. The structural subscale reliability was .62;

.56 was the reliability of the academic subscale. For the structural and academic subscales the reliabilities of the questions were moderate. In many cases, for both subscales (structural and academic) if one item in the domain was deleted it could have either raised or lowered the reliability of the subscale. However, of the three subscales, the personal factors subscale seems to be a more reliable scale with .85 reliability which means the items and responses are well aligned. Lastly, in order to see if there was a difference in the way the participants responded to the questionnaire according to their age (16 versus 14 years old), an independent *t*-test was performed.

### **Qualitative Stage**

Using the results from the quantitative questionnaire the individual interview protocol was developed. The researcher examined the reliabilities of each subscale, structural, academic, and personal. Next, the actual reliability of each subscale was compared to the reliability of the subscale if specific items were deleted from the questionnaire. This process demonstrated statistically significant items within each subscale, which alerted the researcher that more research should be done with that particular item. In addition to using the reliabilities of the subscales, each item was examined and the number of participants who responded a particular way was noted. After all totals or responses were received, the researcher observed that within each subscale there were items where the number of participants who marked agreed or disagreed were close. For example, for any given questionnaire item seven respondents answered agree and nine respondents answered disagree. Conversely, there were also items where the total responses were not close. Nevertheless the first individual



interview protocol was developed by looking at the totals for each questionnaire item within a subscale and determining whether the total was close (like the previous example). If the totals were close, an interview question was created to align with that particular item.

The second individual interview protocol was informed by the responses to the first individual interview protocol. During the first individual interviews the participants had stated that structure of a school was not a major factor for their successful transition to high school. Therefore, on the second individual interview protocol the categories of questions were focused on academic and personal factors that affected their transition from middle school to high school.

Last, the focus group interview protocol was developed by examining the data from the first and second individual interviews. All three subscales, structural, academic, and personal were included on the focus group interview protocol because the researcher wanted to have the participants discuss all factors affecting middle school to high school transition (according to the literature) as a group to gauge if there would be differences between what was said in the individual interviews and what was communicated in the focus group interview.

“In qualitative research, the goal of coding is not to count things, but to fracture the data and rearrange them into categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 96). In addition, organizing the data into larger themes and making sense of the texts are crucial in categorizing analysis (Creswell, 2003, Maxwell, 2005). The procedures for coding the data were: (a) categorizing the

participants' responses, (b) organizing the responses into specific groupings, and (c) recognizing the themes.

After all interviews were completed, I looked for repeated phrases/words within each subgroup or category of interview questions. Each occurrence of a word or phrase was color coded to match the question category (colored red), common responses were, "it's not too big or small" and "I fit right in." These responses were colored red to show they were connected to the structural category.

The categories of questions included structural, academic, and personal. A Microsoft Excel file was created to organize the data. Three separate spreadsheets were created including the participants' pseudonyms, question categories, and all key words/phrases from each category. From the spreadsheets, the researcher was able to clearly see the frequency of each response. The key words/phrases from each category were established as data points. Subsequently, data points were generated from each individual interview and the focus group interview. Indicators were formed from analyzing the data points. After examining the data points and indicators, larger categories were developed by summarizing what the indicators were implying and from these categories, broader themes emerged.

For each aspect of middle school to high school transition, structural, academic, and personal, there were themes that derived from the qualitative data. For the structural aspect there were two themes: (a) school size is not a problem, but . . . and (b) hangin' with my friends in class: missing the interdisciplinary team structure. To arrive at these themes, the researcher noticed repeating key words or data points. For example, in the

individual and focus group interviews the responses centered around and were mostly about the structure of the school. From that indicator (structure of a school), the researcher concluded that there were two portions of the school structure: (a) physical structure and (b) academic structure. Largely, the participants revealed that the number of students (school size) was not a problem for them, thus the theme for physical structure. Likewise, interdisciplinary teaming and the impact it had on friendships was a repeating concept which participants felt was important to the academic structure of a school resulting in the theme for academic structure.

Similar to the structural aspect, the academic aspect also had two themes to emerge from the qualitative data: (a) “they think we can’t do the work”: teacher expectations, and (b) “this is harder than I thought it would be”: rigor of high school classes. The data points (key words) that were repetitive regarding teacher expectations were “they don’t think we can do it,” “when I raise my hand they don’t call on me because they think I don’t know the answer,” and “they don’t think I’ll do good in their classes.” The repetition of these ideas and those similar contributed to the creation of the first theme. In a similar manner, the second theme “this is harder than I thought it would be”: rigor of high school classes was generated by analyzing the key indicators. The data points that were repeated to derive this theme were “too much work,” “way harder than I thought,” “long hard readings,” and “the amount of work is unbelievable.”

Finally, four themes emerged from the personal aspect of middle school to high school transition: (a) “my friends save me”: camaraderie of the “brothers” at school, (b) “teachers: friend or foe,” (c) “you’re not there to take up space”: great expectations of

parents/guardians and community, and (d) the racial and gender disconnections: plight of the young Black male. The participants commented numerous times on the importance of their “boys” and how having them present had a positive effect on them while they were in school. In addition, “teachers: friend or foe” was developed from the discussion of teachers having dual roles, one as part of the barrier and the other as the solution. The participants felt that teachers could be a support during the transition process. Key indicators that were repeated were “teachers help me by standing near their classes,” “putting a face to a place makes a difference,” and “they help come up with ways to remember the buildings.” These indicators helped the researcher construct this theme. The third theme, “you’re not here to take up space”: great expectations of parents and community was generated from the researcher comparing the key indicators, “my parents expect me to do well in school,” “my parents don’t play about my grades,” and “my pastor always try to make sure I am doing well in school.” Within this segment of data, the participants discussed several methods their parents/guardians and community leaders used to inform them of their expectations (academically and behaviorally) in school. The racial and gender disconnections: plight of the young Black male was the last theme within the personal aspect of middle school to high school transition. Key indicators for this theme were “all us born with black marks already,” “they expect us to end up in jail,” and “every time something happen, they blame us.” The participants discussed how society’s assumption of failure affected them and their teachers. While the participants realized that these assumptions were present, they also made a distinction between what others perceived them to be and what they actually were.

In conclusion, the themes from the structural, academic, and personal aspects of middle school to high school transition were generated by examining the repetitive data points and key words and connecting them to specific phrases (from the participants' individual and focus group interview data). Table 1 presents the themes, categories, and indicators.

### **Summary**

This chapter was designed to explain the mixed methods methodology used in this study. First, a description of the design of the study was given. Then, the context of the study and the participants were described. Next, there was a discussion of the role of the researcher and trustworthiness of the study respectively. Finally, the data collection procedures and data analysis procedures were reported.

Table 1

*Summary of Categories and Emergent Themes*

	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Indicators</b>
<b>Structural</b>	School Size Is Not A Problem, But . . .	Physical Structure of the School	Not too big, not too small
			Size is not the problem, but overcrowding re number of people might be
	Hangin' With My Friends In Class: Missing the Interdisciplinary Team Structure	Academic structure of school	Assistance in navigating the physical structure
			Miss the teams from middle school
<b>Academic</b>	Teachers Think We Can't Do the Work	Teacher's Expectations	Teams make school more organized
			They think we're going to make low grades
	This Is Harder Than I Thought It Would Be	Academic Expectations	Expectations are unrealistic
			When I raise my hand she ignores me
		Academic Assistance	Rigor of classes
			Amount of assignments
			Time management
			Assistance from teachers
<b>Personal</b>	My Friends Save Me: Camaraderie of the "Brothers" at School	Relationships with friends	Support from tutors
			My friends are why I come to school
	Teachers: Friend or Foe?	Relationships with teachers	My friends help me
			We are like brothers
	You're Not There to Take Up Space: Great Expectations of Parents/Guardians and Community	Relationships with parents/guardians community members	Significance of having a positive relationship with teachers
			Impact of relationships with teachers on grades
	Plight of the Young Black Male—The Saga Continues	Sociopsychological issues	My parents just tell me what they expect
			My parents don't play about grades
			My pastor is always offering to help me.
			Black male identity: "we already have a black mark against us"
			Society's views of Black males: "they are building more jails for us"
			Gender differences: "they treat the Black girls better than us"
			Discipline: "even if we don't do nothing we still get in trouble"
			Racial/Ethnic Differences: "everybody is above us, Whites, Hispanics, we are dead last"

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Introduction**

This study was designed to examine structural, academic, and personal factors affecting the transition of African American males to high school. In addition, a major aim of this study was to document how the participants perceived their transition experiences via descriptions of the impact of structural, academic, and personal transition issues of the transition.

This chapter presents a discussion of the data analysis. The qualitative dominant, or modified explanatory, mixed methods design was used in order to make the study more comprehensive. During the quantitative phase, a questionnaire was administered in the school cafeteria after the school day ended. The qualitative portion of the study, involved two individual interviews and one focus group interview all of which took place in the school counseling center during the school day and after school. First, the quantitative data analysis will be presented. Descriptive and inferential statistics are used to explain the results of the questionnaire. Following the quantitative data analysis, the qualitative data analysis explains indicators, categories, and themes that emerged from the individual and focus group interviews. Last, both sets of data will be compared to highlight commonalities between the two data sets.

## **Quantitative Results**

The questionnaire consisted of 28 items. The response choices were based on a four-point Likert scale with ratings ranging from 1=strongly disagree (SD) to 4=strongly agree (SA). The questionnaire included three subscales: structural, academic, and personal. Since all of the participants were African American males who had completed the first semester of ninth grade, only one demographic variable was included on the questionnaire: age. Then following analyses of quantitative data include (a) descriptive statistics (frequencies and measures of central tendency and distribution) and (b) inferential statistics (reliability and *t*-test on age groups).

The function of quantitative data analysis is not to explain the cause of an event or justify why the results are as they are; the purpose of the quantitative analysis is to alert the researcher that further study should be done in that particular area to offer additional clarification of the data.

### **Descriptive Statistics**

The structural subscale consisted of nine items. There were three categories of the structural factors—three items addressing how the respondents felt about the size of the school, three items addressing how they felt about the discipline procedures of the school, and three items measuring how the respondents felt about the absence of interdisciplinary teaming. The grand mean score for the structural factors subscale was 2.37 with standard deviation scores ranging from .458 to .976. Tables 2 through 4 report measures of central tendency and distribution for each item in the structural subscale. Table 5 shows the frequencies for each item on the structural subscale.



**Table 2*****Measures of Central Tendency and Distribution for Structural Variables (All Respondents)***

	<i>N</i>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
The size of my high school makes me uncomfortable	15	2	1	3	1.60	.737
I feel lost in my high school because of its size	15	1	1	2	1.27	.458
The size of my school does not bother me	15	2	2	4	3.27	.594
I do not understand my school's discipline procedure	15	3	1	4	2.33	.976
I think my high school's discipline procedures are fair	15	2	1	3	2.33	.617
I understand how I am expected to behave in school	15	3	1	4	3.13	.743
I miss the teams we had in middle school	15	2	2	4	2.80	.676
I think I would be more comfortable if my high school had teams like we did in middle school	15	3	1	4	2.53	.915
I like not being on a team for my classes	15	2	1	3	2.07	.704
Valid N (listwise)	15					

**Table 3*****Measures of Central Tendency and Distribution for Structural Variables (16-Year-Olds)***

	<i>N</i>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
The size of my high school makes me uncomfortable	2	0	2	2	2.00	.000
I feel lost in my high school because of its size	2	1	1	2	1.50	.707
The size of my school does not bother me	2	0	3	3	3.00	.000
I do not understand my school's discipline procedure	2	1	2	3	2.50	.707
I think my high school's discipline procedures are fair	2	1	2	3	2.50	.707
I understand how I am expected to behave in school	2	0	3	3	3.00	.000
I miss the teams we had in middle school	2	0	2	2	2.00	.000
I think I would be more comfortable if my high school had teams like we did in middle school	2	1	1	2	1.50	.707
I like not being on a team for my classes	2	1	2	3	2.50	.707
Valid N (listwise)	2					

**Table 4*****Measures of Central Tendency and Distribution for Structural Variables (14-Year-Olds)***

	<i>N</i>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
The size of my high school makes me uncomfortable	13	2	1	3	1.54	.776
I feel lost in my high school because of its size	13	1	1	2	1.23	.439
The size of my school does not bother me	13	2	2	4	3.31	.630
I do not understand my school's discipline procedure	13	3	1	4	2.31	1.032
I think my high school's discipline procedures are fair	13	2	1	3	2.31	.630
I understand how I am expected to behave in school	13	3	1	4	3.15	.801
I miss the teams we had in middle school	13	2	2	4	2.92	.641
I think I would be more comfortable if my high school had teams like we did in middle school	13	2	2	4	2.69	.855
I like not being on a team for my classes	13	2	1	3	2.00	.707
Valid N (listwise)	13					

Table 5

*Frequencies for Structure Subscales*

**The size of my high school makes me uncomfortable**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid agree	2	13.3	13.3	13.3
disagree	6	40.0	40.0	53.3
strongly disagree	7	46.7	46.7	100.0
Total	15	100.0	100.0	

**I feel lost in my high school because of its size**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid disagree	4	26.7	26.7	26.7
strongly disagree	11	73.3	73.3	100.0
Total	15	100.0	100.0	

**The size of my school does not bother me**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid disagree	1	6.7	6.7	6.7
agree	9	60.0	60.0	66.7
strongly agree	5	33.3	33.3	100.0
Total	15	100.0	100.0	

**I do not understand my school's discipline procedure**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly agree	2	13.3	13.3	13.3
agree	4	26.7	26.7	40.0
disagree	6	40.0	40.0	80.0
strongly disagree	3	20.0	20.0	100.0
Total	15	100.0	100.0	

**I think my high school's discipline procedures are fair**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly disagree	1	6.7	6.7	6.7
disagree	8	53.3	53.3	60.0
agree	6	40.0	40.0	100.0
Total	15	100.0	100.0	

**Table 5. (cont'd)**

<b>I understand how I am expected to behave in school</b>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	1	6.7	6.7	6.7
	agree	10	66.7	66.7	73.3
	strongly agree	4	26.7	26.7	100.0
	Total	15	100.0	100.0	

<b>I miss the teams we had in middle school</b>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	5	33.3	33.3	33.3
	agree	8	53.3	53.3	86.7
	strongly agree	2	13.3	13.3	100.0
	Total	15	100.0	100.0	

<b>I think I would be more comfortable if my high school had teams like we did in middle school</b>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	1	6.7	6.7	6.7
	disagree	8	53.3	53.3	60.0
	agree	3	20.0	20.0	80.0
	strongly agree	3	20.0	20.0	100.0
	Total	15	100.0	100.0	

<b>I like not being on a team for my classes</b>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	4	26.7	26.7	26.7
	disagree	8	53.3	53.3	80.0
	strongly disagree	3	20.0	20.0	100.0
	Total	15	100.0	100.0	

Almost 87% of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the item, “The size of my school makes me feel uncomfortable.” Additionally, all of the participants either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the item, “I feel lost in my high school because of its size.” For item 3, “The size of my school does not bother me,” 93% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed. Sixty percent of participants either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the item, “I do not understand my school’s discipline procedures.” In addition, 60% of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the item, “I think my high school’s discipline procedures are fair.” For item 6, “I understand how I am expected to behave in school,” almost 94% of participants agreed or strongly agreed. Nearly 67% of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the item, “I miss the teams we had in middle school.” Sixty percent of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the item, “I think I would be more comfortable if my high school had teams like we did in middle school.” Finally, approximately, 74% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the item, “I like not being on a team for my classes.”

The academic factors subscale also consisted of nine items. Three categories assessed the academic factors subscale—three items measured how the respondents felt about teacher expectations, four items focused on how they felt about the academic demands of high school, and two items assessed how respondents felt about course requirements. The grand mean of the academic subscale was 2.63 with standard deviation scores ranging from .426 to 1.019. Tables 6 through 8 report measures of central tendency and distribution for each item in the academic subscale. Table 9 shows the frequencies for each item on the academic subscale.

**Table 6*****Measures of Central Tendency and Distribution for Academic Variables (All Respondents)***

	<i>N</i>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
My teachers expect me to do well in my classes	14	3	1	4	3.00	.784
My teachers' expectations are realistic and reachable	14	3	1	4	3.00	.877
My teachers do not expect me to do well in my classes	14	2	1	3	1.50	.650
I make time to finish all my assignments	14	1	2	3	2.79	.426
My classes are harder than I expected	14	3	1	4	2.50	1.019
My classes require me to do a lot more work	14	2	2	4	3.14	.535
My classes are easier than I expected	14	2	1	3	2.21	.579
I understand why the school requires me to take certain courses/classes	14	3	1	4	3.00	.784
The school should not require students to take certain classes	14	3	1	4	2.50	.855
Valid N (listwise)	14					

**Table 7*****Measures of Central Tendency and Distribution for Academic Variables (16-Year-Olds)***

	<i>N</i>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
My teachers expect me to do well in my classes	2	1	2	3	2.50	.707
My teachers' expectations are realistic and reachable	2	1	2	3	2.50	.707
My teachers do not expect me to do well in my classes	2	1	2	3	2.50	.707
I make time to finish all my assignments	2	0	3	3	3.00	.000
My classes are harder than I expected	2	1	3	4	3.50	.707
My classes require me to do a lot more work	2	1	3	4	3.50	.707
My classes are easier than I expected	2	0	2	2	2.00	.000
I understand why the school requires me to take certain courses/classes	2	0	3	3	3.00	.000
The school should not require students to take certain classes	2	0	3	3	3.00	.000
Valid N (listwise)	2					



**Table 8*****Measures of Central Tendency and Distribution for Academic Variables (14-Year-Olds)***

	<i>N</i>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
My teachers expect me to do well in my classes	12	3	1	4	3.08	.793
My teachers' expectations are realistic and reachable	12	3	1	4	3.08	.900
My teachers do not expect me to do well in my classes	12	1	1	2	1.33	.492
I make time to finish all my assignments	12	1	2	3	2.75	.452
My classes are harder than I expected	12	3	1	4	2.33	.985
My classes require me to do a lot more work	12	2	2	4	3.08	.515
My classes are easier than I expected	12	2	1	3	2.25	.622
I understand why the school requires me to take certain courses/classes	12	3	1	4	3.00	.853
The school should not require students to take certain classes	12	3	1	4	2.42	.900
Valid N (listwise)	12					

**Table 9*****Frequencies for Academic Subscales***

<b>My teachers expect me to do well in my classes</b>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	1	6.7	7.1	7.1
	disagree	1	6.7	7.1	14.3
	agree	9	60.0	64.3	78.6
	strongly agree	3	20.0	21.4	100.0
	Total	14	93.3	100.0	
Missing	System	1	6.7		
Total		15	100.0		

<b>My teachers' expectations are realistic and reachable</b>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	1	6.7	7.1	7.1
	disagree	2	13.3	14.3	21.4
	agree	7	46.7	50.0	71.4
	strongly agree	4	26.7	28.6	100.0
	Total	14	93.3	100.0	
Missing	System	1	6.7		
Total		15	100.0		

<b>My teachers do not expect me to do well in my classes</b>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	1	6.7	7.1	7.1
	disagree	5	33.3	35.7	42.9
	strongly disagree	8	53.3	57.1	100.0
	Total	14	93.3	100.0	
Missing	System	1	6.7		
Total		15	100.0		

**Table 9. (cont'd)**

<b>I make time to finish all my assignments</b>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	3	20.0	21.4	21.4
	agree	11	73.3	78.6	100.0
	Total	14	93.3	100.0	
Missing	System	1	6.7		
Total		15	100.0		

<b>My classes are harder than I expected</b>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	3	20.0	21.4	21.4
	disagree	3	20.0	21.4	42.9
	agree	6	40.0	42.9	85.7
	strongly agree	2	13.3	14.3	100.0
	Total	14	93.3	100.0	
Missing	System	1	6.7		
Total		15	100.0		

<b>I understand why the school requires me to take certain courses/classes</b>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	1	6.7	7.1	7.1
	disagree	1	6.7	7.1	14.3
	agree	9	60.0	64.3	78.6
	strongly agree	3	20.0	21.4	100.0
	Total	14	93.3	100.0	
Missing	System	1	6.7		
Total		15	100.0		

<b>The school should not require students to take certain classes</b>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	1	6.7	7.1	7.1
	agree	7	46.7	50.0	57.1
	disagree	4	26.7	28.6	85.7
	strongly disagree	2	13.3	14.3	100.0
	Total	14	93.3	100.0	
Missing	System	1	6.7		
Total		15	100.0		

Eighty percent of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the item, “My teachers expect me to do well in my class.” Approximately 74% of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the item, “My teachers’ expectations are realistic and reachable.” Additionally, almost 87% of the participants disagreed or agreed with the item, “My teachers do not expect me to do well in my classes.” Seventy-three percent of the participants agreed with the item, “I make time to finish all my assignments.” Nearly 54% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the item, “My classes are harder than I expected.” For item 15, “My classes require me to do a lot more work.” Almost 87% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed. In addition, approximately 67% of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the item, “My classes are easier than I expected.” Eighty percent of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the item, “I understand why the school requires me to take certain courses/classes.” Lastly, approximately 52% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the item, “The school should not require students to take certain classes.”

There were ten items within the personal factors subscale. The personal factors were assessed by three categories—four items assessed how the respondents felt about relationships with teachers, three items measured how they felt about their relationships with friends, and three items assessed how they felt about their relationships with family/community members. The grand mean score of the personal subscale was 2.76 with standard deviation scores ranging from .594 to .884. Tables 10 through 12 report measures of central tendency and distribution for each item in the personal subscale. Table 13 shows the frequencies for each item on the personal subscale.

**Table 10*****Measures of Central Tendency and Distribution for Personal Variables (All Respondents)***

	<i>N</i>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
My teachers care about me	15	2	2	4	2.93	.704
My teachers listen to what I have to say	15	2	1	3	2.67	.617
I am important to my teachers	15	2	1	3	2.60	.632
My teacher knows more about me than my grades	15	3	1	4	2.27	.799
Many of my friends go to my school	15	2	2	4	3.13	.640
I feel more comfortable because my friends are with me at school	15	2	2	4	2.93	.594
It is important to me to be with my friends at school	15	2	2	4	2.93	.799
My family/community expects me to get good grades	15	3	1	4	3.20	.862
I want to do good in school to make my community proud	15	3	1	4	3.20	.775
My family/community does not care about how well I do in school	15	2	1	3	1.73	.884
Valid N (listwise)	15					

**Table 11***Measures of Central Tendency and Distribution for Personal Variables (16-Year-Olds)*

	N	Range	Min	Max	M	SD
My teachers care about me	2	0	3	3	3.00	.000
My teachers listen to what I have to say	2	1	2	3	2.50	.707
I am important to my teachers	2	0	3	3	3.00	.000
My teacher knows more about me than my grades	2	0	2	2	2.00	.000
Many of my friends go to my school	2	0	3	3	3.00	.000
I feel more comfortable because my friends are with me at school	2	0	3	3	3.00	.000
It is important to me to be with my friends at school	2	0	2	2	2.00	.000
My family/community expects me to get good grades	2	0	3	3	3.00	.000
I want to do good in school to make my community proud	2	0	3	3	3.00	.000
My family/community does not care about how well I do in school	2	0	3	3	3.00	.000
Valid N (listwise)	2					

**Table 12*****Measures of Central Tendency and Distribution for Personal Variables (14-Year-Olds)***

	<i>N</i>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
My teachers care about me	13	2	2	4	2.92	.760
my teachers listen to what I have to say	13	2	1	3	2.69	.630
I am important to my teachers	13	2	1	3	2.54	.660
My teacher knows more about me than my grades	13	3	1	4	2.31	.855
Many of my friends go to my school	13	2	2	4	3.15	.689
I feel more comfortable because my friends are with me at school	13	2	2	4	2.92	.641
It is important to me to be with my friends at school	13	2	2	4	3.08	.760
My family/community expects me to get good grades	13	3	1	4	3.23	.927
I want to do good in school to make my community proud	13	3	1	4	3.23	.832
My family/community does not care about how well I do in school	13	2	1	3	1.54	.776
Valid N (listwise)	13					

Table 13

*Frequencies for Personal Subscales*

<b>My teachers care about me</b>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	4	26.7	26.7	26.7
	agree	8	53.3	53.3	80.0
	strongly agree	3	20.0	20.0	100.0
	Total	15	100.0	100.0	

<b>My teachers listen to what I have to say</b>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	1	6.7	6.7	6.7
	disagree	3	20.0	20.0	26.7
	agree	11	73.3	73.3	100.0
	Total	15	100.0	100.0	

<b>I am important to my teachers</b>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	1	6.7	6.7	6.7
	disagree	4	26.7	26.7	33.3
	agree	10	66.7	66.7	100.0
	Total	15	100.0	100.0	

<b>My teacher knows more about me than my grades</b>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	2	13.3	13.3	13.3
	disagree	8	53.3	53.3	66.7
	agree	4	26.7	26.7	93.3
	strongly agree	1	6.7	6.7	100.0
	Total	15	100.0	100.0	



Table 13. (cont'd)

**Many of my friends go to my school**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid disagree	2	13.3	13.3	13.3
agree	9	60.0	60.0	73.3
strongly agree	4	26.7	26.7	100.0
Total	15	100.0	100.0	

**I feel more comfortable because my friends are with me at school**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid disagree	3	20.0	20.0	20.0
agree	10	66.7	66.7	86.7
strongly agree	2	13.3	13.3	100.0
Total	15	100.0	100.0	

**It is important to me to be with my friends at school**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid disagree	5	33.3	33.3	33.3
agree	6	40.0	40.0	73.3
strongly agree	4	26.7	26.7	100.0
Total	15	100.0	100.0	

**My family/community expects me to get good grades**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly disagree	1	6.7	6.7	6.7
disagree	1	6.7	6.7	13.3
agree	7	46.7	46.7	60.0
strongly agree	6	40.0	40.0	100.0
Total	15	100.0	100.0	

**I want to do good in school to make my community proud**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly disagree	1	6.7	6.7	6.7
agree	9	60.0	60.0	66.7
strongly agree	5	33.3	33.3	100.0
Total	15	100.0	100.0	

**Table 13. (cont'd)**

		My family/community does not care about how well I do in school			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	4	26.7	26.7	26.7
	agree	3	20.0	20.0	46.7
	strongly agree	8	53.3	53.3	100.0
	Total	15	100.0	100.0	

Seventy-three percent of the participants agreed or strongly agreed to the item, “My teachers care about me.” Over 73% of the participants agreed with the item, “My teachers listen to what I have to say.” In addition, 67% of participants agreed with the item, “I am important to my teachers.” Nearly 67% of participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the item, “My teacher knows more about me than my grades.” Almost 87% of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the item, “Many of my friends go to my school.” Eighty percent of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the item, “I feel more comfortable because my friends are with me at school.” Additionally, 67% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the item, “It is important to me to be with my friends at school.” Nearly 87% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the item, “My family/community expects me to get good grades.” Furthermore, 93% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the item, “I want to do good in school to make my community proud.” Lastly, 73% of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the item, “My family/community does not care about how well I do in school.”

### **Inferential Statistics**

Since this was not a quantitative dominant study, only two inferential statistics were applied: Cronbach's alpha to establish reliability and an independent *t*-test to examine differences between the two age groups.

Cronbach's alpha is a measure of internal consistency, or how closely related a set of items are as a group (Creswell, 2005). In this study Cronbach's alpha was used to examine the reliability (internal consistency) of the structural, academic, and personal subscales. The reliability of the structural subscale was .621 the academic subscale was .568, and the personal factors subscale was .851. The internal consistency of the questionnaire overall was .892. According to Garson (2002), "the widely-accepted social science cut-off is that alpha should be .70 or higher for a set of items to be considered a scale, but some use .75 or .80 while others are as lenient as .60" (p. 189). Consequently, the overall questionnaire and personal subscale were highly reliable. The structural subscale had an acceptable level of reliability, but internal consistency for the academic subscale was a little weak. Table 14 summarizes the reliability statistics for each subscale.

There was a wide age range among the ninth grade participants. Therefore, an independent *t*-test was performed in order to compare the manner in which 16-year-olds and 14-year-olds responded to the questionnaire. In this study, there were two 16-year-olds and thirteen 14-year-olds. Both age groups answered most of the questionnaire items similarly. However, the *t*-test revealed there were four items where responses were

significantly different; two items in the academic domain and two items in the personal domain.

**Table 14**

*Summary of Reliability Statistics for Questionnaire Subscales*

<b>Subscale</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items</b>	<b>N of Items</b>
Structural Factors	.621	.597	9
Academic Factors	.568	.637	9
Personal Factors	.851	.851	10
All Subscales	.892	.895	28

In the academic domain, item 1-C (My teachers do not expect me to do well in my classes) had a 0.12 significant difference. In addition, in the academic domain, item 3-B (The school should not require students to take certain classes) had a 0.46 significant difference. There were also two items within the personal domain where significant differences in responses between age groups occurred. Personal 1-C (I am important to my teachers) showed a 0.27 significant difference. Item 3-C (My family/community does not care about how well I do in school) was another example of the two age groups responding differently on the questionnaire, with a 0.23 significance.

### **Qualitative Results**

Qualitative data were analyzed using Creswell's (2008) content analysis coding procedures. Eight themes related to structural, academic, and personal factors emerged: (a) School Size Is Not A Problem, But . . . (physical structure), (b) Hangin' With My

Friends In Class: Missing the Interdisciplinary Team Structure (academic structure), (c) Teachers Think We Can't Do the Work (teacher expectations), (d) This Is Harder Than I Thought It Would Be (academic expectations and academic assistance), (e) My Friends Save Me: Camaraderie of the "Brothers" at School (relationships with peers), (f) Teachers: Friend or Foe? (relationships with teachers), (g) You're Not There to Take Up Space: Great Expectations of Parents/Guardians and Community (home and community relationships), and (h) Plight of the Young Black Male—The Saga Continues (sociopsychological issues).

### **Structural Factors**

In the transition literature, there are many factors that affect a successful transition to high school. One factor the literature alludes to is the size of the school. Middle schools are usually smaller than high schools in physical size and for the most part class sizes correspond with the school size. Related to school size, another structural factor is the absence of interdisciplinary teaming at the high school level. In middle school, students are divided into interdisciplinary teams. Each academic teacher math, English/language arts, science, and social studies is placed together on one team. The team is expected to create a safe, supportive environment for their students where instruction is student-centered and focused on the whole child. In this study, the structural aspect of middle school to high school transition two themes emerged: (a) school size is not a problem but . . . (related to the physical structure), and (b) hangin' with my friends in class: missing the interdisciplinary team structure (related to the academic structure).

**School size is not a problem, but . . .** The physical structure of the school is an aspect to consider during the transition from middle school to high school. Indicators of the physical structure included: school was not too big or too small; school size is not a problem, but maybe overcrowding is a problem; and while school size or overcrowding may cause some struggle during the transition to high school, the participants noted ways in which they received assistance in navigating the physical structure of high school.

According to the participants in this study, the size of the school did not serve as an obstacle to a successful transition to high school. Brandon commented in the first individual interview, “It’s not too big or too small.” Along with Brandon, Matthew agreed,

For real, I don’t think it is the fact that it’s too many people; I think the size of the school and the classes are ok. People make more out of it than it really is.  
(Individual Interview 1, 04/09/09)

Troy felt that the size of the school was not a problem during his transition to high school but there was a hint at another issue at work during his transition. He said,

Basically, I don’t think the size of the school is a problem. I think sometimes too many students in one place is a problem. If there are too many in one place, other students get distracted. And when people get distracted that’s when some of the trouble start. It’s not necessarily because of the school size. (Focus Group Interview, 05/14/09)

Although most of the participants did not see the physical size of the school as a barrier to a successful transition, Darius shared,

In high school you are just a number. There is no one who really jacks you back in line because it's just too many people to be worrying about. I'm not saying I want to go back to middle school but I am saying high school is more people to deal with so the teachers don't care as much. (Individual Interview 1, 04/09/09)

Even though the school is not too big, sometimes, the classes can be too big. Not all of them, but certain classes have too many people in them but I don't think that's a problem you know what I mean? Everybody can still learn if they want to. (Brandon, Individual Interview 1, 04/09/09)

From the responses of Brandon, Troy, and Darius, it seems that school size may not be the issue however overcrowding may be. Brian expressed how he felt about the physical school structure,

There is too many people in the halls and stuff. They don't really move so you have to walk around them. They might make you late and then you have to get a tardy and explain to the teacher why you late. (Focus Group Interview, 05/14/09)

Christopher agreed,

Yeah, it is too many people in the hallway. That's why stuff be getting started. People don't mean to bump into each other but when you in a rush trying to get to class you can't help it. (Focus Group Interview, 05/14/09)

In order for the participants to become familiar with the physical structure of the school and learn ways to navigate the campus they received assistance from their teachers and friends. These young men relied on the kindness of others to assist them in getting from place to place. Brandon said,

A lot of my cousins go to Meadowview so whenever I wasn't sure about a place or didn't know where to go they helped me out. Plus, I started trying to put numbers to buildings and then buildings to teachers. The only thing is sometimes

buildings are so far apart. Sometime you can't help but be late. (Individual Interview 1, 04/09/09)

Matthew added,

The classes are far apart. But what I tried to do was get with my teachers. I told them I was struggling a little bit with learning the school and they started giving me shortcuts and standing at the end of the hall. It probably wasn't just so I could see them, it was for everybody else too but it helped me. (Individual Interview, 1, 04/09/09)

In addition to assistance from teachers and friends during the school year, the school tour would be beneficial. School tours allow students to make connections with the buildings and draw mental pictures of the overall campus layout. John and Darius commented on how they felt they could have benefited from the school tour and open house. John commented,

I wish we could have gone on a tour of the building before open house. At open house too many people were at the school and everybody is just kinda looking at each other. I wish we could like run through the schedule like I would on a regular day but without all the people there. (Individual Interview, 1, 04/09/09)

Darius added,

The high school open house is definitely not like the one in middle school. In middle school they actually sat you down and told you how to read your schedule. Then you go from room to room following your schedule. So basically on the first day you know where to go and since you on a team you know you only got like three or four teachers you can go to and they all right there together. Not in high school. One class might be in the main building the other one in the trailer at the back of the school. (Individual Interview, 1, 04/09/09)



Nevertheless, John and Darius would have felt more confident about the structure of the school if they had the school tour and extended open house available to them.

**Hangin' with my friends in class: Missing the interdisciplinary team structure.** Another aspect to consider during the transition from middle school to high school is the academic structure of high school. A major change between the middle school structure and the high school structure is the absence of interdisciplinary teaming. Indicators connected to the academic structure include: missing the teams from middle school, and teams make school more organized.

The middle school philosophy and the concept of teaming aimed to make the students feel secure on their team with their teammates and team teachers. Built into this philosophy are team-building activities and games to help foster a sense of community while at school. Matthew struggled with this fact but he finally said,

Having teams might not be that bad because it would be more organized—but we should be allowed to talk to other students on other teams. (Individual Interview, 1, 04/09/09)

Darius agreed,

Although now when I think about teams I think they kinda babyish, but when we had teams everybody wasn't all out in the hallways and standing around. When we was on teams we changed classes at the same time and move together like a group. In high school everybody just do what they want. (Individual Interview 1, 04/09/09)

Brian commented,

Yeah, I kinda miss my old team because all of my friends were in my classes. Like if you forget your books at school you know everybody in your class because we been together since like sixth grade so you just call somebody and ask for their book. But I guess now things is better because in high school we get to talk to everybody not just people from our team. (Individual Interview 1, 04/09/09)

Other participants liked the newly found freedom or less structured academic structure of high school. Brandon stated,

High school should not be divided into teams; I like hanging out with my friends. If we were on teams, we wouldn't be able to see each other as much. (Individual Interview, 1, 04/09/09)

Troy agreed with Brandon's comments,

High school is supposed to be more independence. Why would they try to isolate us if we [are] supposed to be more mature and independent? (Individual Interview, 1, 04/09/09)

John asserted,

Teaming was good for middle school. It was a good way for us to be together and learn middle school but in high school things are different. To me, teams are sort of babyish. I just think that teams are good when you're eleven, not when you're fourteen. We too big to be running around like that with each other. That's just what I think. (Individual Interview 1, 04/09/09)

In examining the data, on the one hand, the participants missed being on their interdisciplinary teams because they felt they belonged and had a special place just for them in that middle school, classroom, and on that team. For the participants who missed teaming, the interdisciplinary team was a tool of organization. However, on the other

hand, the other participants enjoyed the social enhancement and welcomed the less restrictive environment. They enjoyed the social and physical independence of high school.

In summary, the middle school structure and high school structure differ in various ways. The major differences that students had to contend with were the changes in school size and the departmentalization of high school (or the absence of interdisciplinary teaming). The two themes (school size is not a problem but . . . and hangin' with my friends in class: missing the interdisciplinary team structure) of the structural aspect focused on the physical and academic structure of high school.

### **Academic Factors**

In addition to the structural aspect, the transition literature also references the academic aspect of the transition from middle school to high school. Curricular concerns are deemed as factors to a successful transition. Curricular concerns include many facets: academic rigor, time management, curriculum misalignment, attendance, and grades. This study focused on academic rigor and time management. Academic rigor (assignments, assessments, instruction) has a direct influence on student achievement (Alspaugh, 1998). In addition to academic rigor, time management also is considered to be a factor of successful high school transition. The transition literature presupposes that students who are transitioning from middle school to high school do not possess the level of skills to effectively overcome these academic difficulties. Two academic themes emerged: (a) "they think we can't do the work": teacher expectations, and (b) "this is harder than I thought it would be": academic expectations and academic assistance.

**“They think we can’t do the work”:** **Teacher expectations.** Another element of middle school to high school transition is teacher expectations. From the individual focus group interviews, three indicators emerged: they think we’re going to make low grades, expectations are unrealistic, and when I raise my hand she ignores me. Like many of the other subtopics, all of the participants did not feel the same way about the expectations of their teachers. In their discussions, the young men talked about how they were able to know or understand their teachers’ expectations. In addition the young men offered examples of what it looked like when the teacher thought they did not know what they were doing academically; one participant (Brian) gives an example of a teacher’s unrealistic expectation.

Troy said,

I know what my teachers expect of me. Most of the time they give out these papers that say exactly what we got to do for the whole semester. It always be too much but we do know what it is. (Individual Interview, 1, 04/09/09)

Brandon added,

I like knowing what the teacher expect of me. If I know what they expect then I can do it and make good grades. That’ll surprise her. You know me getting real good grades. If you listen to what they say most of the time you can figure out what they want you to do. Even if they don’t tell you exactly. (Individual Interview, 2, 04/30/09)

Unlike Brandon and Troy, Christopher had a different outlook on the expectations of his teachers. He said,

Knowing what teachers expect of me don't benefit me none because I don't care. I really just come to school to get my grades. They [teachers] don't got nothing to do with my life, well in a way they do because they are the ones giving the grades. But I really don't care what they think . . . They don't care what I think. They walk right past me when I have my hand raised to answer a question, but call on me when I don't have it up. (Focus Group Interview, 05/14/09)

Brian added,

Sometimes the teachers expect you to do stuff you don't know how to do. Like my first day in Spanish class. My teacher came in and she was already talking Spanish and looking at me like I understood her. And she was waiting for me to answer her in Spanish. It was like the first day. (Individual Interview 2, 04/30/09)

Brian is speaking to what he feels is an unrealistic expectation.

Matthew commented,

We know or at least I know they supposed to expect the same thing out of everybody but they don't. They know some of the students can do the work and they think some of the others can't. I am just trying to say they know when they give out the assignment who gonna do good or who ain't. It don't be no surprise to them. Luckily, I think I'm one of the ones they know will do my work and get a good grade. (Individual Interview, 2 04/30/09)

Sometimes teachers expect us to do good and sometimes they expect us to do bad. It's all about which ones you get. Like for instance my gym teacher wants us all to do good but he know that some of us are more athletic so he just let us do our best. But, my earth science teacher is another story. She don't believe in that. She look at you and you can tell by the way she looking she think you don't know what you doing. (Darius, Focus Group Interview, 05/14/09)

Christopher chimed in,

Like I said, the teachers' expectations really don't matter much to me, but I think it's good to know what they think about you and expect you to do. Most of the

time I feel the same way about them and I don't expect much from them either. So, you know it ain't no big thing. (Focus Group Interview, 05/14/09)

Overall, being aware of the teacher's expectations whether their expectations were negative or positive was helpful for the participants; it is important to note Christopher who felt what teachers expected had no bearing on his transition to high school.

**“This is harder than I thought it would be”: Rigor of high school classes.**

Two elements comprise the academic theme: academic expectations of high school and academic assistance. The academic expectations of high school include the course/class rigor, amount of assignments, and time management. Indicators of academic assistance included assistance from teachers and support from tutors.

One of the major factors that the boys continued to refer to is the rigor of the courses. Many of them expressed how they felt the assignments and assessments were too difficult for them. For example Marcus said,

I can't really say that my middle school teachers didn't prepare me for high school. I guess it's kinda my fault for not remembering the stuff. It's not like I had never seen the work before. I just couldn't remember how to do it. Well, at least in math. In English, man they try to kill us. All that grammar and stuff, I really don't remember that from middle school. The work was real hard. (Individual Interview 2, 04/30/09)

Troy added,

I think the classes are hard because I keep telling my teachers I can't take notes and comprehend at the same time. I don't want no extra attention because it is a big class. I just need help even if it's after school or during one of my elective classes. (Individual Interview, 1, 04/09/09)

Darius said,

Everybody always said that high school was gonna be harder than middle school. I mean it supposed to be. I just didn't know how hard. And I guess it's so much harder cause you don't have that much help from the teachers like you do in middle school. They just expect you to do it all on your own. That's kinda crazy, but we all do it. (Individual Interview, 2 04/30/09)

One of the participants, when he was explaining his feelings about the rigor of his classes and assignments became very upset. His emotions were evident in his response.

I can't do it, like if they didn't have the little testing things [week by week assessments] I don't even think I'd be passing the class. To me, as long as I pass my class and get through school and graduate that's all I want. I don't care if I barely make it. I do just enough to get a C. (Christopher, Focus Group Interview, 05/14/09)

Matthew wanted to share one of his experiences in his English class.

The amount of work is too much. Not only is it too much but it is too hard for me to understand. English is the hardest. I'm used to talking and using words in front of people. I know sometimes I don't speak proper English, but that don't mean I'm stupid. Everybody ain't perfect. I know some of the teachers here that don't talk proper English. (Individual Interview, 1, 04/09/09)

In addition to the difficulty, the boys also commented on the amount of work that was given to them. From the conversations with the participants it was obvious that the work load from middle school to high school had increased drastically. Darius said,

They not like middle school teachers, high school teachers expect you to get a lot done and they do not expect to have to teach you something you should have learned in middle school. So what they do is give you work after work and eventually, you might get a break but the cycle is usually classwork, homework, project. (Individual Interview, 1, 04/09/09)

Christopher said,

I'm telling you it's off the chain. Every time I look around it's more craziness. Why do we have so much work? We can barely get the first thing down and here come a test. Then, they hurry up and try to teach something else and then it's a test or a worksheet or something like that. They don't even get the first thing graded before they give us something else to do. It's crazy. (Individual Interview 1, 04/09/09)

In addition, Marcus communicated,

Some of the work is impossible. They give you so much work it is basically impossible to pass. I got a C right now, but it is hard. By the time you look at one sheet and put your name on it, you got another one coming right back at you.

Repeatedly in the individual interviews and in the focus group interview the comments about the level and amount of work were very similar. The boys felt overwhelmed with work. They felt as if the work was continuous and in many cases meaningless. In fact, one of the participants talked about how he really didn't know what the assignment was for or how the assignments related to what he was studying.

Like for instance in English, we talk about so many different things you get confused about which worksheet go with what topic. (John, Individual Interview, 1, 04/09/09)

Another element of middle school to high school transition is time management skills. Time management skills are critical for students in general. These skills are particularly critical when students are moving from an interdisciplinary team, to a structure where teachers may not talk and share what is going on in their classes at all. In other words, in middle school students may not have had an English test and a math test



on the same day. However in high school they may have an English, math, and history test all on the same day. It is very difficult to adapt to this type of change overnight.

Darius said,

Well, time management has really been a problem for me, especially now because what I do is wait until the last minute to finish something which is more than likely why I get not so good grades on tests and quizzes. Time management has been a problem but eventually I'm going to write down what I'm going to do and when I'm going to do it. I realize time management is important. I know I have to do it in order to get good grades. (Individual Interview, 1, 04/09/09)

Like Darius, Brandon commented on the fact that he knew time management was important, it was just actually figuring out how to do it. Brandon said,

I try to do one thing at a time. It seems like everything starts piling up all at once. By the time you look around, you got about five or six assignments due at one time. That's hard to keep up with. (Individual Interview, 1, 04/09/09)

Christopher stated,

I thought I was doing pretty good with time management until I realized I was still not getting work done. I just forgot about it. I was keeping it all in my head and that didn't work. So, I started writing it down but then couldn't find the paper I wrote it on when I get home. So basically, that was a waste of time. (Individual Interview 2, 04/30/09)

The participants felt they received assistance with the academic rigor of high school, amount of assignments, and time management. The assistance was in the form of teachers and tutors. Darius said,

The teacher helped me a lot when I was just starting here cause you know, it's my first year and everything so they tried to work with me you know. They gave me

some extensions on my papers things like that. They tried to get me accustomed to high school. I remember they kept saying this is how the system works. (Individual Interview, 2, 04/30/09)

Brian stated,

I stayed after school to get some help with my teachers. Sometimes they different when it's just you and them after school. They give you time to read the answer the questions and stuff without going all fast. I learn way more after school than I do during the day. (Individual Interview, 2 04/30/09)

Because much of the work was considered difficult, a few of the participants said that tutors were very helpful and instrumental in their transition success. In this particular school system, college/university students were asked to come into the schools to tutor in various subjects. Tutoring is optional (unless on one of the athletic teams). Many students do not take full advantage of this opportunity. However, Brandon mentions,

My algebra class is pretty hard. I talked to my teachers and she let one of the tutors work with me. I was glad she did that because I just wasn't getting it in class from my teacher. The tutor took her time and worked with me one on one. It took me a minute but I finally did get it. (Individual Interview, 2, 04/30/09)

Christopher added,

I wish I could work with the tutor everyday instead of my teachers. My tutor know what he talking about. Whenever I work a problem the way he show me I always get it right. Whenever I try to work it the way she show me I don't get it. My tutor told me I know what I'm doing. (Individual Interview 2, 04/30/09)

Matthew noted,

Although I make pretty good grades in class, I like working with the tutors that come from the colleges. They show us different ways of working the problems. We always learn one way to do stuff in class but if you work with the tutors they show about three different ways to do one problem. (Individual Interview 2, 04/30/09)

In summary, teachers' expectations, academic expectations, and academic assistance are three important facets of the academic aspect which led to the two emergent themes: (a) teachers think we can't do the work, and (b) this is harder than I thought it would be.

### **Personal Factors**

The personal aspect in this study is most intriguing. I say this because this is a large hole to fill in most of the transition literature. I venture to say that structural and academic factors have been examined from many different angles. They have been explored through the lenses of social workers, district level personnel, principals, and even teachers. Not to say that the personal aspect has not been explored at all, however there is so much more and so many more ways we can look into this part of the transition puzzle.

Within the personal aspect of this study influential social connections were significant during the transition from middle school to high school. These social connections can be viewed via the personal relationships students pursued. These personal relationships can be further defined as peer and adult relationships: relationships with friends, relationships with teachers, relationships with family/community leaders.

During the transition period, relationships with friends, relationships with teachers, and relationships with parents/guardians and community members are

important. In addition to the interpersonal relationships, sociopsychological issues also play a critical role. Four major themes from the personal aspect of middle school to high school transition emerged: (a) “my friends save me”: camaraderie of the “brothers” at school, (b) teachers: friend or foe, (c) “you’re not there to take up space”: great expectations of parents and community, and (d) plight of the Black male.

**“My friends save me”: Camaraderie of the “brothers” at school.** During the transition to high school from middle school interpersonal relationships change. Although this is still a rather social time for students, these relationships take on different characteristics and may hold very different meanings than they did previously. Relationships with friends are crucial during the middle school to high school transition period. Indicators of this category included: my friends are why I come to school, my friends help me, and we are like brothers.

Darius commented,

If my friends were not at school with me I don’t know what I would do. Yeah, sometimes they do get me into trouble but it’s never anything so bad I can’t handle. They make me want to come to school. (Individual Interview, 2, 04/30/09)

Brian echoed,

Yeah, I could come to school without my friends but I can’t say that I would enjoy myself. With everything you got to do at school and all the crap you got to put up with the least they can do is let you talk to your friends. That always make me feel better. Friends always know how to cheer you up when you having a bad day. (Individual Interview, 2, 04/30/09)

When the boys were talking, many of them had a mentality or a feeling of “my friends save me.” They spoke about their friends as if they were safety nets or safe posts. In other words, whenever their friends were around they felt comfortable, relaxed, and free to try anything, take risks. Matthew said,

When your friends around, it’s almost like your brothers or your family is with you. You know that they are going to help you and have your back regardless. That’s what I like about having my friends around because you never know what’s going to happen and who you might need help from. Some of my boys, we even help each other with our work. (Individual Interview, 2, 04/30/09)

This statement from Matthew was interesting because not only does he depend on his friends for social (moral) support, he took it a step further to say he and his group depend on each other for academic support. These friendships are not just for social, conversational sake these friendships have a specific function. These friendships offer a level of support that adults may not be able to offer. In the focus group interview John said,

It’s always better to have somebody who is like you and going through the same stuff at the same time at the same place. You can talk to them and they understand you exactly. They don’t have to ask you all these stupid questions and you don’t have to explain nothing because they already know exactly what you going through. (Focus Interview, 05/14/09)

Darius jumped in and said,

Yeah, all of us (the males in the group) know what we go through here at this school. We know how some teachers treat us because we black—sometimes it get on my nerves but we don’t say nothing unless they make us really mad. You know, it’s real funny that when we get together in the hall to talk it’s a problem. They come yellin’ break it up but other people get to stand around and talk about

what's up with them. We notice it, we just don't say nothing, most of the time (smiling). (Focus Group Interview, 05/14/09)

The friendships and the role of friends during this period is a major part of the transition to high school. When they talked about the connections and friendship networks they had in middle school many of the participants said that a number of their friends came with them from middle school to high school but they commented on how when they moved to high school, even those students whom they were friends with in middle school (who also attends the same high school) they are not really friends with them anymore.

Marcus gave us an example from one of his situations,

Me and Shawn were best friends in middle school. We had all the same classes and we rode the same bus. When we started school here at Meadowview things started to change. We talked a lot the first week but we started hangin' out with different people. He started hangin' with some dudes from his classes and I started hangin' out more with my boys I play ball with at the rec. It wasn't that we didn't like each other it was just that we made new friends. (Focus Group Interview, 05/014/09)

Yeah that happened to me too with one of my boys. That's the way it is in high school. You keep some old friends and you meet some new ones. That's a good thing. You always gonna meet new people. I'm not saying you gonna be tight friends with all of them. (Brian, Focus Group Interview, 05/14/09)

Participants agreed that they had had a similar situation to occur at some point during the school year. Simply put, during this time the construct of friendships and social networks is very important. Moreover, not only are the old friendships important but the newly formed networks are important as well.

**Teachers: Friend or foe?** In addition to peer relationships, adult relationships are important to the transition to high school too. The natures of adolescents' relationships with adults change during this transition period as well. As mentioned earlier in Chapter II, during this period adolescents are striving for autonomy yet wanting approval from the adults whom they respect. In the individual and focus group interviews the participants talked about the relationship(s) between a teacher and the student, more specifically their personal relationships with their teachers and dual roles teachers may possess.

In one of the individual interviews, Brandon exclaimed:

Of course I want to be important to my teachers. I want my teachers to know more about me than my grades. That gives a better relationship between me and my teachers. They can know my background and what I want to achieve in life. (Individual Interview, 2, 04/30/09)

Brian added,

I want my teachers to know more about me than my grades. I don't really need them to be too much in my personal business but they can know what I like to do for fun. They might like some of the same stuff I do. I doubt it, but they might. (Individual Interview, 1 04/09/09)

Matthew stated,

If you have a relationship with your teachers they might understand you better when you are trying to explain to them something is going on. Like if you don't do your homework one night, if you usually do your work and they know you do, sometimes they cut you some slack. (Individual Interview, 1 04/09/09)

While some of the participants agreed that they would like their teachers to know more about them than their grades some participants disagreed. Christopher said,

No, I don't want them to know anymore about me than they already know. They know about my grades and about my friends or who I hang around. That's all they need to know. The more they know the worst it'll be. (Individual Interview, 2, 04/30/09)

Dovetailing to this discussion, they talked about the importance of having a good relationship with teachers. More specifically, they discussed whether or not the relationships that students have with their teachers have any effect on their grades.

Brandon said,

Having a good relationship with your teachers effect your grades cause if you have a bad relationship between you and your teachers that's gonna make it seem like you don't care and don't want to do the work. I say you will achieve more in class if you have a good relationship with the teacher. (Individual Interview, 2, 04/30/09)

Troy agreed,

I think having a good relationship with your teachers is important because if a student is genuinely trying hard and they don't understand it but they are putting forth the effort and it's obvious they are, they might give them a D. (Individual Interview, 2, 04/30/09)

During the interview with John, he had a different take on the matter of teacher/student relationships. He said,

. . . sometimes you be going through stuff at home and if you have a good relationship with your teachers they will understand and you won't get sent to the office-making everything even worse. (Individual Interview, 2, 04/30/09)



While they were discussing the importance of the relationships with teachers, they also began to talk about how their teachers expressed how they felt about them. This topic was first introduced when they discussed teacher expectations. Brian said,

The best way for my teachers to show me how they feel about me is to show me respect, don't yell at or fuss at me. Talk to me like I am a person. Treat me like they treat other students in the class. If they smile at me, I'll smile back. But when they can't stand me then I can't stand them either. (Individual Interview, 2, 04/30/09)

Troy added,

Teachers can show me they care about me by explaining the work more clearly. Showing extra care and answering my questions makes me think they want me to learn. When they really want me to get it they try to see what my problem really is, where I keep messing up. Not only that, sometimes they (teachers) might talk to me about different things other than class stuff. (Individual Interview, 2, 04/30/09)

The participants expressed the importance of having a positive relationship with teachers and agreed with Brian's and Troy's positive expressions of teacher feelings. From the conversations with the participants, relationships that can be formed between teachers and students can have a large effect not only on grades but also on the student's overall transition to high school. The participants felt strongly that how they (and other students) connected to the teacher made a difference in how they felt about school and the transition.

**“You're not there to take up space”:** Great expectations of parents and community. In addition to relationships with friends and relationships with teachers, relationships with family and community members are significant during the transition

period as well. Many of the participants conversed about how members of their families, community, and spiritual organizations let them know what they expected of them in school and in life in general. Three indicators that emphasize this emerged from the interviews: my parents don't play about grades, my parents just tell me what they expect, and my pastor is always offering to help me.

Darius commented,

When I first started high school everybody in my family told me, let us know if you need some help. Even the people from church was like, call us if you need some help. Well, one day I made a not so good grade in English class. My mom told my pastor and he stopped me after church that Sunday and said we told you to call on one of us if you needed help. I really didn't realize that everyone was that interested. (Focus Group Interview, 05/14/09)

John interjected,

My pastor did the same thing to me once. At first I was mad because I really didn't want the whole church to know what was going on in my personal business but I know now that he was just trying to help me. (Focus Group Interview, 05/14/09)

As their discussion continued, the participants reported how they knew the expectations of their families and community members. Marcus said,

My parents just tell me point blank. We expect you to go to school everyday and do your work. You not there just to take up space. You there to learn. We want you to give it your best. That's basically the drill. I believe it but sometimes it's hard to do everything your parents expect you to. (Focus Group Interview, 05/14/09)

Matthew agreed saying,

My parents don't play around. When they talk to us about school they don't ever be joking. Even if a C is the best you could do my parents be like no—a C is like a F to us. They strict about them grades. I guess that's why I do try hard because I know what my parents gonna be like if my grades are jacked. (Focus Group Interview, 05/14/09)

For the most part, it seems as if parents/guardians were very explicit about what they wanted and expected their students to do in school. However, there was one exception, John. John felt that his grandmother never really explicitly told him what she expected but he just knew she wanted him to do well.

My grandma never tells me what she expect of me. When I have bad grades she don't really say nothing and when I have pretty good grades she don't say nothing. Either way she really don't make a big deal. I'm not saying she don't care, I'm just saying she don't really say nothing to me about it. (Focus Group Interview, 05/14/09)

Not only do participants need to know expectations of the teachers and expectations of parents/family, community members, but they also need to know their expectations of themselves. According to Matthew,

It's good to know what your family and everybody want you to do or expect you to do but like the final thing is what you want to do like sometimes some of the teachers expect me to do good and I do because I want to. But sometimes the teacher don't expect me to do good and I do good anyway because I wanted to. So knowing what everybody want you to do kinda do matter. (Individual Interview 2, 04/30/09)

In other words, Matthew was saying that knowing what teachers, parents/family members, and community members expect of you is helpful however knowing your

expectations of yourself is even more pertinent because sometimes others' expectations may not be positive or appropriate.

As told by the young men, expectations of their families and communities were very high. All of the participants felt as if their families and community members wanted them to succeed.

**Plight of the young Black male: The saga continues.** Since adolescence is a time of identity construction, the notion of self identity and can be difficult. During the middle school to high school transition, there are other sociopsychological issues taking place within the context of this transition. sociopsychological issues that surfaced from this study included: (a) Black male identity, (b) society's views of Black males, (c) gender differences, and (d) racial/ethnic differences.

As each participant began to discuss how he felt about himself, more specifically, who he felt he was in terms of self identity the researcher began to notice some of them slouch down in their seats, one of them rubbed his head, and a few shifted from one side to the other while stretching. Darius said,

I think of myself as a pretty good student. Am I the smartest person, probably not but I know I ain't the dumbest either. I expect to be somebody when I leave here. I do want to go to college. I'm not sure what I want to do yet but I know I'm not gonna be locked up in jail somewhere. (Focus Group Interview, 05/14/09)

Christopher responded,

First off, you don't have to be like this genius to be smart. Just because you don't make real good grades don't mean you don't have high expectations for yourself. You know, I expect to graduate from here and get a job and I think that's good. People kill me thinking you gotta go to college and do all that. I know plenty of

people that do yard work like they got they own yard business that didn't go to college. They make plenty of paper. (Focus Group Interview, 05/14/09)

Christopher makes an important point, which is everyone's expectations are not the same. Each person will think about this concept in a different way. With this in mind, the boys began to think about themselves and what their self expectations might be. Brandon remarked,

Personally, I think my expectations for myself are kinda the same that my families' are. They want me to do good in school and I want to do good in school. The thing is, mostly the teachers do want me to good but sometimes I think, well I know one of my teachers think I can't do stuff as good as some of the other people in the class. The crazy part is I know I might not do stuff as good as some of the people in the class, but it's not because I'm black, it's because I'm just not that good at that. I'm not really saying that the teacher don't like black people, I'm just trying to say he think white people do stuff better. (Focus Group Interview, 05/14/09)

One of the participants remarked that what others expect of them does not have an effect on what they expect of themselves. Christopher wanted to make perfectly clear to the group that while others may not have an effect on their self expectations, they do have an influence on the school and those who work in the school. From his dialogue came a message of pre-destined failure. Christopher said fervently,

... in a way, most of the world already think we gonna fail. I mean look, they making more prisons than they are schools so, if they take all the black generation away, how are we gonna make more black kids and stuff if they keep locking black people up? They already got more black kids in prison as it is. What I'm sayin' is even though we have all these expectations for ourselves they don't have none [for us] or if they do they bad ones. (Focus Group Interview, 05/14/09)

The essence of Christopher's sentiment echoes what Gause (2008) alludes to when he talks about the schools being microcosms or mini reflections of the mainstream society. Christopher and others in the group felt that the way society feels about African American males (building more jails than schools for them) crosses over into how adults in the school (teachers) feel about African American male students.

As the interviews continued, the boys kept referring to being "marked." After the second time one of them mentioned being marked I asked what that meant. Marcus said,

You know marked means you already starting off on the wrong foot. That mean you got one black mark already. (Focus Group Interview, 05/14/09)

Christopher chimed in and said,

For one, white people they already got black people marked, especially us (African American males) when we first come into the world. White kids ain't like that. Most, I say 85% of white kids ain't marked like that. Us black people, 100% black they gotta get us off the streets and put is in jails, that's what they say. They take away people manhood, um, like my brother. He locked up now, he been locked up for a year. You get in trouble the first time and they try to throw the book at you. That's it. Every black kid is marked when he born. (Focus Group Interview, 05/14/09)

Their discussion revealed that the racial tensions that many claim are dead and gone are alive and spreading.

As the participants talked about self-awareness, simultaneously they discussed self identity. As their conversations continued their struggle in constructing the identity of a student, a male student, an African American male student was evident within their language. Christopher said,

It's crazy out here man. We got so much to deal with. And no I don't think white people deal with all this stupid stuff we do. It ain't right. Every time something jump off out here they look at one of us like we just had to have something to do with it. Yeah, sometimes we do but sometimes we don't but catch the blame anyway. (Focus Group Interview, 05/14/09)

Troy agreed,

It's like Christopher said before we already got like one black mark because we black and now we got to really do good so people can see that oh we can be good at stuff too, not just ball. Like if we had to put us in order I'd say it's the white boys, then the white girls, the Hispanic girls, then the black girls, the Hispanic boys, then us. I'm telling you some of them don't think we can do nothing especially if we not in the honors classes and ain't but like three or four black people in there and they girls. (Focus Group Interview, 05/14/09)

Although many of the participants agreed with Christopher and Troy, Marcus made a point that was equally as important as the others, he said,

I don't think, well for most of them, I don't think the teachers feel like that on purpose, like I think that's just the way the school is because the teachers be nice and all, I guess they just be used to us and the Hispanics getting in trouble and stuff like that. (Focus Group Interview, 05/14/09)

Here Marcus was not fully blaming the teachers for some of the issues but also pointing out that there is a larger problem. In other words, it's just not right here in this class or here at Meadowview, this is a larger scale problem. Nevertheless, the participants communicated that knowing who they were and what they could do had a positive effect on them and helped them overcome the barriers so that a successful transition to high school was the outcome.

### **Summary Comparison of the Quantitative and Qualitative Data**

A mixed methods design was selected for this study in order for the transition of African American males from middle school to high school to be examined as comprehensively as possible. According to Creswell (2005), “one would engage in a mixed methods study when you want to follow up a quantitative study with a qualitative one to obtain more detailed specific information than can be gained from the results of statistical tests” (p . 510). As a result of analyzing both sets of data, parallels between the data sets were observed. While examining the quantitative and qualitative data separately is part of this particular mixed methods design, synthesis of the two data types is pertinent as well.

Quantitatively, the questionnaire items regarding school size and physical school structure were reflective of the qualitative data revealed by the participants. Almost 87% of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the item, “The size of my school makes me uncomfortable.” In addition, all of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the item “I feel lost in my high school because of its size.” Ninety-three percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the item, “The size of my school does not bother me.” These items parallel with the qualitative data in that although the participants pointed out their concerns with overcrowding, the young men reported they felt school size was not an issue for them during their transitions to high school. They felt the physical structure of the school was satisfactory; it was the concentration of students in one place at one time they found troubling.



The quantitative and qualitative findings for the academic structure of high school are different. Sixty-seven percent of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the item, “I miss the teams we had in middle school.” While well over half of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, only three of the eight participants revealed they missed teaming during the qualitative portion of the study. Additionally, 60% of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the item, “I think I would be more comfortable if my high school had teams like we did in middle school.” Similarly, 73% of participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the item, “I like not being on a team for my classes.” These items parallel the qualitative findings in that five out of the eight participants articulated the importance of not incorporating the team philosophy into the high school structure. These five participants indicated they enjoyed the less structured approach to the high school environment (in regards to teaming) because it allows for more social opportunities with a greater variety of peers.

Overall the quantitative and qualitative data were aligned for the components of the academic aspect. Eighty percent of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the item, “My teachers expect me to do well in my classes.” Comparatively, the qualitative data revealed that although three young men explicitly stated that some of their teachers did not expect them to do well in their classes, the majority of participants felt their teachers expected them to do well in their classes. In addition to the academic subscale items regarding teacher expectations, 53% of the participants agreed or agreed strongly with the item, “My classes are harder than I expected.” In connection with this item, 87% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the item, “My classes require me to do

a lot more work.” The quantitative results paralleled the qualitative findings for the academic aspect in that the young men shared specific examples from their transition experiences. They shared narratives about the rigor of their classes and classwork; furthermore, the young men discussed the amount of work they were given and the issues they uncovered when coping with time management concerns.

The personal aspect was separated into categories: (a) relationships with friends, (b) relationships with teachers, (c) relationships with family/community members, and (d) sociopsychological issues.

For the most part, the quantitative and qualitative data correlated to one another. The questionnaire items regarding the relationships with the participants’ friends were highly correlated to the qualitative data. Almost 87% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the item, “Many of my friends go to my school.” In addition, 80% of the young men agreed or strongly agreed with the item, “I feel more comfortable because my friends are with me at school.” Lastly, nearly 67% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the item, “It is important to me to be with my friends in school.” Qualitatively, all of the participants indicated they felt better because their friends were with them at school. In addition, participants found that having their friends with them at school was pleasurable, but their friends were also useful because they helped with classwork and other assignments. The participants also mentioned the sharing of experiences and how having their friends at their school made a difference for them because they knew someone had some idea of what they were going through at Meadowview High and in society.

Next, the questionnaire items concerning relationships with family/community members were distinctive. Overall, the quantitative and qualitative findings were aligned with one exception. Eighty-seven percent of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the item, “My family/community members expect me to get good grades.” In addition, over 93% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the item, “I want to do good in school to make my community proud.” According to the participants, the qualitative data reflects the same idea that the young men would like to succeed in school so that their families and community would be proud of them. A few of the participants made comments about the expectations of their parents and community members (for example, pastors). Their parents and community members expected them to be successful in school and do those things that will increase their chances of being successful in life.

One exception to the quantitative and qualitative data alignment is the questionnaire item, “My family/community does not care about how well I do in school.” Seventy-three percent of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with that item. The qualitative data is in direct opposition to the overall response to this questionnaire item. The young men articulated how their families and community actively expressed they cared about how well they did in school. Individual participants stated specifically that their parents and community members told them their expectations and expressed if they needed help to inform them. Nevertheless, according to the young men, the expectation of the participants’ families/community was that they be successful.

Finally, there was not an item on the questionnaire that addressed the next portion of the personal aspect however this element was brought forth by the analysis of the qualitative data. The sociopsychological concern is another element of the personal aspect. The participants spoke extensively indirectly and directly about racial/ethnic and gender issues they felt affected them on a regular basis at school. The boys mentioned how on many occasions there would be several students gathered in a group in the hallway talking and teachers and administrators would walk by or stand near the classroom doors and not disperse the group or even mention to the group that they needed to go to class; however, when the participants (or other groups of African American males) stood in a group in the hallway to talk, the teachers and administrators would quickly rush to get to where the group of African American males were standing and force them to class with vigorous words. To the participants this was a problem on two levels. First, this was a racial/ethnic issue in that White, Asian, and Hispanic groups were permitted to be together and socialize in the hallways. Second, this was a gender issue because African American girls are able to socialize together as well, but only to a certain degree. The participants pointed out that once the African American girls got together the teachers and administrators “kept their eyes on them,” just in case the girls started trouble.

According to the independent *t*-tests, there were four items where there were significant differences in the manner in which the two age groups (16-year-olds and the 14-year-olds) responded. These items included: (a) “My teachers do not expect me to do well in my classes,” (b) “The school should not require students to take certain classes,”

(c) “I am important to my teachers,” and (d) “My family/community does not care about how well I do in school.”

According to the qualitative data, Darius and Troy were the two 16 year olds in the study. Their conversations about teacher expectations were similar to those conversations with the 14-year-old participants. Darius and Troy did not discuss teacher expectations distinctly different than the younger participants in the study. However, there was a commonality between the quantitative and qualitative data regarding item b. Troy more so than Darius had a distinctly different outlook on the relevance of certain classes (related to the questionnaire item, “The school should not require students to take certain classes”). According to Troy, he did not appreciate the fact that he had to take courses that he felt had no bearing or relevance to what he wanted to do in the future. As a result of having a part time job already, Troy was ready to focus his talents on his future occupation.

Qualitatively, there was a difference between the manner in which Troy and Darius spoke about their teachers and how they felt about their relationships with their teachers (“I am important to my teachers”). Darius for the most part did not care to cultivate a positive relationship with his teachers. He felt his job was to come to school and learn and he could do that whether he had a positive relationship with the teacher or not. Troy on the other hand, thought it was very important to have a positive relationship with his teachers. He even mentioned examples of why he thought the relationships were important. In relation to the other participants in the study, qualitatively Darius paralleled with the quantitative data while Troy did not.

Troy and Darius both indicated similar data to the remaining participants in the study. During the interviews all of the participants reported their families/community cared about how well they performed in school. For this questionnaire item (“My family/community does not care about how well I do in school”), the qualitative data is in direct contrast to the quantitative data.

### **Summary**

This chapter discussed analyses of quantitative (descriptive and inferential statistics) data from the questionnaire. Next, the findings of the qualitative data, individual and focus group interviews were presented through a description of the emergent themes. Last, comparisons of the quantitative and qualitative data were summarized.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSION**

This study maintains the assertion there are three main factors affecting the transition of African American males from middle school to high school: (a) structural factors, (b) academic factors, and (c) personal factors. The participants in this study shared perceptions of their individual transition experiences. Each participant spoke to each category (structural, academic, and personal) of factors affecting a successful transition to high school. In addition, the participants shared their perspectives on the structural, academic, and personal facilitators that helped them negotiate the transition to high school successfully.

In this chapter, findings from analysis of the data are aligned with the research questions, in correspondence with the research literature. In addition, a discussion of implications for teacher educators, district level and site based school administrators, and classroom teachers is provided. In the final segment, suggestions and recommendations for future research are offered.

#### **Summary of Research Questions**

*What do ninth-grade African American males describe as structural, academic, and personal barriers related to their transition?*

The participants in this study did not think there were major structural barriers to a successful middle school to high school transition. Although the participants agreed

that initially when they (and other students) moved to high school the size of the building and its newness was intimidating, as time passed, students became more comfortable and familiar with the size therefore the structure of the school was not such an issue anymore. In fact, the participants stated the problems with the school building structure ended within days of the start of school, which is the reason individually and collectively they did not consider the physical structure of Meadowview a barrier to a successful high school transition. While school size may not have been a barrier, it was revealed that overcrowding was an issue for these participants. In addition to physical school size, the participants also offered an explanation for why they thought the teaming process was important (for organizational purposes) in middle school and conversely why in high school the teaming concept may not be as necessary. Some participants initially stated they missed the middle school teams but others admitted they preferred the manner in which high school classes were arranged. They enjoyed the freedom that departmentalization offered. As a result of the short-lived experiences of unfamiliarity (school building) and adjustment (departmentalization), the physical structure and the academic structure (absence of teaming, move to departmentalization) of the high school were not considered major barriers to a successful middle school to high school transition for these participants.

The idea of structural factors not being a major barrier to a successful middle school to high school transition is inconsistent with the research literature on the topic. According to the research literature, the physical change of the school structure is extremely difficult for adolescents as they move from middle school to high school



(Brenner & Graham, 2009; Cushman, 2006; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Mizelle 2005). The responsibility of navigating through this new environment may be a cause of stress and uneasiness for the students (Lindsay, 1997; Chapman & Sawyer, 2001). Additionally, students tend to feel isolated and lonely in their new high schools as a result of the school size (Chapman & Sawyer, 2001). “The change can overwhelm the coping skills of some students, lower self esteem, and decrease motivation to learn. For some students, the singular and unsettling act of changing from one school in eighth grade to a new school in high school may be a precipitating factor in dropping out” (Letrello & Miles, 2003, p. 213).

For the participants in this study the change in structure from middle school to high school was not a barrier to their transitions. However, it is important to note that while the participants came to the conclusion that for their individual transition experiences the structure of high school did not present a roadblock each participant recognized and identified the disorientation he felt when he arrived on Meadowview’s campus for the first time. The researcher’s conclusion is that the change in school structure presented a barrier to high school transition for these participants (as the research literature posits), however a transition facilitator, rather it was a teacher or friend, helped to reduce the anxiety and apprehension caused by the change in school size, location of classes, and the new academic structure, thus assisting them in overcoming the structural transition barriers.

In this study, the participants felt there were specific academic barriers to a successful middle school to high school transition. The academic barriers included (a)

change in teacher expectations and (b) rigor of academic assignments and coursework. Although seven out of eight of the participants knew that the level of coursework in high school would be different and more difficult than middle school coursework, none of them expected the changes in teacher expectations and the level of academic rigor they received at Meadowview High School. Five out of eight participants felt their middle school classes/classwork did not do an adequate job in preparing them for what they faced in high school. The high school teachers expected the participants (and other students) to be relatively intrinsically motivated and organized. In addition, the participants expressed that it was an expectation that they possess time management skills. The participants recalled receiving assignment after assignment with no way of “really” keeping track of the work. Time management, according to the participants, was not a skill that they learned in middle school because of the teaming process. In middle school, the participants were only responsible for one (at the most two) major assignment, project, or test at a time; whereas, in high school, major projects and tests are due more frequently and simultaneously.

The participants reflected on the first semester. They felt time management was a major barrier to a successful middle school to high school transition; they noted if students do not get a handle on their workload immediately and make a schedule to organize and prioritize assignments they will fall farther behind and once students get too far behind in their work, it is almost impossible to regain ground in the classes. The participants also reflected on the change in teacher expectations and the academic rigor. They stated that while there were a few assignments that required group work, for the

most part the teacher expected them to do more of the work individually. For these participants, working individually meant more accountability and more distress.

The perceptions of the participants are in agreement with the research literature. The academic expectations of high school teachers are different from those of middle school teachers (Mizelle 2005; Morgan & Hertzog, 2001). High school teachers expect their students to think independently and attack assignments using higher level thinking skills, as well as to be an astute problem-solver (Morgan & Hertzog, 2001). This assertion is not to say that middle school teachers do not have high expectations for their students, however they take a different approach to fostering the needed academic skills. When students arrive at high school many of them are not accustomed to the level of independent work or the level of rigorous assignments (Jarvis, 1999, Letrello & Miles, 2003; Mizelle, 2005). The participants in this study agreed with the research literature. They found the academic expectations of teachers and the rigor of classes and coursework to be a major barrier to a successful high school transition. The researcher concludes that the change in teacher expectations and academic rigor were major barriers to a successful high school transition for these participants. Similar to the structural aspect, transition facilitators were employed to assist the participants in surmounting the academic barriers.

The participants in this study described several personal barriers to a successful high school transition. According to the participants, the personal barriers affecting their transitions to high school were interpersonal relationships and coping with the racial and gender dilemmas within the context of school.

Interpersonal relationships affecting the high school transition for these participants were divided into two categories (a) relationships with peers and (b) relationships with adults. The relationships with peers were important to seven out of eight of the participants. The participants felt that having their friends at school with them had a large impact on their lives at school. Their friends helped them with academics and they partook in the shared experience of being African American and male at Meadowview High School. There were instances and events that the participants stated they could only share with their friends because they were the only people who would understand the situations they have gone through on a daily basis. The friendships the participants have fostered were both old friendships that have carried over from middle school newly developed friendships that were formed in school. Without the friendships/relationships with their peers, it seemed to the participants they would not have transitioned successfully to high school. In addition to relationships with peers, relationships with adults-teachers and parents according to the participants was important.

Relationships with teachers, to the majority of participants, were essential to a successful transition. Cultivating a positive relationship with teachers can be a benefit for students. The participants mentioned the benefits of having a respectable and pleasant relationship with teachers. They stated that teachers would be more apt to help students with whom they have built a favorable relationship. Additionally, participants felt that teachers who built positive relationships with students made it a point to find out more about their students than their grades, conduct, and extracurricular activities; teachers

who are genuinely interested in their students investigate to discover the hobbies of their students outside of academics. It seemed to the participants that middle school teachers were automatically interested in knowing everything about their students. But when the students got to high school there were only a few teachers that were interested in their students to the degree of the middle school teachers. Participants in this study also commented on the relationships and expectations of their family/community leaders. The relationships the participants mentioned was relationships with their parents/guardians and their pastors (two participants). The participants understood the expectations of their parents/guardians and community leaders. All of the participants resolved to achieve academically and graduate from high school. They wanted to achieve for their families and community but they also wanted to achieve for themselves.

The last personal barrier related to transition was coping with the racial and gender dilemmas within the context of school. The participants shared their feelings about the manner in which African American boys are viewed at Meadowview High School. They recalled several instances where they felt they were being treated negatively because they were African American males.

The participants shared that discipline issues were also a part of the personal barrier (racial and gender dilemmas). The young men commented on instances where they were accused of participating in misbehaviors or rule infractions because they were in close proximity to those who committed the actual infractions. The participants felt they were unfairly targeted because they were African American males. In addition the young men communicated that it seemed as if adults in the building (teachers and

administrators) automatically assumed they were involved in wrong-doing. In some cases, not only was the negative assumption made but the participants also received reprimands and other consequences.

The insights of the participants were in accordance with the research literature. According to Forgan and Vaughn (2000), students have difficulty with high school transition because of the change in interpersonal relationships. Students who move from middle school to high school with their friends are more likely to perform better and have better attendance in high school than those students who do not (Heller et al., 2003). Having an intact social network or developing a social network helps students increase their feelings of belonging. Interpersonal relationships help to combat the loneliness and isolation that may be experienced by adolescents during the transition period (Hymel et al., 1996). Interpersonal relationships with teachers change in that high school teachers tend to be more content centered and middle school teachers as a result of the middle school philosophy was more student centered (Heck & Mahoe, 2006).

Relationships with parents/family may change as students strive for independence. In addition to striving for independence, students are also forming their own identity (Gause, 2008; Letrello & Miles, 2003). Identity development is difficult for adolescence in general. This process is particularly difficult for African American males because of the negative images that are displayed in society and in schools (Gause, 2008). The researcher concluded the assertions of the study were reflected in the literature on the topic. The personal barriers, interpersonal relationships and racial and gender dilemmas within the context of the school were barriers related to transition for these participants.

*What do ninth-grade African American males describe as structural, academic, and personal facilitators of their transition?*

The participants in this study reported transition facilitators for the three aspects: structural, academic, and personal. Although the participants did not identify school structure as a barrier to a successful transition to high school, within their conversations one could infer that teachers (adults) and the participants' peers were used as facilitators for learning and becoming comfortable with the school building. Furthermore, human resources were also employed as facilitators for the academic aspect. The participants conveyed that they used their teachers and tutors to assist them with their assignments. The tutors were especially helpful in that they facilitated new ways of approaching the subject-matter the participants were struggling to successfully complete. The tutors worked with the participants several days a week. In addition, the teachers also worked with the participants one-on-one either after or before school. The participants enjoyed having the opportunity to get more individual or small group assistance. Last, participants reported that personal facilitators for their transitions included new friendships and expectation awareness.

New friendships were identified as a transition facilitator because the participants felt there were fractures in their previous friendships from middle school. New friendships served as a means for coping with the loss or transformation of their friendship networks. Furthermore, the participants noted, being aware of the expectations of parents/guardians and community leaders helped them to make sense of and take responsibility for their actions. In other words, knowing that their parents/guardians and

community leaders expected them to do well academically in school helped shape and determine the actions the participants made while they were in school. None of the participants wanted to disappoint their parents/guardians or community leaders. Living up to what was expected of them was a way to avoid disappointing those they cared about most.

*How do ninth-grade African American males explain the impact of these barriers and facilitators on their transitions?*

According to the participants, the barriers and facilitators had a major impact on their transitions from middle school to high school. Although the participants had anticipated differences in middle school and high school, they had not prepared themselves to handle the extent of the academic and personal barriers they faced. They expressed they wished someone would have explained to them before they actually became ninth-grade students what the barriers were and identified facilitators of these barriers prior to the transition. The participants felt that if they had had some exposure to the barriers and facilitators they would have had a chance to plan how they wanted to manage their ninth-grade year.

The transition literature speaks to exposing students as eighth graders to high school procedures, expectations, and events (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999); however, the literature does not direct educators to explain to students the barriers and facilitators to middle school to high school transition. Certainly, there is an implicit message to admonish students about the pitfalls of high school, but according to the participants in this study, they would have appreciated and preferred an overview of the specific barriers



and facilitators at an open house session or freshman orientation. The researcher agrees with the participants. The barriers and facilitators of transition need to be shared with students and parents prior to the beginning of the students' ninth-grade year. These conversations about the differences between middle school and high school need to begin with the eighth-grade teachers and should go beyond "in high school you are not going to get away with this . . ." A serious discussion about high school barriers and facilitators is essential prior to the transition to high school.

### **Implications for Teacher Educators**

Teacher educators, although not working in public K-12 schools, may still use this research to help inform and transform the curricula they teach aspiring teachers. In addition to the standards new teachers have to meet and courses they have to complete, this research suggests there should be a part of the pre-service teachers' plan of study that relates to understanding the significance of the transition period. I am aware that pre-service teachers must take methods courses in order to get a teaching license. Within those classes there should be a significant section on transition, especially for teachers who will teach eighth and ninth grades.

Secondly, teacher educators could use the information from this research study to help their students prepare and plan for obstacles they will face when they enter the classroom. With this research, teacher educators can help pre-service teachers be proactive rather than reactive to the topic of transition. Pre-service teachers could begin their transition plan or framework before they complete the teacher education program.

In addition to the transition piece, teacher-educators should also consider and share with the pre-service teachers that while the transition to high school is difficult for most students, African American males in particular have another layer to stack on top of the transition difficulties. Pre-service teachers need to understand or at the very least be aware of the complexities of the Black male in American schools.

One recommendation for teacher educators is program evaluation. Teacher education programs provide multicultural education courses, cultural foundations courses, etc. These courses should be examined for effectiveness and efficiency to measure the impact of the courses on the teachers and their practice.

Not only does this research have implications for teacher educators there are also implications for district and site-based administrators.

### **Implications for School Administrators**

At the district level there are numerous program managers and academic coaches. There are two English/language arts program managers, one for K-5 and the other for 6-12; there are two social studies, science, and math program managers as well who serve the same grade spans. In conjunction with the program managers, the academic coaches go out to the schools and demonstrate or model how particular skills should look in the classroom. The district leaders should use this same concept and apply it to middle school to high school transition. A transition program manager and transition coaches should be hired for the district. The transition program manager and transition coaches would go out to middle and high schools and facilitate how to create a transition plan or framework for students, specifically African American males.

In addition to sending personnel to each site, the district leaders should make transition professional development offerings available for teachers and principals to attend. Information similar to that which is presented in this study should be shared with them. The words of the students need to be revealed to these professionals so they will take this notion of transition seriously. I want them to know, from this study especially, that if they would listen, the students will tell them exactly how they can help and support them during the transition period.

If the district personnel take on the responsibility of designating funds for transition planning and professional development, there must be an evaluation tool or some way to hold all who are involved accountable. The accountability portion would be for all high schools to develop a transition plan. In this plan, teachers and principals would have to indicate the facilitators they are employing to assist their students in a successful transition to high school.

### **Implications for Classroom Teachers**

The classroom teacher is critical. The implications for classroom teachers are dire. First and most importantly, the classroom teachers must establish relationships with their students. The participants in this study stated more than once that they wanted their teachers to know more about them. Classroom teachers need to understand their students. They need to recognize their developmental stage and what is happening with their students in relation to identity construction (gender, race, and ethnicity) and the changes that are occurring in the daily lives of their students.

Secondly, classroom practitioners need to be aware of the skills and tools their students do or do not possess. In this study, the participants were very clear when they stated they did not come to high school with some of the skills they needed to be academically successful. It is the classroom teacher's responsibility to ascertain his or her students' capabilities and limitations and create facilitators to support them and help them be successful.

Next, classroom teachers need to realize that their expectations of their students do make a difference. The participants in this study stated that knowing what their teachers expected of them helped them to transition successfully. Teachers need to continue to have high expectations for their students and continue to articulate those expectations to them. As a part of expectations, classroom teachers need to be particularly careful of making stereotypical judgments about students, specifically African American male students in their classrooms. Teachers need to take extra care and analyze themselves and the manner in which they view students.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Based on the analysis and the results/findings in this study, below are the implications for further research.

1. Using a larger sample size for both the quantitative portion and the qualitative segment of the study in several different sites within the school district would give a better rate of generalizability and the results/findings may be more comprehensive and represent many students rather than a few.

2. If a researcher could locate a site or group of sites where a high school transition framework or plan is operating successfully, studies can be done to examine the components of the plan and check to see if the framework encompasses any of the facilitators mentioned by the participants in this study.
3. I would still like to see more investigation into the personal aspect of transitioning from middle school to high school for African American males. What are some of the other personal barriers and facilitators not mentioned by the participants in this study?
4. I would like for a similar study to be done with ninth-grade African American girls to examine the barriers and facilitators they feel are significant during the transition to high school and compare the differences and similarities of the African American girls and boys.
5. I would like for a similar study to be done with ninth-grade Hispanic males to examine the barriers and facilitators they feel are significant during the transition to high school and compare the differences and similarities of the Hispanic males and the African American males.
6. I would like for a similar study to be done with ninth-grade African American males from different socioeconomic backgrounds and examine the barriers and facilitators they feel are significant during the transition to high school and compare the differences and similarities between and among the various socioeconomic backgrounds.

### **Summary**

In this final chapter the findings from the data analyses were linked to the research questions in relation to the research literature. Next, implications for teacher educators, district level and site based school administrators, and classroom teachers were provided. Last, suggestions and recommendations for future research were presented.

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### Appendix A

## Research Approval Form



Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools  
P.O. Box 2513  
Winston-Salem, NC 27102-2513  
(336)777-2816 Fax (336)777-2000  
website: wsfs.k12.nc.us

Project ID 2009-50

### *Approval Form for Research Project to be Conducted In the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools*

Name of Principal Investigator: Anissia Jenkins

Advisor's Name (if student): Ceola Ross-Baber

Research/Educational Institution UNC-G

Research Title African American Male Transition from Middle to High School

The above project has been approved by the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools Administrative Offices. Stipulations to this approval, if any, are noted below. *The investigator understands that the principals have the authority to grant or deny permission for the study to be conducted in their schools.*

Project Timeline: 30 or 40 minute surveys and interviews, 2008-2009 school year

Stipulations:

Interviews and surveys will be done at Parkland High School with parental consent.

Board of Education

- Geneva B. Brown
- A. L. (Buddy) Collins
- Jane D. Goins
- Victor Johnson, Jr.
- Donny C. Lambeth (Chair)
- Jeannie A. Metcalf
- Elisabeth Motsinger
- Marilyn A. Parker
- Jill A. Tackabery

Donald L. Martin, Jr.  
Superintendent

Marty Ward

Marty Ward, Ph.D.  
WSFCS Research & Evaluation

11/4/08  
Date

## Appendix B

### Consent Forms

My name is Anissia Jenkins. I am a graduate student at UNCG. I am conducting a research project at Parkland High School about transitioning African American males from middle school to high school. I am interested in finding out what causes African American males to have success or difficulty when moving from 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

Enclosed in this letter are three (3) forms. The consent forms give more information about the actual study.

If your son would like to participate in this study, please sign the consent forms.

You will need to sign the parental consent form (green paper). Your son will need to sign the assent form (yellow paper) **and** the participant consent form (pink paper).

Students can turn in the consent forms to the 9<sup>th</sup> grade guidance counselor. I will pick up all signed consent forms from the guidance office on Tuesday, March 31, 2009 and Thursday, April 9, 2009.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions/concerns.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation!

Anissia Jenkins  
anissiajenkins@aol.com  
336-403-1237

## UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

**CONSENT FOR A MINOR TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT: LONG FORM**

Project Title: African American Males' Perceptions of Factors Affecting Transition from Middle School to High School

Project Director: Anissia Jenkins

My name is Anissia Jenkins. I am a student at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I am interested in finding out what causes African American males to have success or difficulty when moving from 8<sup>th</sup> grade to 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**What is the study about?**

The move from middle school to high school is hard for many students. African American males tend to have a harder time during this move. The purpose of this study is to find out what is good and bad about the move from 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

**Why are you asking me?**

Your son is an African American male in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. I would like to have him work with me because what he thinks is important. I am interested in hearing what he has to say about coming to high school from middle school.

**What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?**

He will be asked to answer 30 questions on a survey. He may be asked to answer some questions in an interview by himself and to answer some questions with some other 9<sup>th</sup> grade African American males. The survey will be one hour. The interviews will be one hour each.

**Is there any audio/video recording?**

I will use a tape recorder to help me remember what your son says to me when I ask him the questions.

**What are the dangers to me?**

There are no dangers to your son or to you.

If you have any concerns about your rights or how your son or you are being treated please contact Eric Allen in the Office of Research and Compliance at UNCG at (336) 256-1482. You may call me with any of your questions - Anissia Jenkins, (336) 774-4677, (anissiajenkins@aol.com).

**Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?**

Your son may begin to think about his move to high school and decide how well he has been doing. He may decide some ways to make his experience better and for other young men.

**Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?**

By using what your son tells me, it will help other school teachers and leaders know how to prepare 8<sup>th</sup> grade African American males better for high school.

**Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?**

There are no costs to your son or payments made for being in this study.

**How will you keep my information confidential?**

So no one will know who your son is, he will give himself a false name. Only he and I will know who he really is. What he says to me will be kept private. The data will be kept in a locked file cabinet at my home. No information that I collect will be kept at my school. The electronic data will be kept under password protection on a computer at the student researcher's home.

**What if I want to leave the study?**

Your son can leave the study at any time. He is not receiving a grade for working with me. If he does not continue working with me, I will destroy any information he has given me.

**What about new information/changes in the study?**

If there is new information or changes in the study to be made, I will let you know.

**Voluntary Consent by Participant:**

By signing this consent form you are agreeing that you read, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing to consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate, or have the student above as a participant participate, in this study described to you by Anissia Jenkins.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Assent Form*

Study Title: African American Males' Perceptions of Factors Affecting Transition from Middle School to High School

My name is Anissia Jenkins.

**What is this about?**

I would like to talk to you about moving from middle school to high school. I want to learn about what you think about your move from middle school to high school.

**Did my parents say it was ok?**

Your parent(s) said it was ok for you to be in this study and have signed a form like this one.

**Why me?**

We would like you to take part because you are an African American male in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

**What if I want to stop?**

You do not have to say "yes", if you do not want to take part. We will not punish you if you say "no". Even if you say "yes" now and change your mind after you start doing this study, you can stop and no one will be mad at you.

**What will I have to do?**

You will be asked to complete a 30-item survey, approximately 60 minutes. In addition, you might be asked to take part in two (2) individual interviews and one (1) group interview. Each individual interview will take 60 minutes to complete. The focus group interview will also take approximately 60 minutes.

**Will anything bad happen to me?**

There is nothing bad that will happen to you.

**Will anything good happen to me?**

By looking carefully at the first semester, you may be able to focus on some things that might help you to be successful as the school year continues.

**Do I get anything for being in this study?**

There are no costs to you or payments to you for your participation in this study.

**What if I have questions?**

You are free to ask questions at any time.

If you understand this study and want to be in it, please write your name below.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of student

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix C

### Transition: Middle School to High School Questionnaire

#### *Structural Factors*

- |           |           |  |          |                |
|-----------|-----------|--|----------|----------------|
| <b>1.</b> | <b>a.</b> | <b>The size of my high school makes me uncomfortable.</b>  |          |                |
|           |           | Strongly Disagree  | Disagree | Agree          |
|           |           |  |          | Strongly Agree |
|           | <b>b.</b> | <b>I feel lost in my high school because of its size.</b>  |          |                |
|           |           | Strongly Disagree  | Disagree | Agree          |
|           |           |  |          | Strongly Agree |
|           | <b>c.</b> | <b>The size of my high school does not bother me.</b>  |          |                |
|           |           | Strongly Disagree  | Disagree | Agree          |
|           |           |  |          | Strongly Agree |
| <hr/>     |           |  |          |                |
| <b>2.</b> | <b>a.</b> | <b>I do not understand my school's discipline procedures.</b>  |          |                |
|           |           | Strongly Disagree  | Disagree | Agree          |
|           |           |  |          | Strongly Agree |
|           | <b>b.</b> | <b>I think my high school's discipline procedures are fair.</b>                                      |          |                |
|           |           | Strongly Disagree  | Disagree | Agree          |
|           |           |  |          | Strongly Agree |
|           | <b>c.</b> | <b>I understand how I am expected to behave in school.</b>   |          |                |
|           |           | Strongly Disagree  | Disagree | Agree          |
|           |           |  |          | Strongly Agree |
| <hr/>     |           |  |          |                |
| <b>3.</b> | <b>a.</b> | <b>I miss the teams we had in middle school.</b>   |          |                |
|           |           | Strongly Disagree  | Disagree | Agree          |
|           |           |  |          | Strongly Agree |
|           | <b>b.</b> | <b>I think I would be more comfortable if my high school had teams like we did in middle school.</b> |          |                |
|           |           | Strongly Disagree  | Disagree | Agree          |
|           |           |  |          | Strongly Agree |
|           | <b>c.</b> | <b>I like not being on a team for my classes.</b>  |          |                |
|           |           | Strongly Disagree  | Disagree | Agree          |
|           |           |  |          | Strongly Agree |
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*Academic Factors*

1.    **a.    My teachers expect me to do well in my classes.**  
           Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly Agree
- b.    My teachers' expectations are realistic and reachable.**  
           Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly Agree
- c.    My teachers do not expect me to do well in my classes.**  
           Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly Agree
- d.    I make time to finish all of my assignments.**  
           Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly Agree
- 
2.    **a.    My classes are harder than I expected.**  
           Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly Agree
- b.    My classes require me to do a lot more work.**  
           Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly Agree
- c.    My classes are easier than I expected.**  
           Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly Agree
- 
3.    **a.    I understand why the school requires me to take certain  
           classes/courses.**  
           Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly Agree
- b.    The school should not require students to take certain classes.**  
           Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly Agree
-

*Personal Factors***1. a. My teachers care about me.**

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly Agree

**b. My teachers listen to what I have to say.**

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly Agree

**c. I am important to my teachers.**

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly Agree

**d. My teacher knows more about me than my grades.**

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly Agree

**2. a. Many of my friends go to my school.**

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly Agree

**b. I feel more comfortable because my friends are with me at school.**

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly Agree

**c. It is important to me to be with my friends at school.**

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly Agree

**3. a. My family/community expects me to get good grades.**

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly Agree

**b. I want to do well in school to make my family/community proud.**

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly Agree

**c. My family/community does not care about how well I do in school.**

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly Agree

## **Appendix D**

### **Transition: Middle School to High School Individual Interview Protocols**

#### **Transition: Middle School to High School Individual Interview Protocol 1**

##### **Structural Factors**

1. How do you feel about the size of your high school?
2. How would you feel if your high school was divided into teams (like middle school)?
3. What affect, if any, does the size of your high school have on your grades?

##### **Academic Factors**

1. How do your teachers show you their expectations?
2. How do you manage your time?
3. What makes your classes difficult/easy?

##### **Personal Factors**

1. How do you know what your teachers feel about you?
2. What role do your friends play in your life at school?
3. How do you know the expectations of your family/community of you in school?

**Transition: Middle to High School  
Individual Interview Protocol 2**

*Academic Factors*

1. Does having a good relationship with your teachers affect your grades?

How does it affect your grades?

*Personal Factors*

1. Do you want to be important to your teachers?
2. What is the best way for them to express how they feel to you?
3. Would you like for your teachers to know more about you other than your grades?
4. What kind of things do you want them to know?
5. How is your relationship(s) with your high school teachers different from those with your middle school teachers?
6. Does this difference affect your adjustment to or your transition to high school? If so, how?
7. Tell me about your transition to high school.

What did you like/dislike?

Was the transition easy/difficult?

## **Appendix E**

### **Transition: Middle School to High School Focus Group Interview Protocol**

#### **Structural Factors**

1. If you could, how would you change the size of your high school?

How do you think the changes that you would make would affect the students (grades, classes)?

Why does the size of the high school matter?

#### **Academic Factors**

1. How is knowing what your teachers expect of you (academically) at the beginning of the class beneficial for you?

Do your teachers have high academic expectations for you?

Why are classes difficult/easy? (Explain why it's difficult/easy.)

#### **Personal Factors**

1. How do you feel about your teachers?

How do you think your teachers feel about you?

How do you know this? What do they say or do to show you this?

Does the way you think the teacher feels about you influence your feelings about school?

Does the way you think the teacher feels about you influence your feelings about yourself?

## Appendix F

### Theme Analysis Chart

THEME	CATEGORY	INDICATOR	DATA POINTS (no. of responses)
Plight of the Young Black Male—The Saga Continues	Sociopsychological Issues	Black Male Identity	“We already have a black mark against us” (2)
			“Black boys can be smart too” (3)
		Society’s Views of Black Males	“They are building more jails for us” (1)
			“A lot of us they don’t expect be like doctors” (1)
		Gender Differences	“They treat Black girls better than us” (8)
			“Everybody else get to stand around and talk to each other” (8)
		Discipline	“Even if we don’t do nothing we still get in trouble” (8)
Racial/Ethnic Differences	“Everybody is above us, Whites, Hispanics, we are dead last” (3)		