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School Transition from Elementary to Middle School: Perceptions from Economically Disadvantaged Students

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SCHOOL TRANSITION FROM ELEMENTARY TO MIDDLE SCHOOL:
PERCEPTIONS FROM ECONOMICALLY
DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

A Dissertation Submitted
to the Graduate College
Arkansas Tech University

in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in School Leadership

in the Center for Leadership and Learning
of the College of Education

May 2017

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Program: School Leadership

Degree: Doctor of Education

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate school transition from elementary to middle school from the perceptions of economically disadvantaged students. Through the investigation, a determination was made on whether there is a difference in the level of connectedness among economically disadvantaged students between the low performing and higher performing schools. The study was a quantitative research design.

The target population of the study was economically disadvantaged students in four middle schools in an urban school district located in the central region of the state. All of the four middle schools contained sixth through eighth-grade configurations and were designated as Title I schools at the time of the study. The target population consisted of 682 sixth grade students enrolled in the participating four middle schools during fall 2016. Survey data were obtained from 331 students or 49% of the student population. The school district administered the survey online, with students in the designated grades completing the survey in class on school-owned computers. The response rate of 49% was based on the total sixth-grade population of these four schools and the number of completed surveys.

The Student Transition Questionnaire used to collect data on the perceptions of middle school students about transitioning from elementary to middle school, was developed by Akos (2002). This study found that there was no significant difference in the level of connectedness between economically disadvantaged students at low-performing and higher performing schools. The researcher does note that the items that fostered connectedness differed for this population at the lower performing and higher performing schools.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Transitions occur throughout all stages of life. Transition is defined as a movement, passage, or change from one position, state, stage, or concept to another (Transition, 2017). Campbell and Jacobson (2008) indicated that transition requires one to seek out and navigate for the purpose of safety, self, information, and connection. As people journey through life, these fundamentals continue to appear in all phases of their lives. Educationally, the term transition refers to students moving from one stage of education to another such as elementary to middle school, middle school to high school, and high school to college (Queen & Algozzine, 2005).

During these transitions, students may become overwhelmed, anxious, frustrated, or insecure due to being in an unfamiliar school, with new teachers, peers, academic expectations, social issues, and school configurations (Campbell & Jacobson, 2008). For example, most elementary school configurations require students to spend a majority of their day with the same teacher and peers in the same classroom. However, when they transition into middle school, they will be expected to move from class to class during the day, with new teachers at each period and possibly different students as well. Akos (2006) indicated that these personal adjustments can become intense. Along with adjusting to a new environment, students are adjusting to new and multiple teachers and meeting higher academic expectations (Schielack & Seeley, 2010).

Researchers content that making a transition to a new school causes anxiety in students and can challenge the coping skills of many adolescents, especially those at risk, such as economically disadvantaged and English-Language Learner (ELL) students (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Gordon, 2011). To better understand the effect of

transitioning from elementary school to middle school on economically disadvantaged students, the researcher investigated the perceptions of these students on the transitioning process. By better understanding how these students view the process, it may be possible to mitigate or even alleviate much of the stress associated with the move and, in turn, help students succeed academically.

Background of the Study

The effects of transitioning in education became apparent with the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision. In that case, the Supreme Court ruled that segregated public education was unconstitutional, ending the “separate, but equal” ruling from *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). As African American students began to “transition” to formerly “all-white” schools, the effect became very pronounced. The abrupt cultural change for these students proved to be difficult. With the study of the effects of these cultural changes on African American students transitioning into new school environments, the focus eventually broadened to observe and investigate the effects of transitioning on all students. Schumacher (1998) indicates that all students struggle with the transition and that it plays a major role in shaping children’s lives. For this reason, educators must learn to understand these transitions and find ways to mitigate or overcome any adverse effects of the process.

The effects of transitioning may be even more stressful for economically disadvantaged students. Educating these students is a challenge for teachers due to the deleterious effect of poverty on a student’s academic achievement. Çiftçi and Çağlar (2014) reported that students of poverty might experience a variety of circumstances such as lower achievement levels because of the disparity of curriculum between schools,

behavioral difficulties, trouble with social relationships, and a greater risk of dropping out of school. The academic achievements of economically disadvantaged children depend solely on how they can overcome their lives outside the classroom (Çiftçi & Çağlar, 2014).

Students who move from familiar schools to unknown ones may be stifled in the learning process because of transitional disruptions (Schumacher, 1998). If student learning is affected by the transition, then educators should try to diminish the negative effects of transition on achievement in the classrooms. Recognizing this, Japanese educators, for example, use a practice of “looping” in which students remain with the same teacher or group of teachers for several consecutive years (Gaustad, 1998). By contrast, schools in the U.S. have tended to become increasingly narrow in their grade spans.

Accountability in education was brought to the forefront of education reform by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (2002). NCLB (2002) had one inclusive goal - increased student achievement for all children, regardless of their socioeconomic status (Darling-Hammond, 2004). As a result, schools began to place greater emphasis on discipline and academic success with less opportunity for individualization and fewer opportunities for faculty to develop close relationships with parents and students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000). This was a detriment as Carter, Clark, Cushing, and Kennedy (2005) stated, “the need to respond and react to academic, environmental, and social changes happens while parents are experiencing a shift in involvement in their child’s education specifically among low socioeconomic status children” (p.9). Still, Çiftçi and Çağlar (2014) confirmed that effective educators could

improve the academic outcomes of low-income students and provide them with hope and promise for the future. Therefore, the primary focus of a good education should be to ensure that all children have a chance to be successful in life.

The changes that make the transition to middle school difficult for economically disadvantaged students can be complicated. The challenges that many of these students face include a more complex cognitive, social-emotional, and behavioral picture that impacts academic and social success throughout their educational career (National Middle School Association [NMSA], 2010). According to Carter et al. (2005), the gap for this at-risk population widens as the instructional and social context of middle school changes. Douglas-Hall and Chau (2008) explored whether students attending schools with both an urban location and high poverty concentration are faced with many extraneous factors such as aggression, anxiety, depression, and hyperactivity. They also examined whether their counterparts worry about these factors daily. These problems directly affect a student's motivation which then has an effect on their achievement; therefore, learning is not the primary concern for urban students. Daily survival becomes their focus and success seems unforeseeable. It is the responsibility of educators to do all they can to reach, teach, and promote success for all students.

Problem Statement

The transition into middle school brings many complicated issues and potential barriers to success for students. Effective transition programs should be in place at schools to ensure that a successful transition can occur (Akos, 2002). Çiftçi and Çağlar (2014) revealed several elements of middle school transition which acknowledged personal and social, organizational, and academic themes. These themes provided an

abundance of information regarding the stressors and issues that influence the lack of academic achievement among economically disadvantaged students during their transition to middle school.

Although there have been many studies of academic achievement in high poverty schools, especially in elementary and middle schools, there have been few research studies conducted on the effects of transition on the academic achievement of students in high poverty schools. For instance, Reeves (2003) conducted research in high poverty schools that demonstrated high academic performance in what he referred to as 90/90/90 schools. These are schools with 90% or more of the students eligible for free/reduced lunch, 90% or more of the students are members of an ethnic minority group, and 90% or more of the students that met the district or state academic standards in reading or another area. These schools demonstrate that schools with high minority and high poverty students can achieve at a high level, academically.

Also, few studies have focused on the impact of the school transition of economically disadvantaged students and its relationship to academic achievement in middle schools (Nelson & Landel, 2007). However, research on this topic does indicate that the impact of transition on students who are classified as economically disadvantaged, may have its greatest effect on students transitioning from elementary to middle schools (Çiftçi & Çağlar, 2014). Middle schools with large percentages of economically disadvantaged students continue to see these students struggle with adapting to their new school environment. In particular, with the changing of classrooms from period to period in middle schools, some sixth-grade students who must adjust to the team teaching structure in middle school may be at a disadvantage (Hood, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

Educators that work in high poverty, urban districts are always seeking ways to improve the quality of education for students. There are still too many “high poverty” schools in urban districts that are not performing academically compared to their counterparts. Therefore, the purpose of this exploratory, quantitative study was to investigate transition programs in urban middle schools through the lens of economically disadvantaged students in relation to the school’s academic achievement level. By using a questionnaire, students relied on their experiences in transition from elementary to middle schools. Based upon their responses, their experience may have impacted their transition to middle school from elementary. It is hoped that school leaders will be able to create effective transition programs that help all students succeed.

Also, the purpose of the study was to identify practices and strategies that were the most successful in increasing academic achievement among economically disadvantaged students within the selected middle schools. It is hoped that the conclusions drawn from this research will assist educators and administrators in successfully educating all children regardless of circumstances and motivate students that are economically disadvantaged to reach their fullest potential.

Research Questions

In this study of middle school transition of economically disadvantaged students, the focus was on examining and analyzing transition programs that were designed for economically disadvantaged students and the success of those programs as implemented by schools. The research questions that were examined are:

1. Is the level of “connectedness” among economically disadvantaged students, as measured by the STQ, different between low performing and higher performing schools?
 - a. Is there a difference in perception among economically disadvantaged students between low performing and higher performing schools related to the variable, “Positive Factors”?
 - b. Is there a difference in perception among economically disadvantaged students between low performing and higher performing schools related to the variable, “Concern Factors”?
 - c. Is there a difference in perception among economically disadvantaged students between low performing and higher performing schools related to the variable, “Overall perceptions of the transition process”?
 - d. Is there a difference in perception among economically disadvantaged students between low performing and higher performing schools related to the variable, “Who’s helpful in the transition process”?
 - e. Is there a difference in perception among economically disadvantaged students between low performing and higher performing schools related to the variable, “Activities Involved”?

Theoretical Framework

Eccles, Lord, and Midgely (1991) confirmed in the stage-environment fit theory that the effect of environment on student achievement for adolescents was related to developmental theories. Research on environment, social, physical, and behavioral changes that occur during adolescence provided a theoretical framework for looking at

the impact of procedural, social, and academic changes that are often characteristic in middle school models from the perspectives of faculty and parents involved in that transition (McKeon, 2014).

Specifically, the literature and research reviewed in Chapter II illustrate the impact of the changes that occur between the adolescent and the changing middle school environment. The importance of behavioral development that occurs between elementary and middle school was studied in regards to the procedural characteristics faced in middle school. Social-emotional health, when explored from the Freudian theory of development, served to frame research on changes in social relationships that occur between elementary and middle school environments (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Vygotsky, 1978).

Details about each famous theorist are provided in Chapter II. An analysis of stage-environment and person-fit theories will provide an understanding of how complex adolescence becomes when environmental changes are introduced into their academic world. The environmental changes under study characterized the changes between elementary and middle school procedural, social, and academic factors. The theoretical framework for this study was based on environmental factors, academic achievement, perceptions, and social factors identified by researchers as they sought to understand the perceptions of economically disadvantaged students on transitioning to middle school.

Significance of the Study

In urban school districts, a significant number of schools with high percentages of economically disadvantaged students are performing poorly (Akos, 2006). Because of low student achievement, many educators continue to misunderstand the factors that are

keeping these students from achieving when transitioning from elementary to middle school. This study has significance for educators, parents, administrators, and state agencies that are seeking to understand these challenges when economically disadvantaged students are transitioning from elementary to middle school. By examining these student perceptions and gaining a greater understanding of the impact on transition planning, administrators can affect curriculum development, establish parental programs, and provide faculty training to support these students in the transition process to middle school.

The research on the impact of transition among economically disadvantaged students from elementary to middle school is limited. This study offered important information that will help all stakeholders understand the effects of school-to-school transitions on academic achievement.

Definitions

In education, specific terminology is used to describe methods, assessments, transition, and conditions. Important terms are described below.

- **Academic Achievement:** Outcome of education – the extent to which a student, teacher, or institution has achieved their educational goals (Academic Achievement, 2017).
- **Achievement Gap:** The inequality on many educational measures between the performance of groups of students, particularly those defined by gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Achievement Gap in the United States, 2016).

- Adolescence: A transitional stage of physical and mental human development that occurs between childhood and adulthood. This transition involves biological, social, and psychological changes (Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2000).
- Connectedness: A student perception that teachers treat them fairly, that they feel close to people at school, and that they feel as if they are a part of the school (Blum, 2005).
- Middle school: The school level between elementary and high school, typically including grades six through eight (Middle school, 2017).
- School Transition: A change in the grade level that occurs simultaneously with physical, social, cognitive and emotional developmental changes. (Kindle, 2000).
- Socio-Economic Status (SES): The SES for this study is defined by those subjects qualifying for free or reduced lunch status. If a subject is eligible and receives a free or reduced lunch, he or she is classified as economically disadvantaged (The NAEP glossary of terms, n.d., p. 6).
- Stage-environment fit theory: The theory that states that shifts in the environment during adolescence can help to explain academic motivation, educational achievement and social-emotional well-being (Eccles & Midgely, 1989; Eccles & Roeser, 1999).
- Transition: A movement, passage, or change from one position, state, stage, or concept to another; a one-time set of activities that move students to a new grade level or building; an adjustment phase that last as long as half the school

year; a process that involves all students moving from one level to the next (Akos, Queen, & Lineberry 2005); a process requiring one to seek out and navigate for the purpose of safety of self, attainment of needed information, and the opportunity to make a connection to a new environment (Campbell & Jacobson, 2008).

Limitations

There were several identified limitations to this study:

- By choosing a quantitative design for the study, the data obtained from the selected participants lacked a richness that might have been achieved by using a mixed methods design and incorporating qualitative data from student interviews and focus groups.
- There were significant aspects of the participants' middle school transition experience not included on the questionnaire which might have limited the overall perceptions of the participants.
- The sampling method employed was a stratified cluster sample of schools in the district that met specific criteria such as low-performing, high poverty, high minority schools and higher-performing, high poverty, high minority schools. Because the sample was not truly random, the generalizability of the findings is limited to schools in this particular district.
- Because the timeline for the study was limited, the student data is reflective of their perceptions of the transition to middle school after only one semester of their sixth grade academic year. It is possible that the

perceptions of the students may have changed after they became more accustomed to the new school environment.

- Student participation in the survey was limited to those students who returned consent forms signed by their parent(s) or guardians. The students who did not receive parental consent to participate were included in the calculation of the response rate.
- The comparison of perceptions based on low-performing and higher performing schools was simply for exploratory purposes. With literally hundreds of variables that may impact a student's ability to achieve, no causal relationship between the transition programs in these schools and the students' achievement levels is implied.

Delimitations

- The unit of analysis for this study was the student level. To gain a sufficient number of participants, but to keep the scope of the study within the timeline, the study was delimited to four middle schools, two low-performing and two higher-performing.
- The sampled schools were delimited to an urban school district in the central region of the state of Arkansas. Since the focus of this study was perceptions of economically disadvantaged students in an urban school district, districts with other demographics were not included in the study.

Assumptions

As with any study using questionnaires, the researcher assumed that student responses were truthful regarding their perceptions of the middle school transition

experience. It was assumed the survey measured what it purports to measure regarding middle school transition.

Chapter Summary

As students transition into middle school, it is important that they be well-prepared to address the upcoming challenges of middle school. Fortunately, many students experienced a smooth transition into middle school and are successful in adapting to their new surroundings. However, some students who are categorized as economically disadvantaged struggled with the changes associated with moving into a middle school.

For many sixth-grade students, the middle school transition can be full of anxiety and stress as they adjust to their new surroundings. However, by analyzing the impact of elementary classroom structures on economically disadvantaged students and their perceptions of transition, school leaders may be better informed to create positive learning environments for fifth-grade students which promote a successful transition to middle school. The study provided insight into student perceptions of their transition experience, and data may allow school administrators to better understand the process of middle school transition and the effect on economically disadvantaged students. It is hoped that the study was the break in the research concerning school transition and the effect on economically disadvantaged students.

Chapter II: Review of Related Literature

Introduction

Educators that work in high poverty, urban districts are always seeking ways to improve the quality of education for students. These practitioners, along with many researchers constantly strive to discover methods to accomplish their mission of school improvement. One area of research, examining the effects of transitioning from elementary into middle school, is beginning to demonstrate the potential for improving educational quality (NMSA, 2010).

The transition to a new learning environment can be an exciting and challenging process for economically disadvantaged students, but for sixth-grade students making the transition into middle school, progress and success vary as much as the personalities, social, behavioral, and physical characteristics of individual students (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Research in this area indicates that school transitions can affect student achievement, attendance, behavior, and student social-emotional development (Kingery, Erdley & Marshall, 2011). Therefore, it is important that schools and districts implement transitional practices that promote positive student outcomes.

This chapter reviewed the history of school transition programs and provided a theoretical basis for relating the study of school transitions to the reinforcement of the need to understand its impact on young students. Also, personal, social, organizational, academic, and risk factors are examined for their effect on student success and how these factors may be exacerbated for economically disadvantaged students, without a quality transitioning program in their schools.

Literature Search Strategy

An electronic search for current studies and literature reviews was conducted using the electronic education database. Computerized databases included: *Academic Search Complete*, *ERIC research databases*, *Education Research Complete*, and *ProQuest*. Education Research Complete offered over 1000 full-text journals and allowed for peer review searches. Keyword identifiers “transition programs,” “middle school transition,” and “poverty in education” were used. Searches were limited to peer-reviewed journals. As the review of the literature was conducted, articles were selected based on their relevance to the current study of middle school transition, poverty in education, and transition programs. Literature reviews or studies that described specific components of programs were also selected for review.

A search of dissertations was conducted using the internet explorer. Keyword identifiers from the dissertation were “school transition,” “middle school transition,” and “poverty in education.” The search yielded 104 dissertations ranging from 1997 to 2014. Of the 104 dissertations yielded, 45 dissertations came during or after the year of 2000. The search of dissertations proved to be valuable as this database provided several studies that evaluated middle school transition programs.

Theoretical Foundations

Quality transitioning programs for students entering middle school from elementary school helped economically disadvantaged students to achieve academic success. School transition programs had its foundation in several socio-economic and learning theories. Some of these theories are described below.

Social constructivism. Social constructivism is rooted in the belief that learners construct their knowledge (Dewey, 1990). Dewey wrote, “Education is not an affair of ‘telling’ and being told, but an active and constructive process” (p. 46). A student-oriented approach, constructivism follows the belief that knowledge is subjective and built based on the individual learner’s previous experiences (Mayer, 2002). A student’s perception of the world is the foundation upon which new information is integrated. The acquisition of knowledge for highly mobile students, whose personal learning experiences had been fragmented, is disrupted (Rhodes, 2005).

Social constructivism focused on learning that takes place because of a student’s interaction with a group (Rhodes, 2005). Positive home and school environments are essential for students to achieve success in school (Xu, Hannaway, & D’Souza, 2009). Having the benefit of stable home and school environments, non-mobile students fare better than mobile students who experience struggle with adjusting to new school and home environments (Black, 2006; Schwartz, Stiefel & Chalico, 2007; Xu et al., 2009).

Stage-environment fit theory. Neisen and Wise (2004) described the middle school environment as, “less nurturing, larger, more departmentalized, more competitive and more demanding academically. Middle school students are generally expected to be more independent and responsible for their own assignments...” (p. 163). The stage-environment fit theory suggests the procedural, academic, and social changes that characterize middle school setting are not affiliated with the biological, cognitive, and social changes of adolescence. Theorists who are interested in transition research are concerned with procedural, academic, and social changes that occur in middle school and suggest that administrators and policy makers promote developmentally responsive

educational environments based on the needs of the adolescent. According to Schiller (1999), transition is "... the process during which institutional and social factors influence which students' educational careers are positively or negatively affected by this movement between organizations" (pp. 216-217) suggesting that both environmental and developmental needs must be considered during the transition.

Cognitive theory. There were two cognitivist theorists who had opposing views on cognitive thinking: Piaget and Vygotsky. In Piaget and Inhelder's (1969) cognitive development theory, characteristics that define early adolescence are concrete operational (ages 8-11) and formal operational stages (ages 11-14). It was during this sequence of development that children commence to thinking abstractly and developing logic. Piaget alleged that learning should be experiential, not repetitive. He also described the importance of engaged, active learning for the early developing adolescent. According to the Piagetian model, the school has a major role in providing learning opportunities that match each of the developmental stages (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969).

In contrast, sociocultural cognitive theorists do not believe that development must precede learning. In Vygotsky's (1978) seminal work on social learning theory, he underscored that learning comes from experiences where independent thinking is influenced by individual development. According to sociocultural theories, the teacher can act as the medium through which academics are interpreted through societal values and customs. "Learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human psychological function" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90).

Piaget and Inhelder (1969) did not explicitly relate his theory to education. Although, researchers have explained how features of Piaget's theory can be applied to

teaching and learning (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). Per Piaget and Inhelder (1969), students experienced a transition in stages. Students are not taught certain concepts until they have reached the appropriate stage of cognitive development. They also confirmed that students moved from passive learners to active learners. Within the classroom, students have transitioned from teacher centered to students centered. The role of teachers is to facilitate learning, rather than direct learning. Students accomplished this through discovery learning.

Vygotsky's theory promoted learning contexts in which students play an active role in learning. Roles of the teacher and students are shifted. Teachers are collaborating with their students to help facilitate learning in classrooms. Therefore, learning becomes a reciprocal experience for students and teachers (Vygotsky, 1978).

The National Middle School Association's (NMSA, 2010) position paper entitled "This we believe: Successful schools for young adolescents" summarized some of the important cognitive, intellectual changes that occur during adolescent development:

- Commonly face decisions that require more sophisticated thinking skills.
- Prefer interaction with peers during learning activities.
- Thinking skills may shift from concrete to abstract depending on the context.
- Show increasing interest in self with less interest in academic learning.

Social theory. Freud (1935) viewed adolescent changes from the lens of social-emotional health and well-being. He stressed the importance of conflict-resolution between internal desires and external pressures. According to Freud (1935), authority figures, specifically parents and teachers, can control the amount of freedom that allows

the adolescent to mature emotionally. This control of freedom is often perceived as oppression by the developing adolescent and may result in internal and external conflict.

Erikson (1968) expanded on the psychoanalytic theory by defining specific characteristics of change throughout a person's lifespan. Erikson suggested that in the industry versus inferiority stage (age 6-11) that defines the early adolescent phase of development, children learn that society rules and skills are what determine acceptance by peers and adults. Erikson considers feelings of acceptance and belonging critical aspects in social-emotional development. In psychoanalytic theories, persons with authority act as the external force that ensures emotional maturation occurs in a nurturing environment (Puckett, Black, & Trawick-Smith, 2004).

Some of the social-emotional changes outlined by the NMSA (2010) position paper include:

- Have a strong need for approval from peers and to belong to a group.
- Are torn between dependence on and independence from parents.
- Are often pre-occupied with self.
- Believe that their problems are unique and are highly sensitive to personal criticism.
- Become increasingly aware of the differences between themselves and others.

Physical theory. Two noted maturational theorists are Arnold Gesell (1880-1961) and G. Stanley Hall (1884-1924). They described physical changes in adolescence as genetically predetermined and explained maturation as a product of age, viewing the environment as a minor player in the developmental process. According to maturation theory, early adolescents undergo bodily changes related to puberty, a phase that affects

maturation rate at different times for different people (McKeon, 2014). According to physical theory, hormonal changes that occur during maturation cause simultaneous changes in sleep patterns and the need to expel excess energy. Maturation theories are concerned with physiological changes that occur during each stage of growth and stress the importance of genetics over the environment as the cause of development.

Behavioral theory. Behavioral theorists like Watson (1878-1958), Skinner (1904-1990), and Bandura (b. 1925) viewed environment as a critical factor in development. Modern day theorists such as Ilg and Ames (as cited in Puckett et al., 2004) also view the environment as an important factor in changes in adolescent behavior. Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed that human development should be viewed from a systems approach in which each system influences development in its way. The importance of this theory is that it stresses that an individual's growth and development is not static or sequential, rather it is influenced by context (i.e. school, community, family) that can change over time.

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP, 2011) synthesized these important theories in its description of adolescence (ages 10-24). Each developmental stage is characterized by cognitive, social-emotional, and physical changes associated with specific developmental age ranges. According to the AACAP, the early adolescent stage (ages 10-14) is characterized by cognitive changes that can include: increased interest in self, greater consideration for the present, and a growing sense of morality. Social-emotional characteristics associated with early adolescence can include: increased conflict with authority (especially parents), a need for independence, and a growing importance in friendships. Physically, the early adolescent is undergoing

hormonal changes that impact feelings of awkwardness and result in concerns about belonging. According to Kaplan (2004), adolescence is second only to infancy in the rate of developmental changes that occur in a person's life span. The topic of middle school transition has its roots in the early-developing theories of adolescence.

Team Teaching

According to NMSA (2010), during the middle school movement, the needs of young adolescents grew and to accommodate them many innovations were made. One of the lead movements was team teaching. NMSA (2010) believed that team teaching is a strong common component of the middle school learning environment and is the key to academically successful schools because teams provide a foundation for a sense of family and a strong learning community. The implementation of team teaching was the first organizational step toward increasing student achievement by increasing the sense of belonging for students (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Erb (2001) studied team teaching and reported improvements in attitude toward school and learning were one of the greatest benefits of team teaching. Teaming helped change public perceptions of schools as the new middle schools were viewed as more nurturing for students who were in the development stage of early adolescence (Friend & Thompson, 2010). The NMSA (2010) emphasized the importance of interdisciplinary teams that build a sense of community and increased curriculum integration. Effective team teaching has been shown to improve academic achievement for students with different types of backgrounds and across many grade levels (Erb, 2001; Jackson & Davis, 2000; NMSA, 2010).

The structure and dynamics of a team can vary; however, the common understanding of team teaching is for two or more teachers to share responsibility for the

curriculum, instruction, and assessment of a common group of students (Jackson & Davis, 2000; NMSA, 2010). Team teaching is commonly referenced as interdisciplinary teaching or teaming, and the common group of teachers and students in the team teaching structure are called teams or pods (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Research based principals of team teaching are providing sufficient planning time for each team, creating team areas within the school building, and ensuring continuity among team teachers over many years (Erb, 2001).

Erb (2001) emphasized relationships between teachers and students is one of the most important aspects of team teaching. He also stressed that the connectedness between students and teachers had been shown to improve teacher morale as well as the organizational climate and support for students. In the team teaching setting, teachers successfully establish supportive relationships with individual students and provide motivation for student development in many areas of their academics (Strahan, 2008). Wallace (2007) stated that smaller numbers of students on teams allow for more time to develop relationships and increases social bonding between students and teachers. Instead of using academic tracking, middle schools use cooperative learning groups, enrichment programs, and independent study periods to accommodate the variety of student competencies, interests, and abilities (NMSA, 2010). The cookie cutter approach to the organizational structure of middle schools proved to provide an inappropriate learning environment for early adolescence (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Teachers on established and successful teams reported high levels of morale and peer cohesiveness, a unified system in supporting their students, and open communication as key components to their success (Cook & Faulkner, 2010).

Discipline

When researching student behavior and its relationship with the transition into middle school, the connection between discipline referrals and student achievement should be considered (Theriot & Dupper, 2010). When students misbehave, they are disruptive to classmates, less connected to their teacher and instruction, and consequently perform poorly academically (Freiburg, Cortina, Turner, & Midley, 2009). Research indicates a dramatic increase in discipline problems in middle school compared to elementary school (Theriot & Dupper, 2010). In their study on elementary and middle school discipline referrals, Theriot and Dupper (2010) found that only 8% of fifth graders received discipline referrals while 26% of sixth graders were written up for an infraction, indicating an 18% increase in the number of referrals from fifth to sixth grade. Of all students who received a discipline referral, 8% of the fifth graders received an in-school suspension (ISS) while 67% of sixth graders received ISS. However, comparing the same groups, 71% of elementary students with write-ups received an out-of-school suspension (OSS) compared to 43% of sixth-grade students who received a write-up (Theriot & Dupper, 2010).

LaRusso, Romer, and Selman (2008) studied the impact of student perceptions of school climate on discipline issues. Their research showed that adolescents' positive perceptions of school climate are both, directly and indirectly, related to fewer behavioral problems, including substance abuse and bullying. Wang, Selman, Dishion, and Stormshak (2010) found that middle school students reported a gradual decrease in their perceptions of a positive school climate from grades six through eight. As the positive perceptions of school climate decreased through their middle school years, the level of

problem behavior increased. Of all discipline referrals reported, approximately 75% occurred in the classroom (Algozzine, Christian, Marr, McClanahan, & White, 2008; Spaulding et al., 2010). Wang et al. (2010) explained that the correlation between perception of school climate and problem behavior were found to be significant since lower levels of problem behaviors were associated with positive perceptions of school climate. Algozzine et al. (2008) noted that the increased discipline infractions within the classroom might have resulted from students attempting to avoid completing difficult academic tasks and assignments. Males showed higher levels of behavior problems and reported increased negative perceptions of school climate than females; but, overall, both showed a gradual increase in problem behaviors and decreased positive perceptions of school climate in grades six through eight (Wang et al., 2010).

There are factors associated with the pubertal development and may have significant roles in discipline referrals for young adolescents. Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989) explained that adolescent development is a period “of trial and error, of vulnerability to emotional hurt and humiliation, of anxiety and uncertainty that are sources of unevenness of emotions and behavior associated with the age” (p. 21). Jackson and Davis (2000) confirmed that middle school students attempt to establish new social roles and an evolving identity, inconsistent behavior patterns, and struggle to balance the physical and emotional changes that accompany puberty. They believed that young people develop a greater capacity for complex thinking and are better equipped to make decisions when faced with new circumstances, but their lack of experience can result in poor decisions and negative behaviors. NMSA (2010) stated that young adolescents desire peer acceptance and attempt to associate themselves with

certain social groups, and their behavior is influenced by their environment and outside influences such as the media. NMSA (2010) also believed that young people, in their quest for independence, may test the boundaries of appropriate and inappropriate behavior and the struggle between choosing right and wrong.

Personal and Social Factors

An unpredictable change that occurs during the transition to middle school is the personal and social aspects of adolescents. Eccles et al. (1991) believed that students might struggle with establishing an identity in their new surroundings in middle school, and these personal factors can have an adverse impact on the transition experience. The factors associated with the personal and social theme of middle school transition are puberty, self-concept, peer acceptance, school connectedness, bullying, and peer aggression. As the personal and social factors are considered regarding middle school transition, the person-environment fit theory notes that the pubertal development associated with the psychological changes for adolescents includes a concept of self, peer relationships, and desired intimate relationships.

NMSA (2010) confirmed that early adolescence is characterized by the rapid physical and emotional changes. As young people develop, hormonal shifts trigger physical changes such as increases in weight and height, abrupt muscle and bone growth, and changes in complexion, hair, and voice. Dramatic physical, emotional, and social changes emerge due to sexual development and a growing capacity to have sexual relations and reproduce (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989). Females experience physical maturation earlier than males, and the varying growth rates for everyone may cause awkwardness and embarrassment during the various developmental

stages (NMSA, 2010). Amid the many concurrent physical and emotional transformations, adolescents are attempting to establish their identity, adapt to new social relationships, and create their individual temperament (Jackson & Davis, 2000).

Early adolescents clearly define their sense of ability in different areas, and the doubts of sixth-grade students are more deep-seated than in elementary school (Wigfield & Wagner, 2005). Esch and Zullig (2008) reported middle school students who considered themselves overweight had negative self-perceptions of their appearance and abilities. In the study, females with self-perceptions of being overweight often ate less food and took diet pills to lose weight. Overall, students with negative self-perceptions of their weight reported significantly higher levels of life dissatisfaction than students considered to be about the appropriate weight (Esch & Zullig, 2008). Physical appearance was the most powerful predictor of self-esteem levels for adolescents, and self-esteem showed to predict levels of school performance (Kutob, Senf, Crago, & Shisslak, 2010).

Barber and Olsen (2004) conducted a study that provided insightful findings on adolescents' self-concept during their middle school transition experience. Their study revealed positive effects of the middle school transition on self-concept for sixth graders. The structure of the sixth grade in the study featured small, family-like pods, and students experienced increased support from teachers, higher self-esteem, and less depression. Interestingly, students progressing from the sixth grade to the seventh at the same school experienced significant negative experiences involving school environment, psychological functioning, behavior issues, and interpersonal competence. This decrease in positive effects was associated with the move from the small pod atmosphere of sixth

grade to a more traditional middle school setting for the seventh grade, which included more teachers, lower quality relationships with teachers and students, and less support from teachers and administration (Barber & Olsen, 2004). Parker (2009) deduced that groups of adolescent students experienced stable ratings of self-concept as they entered middle school, then experienced real increases as their sixth-grade year progressed, including a decrease in anxiety.

Eccles et al. (1991) believed that multiple predictors of adjustment to middle school transition are the role of peer acceptance, social withdrawal, and the quality of friendships. As students transition into middle school, the role of peer relationships increases in the adolescent's life. Both intensity and intimacy increase in peer relationships as adolescents attempt to establish their identity within their new school climate. Young adolescents' need for peer acceptance is often strong, and the desire to be included in social groups can lead to a shift in allegiance from adults to peers (NMSA, 2010). Oh et al. (2008) found that 7% of sixth graders experience increased social withdrawal during the transition to middle school. Kingery and Erdley (2007) found that students with low levels of peer acceptance, fewer friends, and/or low quality of friendships in fifth grade had increased feelings of loneliness and lower levels of school involvement before transition. Students who felt valued and respected by their peers reported higher motivation levels toward academic achievement (Nelson & DeBacker, 2008).

The inability to socialize with peers and adults can interfere with an adolescent's normative development and consequently with their social, behavioral, and academic adjustment (Obradovic, Burt, Long, & Masten, 2008). Veronneau and Dishion (2010)

found that children who are rejected by their peers experience reduced accessibility to well-balanced peers from whom they could learn and acquire self-control, coping skills, and social competence. The rejected adolescents, particularly among male students, often feel angry and display aggressive behaviors toward their peers (Veronneau & Dishion, 2010). Bellmore (2011) found that the grade point averages (GPAs) of socially rejected students were consistently lower than those of students who were socially accepted. The perceived level of a best friend's academic valuing was found to impact a student's learning, responsibility, and approval goals (Nelson & DeBacker, 2008). Oh et al. (2008) suggested that students making the transition to middle school who had a socially withdrawn best friend experienced an increase in social withdrawal over time. This finding revealed the significance of the impact of characteristics of friendships and predicting developmental trajectories regarding social withdrawal (Oh et al., 2008). Furthermore, peer rejection and unpopularity in the fifth grade contributed to lower GPAs for students during the sixth grade, indicating that the effects of peer experiences in elementary school may carry over to middle school (Bellmore, 2011).

Bellmore (2011) believed that students with low peer acceptance experienced difficulties in academics. Kingery and Erdley (2007) suggested that students transitioning to middle school will experience behavioral, emotional, and peer difficulties.

Organizational Factors

Many factors should be considered when addressing the problems associated with middle school transition and providing students with resources that will promote positive student achievement (NMSA, 2010). School leaders should consider the various

organizational factors for middle school transition when evaluating effectiveness (Akos, 2006). The factors associated with the organizational theme of middle school transition are extracurricular activities, varying class structures, and differences in discipline policies between elementary and middle schools.

Akos (2006) found that GPAs, students' feelings of connectedness, and perceptions of the positive aspects of student transition are related to participation in extracurricular activities. Adolescents who participated in sports and clubs displayed higher social skills scores compared to their peers who did not participate in those activities outside of school (Howie, Lukacs, Pastor, Reuben, & Mendola, 2010). Male participation in team sports showed a higher GPA in middle school, and a higher GPA was found for both male and female students engaged in two or more moderate to vigorous-intensive activities a week (Fox, Barr-Anderson, Neumark-Sztainer, & Wall, 2010).

Student involvement in extracurricular activities may enhance connectedness to their school which may have a positive impact on psychosocial outcomes and academic achievement (Akos, 2006). Fox et al. (2010) suggested that factors that connect the relationship between higher GPA and participation in team sports include eligibility requirements to play sports, additional academic tutoring opportunities for athletes, and differences in social norms for athletes regarding the importance of academic achievement. Furthermore, student connectedness to their school impacts and serves as an indicator of the success of the transition (Akos & Galassi, 2004b). Booth, Sheehan, and Earley (2007) stated that middle school students were unable to raise their self-esteem during their sixth-grade year which suggests that the environmental factors of a

sixth through eighth-grade middle school configuration may not be as conducive to connecting. Higher levels of negative attitudes toward their social behaviors were found in middle school students along with greater feelings of anonymity, especially among female middle school students (Booth et al., 2007).

Academic Factors

Elementary and middle schools have many aspects of instructional strategies between them. Some of these differences allegedly have an impact on academic achievement of sixth-grade students during their transition into middle school. Jackson and Davis (2000) articulated whether the different grading policies and school climate can potentially lead to students struggling to adjust to their new teachers and classes. The factors associated with the academic theme of middle school transition include self-efficacy, student motivation, teaching approaches, and differences in grading policies between elementary and middle school teachers (Jackson & Davis, 2000).

According to Jackson and Davis (2000), there are different teaching practices between elementary and middle school teachers. These teaching practices may impact academic achievement of sixth-grade students. Their unique characteristics included an emerging capacity for creative thinking, consideration of multiple ideas, and applying personal experiences to their learning process (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Expectations regarding independent work, including homework, are greater in middle school along with higher levels of concentration in math classes (Schielack & Seeley, 2010). Because early adolescents learn more effectively through interactive activities and collaboration, teaching approaches should be directed toward the skills, abilities, and prior knowledge of each student (Jackson & Davis, 2000).

Haselhuhn, Al-Mabuk, Gabriele, Groen, and Galloway (2007) agreed that the goal structures are higher mastery-themed in elementary school teachers compared to middle school teachers. Middle school teachers showed a more performance-oriented learning culture. Middle school policies, including ability grouping, recognizing excellent achievement, emphasis on high grades, and academic competition support a performance goal environment.

Haselhuhn et al. (2007) concluded that students with mastery orientations are more likely to be more persistent even on difficult tasks, possess a higher academic self-efficacy and use more effective learning strategies. Friedel, Cortina, Turner, and Midgley (2010) found that students who perceive strong emphasis on mastery goals during transition experienced a significant increase in self-efficacy. Students who perceived teachers as promoting performance goals showed higher levels of problem behaviors and depression symptoms (Wang, 2009). The learning climates of secondary schools result in a lack of motivational and supportive aspects for all students, except for the highest achieving students, as adolescents advance into middle and high school (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Classroom climates with positive student-teacher relationships showed a lower probability of problem behaviors from students (Wang et al., 2010). The level of teacher emotional support as perceived by the student strongly impacted student behavior and depression levels (Wang, 2009).

Research indicates that when teachers provide students with opportunities to make decisions and solve problems independently in the classroom, students increase their self-confidence and competence when interacting with others (LaRusso et al., 2008). Wang (2009) found that when adolescents feel less competition, academic comparison to peers,

and emphasis on achieving high grades but are encouraged to become independent thinkers and interact with their peers, students experience decreased depressive symptoms and exhibit fewer problem behaviors in class. Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, and Salovey (2011) reported that fifth-grade elementary classrooms were perceived by students to have a more positive emotional environment and students felt more connected to their teachers than sixth-grade middle school classrooms and teachers. The emotional setting of a classroom is related to student motivation, interest, enjoyment, and engagement which all impact academic objectives and student achievement.

Impact of Poverty

Payne (2005) contended that the Intergenerational Transmission Theory explained the dynamics of generational poverty and the reasons why some children grow up and remain in poverty. Payne (2005) also believed that when children are raised in poverty, it is difficult for them to reach an economic level that provides equal opportunity. Impoverished students have fewer wealth-acquiring skills compared to their wealthier counterparts. Brooks-Gunn, Rouse, and McLanahan (2007) conducted a study that showed poverty among the economically disadvantaged students have risk factors such as lower parental involvement, high family stress, low cognitive development, poor academic achievement, smaller effects on behavior, and inconsistent effects on socio-emotional outcomes. Zastrow and Kist-Ashman (2008) proposed a social culture theory stating that children rarely make headway on the developmental path when they walk alone, and they progress when they walk hand in hand with an expert partner.

Bennett (2008) states that the study of poverty highlights general data on living in poverty and its effect on students' home and school lives. Preservice teachers seldom

recognize that their students live in similar neighbors and could be affected in multiple ways by factors outside their control. Nickols and Nielsen (2011) concludes, during the past three decades, there has been remarkable consistency in the public's perceptions about the causes of poverty. There are three classifications of causes: individualistic, structural, and fatalistic. Individualistic causes identify people's characteristics and behavior (i.e., lack of ability, lack of effort, moral deficiency) as the primary determinants of poverty. The structural causes encompass the features of the labor market; economic change; job location, quality, and availability; the nature of capitalism itself; inadequate schools; and discrimination. Fatalistic causes for being poor include luck, fate, and divine will.

Entwisle and Alexander (1993) reported social inequalities among economically disadvantaged students are one of the many dimensions that play a vital role in transitions to schools. Single parent families are at a high risk of getting low test scores, failing a grade, dropping out of school before finishing, or having behavior problems. Entwisle and Alexander (1993) also reported that the transition experience might be kept for the prospects of "at risk" children. For children who have been reared from the middle-class, differences between home and school are dramatic. Successful or unsuccessful adjustment over the transition from elementary to middle school can be a result of (or lack of) interconnectedness in several areas: "community and family cultures and educational and social values; the environments and resources of sending and receiving schools; the social, cognitive, emotional, and physical needs and resources of students; and the economic conditions of their lives" (San Antonio, 2004, p. 249).

Regardless of the focal point, transitions are increasingly being recognized as critical periods in the movement through public education in the United States (Queen & Algozzine, 2005). Transitional factors are plentiful as described previously. Regardless of whether the context is educational, social, or physical, there are broad classifications of factors that potentially differentiate individual experiences. Whether the concern is over personal safety, needed information, or potentially connecting with others or an organization, people will experience these anxious emotions. From an academic perspective, students at all levels of education can be affected by other students, school, team (potentially), and teacher level transition factors that play a part in how students adjust to their new environment (Murray & Malmgren, 2005).

Children of poverty are less prepared to benefit from school than children from affluent or middle-class homes (Parrett & Budge, 2012). Health and well-being, language development, access to resources, and mobility are all poverty related factors that impede a student's ability to learn. Environmental factors such as poor housing, lack of medical care, and poor nutrition affect a child's physical and cognitive development. Children who live in poverty begin school lacking language development as opposed to their affluent peers.

Chapter Summary

The transition into middle school is an essential time for all students. The middle school environment presents many challenges for sixth-grade students, specifically among the economically disadvantaged students. An effective transition program must be in place and successfully implemented by school leaders to provide a positive and productive environment that allows students to flourish in their school surroundings.

The research identified various aspects of the academic, personal, and organizational issues concerning students across the middle school transition. Given that few studies have focused on the impact of transition on economically disadvantaged students in elementary classroom structure on middle school classroom structure, there is a void in the research. By investigating sixth-grade students' perceptions of their middle school transition experience based on their fifth-grade classroom structure, much knowledge was gained regarding personal, social, academic, and organizational factors. Knowledge was gained about the behavioral, cognitive, physical, and social theories that may impact economically disadvantaged students. A review of how students of poverty are affected and the risk factors for students of poverty was explored.

The transition from elementary school to middle school can negatively affect some students. They experience losses in achievement, motivation, and cognition. There is not one single aspect of middle school that is responsible for this; however, there are several aspects of middle school that confounds the notion of transition. This includes the school overall, as well as the classroom. The school environment plays a tremendous role in the negative outcomes associated with the transition to middle school (Eccles et al., 1993; Gordon, 2011). Many middle school classrooms are focused on how good students can perform the tasks they are assigned. Those students who perceived that the focus of the class was on performance were more likely to experience declines in achievement, motivation, and self-efficacy (Gordon, 2011; Urdan & Midgley, 2003).

Chapter III will reintroduce the problem being investigated, give a brief overview of the chapter, and a detailed description of the population being sampled. The research questions that guided the study are also presented in this chapter. The research design,

data collection, and analysis, testing and assumption along with a summary conclude the chapter.

Chapter III: Methodology

Introduction

Educators who work in high poverty, urban districts are seeking ways to improve the quality of education for students. The purpose of this exploratory, quantitative study was to investigate transition programs in urban middle schools through the lens of economically disadvantaged students about the school's academic achievement level. Also, the purpose of the study was to identify practices and strategies that might increase academic achievement in middle schools that have a high percentage of economically disadvantaged students. It is hoped that the conclusions drawn from this research will assist educators and administrators in successfully educating children regardless of circumstances and motivate economically disadvantaged students to reach their fullest potential.

Research Questions

1. Is the level of “connectedness” among economically disadvantaged students, as measured by the STQ, different between low performing and higher performing schools?
 - a. Is there a difference in perception among economically disadvantaged students between low performing and higher performing schools related to the variable, “Positive Factors”?
 - b. Is there a difference in perception among economically disadvantaged students between low performing and higher performing schools related to the variable, “Concern Factors”?

- c. Is there a difference in perception among economically disadvantaged students between low performing and higher performing schools related to the variable, “Overall perceptions of the transition process”?
- d. Is there a difference in perception among economically disadvantaged students between low performing and higher performing schools related to the variable, “Who’s helpful in the transition process”?
- e. Is there a difference in perception among economically disadvantaged students between low performing and higher performing schools related to the variable, “Activities Involved”?

Research Design

This study used an exploratory, quantitative design measuring student perceptions of the transition from elementary to middle school using the Student Transition Questionnaire (STQ) (Akos, 2006). The purpose of this study was to examine differences in the perceptions of economically disadvantaged sixth-grade students transitioning from elementary to middle school. The goals of this study were to identify the effects of school transition on economically disadvantaged students, to study the impact of the school transition, and to make recommendations for providing adequate support to economically disadvantaged students who are transitioning to middle school.

Population and Sample

The target population for this study was all sixth-grade students in a specific urban school district in the central region of the state of Arkansas. There are approximately 25,000 students in this school district. Demographically, roughly 72% of

the students qualified for free and reduced lunch. There were approximately 3,800 faculty members in the district with roughly 75% with advanced degrees.

For this study, four middle schools in this district were purposively selected to participate. Two of the middle schools were categorized as low-performing schools based on state assessments. The other two middle schools were categorized as higher performing schools in the district based on state assessments. These two schools were referred to for this study as “higher” performing, rather than high performing because the schools were not performing in the upper levels of state assessment, but they were performing at a higher rate than the two low-performing schools. All four middle schools contain sixth through eighth-grade configurations and were designated as Title I schools at the time of this study. Demographics of the two low-performing middle schools were similar regarding student ethnicity consisting of approximately 66% African American, 18% White/Non-Hispanic, 12% Hispanic American, 2% dual race, 2% Asian American, and .34% Native American. Demographics of the two higher performing middle schools were similar regarding student ethnic backgrounds consisting of approximately 57% African American, 30% White/ Non-Hispanic, 8% Hispanic, 4% Asian American, .05% Native Americans, and .05% dual race.

Instrumentation

The STQ (Appendix A), used to collect data on the perceptions of middle school students about transitioning from elementary to middle school, was developed by Akos (2002) to study the psychosocial effects of moving from one stage of a student’s education to another. The survey collects data related to a student’s overall perception of the transition experience (Item 4), and the concerns (Item 3) and positive factors (Item 2)

they perceived during the transition, which serves as a proxy for “psychosocial adjustment to middle school” or connectedness (Akos, 2006, p. 9). Item 4, “How was the move from elementary school to middle school for you?”, was measured by a Likert scale of 1-4 with 1 representing “very difficult” to 4 representing “very easy.” Both Item 2 and Item 3 of the survey consist of multiple-response questions where students were asked to select from a list of 18 transition positives and 22 transition concerns.

The variable, “Who’s Helpful in the Transition?”, is a series of 12 responses to the question, “How helpful has each of the following been to you in moving from elementary to middle school?” Each of the 12 responses was to be rated by the students from 1-4 with 1 representing “not very helpful” to 4 representing “very helpful.”

The last variable, “Activities Involved,” is represented in the survey by Item 8. It is another multiple-response item that asks the students to select all of the activities that they have been involved in from a list of five extracurricular activities or select none options since the students began school. This item is also reflective of “connectedness” with the school where the more activities involved, the more connected the students feel with the school.

The STQ was administered online by administrators to sixth-grade students to gauge their perceptions of the transitioning process in the district. The STQ items were developed from previous literature and feedback from stakeholders from other transition programs (Akos, 2002). According to Akos (2002), the STQ was administered in two previous studies to get an understanding of student perceptions of the transition experience from elementary school into middle school. The survey measured items that were associated with middle school transition such as social/personal, organizational, and

academic success. The survey determined the findings that students are most concerned with such as bullying and making new friends (personal/social construct), getting familiar with the building and following new rules and procedures (organizational construct), and excessive homework and harder teachers (academic construct).

According to Akos and Galassi (2004a), students were most concerned with the following: getting along with peers, making new friends, and dealing with bullies (personal/social construct); more challenging class work and increased homework (academic construct); and being in a larger building and dealing with the complexities of multiple classes being taught by different teachers (organizational construct). Akos and Galassi (2004a) “concluded that students appear to identify three primary categories of school transition of academic, procedural, and social” (p. 218).

To ensure construct validity of the instrument for this specific study, the researcher consulted with four middle school principals, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) team, and a statistician in an urban school district in central Arkansas. The feedback from the survey was positive, and the items accurately measured the three constructs of personal/social, organizational, and academic variables. The items on the survey are low-risk in nature and were written using clear language and simple terms to ensure the sixth-grade participants could understand the items. An analysis was conducted on each survey item and measured within the construct that the item addresses.

Data Analysis

Data consisted of STQ survey data obtained from the school district in which the four participating middle schools were located. The data were placed into a digital file and provided to the researcher in an Excel spreadsheet. The data were uploaded into an

SPSS23 file for analysis. The data consisted of no markers that identified any of the students. The schools were identified to tag them as either low performing or higher performing for analysis purposes. The identity of the individual students who completed the survey was never made known to the researcher, guaranteeing complete anonymity.

The STQ (Appendix A) used to collect data on the perceptions of middle school students about transitioning from elementary to middle school was developed by Akos (2002) to study the psychosocial effects of moving from one stage of a student's education to another. The survey collects data related to a student's overall perception of the transition experience (Item 4), the concerns (Item 3), and positive factors (Item 2) they perceived during the transition, which serves as a proxy for "psychosocial adjustment to middle school" or connectedness (Akos, 2006, p. 9). Item 4: "How was the move from elementary school to middle school for you?" was measured by a Likert scale of 1-4, with 1 representing "very difficult" to 4 representing "very easy." Both Item 2 and Item 3 of the survey consist of multiple-response questions where students were asked to select from a list of 18 transition positives and 22 transition concerns.

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The last variable, "Activities Involved" is represented in the survey by Item 8. It is another multiple-response item that asks the student to select all of the activities that they have been involved in since coming to the school from a list of five extracurricular

activities or select none. This item is also reflective of “connectedness” with the school, with the more activities involved, the more connected they feel with the school.

Each of these variables was analyzed by using descriptive statistics in the form of frequencies, means, standard deviations, and inferential statistics in the form of *t*-tests and analysis of variance (ANOVA). Data were analyzed to determine if differences existed in the perceptions of economically disadvantaged students between low and higher performing middle schools as to their transition experiences. The frequencies of the multiple-response questions were analyzed to determine what aspects of the transition were the most positively perceived and the least positively perceived across all schools and in the comparison between the low and higher performing schools. The textual and tabular results of these analyses are presented in Chapter IV.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this quantitative study was to explore school transition programs in identified urban middle schools and the effects these programs have on economically disadvantaged students regarding academic achievement. Also, the purpose of the study was to identify practices and strategies that are most successful in increasing academic achievement among economically disadvantaged students within the selected middle schools. Akos’ Student Transition Questionnaire was administered to sixth-grade students anonymously at four urban middle schools in central Arkansas to compare student perceptions of the middle school transition experience. This study intended to add to the current research regarding school transition and its impact on the economically disadvantaged students.

Chapter IV: Results

As elementary students transition into middle school, it is essential that they be prepared to cope with the challenges inherent in such a major cultural shift. Fortunately, many students experience a smooth transition into middle school and are successful in adapting to their new surroundings. However, some students struggle with the psychosocial, personal, organizational, and academic changes associated with moving into middle school. For those sixth-grade students, the middle school transition can be full of anxiety and stress as they adjust to their new surroundings. This situation can be exacerbated for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, who may experience added stress from a lack of academic success, in addition to the usual personal, organizational, and social changes that will confront them. By analyzing the perceptions of these students as they move into the middle school environment, school officials may learn better methods for facilitating this process, which in turn will help create a positive learning environment for all sixth-grade students.

This study utilized an exploratory, quantitative research design using data collected by the school district through anonymous surveys to examine middle school students' perceptions of their transition from elementary school to middle school. The data were collected through the use of the Student Transition Questionnaire (STQ) (Akos, 2002). This instrument was developed by the author to measure the responses of students to the process of transitioning from elementary to middle school, particularly in the areas of social/personal interactions, organizational factors, and academic factors. By using the STQ, the data provided the researcher with insight into the students' perceptions of their transition experience. The results of the analysis may allow school administrators to

understand better the process of middle school transition and the many facets that affect each student.

Educators who work in high poverty, urban districts are seeking ways to improve the quality of education for the students they serve. The reason that middle schools with high percentages of economically disadvantaged students were selected for participation in this study was to focus specifically upon the perceptions of these students to determine what they feel about the transition process. The contrast variable that was used to compare the four middle schools was school-level academic performance. Two of the schools were categorized as low-performing schools, while the other two were categorized as higher-performing schools. The purpose for including this variable into the study was to explore the transition process in these four urban middle schools to determine if the perceptions of these economically disadvantaged students differ depending on the level of academic performance. While no attempt was made to determine a causal relationship between the transition programs in these schools and the level of student performance, this exploratory study may offer insights into what works about the level of success encountered in a particular school. In turn, that information may lead to better methods of transitioning these students from elementary to middle school. In essence, it is hoped that the conclusions drawn from this study will assist educators and administrators in successfully educating children regardless of circumstances and motivate economically disadvantaged students to reach their fullest potential.

Research Questions

There was one overarching research question guiding this study, with five sub-questions used to address a portion of the major research question. The premise was that the data from the STQ contained five variables that are linked to the dependent variable “connectedness.” Each sub-question was answered by analyzing specific elements of the STQ. The results of these sub-questions were then evaluated together to respond to the overall research question. In other words, the five sub-questions each represent a component of the variable “connectedness.”

1. Is the level of “connectedness” among economically disadvantaged students, as measured by the STQ, different between low performing and higher performing schools?
 - a. Is there a difference in perception among economically disadvantaged students between low performing and higher performing schools related to the variable, “Positive Factors”?
 - b. Is there a difference in perception among economically disadvantaged students between low performing and higher performing schools related to the variable, “Concern Factors”?
 - c. Is there a difference in perception among economically disadvantaged students between low performing and higher performing schools related to the variable, “Overall perceptions of the transition process”?
 - d. Is there a difference in perception among economically disadvantaged students between low performing and higher performing schools related to the variable, “Who’s helpful in the transition process”?

- e. Is there a difference in perception among economically disadvantaged students between low performing and higher performing schools related to the variable, “Activities Involved”?

Data Collection

The STQ survey was administered in the school district during the fall semester of 2016. The district has an enrollment of approximately 25,000 students and a diverse demographic makeup, with 72% of the students qualifying for free and reduced lunch. There are approximately 3,800 faculty members in the district with roughly 75% holding advanced degrees.

The data used in this study were obtained, with permission from the district administration (see Appendix C) and consisted of STQ survey data from four selected middle schools. Of the four schools, two were classified as low performing schools by the state of Arkansas assessment measures, and two were classified as higher performing schools. All four of the schools have a grade configuration of sixth through eighth grade.

The school-level assessment ranking of low performing and higher performing serves as a proxy variable for student achievement. Again, it is not the intent of this study to draw a direct causal effect on the students’ perceptions of transition and student-level academic performance. However, by contrasting the participating schools based on their overall level of academic performance, it allows the researcher to contrast any perceptions these students may have that differ from these two performance levels in the schools. That, in turn, may reveal differences in the transition programs that could lead to higher performance. Further study would then be warranted.

The students whose data were used in this study attended one of the four middle schools selected from an urban school district located in the central region of the State of Arkansas. Two of the middle schools were categorized as low-performing schools in the district, and two were categorized as higher performing schools in the district.

Demographics of the two low-performing middle schools are similar regarding student ethnicity consisting of approximately 66% African American, 18% White/Non-Hispanic, 12% Hispanic American, 2% dual race, 2% Asian American, and .34% Native American.

Demographics of the two higher performing middle schools are similar regarding student ethnic backgrounds consisting of approximately 57% African American, 30% White/Non-Hispanic, 8% Hispanic, 4% Asian American, .05% Native Americans, and .05% dual race.

The data collected from this survey were archived by the district and the researcher was provided with the data in the form of Excel® spreadsheets from the district administration. The spreadsheet contained only raw data from the survey administration coded by school attended and gender. No other identifying evidence was included, maintaining the complete anonymity of all respondents.

The target population in this study consisted of 682 sixth grade students enrolled in the four participating middle schools during fall 2016. Survey data were obtained from 331 students or 49% of the student population. The school district administered the survey online, with students in the designated grades completing the survey in class on school-owned computers. The response rate of 49% was based on the total sixth-grade population of these four schools and the number of completed surveys.

The STQ (Appendix A) used to collect data on the perceptions of middle school students about transitioning from elementary to middle school was developed by Akos (2002) to study the psychosocial effects of moving from one stage of a student's education to another. The survey collects data related to a student's overall perception of the transition experience (Item 4), and the concern factors (Item 3) and positive factors (Item 2) they perceived during the transition, which serves as a proxy for "psychosocial adjustment to middle school" or connectedness (Akos, 2006, p. 9). Item 4: "How was the move from elementary school to middle school for you?" was measured by a Likert scale of 1-4, with 1 representing "very difficult" to 4 representing "very easy." Both Item 2 and Item 3 of the survey consisted of multiple-response questions where students were asked to select from a list of 18 transition positives and 22 transition concerns.

The variable "Who's Helpful in the Transition?" is a series of 12 responses to the question, "How helpful has each of the following been to you in moving from elementary to middle school?" Each of the 12 responses was rated by the students from 1-4, with 1 representing "not very helpful" to 4 representing "very helpful."

The last variable, "Activities Involved" was represented on the survey by Item 8. It is another multiple-response question that asks the student to select all of the activities that they have been involved in since coming to the school from a list of five extracurricular activities or select none. This item is also reflective of "connectedness" with the school, with the more activities involved, the more connected they feel with the school.

It should be noted that an item on the survey that represents the variable "connectedness" (Item 7) consisting of five Likert scale items asking how the student

feels about the school was not used due to incorrect responses to the survey. The students ranked the items, instead of assessing each item individually based on the Likert scale. Akos (2006) indicates that this survey item, with a calculated mean for the five questions under that item, measures the variable “connectedness.” Since the data for this item were not valid, a proxy for the variable “connectedness” was represented by Items 2, 3, 4, 7, and 8 and will be discussed in the Data Analysis section below.

Data Analysis

A series of statistical analyses were performed on the STQ survey data. The following description and tables present the results of the data analysis from the study. First, the individual items from the survey representing variables related to “connectedness” were presented in a textual and tabular form to provide a description of the data regarding demographics and participants’ responses. Also, the results of various inferential statistics, including *t*-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) are presented to provide the results that are used to answer the study’s research questions.

The response rate for the survey is provided in Table 1. Of the four schools, 334 of the 682 sixth grade students completed the survey, for a response rate of 49%. For the individual schools, the total number of sixth graders and the number of completed surveys is provided, with the rate of return for each school ranging from 14% to 85%.

Table 1

Survey Response Rate by School

School	Total No. Sixth Graders	Total No. Complete Surveys	Percentage of Responders
LP1	197	75	38%
LP2	214	183	85%
HP1	81	11	14%
HP2	190	65	34%
Total	682	334	49%

Note: LP = Low Performing School and HP = Higher Performing School.

Non-response bias may occur if a certain percentage of sixth graders do not participate in the survey. There is a risk that these non-responders may have perceptions that are statistically different from those who took part in the surveys. Since nearly half of the sixth-grade students in these four middle schools completed the survey, it was determined that given the size of the sample and the relatively high response rate, non-response bias was not an issue.

Table 2 provides a breakdown of respondents by gender as part of the overall description of the sample. One hundred and sixty-four students were male, representing 49.2% of the students. One hundred and sixty-nine students were female, representing 50.8% of the students.

Table 2

Survey Responders by Gender

Gender	N	Percentage
Male	164	49.2%
Female	170	50.8%
Total	334	100%

Research Questions

In measuring the effectiveness of a transition program from elementary to middle school, Akos (2006) used the term “connectedness.” For purposes of this study, the operational definition of connectedness consisted of variables represented by student responses to specific items in the STQ. Those variables are “Positive Factors” (Item 2), “Concern Factors” (Item 3), Overall Perception of the Transition (Item 4), Who’s Helpful (Item 6), and Number of Activities Involved (Item 8). The responses to each of these items differ, with Item 2, 3, and 8 being multiple-response items with students being asked to select from a list, all that apply to them. Items 4 and 6 are Likert-type rating scales. The descriptive statistics relating to the survey data for these variables are provided in tabular form below.

1. Is the level of “connectedness” among economically disadvantaged students, as measured by the STQ, different between low performing and higher performing schools?
 - a. Is there a difference in perception among economically disadvantaged students between low performing and higher performing schools related to the variable, “Positive Factors”?
 - b. Is there a difference in perception among economically disadvantaged

students between low performing and higher performing schools related to the variable, “Concern Factors”?

- c. Is there a difference in perception among economically disadvantaged students between low performing and higher performing schools related to the variable, “Overall perceptions of the transition process”?
- d. Is there a difference in perception among economically disadvantaged students between low performing and higher performing schools related to the variable, “Who’s helpful in the transition process”?
- e. Is there a difference in perception among economically disadvantaged students between low performing and higher performing schools related to the variable, “Activities Involved”?

The descriptive statistics for the variable, Positive Factors (Item 2), is a frequency table representing the multiple responses from the respondents to the question, “When you first came to middle school, what things about moving on to middle school made you happy?” (see Table 3). The respondents were asked to select all that apply to them from a list of 15 possible responses. The frequencies for all respondents and those from low and higher performing schools are provided in Table 3.

Table 3

Positive Factors Low and Higher Performing Schools and Total

Positive List	<i>f</i> LP	Percent of Cases for LP	<i>f</i> HP	Percent of Cases for HP	<i>f</i> Total	Percent of Cases for Total
Making new friends	193	75.1%	50	65.8%	243	72.8%
Having new teachers	166	64.6%	43	56.6%	209	62.6%
Changing classes	153	59.5%	43	56.6%	196	58.7%
More freedom	131	51.0%	54	71.1%	185	55.4%
Being in a larger school	145	56.4%	28	36.8%	173	51.8%
Able to choose some classes	121	47.1%	50	65.8%	171	51.2%
Taking connection classes	127	49.4%	40	52.6%	167	41.0%
Attending school events	134	52.1%	32	42.1%	166	49.7%
Getting good grades	130	50.6%	36	47.4%	166	49.7%
Participate in sports	136	52.9%	36	47.4%	162	48.5%
Making the honor roll	110	42.8%	28	36.8%	138	41.3%
More choices at lunch	106	41.2%	17	22.4%	123	36.8%
Using a locker	59	23.0%	57	75.0%	116	34.7%
More students	88	34.2%	14	18.4%	102	30.5%
Older students	81	31.5%	15	19.7%	96	28.7%
Total	1880	731.4%	543	714.5%	2413	722.5%

Note. LP = Low Performing School and HP = Higher Performing School.

The descriptive statistics for the variable, Concern Factors (Item 3), is a frequency table representing the multiple responses from the respondents to the question, “When you first came to middle school, what things about moving on to the middle school were you worried about?” (see Table 4). The respondents were asked to select all that apply to them from a list of 22 possible responses. The frequencies for all respondents and those from low and higher performing schools are provided in Table 4.

Table 4

Concern Factors Low and Higher Performing Schools and Total

Concern List	<i>f</i> LP	Percent of Cases for LP	<i>f</i> HP	Percent of Cases for HP	<i>f</i> Total	Percent of Cases for Total
Finding my way around or getting lost	191	74.3%	57	75.0%	248	74.3%
How much homework I have	172	66.9%	49	64.5%	221	66.2%
Getting to class on time	138	53.7%	46	60.5%	214	64.1%
Harder classes than 5 th grade	138	53.7%	38	50.0%	176	52.7%
Getting along with other students	138	53.7%	24	31.6%	162	48.5%
Getting good grades	118	45.9%	37	48.7%	155	46.4%
Fitting in or making new friends	101	39.3%	31	40.8%	132	39.5%
Hard or unfriendly teachers	109	42.4%	23	30.3%	132	39.5%
Older students	91	35.4%	28	36.8%	119	35.6%

New rules and regulations	92	35.8%	24	31.6%	116	34.7%
Not knowing anyone in my classes	89	34.6%	27	35.5%	116	34.7%
Pressure to do well	86	33.5%	29	38.2%	115	34.4%
Changing classes	84	32.7%	22	28.9%	106	31.7%
Being unorganized /losing work	78	30.4%	23	30.3%	101	30.2%
Being bullied	77	30.0%	22	28.9%	99	29.6%
Learning my new teacher's name	89	34.6%	9	11.8%	98	29.3%
Peer pressure	64	24.9%	20	26.3%	84	25.1%
New or more students	73	28.4%	10	13.2%	83	24.9%
Changing clothes for PE	63	24.5%	15	19.7%	78	23.4%
Receiving in-school suspension	62	24.1%	16	21.1%	78	23.4%
Riding the bus	59	23.0%	8	10.5%	67	20.1%
Using a locker	40	15.6%	27	35.5%	67	20.1%
Total	2152	696.2%	585	769.7%	2767	828.4%

Note: LP = Low Performing School and HP = Higher Performing School.

The descriptive statistics for the variable, “Overall Perception of the Transition Process” (Item 4), consists of the mean (*M*) and standard deviation (*SD*) for responses to the question “How was the move from elementary to middle school for you?” The responses on the Likert scale ranged from 1 representing “very difficult” to 4

representing “very easy.” The results indicate that the mean approximates a response of “easy” on the Likert scale ($M = 3.10$, $SD = .916$).

The descriptive statistics for the variable, “Activities Involved” (Item 8), is a frequency table representing the multiple responses from the respondents to the question, “Since coming to the middle school, in which of the following activities have you been involved?” (see Table 5). The respondents were asked to select all that apply to them from a list of 6 possible responses, including “none.” The frequencies for all respondents and those from low and higher performing schools are provided in Table 5.

Table 5

Activities Involved in Middle School

Activity	<i>f</i> LP	Percent of Cases for LP	<i>f</i> HP	Percent of Cases for HP	<i>f</i> Total	Percent of Total Cases
None	105	40.9%	29	38.2%	134	40.1%
A school club	70	27.3%	22	28.9%	92	27.5%
School Sports Team Cheerleading	68	26.5%	18	23.7%	86	25.7%
The School Band	43	16.7%	9	11.8%	52	15.6%
The School Chorus	28	10.9%	12	15.8%	40	12.0%
A School Play or Drama Group	28	10.9%	4	5.3%	32	9.6%
Totals	342	133.2%	94	123.7%	436	130.5%

The descriptive statistics for the variable, “Who’s Helpful in the Transition Process” (Item 6), consist of the mean (*M*) and standard deviation (*SD*) for responses to the question “How helpful has each of the following been to you in moving from elementary to middle school?” (see Table 6). The responses on the Likert scale ranged from 1 representing “not very helpful” to 4 representing “very helpful.” The results are reported in Table 6.

Table 6

Who’s Helpful in the Transition?

Response	<i>N</i>		<i>Mean</i>		<i>SD</i>		<i>t</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
	LP	HP	LP	HP	LP	HP			
Middle school principals and counselors coming to the elementary school to talk about classes I can take in middle school.	85	22	2.33	2.77	1.16	.92	-1.66	105	.065
Comments and suggestions from elementary school teachers and counselors.	61	21	2.41	2.43	.86	.81	-.087	80	.931
The schedule that I picked up before the start of school.	53	18	2.85	2.89	1.13	1.02	-.132	69	.895
My sixth-grade teacher.	54	17	2.85	3.12	.98	.99	-.973	69	.334
The principal and assistant principals.	30	14	2.60	2.71	1.07	1.27	-.311	42	.757
Team building activities.	34	6	2.24	1.50	1.05	.84	1.626	38	.112

My parents.	58	13	3.16	3.38	1.20	.77	-.660	69	.512
Other family members.	40	17	2.78	2.82	1.07	1.13	-.154	55	.878
Students and friends in my class.	48	14	2.79	2.79	.99	1.12	.019	60	.985
Older students in the middle school.	66	14	2.24	2.36	1.02	1.28	-.364	78	.717
Counselors at the middle school.	70	11	2.74	2.64	.97	1.12	.331	79	.742
Other adults (band directors, coaches, etc.)	125	23	2.65	2.26	1.12	1.13	1.516	146	.132

Note: LP = Low Performing School and HP = Higher Performing School.

In addition to the descriptive statistics reported above, a series of inferential statistics were run to determine if any significant differences existed among the “connectedness” variables between low performing and higher performing schools. The responses for the two low-performing schools were combined using SPSS23 by recoding the School Attended variable into 1 = low performing and 2 = higher performing. This combined set of data allowed the series of connectedness responses to be analyzed with a series of *t*-tests and ANOVAs to determine if any of the variables differed significantly between low and higher performing schools.

Since the variable, “Positive Factors,” was a multiple response item, the total frequency of all responses was combined, and a mean response for both low and higher performing schools was created and used in a *t*-test. The results indicated that there was no significant difference between low-performing schools ($M = 7.27$, $SD = 3.72$) and higher performing schools ($M = 7.14$, $SD = 3.92$) in relation to the number of Positive Factors reported; $t(331) = .267$, $p = .789$.

The variable, “Concern Factors,” was a multiple response item; the total frequency of all responses was combined and a mean response for both low and higher performing schools was created and used in a *t*-test. The result indicated that there was no significant difference between low-performing schools ($M = 8.49$, $SD = 5.31$) and higher performing schools ($M = 7.70$, $SD = 4.71$) in relation to the number of Concern Factors reported; $t(331) = 1.17$, $p = .242$.

The variable, “Overall Perception of the Transition Process,” was a Likert scale response item. The mean for all responses to this item was calculated for both low and higher performing schools, and a *t*-test was used to determine if there was a difference in the means between the two types of schools. The results of this analysis indicated that there was no significant difference between low-performing schools ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 0.95$) and higher performing schools ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 0.77$) in relation to their perception of the connectedness variable, Overall Perception of the Transition Process; $t(321) = .309$, $p = .757$.

The variable “Who was Helpful in the Transition Process” was a series of Likert scale response items. Respondents were asked to rate each of the 12 responses on a scale of 1-4, with 1 representing “not very helpful” to 4 representing “very helpful.” Means and standard deviations were determined for each of the 12 responses, and that was followed by a series of *t*-tests to determine if there were any differences in the students’ perceptions across each response. Table 6 contains the means and standard deviations for each of the responses. The *t*-test results revealed that there were no significant differences between low and higher performing schools on student perceptions of the 12 responses.

Answering the Research Question

The overarching research question for this study was whether the level of “connectedness” among economically disadvantaged students, as measured by the STQ, differed between low performing and higher performing middle schools. The five sub-questions addressed specific variables that provided a conclusion to whether there was a difference in connectedness among economically disadvantaged students in low and higher performing schools.

Positive factors. Sub-question 1a sought to determine if there was a difference in perception between low and higher performing schools regarding the “Positive Factors” reported by survey Item 2. In analyzing the number of responses reported, a *t*-test was ran to determine if there was a difference in the means between low and higher performing schools. The result indicated that there was no significant difference between low-performing schools ($M = 7.27$, $SD = 3.72$) and higher performing schools ($M = 7.14$, $SD = 3.92$) in relation to the number of Positive Factors reported; $t(331) = .267$, $p = .789$.

Although there was no significant difference between the two groups, the responses that were reported the most by each group were indicative of the things that they saw as positive elements of middle school. The most often selected response in the low-performing schools was *making new friends*, while the top positive factor for the higher performing schools was *using a locker*. It is an important to note that although there was no significant difference in the number of responses, the fact that the low performing school most often chose a psychosocial element, that indicates personal relationships are what make them the happiest in middle school. While on the other

hand, the higher performing school students reported a procedural element, using a locker, as what makes them the happiest about middle school.

Stage-environment fit theory suggested that school transition should be responsive to the maturing adolescent (Eccles & Midgely, 1989). This framework draws on person-environment fit and self-determination theories (Deci & Ryan, 2000) but places emphasis on adolescent development in the context of middle school. Based on the findings of this study, the researcher determined that there was no difference in perception among economically disadvantaged students between low performing and higher performing schools as related to the variable, “positive factors.”

Concern factors. Sub-question 1b sought to determine if there was a difference in perception between low and higher performing schools regarding the “Concern Factors” reported by survey Item 3. In analyzing the number of responses reported, a *t*-test was run to determine if there was a difference in the means between low and higher performing schools. The result indicated that there was no significant difference between low-performing schools ($M = 8.49$, $SD = 5.31$) and higher performing schools ($M = 7.70$, $SD = 4.71$) in relation to the number of Concern Factors reported; $t(331) = 1.17$, $p = .242$.

In reviewing the responses of both groups, it was interesting that both groups worried about *finding their way around or getting lost*. *How much homework I would have* and *getting to class on time* were also perceived as another concern among the economically disadvantaged students in both low performing and higher performing schools. In this case and consistent across both groups, procedural factors and academic factors weighed heavily on the minds of these middle school students.

Overall perceptions of the transition process. Sub-question 1c sought to determine if there was a difference in perception between low and higher performing schools regarding the variable, “Overall Perception of the Transition Process,” as reported by survey Item 4. This was a Likert scale item on a scale of 1-4. The mean for all responses to this item was calculated for both low and higher performing schools, and a *t*-test was used to determine if there was a difference in the means between the two types of schools. The result of this analysis indicated that there was no significant difference between low-performing schools ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 0.95$) and higher performing schools ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 0.77$) in relation to their perception of the connectedness variable, Overall Perception of the Transition Process; $t(321) = .309$, $p = .757$.

This result indicated that in both the low and higher performing schools, the students perceived the overall transition process in a rather positive light. The mean indicates that on average all students rated the experience as “easy.” This is an indication that, overall, the schools appear to be effective with their transition programs in both the low performing and higher performing schools.

Who’s helpful in the transition process? Sub-question 1d sought to determine if there was a difference in perception between low and higher performing schools regarding the variable, “Who’s Helpful in the Transition Process,” as reported by survey Item 6. This item was a series of Likert scale response items. Respondents were asked to rate each of the 12 responses on a scale of 1-4, with 1 representing “not very helpful” to 4 representing “very helpful.” Means and standard deviations were determined for each of the 12 responses, and that was followed by a series of *t*-tests to determine if there were any differences in the students’ perceptions across each response. Table 6 contains the

means and standard deviations for each of the responses. The *t*-test results revealed that there were no significant differences between low and higher performing schools on student perceptions of the 12 responses.

There were no significant differences between the low and higher performing middle schools in this variable. The most helpful in the transition process were parents. Sixth-grade teachers and picking up their schedule early were other helpful factors. The least helpful, according to students in both groups, was team building activities. This indicated that schools were not engaging in this activity or the activities were not very effective in their perception.

Activities involved. Sub-question 1e sought to determine if there was a difference in the number of activities that students reported to be involved in, across low and higher performing schools. Using the frequency of responses, 41.6% of the students from low performing and higher performing schools reported that they were not involved in activities at their middle school. While there was no significant difference between the perceptions of students in low and higher performing schools, the percentage of students not engaged in any of the listed activities should be troubling.

Overall level of connectedness. In answering the overarching research question, “is there a difference in the levels of connectedness between low and higher performing middle schools,” the results of this study indicate that in these four schools, there is no difference between low and higher performing schools. Again, this does not imply that there is no effect on the quality of transitioning programs and continued efforts to make the transition as comfortable for students is important.

Regarding the level of “connectedness,” there were no differences in perception among economically disadvantaged students between low performing and higher performing schools. However, the results of the study indicate that these four schools are having some success regarding transition. The students, overall, reported that the transition to middle school was easy. They reported that their parents and their new sixth-grade teacher were very helpful in the transition. Moreover, they reported that there were both positives and negatives in the transition. The negatives most often reported indicated that most are procedural in nature, which can be addressed with an evaluation of the transition programs. The one troubling indicator of connectedness was the high percentage of students that reported they were not engaged in extracurricular activities. However, that could be a reflection of the fact that the survey was administered very early in their middle school experience. If surveyed at the end of the school year, the number of participating students may be much higher.

The next chapter contains an analysis of these findings as they relate to the literature on the transition components. It provides a summation and interpretation of the findings for each research question and the implications for current and future educational practices along with recommendations for continuing research related to academic success among economically disadvantaged students.

Chapter V: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

For students making the transition into middle school, progress and success during the sixth-grade year vary as much as the personalities and behaviors of individual students. Educators who work in high poverty, urban districts are always seeking ways to improve the quality of education for students, specifically in schools with a large percentage of economically disadvantaged students. Although various studies have been analyzed, few studies, if any, have focused on the impact of the school transition of economically disadvantaged students and its relationship to academic achievement in the classroom structure of middle school (Nelson & Landel, 2007). With the fluctuating classroom structures at middle schools, elementary schools can create a disadvantage for some sixth-grade students who must adapt to the middle school structure (Hood, 2010).

The transition into middle school brings many complicated issues and opportunities for students. Effective transition programs must be in place by school leaders to ensure a successful transition occurs (Akos, 2002). The purpose of this exploratory quantitative study was to explore school transition programs in identified middle schools and the effects these programs have on economically disadvantaged students in urban middle schools regarding psychosocial, personal, organizational, and academic changes associated with moving into middle school. Also, the purpose of the study was to identify practices and strategies that are most successful in increasing academic achievement among economically disadvantaged students within the selected middle schools.

Through the use of the STQ survey, sixth-grade participants from four urban middle schools gave their perspectives of the personal and social, organizational, and

academic constructs associated with their transition into middle school. Archival data about the 334 sixth grade students at these four urban middle schools with a large percentage of economically disadvantaged students were gathered. The survey method was utilized to find data about the relationship between elementary classroom structure and student perceptions of their middle school transition experience. The overall response rate of the eligible sixth-grade students who participated in the STQ was 49%.

Personal Perceptions

Many middle school students have shown declines in academic achievement and motivation following their transition into middle school while developing negative perceptions toward their school environment (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Although there were no statistically significant differences between the classroom structure and personal and social perception among the low performing and high performing middle schools, the data yielded discussion points regarding social and personal issues of transitioning economically disadvantaged students. When asked about items that made each student happy about entering middle school, *making new friends* was selected by 73.1% of the participants. This finding supports the belief that, upon entering middle school, for the first time in their lives adolescents are given the opportunity to create their identity, progress into new social roles, and develop their code of ethics to guide their behavior (Jackson & Davis, 2000). These data relate to the finding that adolescents who were socially competent displayed positive attitudes toward school and adjusted to new experiences and surroundings more effectively than students with lower levels of social competence (Prelow, Loukas, and Jordan-Green, 2007). Eccles and Midgley (1989) explained that as a part of their person-environment fit theory, an essential need for

adolescents is continuity of classmates throughout the school day to promote positive friendship and social bonding with their peers. Students in this study from all four schools strongly indicated they were happy about making new friends.

Due to the detrimental impact of bullying within schools, a keen awareness of potential bullying issues is essential in schools at all levels. Students who experienced bullying, both victims, and the perpetrators, are more likely to engage in aggressive behavior such as carrying weapons and performing acts of violence than students who do not experience bullying (Meyer-Adams & Conner, 2008). When asked what things about moving on to the middle school they were worried about, 29.9% (N=21) of these students selected *being bullied*. Students with bullying experiences show higher rates of skipping school and missing classes (Meyer-Adams & Conner, 2008). The data from this study indicated economically disadvantaged students had an increased level of anxiety of being bullied in sixth grade and this may cause concern for school leaders. Middle schools must have a comprehensive transition program that stresses the importance of treating others with respect and focuses on the behaviors such as bullying that may be detrimental to a successful, productive middle school.

Organizational Perceptions

While there were no significant findings in the four participating urban schools, data from this study indicated that 35% (n=117) of economically disadvantaged students from both low performing and high performing middle schools were looking forward to *using a locker*, and 30.5% (n=101) of students were worried about *being unorganized/losing work*. Students indicated their levels of happiness regarding *changing classes* 59.3% (n=198) and *having new teachers* 63.2% (n=211). This finding was found to be

encouraging as the literature has shown that during the transition into middle school, many students find their new surroundings less supportive than elementary school and often experienced losses in self-esteem and student achievement (Eccles & Midgley, 1989).

Contrariwise, of the items that worried the students during sixth grade, *finding my way around or getting lost* ($n = 249$) 75.2% along with *new rules and expectations* ($n = 116$) 35.0% were chosen at higher levels by economically disadvantaged students from all four middle schools. The heightened worries may be explained by economically disadvantaged students having never been exposed to the middle school classroom structure. Previous studies revealed that by utilizing the team teaching structure in middle school, students acquired deeper content knowledge within each subject (Nelson & Landel, 2007).

The fear of *finding my way around or getting lost* could be alleviated by effective transition programs that include small group tours of the sixth-grade hall and all areas of the school building the sixth graders will be using. Furthermore, strategic placement of teams within the school will reduce the travel between classes and prevent issues with students getting lost in their new school. The data on these organizational concerns reveal that large middle schools are subdivided into schools-within-a-school, and this model is associated with the smaller learning community movement (NMSA, 2010).

Academic Perceptions

While the results were not significant, there were noteworthy findings regarding academic perceptions among the economically disadvantaged students in the four urban middle schools. Economically disadvantaged students indicated *getting good grades* ($n =$

167, 50.0%) and *making the honor roll* ($n = 139$, 41.6%) were the top items that make them happy moving to middle school. Interestingly, economically disadvantaged students were more worried about *how much homework they would have* ($n = 222$, 67.1%) and *harder classes in sixth grade compared to fifth grade* ($n = 177$, 53.5%). The findings also indicated that most economically disadvantaged students perceive their transition as “easy” or “very easy.” Out of 334 participants, 125 participants reported their transition to middle school was easy (38.5%). Also, 114 participants recorded their transition to middle school was very easy (35.1%). Compared to 62 (19.1%) participants stated that their transition was difficult and 24 (7.4%) participants added that their transition was very difficult. This contradicts findings from most transition studies conducted in public schools. Barber and Olsen (2004) found that students transitioning into middle school reported several difficulties such as lower grades, lower self-esteem, receiving less adult support, experiencing more loneliness and depression, and a lowered sense of connectedness to others. Based on these findings, economically disadvantaged students in these middle schools appeared slightly more prepared academically regarding expectations. Previous studies have revealed that class structure in the middle schools creates the foundation for successful, highly-functional classrooms by creating small learning communities characterized by a sense of family (NMSA, 2010).

While not statistically significant, economically disadvantaged students believed their *elementary school teachers or counselors* were helpful during their transition to middle school more strongly than *students and friends in their classes*. This finding relates to Wallace’s (2007) findings that smaller teacher-to-student ratios allow for more time to develop relationships and increases social bonding between students and teachers.

Given the complexity of the development of early adolescence, creating an appropriate instructional climate designed to address the unique developmental needs of young students is crucial for proper student development (Jackson & Davis, 2000).

Recommendations

The findings from this study indicate that economically disadvantaged students are impacted by the transition, middle school classroom structure, and academic expectations. Various items that economically disadvantaged students are both excited about and concerned with regarding middle school have been identified in this study and may be useful when developing an effective transition program. Recommendations for implementation of the results of this study and further research are explained in the following sections.

Implementing the Recommendations of this Study

1. Given that safety and security are a top priority in middle schools, a school-wide bullying prevention program effectively implemented may alleviate fifth-grade students' anxiety about their transition to middle school.
2. With getting lost being a concern for students, school tours should be considered before the start of school, during orientation programs, and during the first week of their sixth-grade school year.
3. School districts should consider implementing some middle school classroom structures in the fifth grade of elementary school. This will better prepare students for their transition into middle school, specifically with changing classes, arriving on time for each class, and exposure to multiple teachers throughout the school day.

4. To promote social skills and improve student behavior, a specific advisement period could be implemented during the sixth grade specifically for the economically disadvantaged students. Teachers would meet with students once a week to discuss effective communication, school rules, and model appropriate situational behaviors.
5. Principals and guidance counselors from the elementary and middle schools should meet in the spring each year and identify economically disadvantaged students who are at risk. By discussing each student and the problem behaviors they have exhibited, academic and behavior plans can be established for incoming economically disadvantaged students.
6. School leaders are encouraged to provide training for teachers regarding the specific learning styles of all students, specifically economically disadvantaged. Training should include specific strategies for teaching students of poverty.
7. District leaders are encouraged to provide training for elementary and middle school administrators and counselors regarding adolescent development and transition. This personnel was found to be helpful to the transition, so they must be armed with information and strategies to assist students as much as possible.
8. Administrators could assign buddies for new middle school students with older middle school students. This could potentially ease the concerns of finding new friends for economically disadvantaged students.

9. Family members were found to be very helpful to the transition. To ease the transition, schools should involve family members in the transition process through education and special events before, during and after the transition.

Recommendations for Future Research

One suggestion for further research is to review a qualitative study regarding school transition among economically disadvantaged students in the urban school district. The qualitative study would allow researchers to be able to conduct interviews with students, parents, and faculty on their personal perception of school transition from elementary to middle among the economically disadvantaged community.

Since this study was quantitative, another recommendation for further research is to create opportunities where economically disadvantage students in the fifth grade to complete the questionnaire from the elementary perception. The focus on fifth-grade students at elementary level would provide a perception in preparation to transition to middle school at the elementary level. Evidence could be gathered through examining attendance habits, discipline trends, course performance, testing results, and leadership potential within the team or grade level.

Also, another possible future research option could be to seek out similar urban school districts with similar demographics and examine their schools to convey their transition of economically disadvantages students from elementary to middle school. An examination of their success could be used to determine implementations for impacted schools. Also, examination of the failures could be explored to prevent future failures in this region in the state of Arkansas. Evidence could be gathered through examining

attendance habits, discipline trends, course performance, testing results, and leadership potential within the team or grade level.

About systems theory, further research could be utilized to help define the role of the administrator, sixth-grade teacher, support personnel, students, parents, and community in supporting and increasing the focus on the academic, organization, and personal perception of transition of incoming sixth-grade students into the middle school.

Conclusions

Evidence from this study suggests that middle school classroom structure may impact economically disadvantaged students during the transition to middle school. The transition to middle school is a process which brings anxiety and stress for most adolescents, and the extra burdens associated with transitioning to middle school. Economically disadvantaged students reported feeling very connected to their new middle school, and they felt that their transition was easy. Students found teachers, parents, and friends most helpful to the transition.

The findings also indicated that males and female students classified as economically disadvantaged might also experience increased academic issues during their transition into middle school. These data correspond with previous studies and highlights the challenges facing schools designated as Title I status and/or schools located in economically disadvantaged communities. Given the state of the U.S. economy and its current direction, the number of economically disadvantaged students may continue to increase, leading to increased academic issues as indicated by current data. Through increased collaboration with feeder elementary schools, middle schools may be able to

proactively identify and support students at risk of experiencing academic issues as they enter sixth grade.

The data from this study indicated that students were happy about being given more freedom, using a locker, attending school events, and making new friends. As a way to help alleviate stress and anxiety of rising sixth-graders, these positive aspects of middle school should be discussed and promoted by middle school administrators and teachers. By celebrating these positive aspects of the middle school, a sense of excitement and belonging may begin to develop before students step foot on campus. Conversely, students entering middle school are concerned about getting lost, having new teachers, new rules, and harder classes than fifth grade. These are the issues that an effective transition program should address when parents and students visit during orientation or schedule pick-up before the start of school. A student packet should be given to each student that includes a detailed class schedule with room numbers and class times, the locker number and combination for each student, a copy of the school handbook, and a map of the school.

This study investigated the relationship between low and high performing middle schools from the perception of the economically disadvantaged students and perceptions of their middle school transition experience. The participants provided useful information regarding their transition experience, and that data may help middle school leader develop a more encompassing and comprehensive transition program that promotes a successful transition into middle school.

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Appendix A
Student Transition Questionnaire

We would like to know more about your move from elementary school to middle school. Please help us by completing the questions below.

1. What middle school do you attend?

Blue	Green	White	Gold
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2. When you first came to **middle school, what things about moving on to the middle school **made you happy**? Please fill in all that apply.**

<input type="radio"/> being in a larger school	<input type="radio"/> older students	<input type="radio"/> getting good grades
<input type="radio"/> more freedom	<input type="radio"/> making new friends	<input type="radio"/> taking connection classes (i.e., P.E., Band, Art, etc.)
<input type="radio"/> more students lunch	<input type="radio"/> having new teachers	<input type="radio"/> more choices at
<input type="radio"/> able to choose some classes events	<input type="radio"/> participate in sports, clubs, etc.	<input type="radio"/> attending school (football games, dances)
<input type="radio"/> changing classes roll	<input type="radio"/> using a locker	<input type="radio"/> making the honor

3. When you first came to **middle school, what things about moving on to the middle school **were you worried about**? Please fill in all that apply.**

<input type="radio"/> finding my way around or getting lost	<input type="radio"/> harder classes than 5 th grade
<input type="radio"/> getting to class on time	<input type="radio"/> getting along with other students
<input type="radio"/> new rules and expectations	<input type="radio"/> older students

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> pressure to do well | <input type="radio"/> how much homework I would have |
| <input type="radio"/> getting good grades | <input type="radio"/> changing classes |
| <input type="radio"/> peer pressure | <input type="radio"/> learning my new teachers' name |
| <input type="radio"/> fitting in or making friends | <input type="radio"/> receiving in-school suspension |
| <input type="radio"/> not knowing anyone in my classes | <input type="radio"/> new or more students |
| <input type="radio"/> being bullied | <input type="radio"/> being unorganized/losing work |
| <input type="radio"/> changing clothes for P.E. class | <input type="radio"/> using a locker |
| <input type="radio"/> hard or unfriendly teachers | <input type="radio"/> riding the bus |

4. How was the move from elementary school to middle school for you?

- | Very Difficult | Difficult | Easy | Very Easy |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

5. How many discipline referrals have you received this year?

- | 0-1 | 2-5 | 6 or more |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

6. How helpful has each of the following been to you in moving from elementary to middle school:	Not Very Helpful	A Little Helpful	Helpful	Very Helpful
A. Middle school principals and counselors coming to the elementary school to talk about classes I can take in middle school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
B. Comments and suggestions from elementary school teachers or counselors.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
C. The schedule that I picked up before the start of school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
D. My sixth-grade teachers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
E. The principal and assistant principals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

F. Team building activities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
G. My parents.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
H. Other family members (brothers, sisters, cousins, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I. Students/ friends in my classes.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
J. Older students at the middle school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
K. Counselors at the middle school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
L. Other adults (band directors, coaches, secretaries, etc.) at the middle school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. Please answer the next five (5) questions by filling in answers that best describes how you feel about **this middle school**.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel close to other students at this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel like I'm part of this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers at this school care about students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is at least one adult at this school I feel comfortable talking to about personal questions and concerns.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am happy to be at this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. Since coming to the **middle school** in which of the following activities have you been involved? (Please fill in all that apply)

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> a school sports team or cheerleading | <input type="radio"/> a school club |
| <input type="radio"/> a school play or drama group | <input type="radio"/> the school band |
| <input type="radio"/> the school chorus | <input type="radio"/> none |

9. In which of the following activities are you interested in becoming involved?
(Please fill in all that apply)

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> a school sports team or cheerleading | <input type="radio"/> a school club |
| <input type="radio"/> a school play or drama group | <input type="radio"/> the school band |
| <input type="radio"/> the school chorus | <input type="radio"/> none |

Appendix B

Permission to Use the STQ Questionnaire

McGee, Keith

Subject:

FW: Student Transition Questionnaire

Keith McGee, Principal
Horace Mann Arts/ Science
Magnet Middle School
 (501) 447-3100 - Office; (501) 447-3101 - Fax
Keith.McGee@lrzd.org

From: Kathleen Rakestraw [<mailto:KRakestraw@schoolcounselor.org>]
 Sent: Thursday, August 18, 2016 2:49 PM
 To: McGee, Keith
 Subject: FW: Student Transition Questionnaire

Permission granted.

Kathleen Rakestraw
 Director of Communications
 American School Counselor Association
 (703) 683-1722
www.schoolcounselor.org

From: McGee, Keith [<mailto:keith.mcgee@lrzd.org>]
 Sent: Thursday, August 18, 2016 3:45 PM
 To: Ethics <E@schoolcounselor.org>
 Subject: Student Transition Questionnaire

Ms. Cook,

My name is Keith McGee and I am a doctoral student at Arkansas Tech University in the State of Arkansas. I am writing my dissertation on student transition from elementary to middle school from the perspective of economically disadvantaged students. I researched a questionnaire regarding student transition from Patrick Akos, 2002. I saw on a website that American School Counselor Association has the copyrights. I am requesting to use this survey for my dissertation with some amendments to address the population being studied. I am asking for permission. Please let me know if you will grant me permission or direct to the responsible party. If you have any questions, you may reach me via email or phone. My cell phone number is 501-539-0218. Thanks.

Appendix C

School District Approval

Department of Testing and Evaluation
3001 S. Pulaski Street
Little Rock, AR 72206
501.447.3385

October 17, 2016

Mr. Keith McGee, Sr. / Dr. John Freeman, Advisor
Advanced Leadership Studies
Arkansas Tech University
Russellville, AR 72801

RE: Permission Letter for Keith McGee

Dear Mr. McGee:

I received your request to conduct research for your dissertation toward receiving a doctoral degree in advanced leadership studies. The study is entitled *School transition from elementary to middle schools: Perceptions from economically disadvantaged students*.

I understand you are requesting to contact middle school principals in order to solicit survey data from middle school sixth grade students and gather archival data in the Little Rock School District. I further understand students will not be contacted, nor their names used on any data you choose to collect. After reviewing documents pertaining to your study and thoughtfully considering the request, my response is as follows:

☒ I approve your request to conduct your study in the Little Rock School District by contacting middle school principals to solicit survey data from middle school sixth grade students, as well as gathering archival data.

☐ The request to conduct this study in the Little Rock School District is denied.

As your study may prove beneficial to the education of students in the Little Rock School District, please provide a copy of your findings at the conclusion of your project. Should you need additional information feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,



Dr. Danyell Crutchfield Cummings,
Director of Testing and Evaluation

cc: Michael Paine, Superintendent of Schools
Marvin Burton, Deputy Superintendent of Schools
Dennis Glasgow, Executive Director of Accountability



The Power of Us!

Appendix D

Arkansas Tech University IRB Approval

APPLICATION FOR REVIEW OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS RESEARCH

Submit to Jack Tucci, Ph.D., College of Business, Rothwell 445 or email (preferred) as an attachment to jtucci@atu.edu

Principal Investigator(s): I acknowledge that this represents an accurate and complete description of my research.

Keith McGee, Sr. kmcgee7@atu.edu 9-30-16
Name of Primary PI Email Date

Additional Researchers' Names

Advanced Leadership Studies/CLI Annex 479-866-3236
Department and Office Number Telephone

The Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) is an online training module teaching research methods. Researchers must complete the CITI training course prior to beginning their project. Please print the confirmation page at the end of the training and include it with IRB application. The CITI training course can be found here: www.citiprogram.org.

Adviser (complete if PI is a student): I agree to provide the proper surveillance of this project to ensure that the rights and welfare of the human participants are properly protected.

John Freeman JohnFreeman45@atu.edu 9-30-16
Name of Adviser Email Date

Advanced Leadership Studies CLI Annex/61 Lake Point Lane 479-856-2001
Adviser's Department Adviser's Office Number Telephone

School Transition from Elementary to Middle Schools: Perceptions from Economically Disadvantaged Students

PLEASE NOTE: All applications should be typewritten and edited prior to submission for review. If sufficient space is not provided below for a complete description of the proposed project, please use additional pages as necessary.

IRB Approval Number: McGee-101010 10-10-16
Date
by 10-10-16

