

PERCEIVED STRESS AND TRANSITION OF SEVENTH GRADE STUDENTS TO
THE MIDDLE SCHOOL

by

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to describe the perceived level of stress early adolescents associate with academic, social, daily routine, rules, personnel and authority, and extracurricular stressors during the transition from elementary school to middle school as measured by a Likert scale developed on transition stressors. This study also identifies transition program concepts for students moving from elementary school to the middle school level. The objectives of the study were to: (1) describe the six categories of stressors related to the middle school transition process, (2) determine the most common needs of new seventh grade students in regard to academic stressors, (3) determine the most common needs of new seventh grade students in relation to social stressors, (4) determine the most common needs of new seventh grade students in stress-related aspects of daily routine, (5) determine the most common needs of new seventh grade students in relation to learning the middle school rules, (6) determine the most common needs of new seventh grade students in developing relationships with middle school personnel and authority figures, (7) determine the most common needs of new seventh grade students in

relation to their involvement in extracurricular activities, (8) describe how gender affects student's stressors related to the transition process, (9) describe how birth order affects student's stressors related to the transition process, and (10) describe how participation in the "Moving On" transition program affects student's stressors related to the transition process.

In August, 1999 one section of the new seventh grade students in a Southeastern Wisconsin school district responded to the questionnaire designed by the researcher. The survey consisted of two parts. The first part required the students to respond to 43 attitude statements on a 5 point Likert Scale. In the second section students indicated pertinent demographic information including: gender, birth order, elementary school location, and participation in the transition program. The responses from the questionnaire were computed using mean, standard deviation, frequency, percentage and t-test analysis.

Specific findings in this study were: (1) students who participated in "Moving On" were less stressed about the transition process, (2) significant differences were found between male and female responses on daily routine and social stressors, (3) each category of transition stressors had several top concerns that students indicated.

Recommendations for future research concerning the transition process of elementary students to middle school include: (1) continue research by surveying the students who attend the "Moving On" program, (2) survey all seventh grade students at the beginning, middle, and end of the seventh grade school year, and (3) conduct additional research including the seventh grade teachers and their planning process for transition.

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Table of Contents

	Page
Chapter 1	
Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Objectives.....	3
Assumptions.....	4
Definition of Terms.....	4
Chapter 2	
Review of Literature.....	6
Development During Adolescence.....	6
Stress and the Adolescent.....	10
Social Support and Adjustment of Adolescents.....	11
Planning for Transition.....	14
Summary.....	17
Chapter 3	
Methodology.....	18
Purpose of Study.....	18
Subjects.....	19
Instrumentation.....	19
Procedure.....	20
Pilot Study.....	20
Data Analysis.....	21

Limitations.....	21
Chapter 4	
Results and Discussion.....	22
Results.....	22
Demographic Characteristics.....	23
Attitudes toward Transition Stressors.....	26
Significant Differences.....	37
Discussion.....	42
Summary.....	44
Chapter 5	
Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	46
Summary of the Study.....	46
Conclusions.....	51
Recommendations for Research.....	51
Educational Implications.....	52
Bibliography.....	53
Appendix.....	55
Survey Instrument.....	55

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Gender of Respondent.....	23
2. Birth Order of Respondent.....	23
3. Participation in “Moving On” Summer Class.....	24
4. Elementary School Attended.....	25
5. Attitude Statements of Middle School Transition Stressors.....	26
6. Attitude Statement Subgroup Scores.....	30
7. Percentage of Agreement of Daily Routine Stressors.....	31
8. Percentage of Agreement of Academic Stressors.....	32
9. Percentages of Agreement of Personnel or Authority Figure Stressors.....	33
10. Percentage of Agreement of Rule Stressors.....	34
11. Percentage of Agreement of Social Stressors.....	35
12. Percentage of Agreement of Extracurricular Stressors.....	36
13. Significant Differences Between Male and Female Responses.....	37
14. Significant Differences Between Students Who Participated in “Moving On”.	39
15. Significant Differences Between Students’ Birth Order and Perceived Stress...	41

Chapter 1 Introduction

Every year in August and September across the country, many new seventh graders are about to enter a place where they have never been before: the middle school. These students are going from being top dog at their elementary schools to being at the bottom of the heap at their more demanding middle school (Hartman, 1996). The challenge that comes across, however, is not just for the student; it also impacts the families and the teachers as well. Young adolescents are ready for the challenge of new experiences, but at the same time they are still in tune with their elementary experiences – a state of mind that may result in anxiety and stress (Perkins & Gelfer, 1995). This process of transition is a major concern in and of itself. However, due to these students being at the early adolescence stage of life, makes the transition process much more complex.

An adolescent's life is not only comprised of school and academics, but also involves family, social, developmental, and work-related aspects. One student may be dealing with his parents' divorce, another student may be dealing with depression, and a third student may be physically delayed in developmental changes as compared to his/her classmates. It would be incorrect to assume that the only concern of an adolescent entering the middle school is making the transition successful. However, the stress of transition is added to a base of stress that is unique for each student. The stress of transition is different for each student, which may be dependent on their gender, birth order, or how well elementary school teachers prepared students for the transition process. This personal level of stress should not be minimized. It is important for all teachers and staff to keep this information in mind as they set out to prepare students for the transition to the middle school.

Many schools have developed or are developing transition program models. Only by examination of local data and context can educators gain a clearer understanding of the nature and cause of the problems associated with transition in their school (Mullins & Irvin, 2000).

School staff and administration are recognizing that program support and commitment and a well-developed plan of transition benefits everyone involved including students, teachers and staff, and parents. By examining the contextual factors of the transition process, one can determine which factors are most important to a student who is in the transition process. These contextual factors seem to be categorized in one of the following six areas: daily routine, academics, social factors, rules to follow, extracurricular activities, and personnel and authority relationships. For example, students are concerned about finding each new classroom on their schedule, wondering how much more difficult homework they will have and how they will meet or make new friends amongst a larger group of peers. After gaining information in regards to which contextual factors are seen as important to middle school students, teachers and administration can then focus on planning or updating a transition model program.

As adults, some of these contextual factors of transition may seem quite trivial to us. However, if we want these middle school students to succeed, we need to look at what their needs are at this time of transition. By identifying the needs that are most important for the students during the first weeks of the school year, hopefully students can be assisted in meeting the many challenges they will encounter.

While many studies focus on the amount of overall stress adolescents face, research is lacking in the area of how young adolescents perceive stressors that are related to the transition process into the middle school. An in-coming middle school student without the background of participating in a transition program, bases his/her perception of the transition process on the concerns and pressures he/she has been told exist at the middle school (Shoffner & Williamson, 2000) through second hand information. Research is also lacking in specifying if certain demographic characteristics contribute to the stressful factors of transition, such as the student's gender, birth order, or the location of the elementary school from which they are coming. By zeroing in on the transition stressors, this study provides a unique variation that encompass all stressors of adolescents.

A review of literature shows that there is concern by teachers and administration that the transition process from elementary school to middle school is not meeting the developmental needs of adolescents. A mismatch exists between the needs of young adolescents and the environments of some of the schools they attend (Mullins & Irvin, 2000). Studies have also shown that once transition stressors are identified at individual local levels, schools can then begin to work on developing or improving the transition process. Without a thoughtfully designed transition program, the adjustment period for these adolescents can be lengthy and may be accompanied by a lack of school success (Shoffner & Williamson, 2000). Therefore, the research hypothesis for this study is that middle school students will perceive contextual factors of transition to be stressful at various levels of agreement.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to describe the perceived level of stress early adolescents associate with academic, social, daily routine, rules, personnel and authority, and extracurricular stressors during the transition from elementary school to middle school as measured by a Likert scale developed on transition stressors.

This study will focus on the following objectives to:

1. Describe the six categories of stressors related to the middle school transition process.
2. Determine the most common needs of new seventh grade students in regard to academic stressors.
3. Determine the most common needs of new seventh grade students in relation to social stressors.
4. Determine the most common needs of new seventh grade students in stress-related aspects of daily routine.
5. Determine the most common needs of new seventh grade students in relation to learning the middle school rules.

6. Determine the most common needs of new seventh grade students in developing relationships with middle school personnel and authority figures.
7. Determine the most common needs of new seventh grade students in relation to their involvement in extracurricular activities.
8. Describe how gender affects student's stressors related to the transition process.
9. Describe how birth order affects student's stressors related to the transition process.
10. Describe how participation in the "Moving On" transition program affects student's stressors related to the transition process.

Assumptions

It is assumed that the students surveyed gave accurate and honest answers during the completion of the survey. It is also assumed that the students surveyed were an accurate sample and representation of the population.

Definition of Terms

Transition - The movement from one developmental stage, life cycle, situation, or environment to another.

Adolescence - The developmental period of transition between childhood and adulthood that involves biological, cognitive, and social-emotional changes.

Early adolescence - Corresponds roughly to the middle school or junior high school year and includes most puberty change.

Contextual factors - The factors that are from the environment around a person or group of people.

Anxiety - An individual's emotional and physical state of being uneasy or apprehensive of what is going to happen in the future.

Stress - The physiological and psychological response to a positive or negative situation, transition, crisis, or life event.

Chapter 2 Review of Literature

In the area of transition for early adolescents, many factors impact how middle school students will respond to their new set of changes. Background knowledge in the following areas will help give a clearer picture of a student embarking on transitional changes. The first area to be addressed is the development process during the early adolescent stage and what impact this has on experiences from both the school setting and the family setting. The second area to be addressed is refining the definition of stress to recognize aspects of stress pertaining specifically to adolescents and then identifying coping strategies for them. The third area focuses on resources for adolescent social support to aid in the adjustment to the middle school environment. The final area will address a multitude of ways to assist people who are involved directly in the planning process for providing a smooth transition from the elementary school to the middle school.

Development During Adolescence

Early adolescence marks the stage for a wide range of change. This is what makes this stage in life unique. Change includes a variety of areas at different levels and times for each individual. However, with this rapid change comes a greater potential for both positive and negative outcomes. Although most individuals pass through this developmental period without excessively high levels of storm and stress, many individuals do experience difficulty during this period (Eccles, Midgley, Wigfield, Buchanan, Reuman, Flanagan, & Mac Iver, 1993). Puberty development, sexuality issues, cognitive development advances, social development, and school transition all accelerate at this stage in life, making early adolescence a challenging and potentially more stressful time.

The portrait of middle level students can be broken down into four main categories of characteristics: physical development, cognitive development, emotional development, and social development. However, it needs to be remembered that there are no boundaries that

separate these characteristics. These characteristics are intertwined and interact with one another to form a complex adolescent human being (Milgram, 1992).

Physical development, to some extent, runs the entire process of transitional development. This period of maturation varies among different adolescent individuals, but there are some general physical characteristics of young adolescent development. Young adolescents are characterized by the following physical characteristics: uneven growth spurts, a tendency toward poor motor coordination, muscular development and changes in body contour, sexual development, mood swings, abrupt transitions from alertness and excessive energy to fatigue, increased nutritional demands and unpredictable food preferences, a need for plenty of sleep, and a need for frequent and somewhat continuous movement (Schurr, Thomason, & Thompson, 1995).

Cognitive development refers to the intellectual development and the students learning. As young adolescents, middle level students show the following cognitive characteristics: intense curiosity about things that interest them, a wide range of intellectual abilities, increasing metacognition, willingness to learn material they consider useful and relevant, egocentricism and difficulty in seeing events and intentions from another's point of view, and a shift in creative abilities toward the cognitive (Schurr, Thomason, & Thompson, 1995).

People tend to think of emotional development during the time of young adolescence as a time of psychological turmoil equaled at no other time in human development (Schurr, Thomason, & Thompson, 1995). If not examined appropriately, the middle years can become a negative turning point in the development of a sense of self. The following are emotional characteristics of young adolescents: chemical and hormonal imbalances, idealism, a closer resemblance to children than to adults, a need for personal as well as family security, increasing awareness of themselves as individuals, a tendency to be unrealistically self-critical, a tendency to be easily offended, a need for privacy, vulnerability to naïve arguments and difficulty in seeing more than one side to any discussion, an emerging sense of humor and a basic optimism and hopefulness (Schurr, Thomason & Thompson, 1995).

Social development occurs as young adolescents become aware of themselves not only as individuals but also collectively as members of society. The transition into middle school is the optimal time for students to begin or continue their social development. The following are social characteristics of young adolescents: peer-group orientation and motivation, failure to adapt and flourish in uncompromising settings, argumentativeness, social self-consciousness, rejection of adult standards and adult viewpoints on many social issues, social fads, exaggerated responses, extreme social shyness or social extroversion beyond their years, and the need for supportive and stable home environments (Schurr, Thomason, & Thompson, 1995).

As a part of their social development, youth should be encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities during the teen years (Pruitt, 1999). Young adolescents not only learn about others, but also about themselves through exposure to a wide variety of what life has to offer. Extracurricular activities also keep young adolescents occupied. A teen who is busy is less likely to be sitting around brooding or getting into trouble out of boredom (Pruitt, 1999). However, some adolescents are so eager to try everything that they become overextended. Parents of a new middle school student who encourage their child to join extracurricular activities may ease the transition process if the child becomes involved in an activity he/she enjoys.

As a result of the many concurrent changes in early adolescence, there are specific needs to be addressed. According to the stage-environment fit theory, some of the negative psychological changes associated with adolescent development result from a mismatch between the needs and characteristics of developing adolescents and the opportunities afforded them by their social environment's characteristics (Eccles et. al., 1993). If these needs are mismatched during the transition process from elementary school, the stress of beginning middle school may in fact carry on through the entire school year or even further. For early adolescents, the two main social environments that are of concern are the school environment and the family home environment.

The school environment influences early adolescents mainly within motivational constructs, such as attention in class, school attendance, and interest in school. If the social environment in a typical middle school does not meet the psychological needs of the adolescent, the stage-environmental theory predicts a decline in the motivation of early adolescents. Teachers should provide the optimal level of structure for children's current levels of maturity while providing a sufficiently challenging environment to pull the children along a developmental path toward higher levels of cognitive and social maturity (Eccles et. al.,1993). The differences in the classroom environment from elementary to junior high/middle school show patterns of change which may not be meeting the needs of the students.

After elementary school, changes may typically occur either in the classroom setting or in the personality type of the teacher. Junior high school classrooms have been considered to have a stronger emphasis on teacher control, possibly because during the school day teachers teach one common subject to many different groups of students. This may then affect the amount of time experienced in positive teacher-student relationships. Obviously, some of this is due to the school day schedule or structure of teams and departments. However, during this time of early adolescence when students become much more self-conscious and self absorbed, they may become the victim of such a school structure because of those varying needs. Consequently, the students' motivation levels may be affected, which then leads to the decline in academic scores.

The stage-environment theory also has an impact on student success in school in relation to the perceived control in the family between the early adolescent and the parents. Again, during the time of early adolescence, another stressful change is occurring. This stressful period often focuses on the changing perceptions by the adolescent concerning the issues of control and independence within the family. As an early adolescent emerges from childhood, he or she is looking to increase the amount of decision making in which they participate in the family. However, young adolescents are not merely miniature adults. They still need to be taught how to do things and how to think about things, but above all they need to know that there is a safety net within the parent (Rutter, 1995). If parents have not tuned into these changes in autonomy, the

struggle for power may become more and more evident as the adolescent gets older. The greater the mismatch in these perceptions, the greater possibility for lower levels of school-related motivation and self-esteem, as well as increased family conflict. Also, as the adolescent is socially exposed to friends with various family types that have different belief systems, they are more likely to question the beliefs and practices of their own parents.

Stress and the Adolescent

According to Lazarus and Cohen, as cited in Whitman, Spendlove and Clark, 1984, there are three basic sources of situational stress which represent the environment side of the person-environment model. The first source of situational stress is probably the most dramatic with world wide events, such as war or a natural disaster. The second source is dramatic on more of an individual or family basis. Events such as a death in the family or serious illness would be included. The third category of stress involves "daily hassles" which are ongoing problems in which there has been some adaptation, but the problem still has an impact over time. An example of this for adults would be dealing with rush hour to and from work. For the early adolescent, transitioning may have this effect. Middle school students are not fully adapted to their new environment during the first few days of a new school year in a new building.

Sometimes adults or parents who are busy with work, family, and other responsibilities, perceive the type of stress children and adolescents are going through to be real, but maybe not as important or as difficult. The school experience can be representative of many of the stressors a child experiences throughout childhood and adolescence. As an adult, you need to reflect back on your own school days. These are times of feeling flooded with problems and stressed by matters sometimes out of your control (Youngs, 1986).

School is considered to be the students' world of work. The demands placed on students in the school organization is quite similar to that of the adult in the workplace. The intrinsic demands, personal safety needs, organizations climate and culture, and the balance between organizational demands and personal life are all contributing factors which are responsible for organizational stress (Youngs, 1986). Add this to the fact that the pace of our society is moving

so fast, teenagers don't have as much time to just be teenagers. However, this comparison can be helpful in several ways. An adult can then empathize with the teenager because of being familiar with work-related stress. Teenagers will then be processing skills and techniques during the school years that will be applicable as they enter the workforce.

To say that all early adolescents entering the transition from elementary school to middle school will experience stress is probably true. However, the degree or extent of how long the stress lasts is quite individualistic. Each adolescent has experienced different situations and coping models in their lives. Some adolescents may experience more psychological effects of stress while others may experience more physical effects, all at varying degrees. The danger occurs when there is a prolonged period of stress that could result in burnout or physical exhaustion. Therefore, schools need to recognize that becoming comfortable in their new setting, is an ongoing process for new middle school students, not a single event (Shoffner & Williamson, 2000). Teachers and parents can help transitioning students prevent extreme stress-related problems by organizing ways of preparing students for the transition to middle school.

The transition process from elementary school to middle school is most likely a stressful time for most students, as stated earlier. However, many adolescents are experiencing more than one stress at a time in their lives. For example, in one study, British psychiatrist Michael Rutter (1979) found that boys and girls who were under two chronic life stressors were four times as likely to eventually need psychological services as were those who had to cope with only one chronic stress (Santrock, 1996). A similar multiple effect was found for boys and girls who experienced more than one short-term stress at a time. For example, stressful daily experiences in conjunction with the stress of transition for early adolescents may require outside assistance by parents, teachers, counselors or other professionals.

Social Support and Adjustment of Adolescents

Middle school for the early adolescent entails major changes both in the academic and social domains. Differentiating among the types of stress that students' experience shows that the effects on the adjustment may be linked specifically to that type of stress. For example,

stress in relation to peers may affect adjustment in the area of self-concept whereas conflicts with teachers and rules may affect adjustment in the area of motivation for school (Wenz-Gross, Siperstein, Untch, & Widaman, 1997). The resources for social support that adolescents draw from need to meet the demands of their environment. Sources of support include family, peers, and other adults. Types of support include emotional support, problem-solving support, and companionship. As transition is occurring for middle school students, many sources and types of social support are necessary, but too many or a certain combination of support can also influence the adjustment period (Wenz-Gross et al, 1997).

What kind of parental involvement can best support the achievement of young adolescents in middle school? A challenge for middle level educators is to determine reasons for parental non-involvement and to be proactive in guiding families to become involved in young adolescents' schooling in various ways (Brough & Irvin, 2001). Elementary schools seem to have concrete roles for parents to play. However, those roles become less defined as children move into middle level schools and begin to demand more independence. According to Farkas, Johnson, & Duffet (1999), as cited in Brough & Irvin (2001), parents reported less of a need for school involvement as their children got older. Parents felt that it was natural and desirable for their children to distance themselves from their parents and become increasingly independent. Is it necessary for parents to be visible in the school facility or is it enough for parents to be involved in their children's schoolwork at home? According to a report from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (1998), as cited in Brough & Irvin (2001), no one-size-fits-all practice works when it comes to developing home-school partnerships. The parental involvement needed to support and assure each student's success will vary depending on the individual student. For example, parents can support their child by doing one or a combination of the following: attending school sponsored events, monitoring schoolwork at home, communicating with teachers and staff, or being involved in school governance.

The family still remains one of the most effective vehicles to promote school success (Rutter, 1995). Even though tension is a natural part of family life, the family is still looked

upon as a safety net or comfort zone for adolescents. According to Steinberg, as cited in Rutter (1995), the one common link among the many successful adolescents in his studies is that they all have positive relationships with their parents. However, if parental support is missing, grandparents, other extended family members, friends, and community groups and agencies with caring adults can provide support that is absent in the home (Brooks, 1994).

Since a large portion of a student's day is spent at school, teachers are in an opportune spot to also provide support on a daily basis towards a successful transition and school year. Personalizing the middle school experience for the transitioning student can help facilitate a successful school year (Ames & Miller, 1994). Personalization of the middle school experience begins with a deep understanding of the developmental challenges of early adolescence, requires valuing and respecting each student, involves close adult-child relationships, demands rich and developmentally appropriate curricula, calls for a range of support services, and involves building strong links among family, school, and community. Middle school learners have unique characteristics and needs. The middle school experience should be directly concerned with the here-and-now problems and interests of its own students, not an extension of the program of the elementary school or an earlier introduction to the demands of high school (George & Alexander, 1993).

Even in the most ideal school, with the most ideal staff who has prepared well for the upcoming school year to support the incoming middle school students, another factor comes into play immediately on the first day of school (or maybe even sooner). That factor is each new middle school student's perception of school itself. For young adolescents, the perception of school events by the student themselves have real consequences for how much they learn (Kramer, 1992). This does not necessarily mean it is the experience itself, but the interpretation of the experiences by the student that has the consequences. Perceptions of which teachers students prefer and of the teacher's attitude in the classroom can also be a motivational factor for new middle school students.

More specifically in regard to the transition process to middle school, perceptions of school also differ among students based on gender and the type of elementary school attended. It is reported by Mekos (1989), as cited in Mullins and Irvin (2000) that prior to transition, girls were primarily concerned about peer relations at junior high, but these concerns reduced after transition. Boys and girls in the study expressed concerns about academics and the new school setting just after transition. Different school contexts also showed differences in self-esteem for age-peers. Twelve year olds in junior high had lower self-esteem ratings and greater instability of self-image than the twelve year olds still in elementary school (Mullins & Irvin, 2000).

Kramer goes on to discuss how teachers can then better understand students' perceptions. First, teachers need to know that young adolescents are particularly sensitive to the psychosocial environment where classmates are seen as a constant, critical, and observing audience, according to Elkind as cited in Kramer (1992). A particular student's class experience doesn't always agree with a teacher's or objective observer's view of what happened. Sometimes these perceptions are not even rational. Secondly, educators can more effectively plan classroom improvement when student perceptions are taken into consideration (Kramer, 1992).

Planning for Transition

Young adolescents have both anxieties and keen anticipation regarding their impending move from elementary to middle school. School leaders might examine the elements in both categories and tailor their transition programs to address the needs expressed by young people (Odegaard & Heath, 1992). Every community structures the middle school or junior high differently. Therefore, each specific school needs to address common transition anxieties and anticipations in general, but then apply them to the needs in which they have identified. By carefully setting the stage for successful entry into this new level of school, it should pay off in having the potential for a positive challenge for early adolescents, their families and school staff.

In looking at the whole picture of transitioning from the elementary school to the middle school, one sees that a variety of key people are involved. Students, families, and school staff are all challenged by the transition process. Middle school administrators across the country realize that this process can be hard on children for a variety of reasons (Decker, 1997). First, students are entering a larger school with higher academic demands being put on them. In the social realm they have moved from being the oldest children in their school to the youngest, in a setting with different behavior expectations. Finally, in terms of development, students are experiencing the beginning stages of puberty and a greater awareness of the opposite sex.

A planning model for elementary-to-middle school transition has five essential components for teachers and staff to consider. The components are: developing a planning team, generating goals and identifying problems, developing written strategic plans, acquiring the support and commitment of school staff and evaluating the transition process (Perkins & Gelfer, 1995). By planning for important changes in our lives and the lives of others, we prepare to cope with any uncertainties that accompany these changes.

As a middle school staff and faculty, teachers need to realize that students who are new to the middle school setting will require some time to feel comfortable. This should be tackled as an ongoing process by the middle school faculty, not as a first-day-only concern (Shoffner & Williamson, 2000). The following suggestions by Shoffner and Williamson gives a detailed list for the ongoing process schools can utilize prior to the transition, during the summer months, and during the school year.

- *Invite teams and/or teacher advisors to participate in a group study to examine current transition programs.

- *Visit elementary school(s) during the spring before the transition.

- *Work with teachers and students to develop a middle school introduction program that addresses persistent concerns of new middle school students.

- *Meet with parents at each of the elementary schools in small interactive groups.

- *Identify ways to assure that students and their parents will be comfortable in the new setting.
- *Hold an open house during the spring for incoming students and their parents.
- *Build connections with parents at an early date with newsletter and parent organizations.
- *Establish connections for students between elementary and middle school.
- *Arrange for school counselors to meet with each incoming student.
- *Provide information concerning the start of the school year at an early date.
- *Assign students to teacher or teams before the end of the previous school year.
- *Establish a buddy system with older students.
- *Provide a time for students and parents to meet with teacher, counselors, and administrators during a summer open house, breakfast, or picnic.
- *During the school year, address early concerns over logistics, such as practice sessions with lockers.
- *Provide an opportunity for parents to continue to support their children in the new setting.
- *Provide classroom guidance lessons for use by teams or teacher advisors that deal with persistent transition issues.
- *Establish first-year support groups where school counselors work with students to address typical transition problems.
- *Schedule a time for counselors and/or administration to visit the classrooms of first-year students during the first weeks of the school year.
- *Work with teachers and students to evaluate the effectiveness of transition activities.

Each incoming-middle-school-student will adjust differently to their new experience. Sometimes this is due to their maturity level and other individual differences. However, all students deserve the opportunity to be successful. Middle level educators can make a difference for students as a result of the activities incorporated into their transition programs (Shoffner & Williamson, 2000). According to Mullins (1997), it was found that, in general, students who had

participated in multiple transition activities and were placed in interdisciplinary teams made a good transition to middle school. These students maintained their sense of scholastic competence across the transition as well as their sense of perceived social acceptance.

The first day of classes in a new school year can definitely be filled with changes and uncertainties. Gently breaking in students with school tours, time to go over schedules, and other ice breaker activities will ensure that by the end of the first week or so, there are very few kids who aren't completely comfortable, according to Ann Marie Benzinger as cited in Harman, 1996.

Families, especially parents, also face new challenges. According to Margo Bellamy, 1996, the following suggestions may be helpful for parents to discuss with their soon-to-be middle school child. Parents should help their child understand that expectations will increase in all areas, including behavior and academic areas. Visiting the school prior to the first day will help your child find his way around and practice opening their locker. Encouraging your child to get involved with school activities will help students have a sense of belonging outside the classroom as well as in the classroom. Model this for your child by you as a parent volunteering for an activity at school. By making the whole process of transition a group process instead of just an individual process, aids in a smoother change.

Summary

This chapter indicated that the transition from elementary school to middle school is stressful for new middle school students. The degree of stress and the amount of time that it takes to adjust to the middle school atmosphere, however, shows an individualistic impact for each child. Researchers appear to agree that middle school and elementary school administration and faculty can work together to provide the nurturing atmosphere and support necessary for optimal success in all areas of development for the adolescent entering middle school.

Chapter 3 Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology used in the present study. It was subdivided into the following sections: purpose, subjects, instrumentation, procedures, pilot study, and data analysis.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to describe the perceived level of stress early adolescents associate with academic, social, daily routine, rules, personnel and authority, and extracurricular stressors during the transition from elementary school to middle school as measured by a Likert scale developed on transition stressors.

This study will focus on the following objectives:

1. Describe the six categories of stressors related to the middle school transition process.
2. Determine the most common needs of new seventh grade students in regard to academic stressors.
3. Determine the most common needs of new seventh grade students in relation to social stressors.
4. Determine the most common needs of new seventh grade students in stress-related aspects of daily routine.
5. Determine the most common needs of new seventh grade students in relation to learning the middle school rules.
6. Determine the most common needs of new seventh grade students in developing relationships with middle school personnel and authority figures.
7. Determine the most common needs of new seventh grade students in relation to their involvement in extracurricular activities.

8. Describe how gender affects student's stressors related to the transition process.
9. Describe how birth order affects student's stressors related to the transition process.
10. Describe how participation in the "Moving On" transition program affects student's stressors related to the transition process.

Subjects

The participants of this study were 116 seventh grade students, all of whom are housed in the same "base". A "base" is the structure used to house one third of the entire seventh grade population. All of the students in the same "base" have the same core academic teachers. The only time they mix with students from other bases is during exploratory classes such as Family Consumer Education or Music. These students were randomly selected alphabetically as to which "base" they were a part of for the entire school year. All of the participants were in the process of transitioning into the middle school of the Oconomowoc School District. The seventh grade students came from one of the seven of the district's elementary schools or transferred from a private school or another district. There was an area on the survey instrument in which to indicate where they went to elementary school.

Approval was granted by the administration of Oconomowoc Middle School and the appropriate forms were filed with the Human Subjects Committee in August of 1999. A parent permission and signature letter was drafted and a copy of the survey instrument has also been approved.

Instrumentation

A survey was developed specifically for this project. In order to assess students' perceptions of which contextual factors related to the transition from elementary school to

middle school were most stressful, the students responded to 43 attitude statements dealing with stressful transition factors on a five point Likert scale. See Appendix A. If the student strongly agreed to the statement, they indicated this by circling the number five. If the student strongly disagreed to the statement, they indicated this by circling the number 1. All statements dealt with transition factors in one of the following six domains: academic, daily routine, social, rules, personnel relationships, and extracurricular stressors. The survey also contained a demographics or general information section. The students indicated the location of their elementary school, gender, and birth order. Students also indicated if they attended the Moving On summer class in preparation for the new school year at the middle school.

Procedures

The survey was administered on the second day of the 1999-2000 academic school year by the core academic teachers of Base 7-3. The researcher met with this core group of teachers during the first day of staff inservice meetings to discuss the importance of administering the survey at the same time of the day by each teacher to avoid duplicating students taking the survey. The optimal time of the day for the best results was determined to be in the early afternoon. The survey took approximately twenty minutes to administer. The core teachers then returned the completed surveys to the researcher in a manila envelope to ensure confidentiality.

Pilot Study

Prior to the beginning of the 1999-2000 school year, the researcher administered a test pilot survey with 12 incoming seventh grade students that were enrolled in a summer cooking class taught at the middle school. The researcher noted concerns in regard to the readability and clarity of the questionnaire statements. Also, the researcher looked for varying answers that showed that all of the students would not respond to each statement in the same degree of agreement or disagreement.

The pilot study proved that the survey was clearly written for the incoming seventh graders. They had minimal questions and responded to the survey within twenty minutes. The

students were able to relate to the topics presented to them on the survey. The students also felt it was a timely issue for the upcoming school year.

Data Analysis

The responses of the survey were analyzed by the University of Wisconsin-Stout Computer User Support Services. Objective numbers two through seven, which relate to the needs of new seventh grade students, were analyzed to determine the number of frequencies for each attitude statement (numbers 1-43). In order to weight the attitude statement appropriately, the following statements' answers were reversed: statement numbers 1,3,13,20,22,24,25-31,33,36,38,39,41,and 42. See Appendix A. The mean, percentages, and the standard deviation were also obtained for attitude statements 1-43. For objective numbers eight, nine, and ten, the frequencies, percentages, the mean, median, and standard deviation were obtained using the subcategories of student gender, birth order, and elementary school on the demographics section of the survey. A t-test was also computed on each attitude statement (numbers 1-43) and for each of the six subscales based on gender and participation in the Moving On class. A one-way analysis of variance and the Newman-Keuls multiple range test was also computed for items 1-43 based on the position in the family.

Limitations

This research was limited in its scope by restriction of the population surveyed. It represented new seventh grade students who had transitioned from an elementary school to the middle school, but should still generalize across the population for the Midwest United States.

Chapter 4

Results and Discussion

In this chapter, results of the survey given to new seventh grade students transitioning from an elementary school to the middle school in the Oconomowoc School District will be reviewed. The first section of this chapter shows the compilation of demographic information about the students, including the elementary school they attended, gender, birth order, and participation in a summer preparation class called Moving On. In the second section of this chapter, students' responses to 43 attitude statements regarding how stressful they perceived the middle school transition were tabulated into various table format sections. Significant differences in these areas will be reported and a discussion will follow. One hundred sixteen seventh grade students participated in this study.

DEMOGRAPHICS

TABLE 1
Gender of Respondent

<u>Gender</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Male	61	52.6%
Female	55	47.4%

In Table 1, the data shows that there was fair representation from each of the genders for the survey results. There were 61 male seventh grade respondents to the survey out of 116 total respondents (52.6%). There were 55 female seventh grade respondents to the survey out of the 116 total respondents (47.4%).

TABLE 2
Birth Order of Respondent

<u>Birth Order</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Oldest/Only Child	46	40.0%
Middle Child	25	21.7%
Youngest Child	44	38.3%

Table 2 shows that the sample of seventh grade students surveyed represents each birth order category well. The oldest/only child category represents 46 students out of the 116 students surveyed (40.0%). The middle child category represents 25 students of the 116 students surveyed (21.7%). The youngest child category represents 44 students of the 116 students surveyed (38.3%).

TABLE 3
Participation in “Moving On” Summer Class

<u>Participation</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
YES	74	64.3%
NO	41	35.7%

In Table 3, the data shows that the majority of the students in this base did participated in the Moving On summer class prior to entering the middle school. Of the 116 students surveyed, 74 students responded “yes” (64.3%) that they participated in the Moving On class prior to the 1999-2000 school year. On the opposite side, 41 students responded “no” (35.7%) that they did not participate in the Moving On class.

TABLE 4
Elementary School Attended

<u>School</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Ashippun	7	6%
Greenland	21	18.1%
Ixonia	5	4.3%
Meadow View	11	9.5%
Okauchee	12	10.3%
Park Lawn	22	19%
Summit	21	18.1%
Other	10	8.6%

The data in Table 4 shows a spread out distribution of where the seventh graders attended elementary school within the district and those students who came into the district from other private schools or districts. The elementary schools with the highest representation from the group of students surveyed were: Greenland (18.1%), Park Lawn (19%), and Summit (18.1%). The schools with the smaller percentages reflect the schools with the smallest population size (with the exception of Meadow View School). Ashippun School was represented by 6% of the total number of students surveyed, Ixonia by 4.3%, and Okauchee by 10.3%.

TABLE 5
Attitude Statements of Middle School Transition Stressors

Item	X	SD	RO
19. Having time to spend with my friends the first day of school is important to me.	4.53	.74	1
43. I am enjoying my middle school experience so far.	4.43	.83	2
4. I like having a different teacher for each subject.	4.37	.95	4
17. I know whom I can ask to get help with homework.	4.37	.93	4
21. Learning to open my locker is important to me.	4.36	1.02	5
5. I like knowing what supplies are needed for each subject.	4.35	.96	6
2. Using my daily planner will help me be organized.	4.22	1.03	7
38. I feel upset when a teacher does not know my name.	4.21	1.18	8
15. I like knowing what the consequences are if I break a rule.	4.17	1.05	9
33. I feel teachers don't like me.	4.13	1.16	10
32. I like being in class with students from other elementary schools to get to know different students.	4.09	1.07	11
18. I know what extracurricular activities I can join.	3.91	1.27	12
16. I know what "allied arts" classes I will be taking.	3.81	1.31	14

Item	X	SD	RO
7. Knowing where to buy food at lunch time is important to me.	3.81	1.22	14
10. I know what to do if I have a conflict with a teacher.	3.81	1.04	15
11. I know the purpose of PRIDE.	3.75	1.32	16
24. My parents are worried about me starting middle school.	3.72	1.45	17
12. I know how much school work to expect in each subject.	3.70	1.16	18
39. I'm worried about people laughing at me in the hallway.	3.65	1.39	19
30. I feel I'm not good enough to get much playing time in my sport of choice.	3.64	1.26	20
14. I know how to use the library for class projects.	3.58	1.17	21
6. I feel comfortable joining an after school club.	3.53	1.16	22
22. Making new friends is difficult for me.	3.50	1.22	23
20. Not knowing all the students in my base is scary to me.	3.48	1.32	24
37. I think attending school dances is fun.	3.46	1.20	25
28. I'm worried that other students don't like me.	3.41	1.29	27
42. I feel uncomfortable asking my teachers a question.	3.41	1.29	27
25. I find it stressful to have different rules in each class.	3.34	1.36	28

Item	X	SD	RO
34. The style of clothes you wear in middle school is more important than in elementary.	3.30	1.37	29
40. Understanding my new schedule is easy.	3.30	1.29	30
27. The homework at the middle school will be too hard to do.	3.30	1.24	31
13. I am overwhelmed by the new school rules.	3.28	1.30	32
36. Being picked on by older students, bothers me.	3.12	1.49	33
26. I don't think I'll have enough time to change clothes after gym.	3.08	1.49	34
8. I feel comfortable talking to the principal about a problem.	3.00	1.18	35
23. I feel comfortable meeting with my counselor.	2.96	1.16	36
1. Finding new classrooms the first day of school is difficult.	2.89	1.28	37
35. I am in classes with my best friends.	2.83	1.50	38
9. It's important to wear name brand clothes at our school.	2.77	1.35	39
31. I'm worried I'll have too much homework to do.	2.68	1.32	40
29. I'm worried about my grades.	2.54	1.42	41
3. Not making it to class on time worries me.	2.20	1.23	42
41. I think three minutes is too short to go to restroom.	2.14	1.38	43

Perceived Attitudes of Stressors for New Seventh Grade Students

Table 5 shows the mean, standard deviation, and rank order of the attitude statements answered by seventh grade students. The students were to circle the number that reflected their level of agreement to an attitude statement. The numbers ranged from 1-5 with number one being strongly disagree and number 5 being strongly agree. Eleven attitude statements had mean scores of 4.09 to 4.53 which shows slight to strong agreement. The attitude items in agreement were numbers: 19,43,4,17,21,5,2,38,15,33, and 32. These attitude statements were perceived as the most stressful for the seventh grade students. Twenty-four attitude statements had mean scores of 3.00 to 3.91 which shows movement from undecided to slight agreement. The attitude items in this area were numbers: 18,10,7,16,11,24,12,30,14,39,6,22,37,20,28,42,25,27,34,40,13,36,26,and 8. Only eight attitude statements had a mean score below 3.00, showing that only 19% of the attitude items were not perceived as stressful as the majority of the remaining statements. The statements below 3.00 were numbers: 23,1,35,9,31,29,3,and 41.

TABLE 6
Attitude Statement Subgroup Scores

<u>Subgroup</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Median</u>	<u>SD</u>
Social	3.5719	3.6154	.4470
Academic	3.4589	3.5000	.6949
Daily Routine	3.3736	3.3333	.4569
Teacher/Authority	3.7004	3.7143	.5834
Rules	3.6058	3.6667	.8442
Extracurricular	3.6997	3.6667	.8027

Table 6 shows the degree of agreement between the six subgroups of stressors that new seventh grade students encounter by using the mean score, median score, and standard deviation. The highest and lowest mean scores only differ by .3268. The subgroups that appear to be the most stressful are the teacher/authority stressors ($X=3.7004$), rules stressors ($X=3.6058$), and extracurricular stressors (3.6997). However, the standard deviation for the rules and extracurricular subgroups is almost doubled from the daily routine group.

TABLE 7
Percentage of Agreement of Daily Routine Stressors

<u>Item</u>	<u>% Slight Agree</u>	<u>% Strong Agree</u>	<u>%Total</u>
1. Find class first day	33.6	12.1	45.7
2. Daily planner helps	30.2	51.7	81.9
3. Not making to class on time worries me	37.1	34.5	71.6
5. Knowing supplies needed	24.1	59.5	83.6
7. Know where to buy food	23.3	38.8	62.1
21. Learn to open locker	19.0	63.8	82.8
26. Not enough time to change after gym	13.2	27.2	40.4
40. Understand new schedule is easy	24.1	22.4	46.5
41. Three minutes too short between classes	19.1	48.7	67.8

In Table 7, the data shows the total percentages of slight and strong agreement of daily routine stressors. The results show that 81.9% new seventh grade students agree that planners will help them be organized, 83.6% are most concerned about having the correct supplies for each class and 82.8% about getting their lockers open. These were the top three concerns in the daily routine subgroup.

TABLE 8
Percentage of Agreement of Academic Stressors

<u>Item</u>	<u>% Slight Agree</u>	<u>% Strong Agree</u>	<u>% Total</u>
11. Know purpose of PRIDE	24.1	39.7	63.8
12. Know how much home-work to expect	37.9	27.6	65.5
14. Know how to use library	33.3	24.6	57.9
16. Know which Allied Arts classes I will take	20.7	43.1	63.8
17. Know who to ask for homework help	31.9	56.9	88.8
27. Homework too hard	17.4	8.7	26.1
29. Worried about grades	30.2	29.3	59.5
31. Worried have too much homework.	27.0	22.6	49.6

In table 8, the data shows the slight and strong agreement percentages for attitude items regarding academic concerns for new seventh grade students. These percentages were then added for a total percentage of students who were in some form of agreement with the attitude statement. The basic knowledge of academic aspects of the middle school such as: PRIDE, how much homework, use of library, Allied Arts classes, and who to ask for help for homework were all in the majority with 57% or more in some form of agreement. Only 26.1% of students agreed to some extent that the homework would be too hard. The students seemed most worried about grades (59.5% agreement) and having too much homework (49.6% agreement).

TABLE 9
Percentages of Agreement of Personnel or Authority Figure Stressors

Item	% Slight Agree	% Strong Agree	% Total
4. Like different teacher for every subject	20.9	61.7	82.6
8. Feel comfortable talking to principal	21.7	11.3	33.0
10. Know what to do if conflict with teacher	37.9	28.4	66.3
23. Feel comfortable meeting with counselor	16.4	11.2	27.6
33. Feel teachers don't like me	6.9	3.4	10.3
38. Upset when teacher doesn't know my name	7.8	4.3	12.1
42. Comfortable asking teachers questions	22.4	6.0	28.4

In table 9 the data shows the slight and strong agreement percentages separately as well as a total percentage for the stressors related to school personnel and authority figures. New seventh grade students seem most concerned about the direct contact with the school personnel and authority figures. Only 33% of the students felt comfortable talking to the principal, 27.6% felt comfortable meeting with the counselor and 28.4% felt comfortable asking a teacher a question.

TABLE 10
Percentage of Agreement of Rule Stressors

Item	% Slight Agree	% Strong Agree	% Total
13. Overwhelmed by new rules.	13.8	12.1	25.9
15. Like knowing consequences when break rules	29.6	49.6	79.2
25. Stressful to have different rules in each class	15.5	11.2	26.7

In Table 10, the data shows the percentages of slight, strong, and total agreement for stressors related to school rules as new middle school students. Only 25.9% of the students felt overwhelmed by the new rules and only 26.7% agreed to some extent that it was stressful to have different rules in each class. However, the students did agree by 79.2% that they liked to know the consequences to rules if they were to break them.

TABLE 11
Percentage of Agreement of Social Stressors

Item	% Slight Agree	% Strong Agree	% Total
9. Important to wear name brand clothes	13.9	14.8	28.7
19. Time with friends first day of school is important	22.6	66.1	88.7
20. Not knowing all students scares me.	19.0	8.6	27.6
22. Making new friends is important.	17.4	7.0	24.4
24. Parents are worried about middle school	12.9	12.1	25.0
28. Worried that others don't like me.	16.4	10.3	26.7
32. Like class with other elementary students.	33.6	44.0	77.6
34. Clothes in middle school more important than elementary school.	20.7	25.9	46.6
35. In classes with best friends.	23.5	16.5	40.0
36. Being picked on by older students worries me.	17.4	20.0	37.4
37. Attending school dances is fun.	24.1	23.3	47.4
39. Worried people laugh at me in the hallway.	12.5	10.7	23.2
43. I am enjoying my middle school experience.	28.4	59.5	87.9

In Table 11, the data shows the percentages of slight, strong, and total agreement of attitude statements regarding social concerns for new seventh grade students. In regards to social issues related to making friends, 88.7% of the students agreed that they liked having time to spend with friends that they already knew on the first day of school. However, the students also responded that 77.6% of them liked having classes with students from different elementary schools. A significant amount of students seemed worried about three main items: being picked on by the older students (37.4%), worrying that other students don't like them (26.7%), and not knowing all the students scared them (27.6%).

TABLE 12
Percentage of Agreement of Extracurricular Stressors

Item	% Slight Agree	% Strong Agree	% Total
6. Feel comfortable joining a club.	21.7	26.1	47.8
18. Know which extra-curricular activities to join.	20.2	46.5	66.7
30. Feel not good enough to get much play time in my sport of choice.	14.0	5.3	19.3

In Table 12 the data shows the slight, strong, and total agreement percentages for the stressors new middle school students felt in the area of extracurricular activities. The percent of students who knew which activities were available to them was 66.7%. The percent of students who felt comfortable joining a club was 47.8%. Only 19.3% of the students felt that they would not get enough playing time in their sport of choice.

TABLE 13

Significant Differences Between Male and Female Responses

Item	Male n=61	Female n=55	t	Sig.
3. Not making it to class on time.	X 2.54 SD 1.31	1.82 1.02	3.331	.001
8. Feel comfortable talking to principal.	\bar{X} 2.74 SD 1.18	3.30 1.11	-2.603	.010
12. Know how much school work to expect per subject.	\bar{X} 3.41 SD 1.27	4.02 0.93	-2.959	.004
15. Like knowing consequences when break rules.	\bar{X} 4.02 SD 1.16	4.35 0.91	-1.685	.095
16. Know which Allied Arts classes I will take.	\bar{X} 3.59 SD 1.42	4.05 1.15	-1.926	.057
20. Not knowing all students scares me.	\bar{X} 3.82 SD 1.18	3.11 1.37	3.005	.003
21. Learning to open locker is important.	\bar{X} 4.21 SD 1.14	4.53 0.86	-1.685	.095
22. Making new friends is important.	\bar{X} 3.30 SD 1.20	3.73 1.21	-1.903	.060
32. Like class with other elementary students.	\bar{X} 3.89 SD 1.13	4.31 0.96	-2.169	.032
35. In classes with best friends.	\bar{X} 3.23 SD 1.44	2.38 1.45	3.158	.002
36. Being picked on by older students worries me.	\bar{X} 3.37 SD 1.44	2.85 1.51	1.864	.065
37. Attending school dances is fun.	\bar{X} 3.21 SD 1.28	3.73 1.04	-2.355	.020
41. Three minutes too short between classes.	\bar{X} 2.49 SD 1.50	1.74 1.12	3.063	.003

43. Enjoying middle school experience.	\bar{X} 4.30 SD 0.95	4.58 0.63	-1.927	.057
Daily Routine Average Score	\bar{X} 3.456 SD 0.463	3.270 0.432	2.299	.023

In table number13, Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances found there were significant differences at the .01 level among the two groups, male and female. The following 4 items were more significant for males using the t-test: item 3, “not making it to class on time worries me” (male X=2.54, female X=1.82), item 20 “not knowing all the students scares me” (male X=3.82, female X=3.11), item 35 “I am in classes with my best friends” (male X=3.23, female X=2.38), and item 41, “three minutes are too short in between classes” (male X=2.49, female X=1.74). The t-test also showed that the Daily Routine Subgroup had a significant level of difference among males (male X=3.456, female X=3.270).

The following 4 items were more significant for females using the t-test: item 8, “I feel comfortable talking to the Principal” (female X=3.30, male X=2.74), item 12 “I know how much school work to expect per subject” (female X=4.02, male X=3.41), item32, “I like class with other elementary students” (female X=4.31, male X=3.89), and item 37 “attending school dances is fun” (female X=3.73, male X=3.21).

The following 6 items did not show a significant level of difference, but reveal a trend towards one group. These are the 5 out of the 6 items which showed a trend towards the female group: item 15, “like knowing consequences when I break the rules” (female X=4.35, male X=4.02), item 16, “know which Allied Arts classes I will take” (female X=4.05, male X=3.59), item 21, “learning to open lockers is important” (female X=4.53, male X=4.21), item 22, “making new friends is important” (female X=3.73, male X=3.30), and item 43, “I am enjoying

my middle school experience so far” (female X=4.58, male X=4.30). The only item that approached a significant level for the male group was item 36, “ being picked on by older students worries me” (male X=3.37, female X=2.85).

TABLE 14
Significant Differences Between Students Who Participated in “Moving On”

Item	Yes n=74	No n=41	t	Sig.
6. Feel comfortable to join club.	X 3.73 SD 1.05	3.23 1.23	2.304	.023
20. Not knowing all students scares me.	\bar{X} 3.31 SD 1.33	3.76 1.24	-1.757	.082
22. Making new friends is important.	\bar{X} 3.77 SD 1.03	3.05 1.40	2.881	.005
37. Attending school dances is fun.	\bar{X} 3.69 SD 1.06	3.05 1.34	2.820	.006
41. Three minutes is too short between classes.	\bar{X} 1.89 SD 1.15	2.53 1.62	-2.193	.032
Daily Routine Average Score	\bar{X} 3.321 SD 0.442	3.490 0.461	-1.897	.060

In table number 14, the two groups being compared for a significant level of difference include the “Yes” group which did participate in the “Moving On” transition program and the “No” group which did not participate in the “Moving On” program. Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances found there were significant differences at the .01 level among these two groups. There were three items showing a significant difference for those students who did participate in “Moving On”; item 6, “I feel comfortable joining a club” (Yes X=3.73, No X=3.23), item 22, “I

think making new friends is important” (Yes X=3.77, No X=3.05), and item 37, “Attending school dances is fun (Yes X=3.69, No X=3.05). Item number 41 “I think 3 minutes are too short between classes”, was the only item that showed a stronger response for the group that did not participate in the “Moving On” program at the .01 level (Yes X=1.89, No X=2.53).

There was one item and a subgroup’s average score that did not reach a significant level of difference, but showed a trend towards one group. The data from item 20, “Not knowing all of the students scares me” shows that there is a trend toward the group that did not participate in the “Moving On” program (Yes X=3.31, No X=3.76). The daily routine subgroup’s average score is also seen moving toward the “No” group (Yes X=3.321, No X=3.490). The trend seems to indicate that those students who did not participate in the “Moving On” program, were more stressed about daily routine types of issues when starting the first year at the middle school.

TABLE 15

Significant Differences Between Students' Birth Order and Perceived Stress

Item	Oldest/Only n = 46	Middle n = 25	Youngest n = 44	F value	Sig.
6. Feel comfortable joining a club.	X 3.91 SD 0.96	3.33 0.96	3.25 1.35	4.371	.015
26. Not enough time to change clothes after gym.	\bar{X} 3.40 SD 1.44	2.44 1.53	3.14 1.44	3.522	.033
37. Attending school dances is fun.	\bar{X} 3.78 SD 1.13	3.28 0.98	3.23 1.33	2.854	.062
42. Comfortable asking teachers questions.	\bar{X} 3.65 SD 1.32	2.96 1.10	3.45 1.30	2.428	.093

In table 15, the ANOVA test found that there was a significant difference at the .05 level among the groups on item 6, comfortable joining clubs. Using the Student-Newman-Keuls test a significant difference was found between the oldest/only group ($X=3.91$) and both the youngest group ($X=3.25$) and the middle group ($X=3.33$) at the .05 level.

The ANOVA test also found that there was a significant difference at the .05 level among the groups on item 26, not enough time to change clothes after gym. Using the Student-Newman-Keuls test a significant difference was found between the middle group ($X=2.44$) and both the youngest group ($X=3.14$) and the oldest/only group ($X=3.40$) at the .05 level.

There were two items that were close to approaching a significant difference at the .05 level: item 37, attending school dances is fun and item 42, comfortable asking teachers questions. In item 37, the trend seems to indicate that the oldest/only group found that attending dances is more fun ($X=3.78$) than the middle group ($X=3.28$) and the youngest group ($X=3.23$). In item 42, the trend seems to show that the middle child group ($X=2.96$) had the most difficult

time feeling comfortable asking teachers questions as compared to the oldest/only group ($X=3.65$) and the youngest group ($X=3.45$).

Discussion

New seventh grade middle school students surveyed in this study reported that 64.3% of them did participate in the “Moving On” transition program during the summer prior to the 1999-2000 school year. According to Odegaard & Heath (1992), every community needs to structure the middle school differently in order that school leaders might examine the anxieties of young adolescents and then tailor their transition programs to address these needs. Current professional literature supports the idea of schools implementing transition programs. Shoffner and Williamson (2000) stated that middle level educators can make a difference for students as a result of the activities incorporated into their transition programs. According to Mullins (1997), in general, students who participated in multiple transition activities made a good transition to the middle school. Although research presents the advantages of participating in transition programs, 35.7% of the students surveyed by the researcher did not choose to participate in the “Moving On” transition program.

Significant levels of difference were found in the survey between those new middle school students who did and did not participate in the “Moving On” transition program the summer prior to the 1999-2000 school year. There were three items which showed a significant difference for the “Yes” group which did participate in the transition program: “I feel comfortable joining a club”, “I think making new friends is important”, and “Attending school dances is fun”. The item “I think 3 minutes are too short between classes” was the only item that

showed a stronger response for the group that did not participate in the “Moving On” program at the .01 level.

Current professional literature recognizes that one basic source of situational stress involves “daily hassles” which are ongoing problems that can have an impact over time according to Lazarus and Cohen, as cited in Whitman, Spendlove, and Clark, 1984. The new seventh grade students revealed these three top daily routine stressors in the survey administered by the researcher: 83.6% of the students were concerned about having the correct supplies for each class, 82.8% of the students are concerned about getting their lockers open, and 81.9% of the students agreed that planners will help them be organized.

New seventh grade students surveyed in this study reported that 66.7% of them slightly or strongly agreed to knowing which extracurricular activities to join in the current school year and 47.8% of the students felt comfortable joining a club in the current school year. According to Pruitt (1999), joining extracurricular activities should be encouraged during the teen years in order to be exposed to a variety of experiences. While a majority of the students seemed to know which activities they wanted to join during the school year (66.7%) , slightly less than the majority of the students felt comfortable joining a club (47.8%). This leaves the door open for more encouragement and discussion by teachers and parents for students to join extracurricular activities.

According to Mekos (1989), as cited in Mullins and Irvin (2000), girls were primarily concerned about peer relations at junior high, but these concerns reduced after transition. The following two items, which support the current literature were found to be more significant for the female than the male respondents to the survey: “I like class with other elementary students” and “Attending school dances is fun”. In addition, the remaining two items “I feel comfortable

talking to the Principal” and “I know how much school work to expect per subject” were also found to have a significant level of difference at the .01 level for the female students. The male respondents had four items which were more significant for them at the .01 level: “Not making it to class on time worries me”, “Not knowing all the students scares me”, “I am in classes with my best friends”, and “Three minutes are too short in between classes.”

Significant differences among the birth order groups of the seventh grade respondents were found at the .05 level. A significant difference was found between the oldest/only group and both the youngest group and the middle group on the item “I am comfortable joining clubs”. There was also a significant difference at the .05 level among the groups on the item “Not enough time to change clothes after gym”. A significant difference was found between the middle group and both the youngest group and the oldest/only group.

Summary

In chapter four, data was compiled and tabulated for the two sections of the stress and transition survey. The demographics section of the survey was primarily presented in the number of frequencies and percentages. For the attitude statement section of the survey, the means of the attitude statements were rank ordered and the standard deviation was also given. Percentages of agreement were given for the 6 subgroup scores: social, academic, daily routine, teacher/authority, rules, and extracurricular; as well as the percentage of agreement for the attitude statements within each subgroup. Differences in responses were also included in the analysis. Means, standard deviation, t-values, and 2 tail probability were reported for differences found between male and female responses to the attitude statements and between students who participated in “Moving On”. Means, standard deviation, f-values, and 2 tail probability were reported for differences found among the birth order groups. A discussion of the findings in

relation to the research objectives and professional literature were included. The next chapter will synthesize research findings, draw conclusions, and make recommendations for further research.

Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This chapter presents an overview of the study of new seventh grade students to the middle school setting and their perception of which contextual factors are the most stressful to them. A summary of the purpose, methods, data analysis, limitations, and results were included. The conclusions and suggestions for further research were given.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the perceived level of stress early adolescents' associate with stressors during the transition from elementary school to middle school. The specific objectives that were focused on during the study were to:

1. Describe the six categories of stressors related to the middle school transition process.
2. Determine the most common needs of new seventh grade students in regard to academic stressors.
3. Determine the most common needs of new seventh grade students in relation to social stressors.
4. Determine the most common needs of new seventh grade students in stress-related aspects of daily routine.
5. Determine the most common needs of new seventh grade students in relation to learning the middle school rules.
6. Determine the most common needs of new seventh grade students in developing relationships with middle school personnel and authority figures.
7. Determine the most common needs of new seventh grade students in relation to their involvement in extracurricular activities.

8. Describe how gender affects student's stressors related to the transition process.
9. Describe how birth order affects student's stressors related to the transition process.
10. Describe how participation in the "Moving On" transition program affects student's stressors related to the transition process.

A questionnaire, designed by the researcher, was used as the primary data collection instrument for this study. The survey instrument consisted of two parts. For the first part of the survey, the respondents were asked to give their opinion on 43 attitude statements using a 5 point Likert Scale in regard to which contextual factors they perceived as the most stressful in transitioning to the middle school from the elementary school. The second part of the survey included the following demographic information about the seventh grade respondents: gender, birth order, elementary school location, and participation in the "Moving On" transition program.

The pilot study was administered to 12 incoming seventh graders in the summer of 1999 in the school district. The questionnaire was then administered to 116 seventh grade student the second day of classes during the 1999-2000 school year. Responses were tabulated in January, 2000.

Tabulation and analysis of the surveys was done through Computer Services at the University of Wisconsin-Stout in Menomonie, Wisconsin. The number of frequencies, means, percentages, and the standard deviation were obtained for attitude statements 1-43 which correlated with objective numbers two through seven. For objective numbers 8-10, the frequencies, percentages, the mean, median and standard deviation were obtained using the subcategories of student gender, birth order, and elementary school on the demographics section of the survey. A t-test was also computed on each attitude statement and for each of the six

subscales based on gender and participation in the “Moving On” class. A one-way analysis of variance and the Newman-Keuls multiple range test was also computed for items 1-43 based on the position in the family.

Research Objective 1: Describe the six categories of stressors related to the middle school transition process. The attitude statements created by the researcher were divided into six subgroups in order to zero in on which categories seemed most stressful for the incoming middle school students. The subgroups in which the attitude statements were divided: social, academic, daily routine, teacher/authority, rules, and extracurricular stressors. When comparing the attitude statements’ subgroup mean scores, the top three subgroups from highest to lowest seemed to be teacher/authority stressors, rules stressors, and extracurricular stressors.

Research Objective 2: Determine the most common needs of new seventh grade students in regard to academic stressors. Of the eight attitude statements related to academic stressors, only two of them showed high percentages of needs or concerns by the new seventh grade students. The students seemed most worried about grades (59.5% agreement) and having too much homework (49.6% agreement).

Research Objective 3: Determine the most common needs of new seventh grade students in relation to social stressors. Of the thirteen attitude statements related to social stressors, a significant amount of students seemed worried about three main items: “Being picked on by the older students” (37.4%), “Worrying that other students don’t like them” (26.7%), and “Not knowing all the students scares me” (27.6%). In regards to social issues related to making friends, 88.7% of the students agreed that they liked having time to spend with friends that they already knew on the first day of school. In contrast however, the students also responded that 77.6% of them liked having classes with students from different elementary schools.

Research Objective 4: Determine the most common needs of new seventh grade students in stress-related aspects of daily routine. Of the nine attitude statements related to daily routine stressors, 83.6% of the students were most concerned about having the correct supplies for each class and 82.8% about getting their lockers open. The results also showed that 81.9% of the new seventh grade students agreed that planners will help them be organized.

Research Objective 5: Determine the most common needs of new seventh grade students in relation to learning the middle school rules. Only three attitude statements related to school rules. A significant amount of students felt overwhelmed by the new rules (25.9%) and only 26.7% of the students agreed to some extent that it was stressful to have different rules in each class. However, the students did agree by 79.2% that they liked to know the consequences to rules if they were to break them.

Research Objective 6: Determine the most common needs of new seventh grade students in developing relationships with middle school personnel and authority figures. Of the seven attitude statements related to personnel or authority stressors, new seventh grade students seemed most concerned about the direct contact with the school personnel and authority figures. Only 33% of the students felt comfortable talking to the principal, 27.6% felt comfortable meeting with the counselor and 28.4% felt comfortable asking a teacher a question.

Research Objective 7: Determine the most common needs of new seventh grade students in relation to their involvement in extracurricular activities. Of the three attitude statements related to extracurricular activities, a majority of students knew which activities were available to them (66.7%). However, only 47.8% of the students felt comfortable joining a club.

Research Objective 8: Describe how gender affects student's stressors related to the transition process. Significant differences were found among the 116 male and female seventh

grade middle school respondents. There were 52.6% male respondents and 47.4% female respondents to the survey. For the male respondents, the following items were more significant: “Not making it to class on time worries me”, “Not knowing all the students scares me”, “I am in classes with my best friends”, and “Three minutes are too short in between classes”. The daily routine subgroup also had a significant level of difference among the male group. The following items were more significant for female seventh grade students: “I feel comfortable talking to the Principal”, “I know how much school work to expect per subject”, “I like class with other elementary students”, and “Attending school dances is fun”.

Research Objective 9: Describe how birth order affects student’s stressors related to the transition process. Of the 116 seventh grade middle school respondents, 40.0% of them were the oldest/only child, 21.7% of them were the middle child, and 38.3% of them were the youngest child. A significant difference was found among the three groups on the item “Comfortable joining clubs”. A significant difference was found between the oldest/only group and both the youngest group and the middle group. The oldest/only group felt the most comfortable joining clubs. A significant difference was also found between the middle group and both the youngest and the oldest/only group concerning the item “Not enough time to change clothes after gym”. The middle group felt that there was enough time to change after gym, while the youngest and oldest/only group felt that there should be more time.

Research Objective 10: Describe how participation in the “Moving On” transition program affects student’s stressors related to the transition process. Of the 116 seventh grade middle school respondents, 64.3% of them indicated “yes” they did participate in “Moving On” and 35.7% indicated “no” they did not participate in the “Moving On” transition program. There were three items which showed a significant difference for those students who did participate in

“Moving On”: “I feel comfortable joining a club”, “I think making new friends is important”, and “Attending school dances is fun”. For those students who did not participate in the “Moving On” program, one item stands out showing a significant difference, “I think 3 minutes is too short between classes”. These students did not have a school tour or other activities prior to the first day to help with things such as where to go and the schedule of time to follow. This shows the importance of a program such as “Moving On” to new seventh grade students.

Conclusions

Overall, the results of this survey indicated new seventh grade middle school students who did participate in the “Moving On” transition program were less stressed about daily routine items and social issues including meeting new classmates, friends and teachers. While 64.3% is a substantial turn out for a voluntary transition program, the total number of participants could be improved. Each of the six categories of stressors related to the transition process (academic, social, daily routine, rules, personnel, and extracurricular), seemed to have items which students were most concerned about, showing that the entire transition process is multifaceted and needs to be addressed in this manner.

Recommendations

Since transitioning from elementary school to middle school is such an important step for students, continued research in providing the best possible transition program tailored to each community is necessary. Additional research could include surveying the students who do attend “Moving On” at the end of the program, surveying all seventh grade students at the beginning, middle, and end of the seventh grade year, and surveying seventh grade teachers concerning methods used at the beginning of and throughout the school year. As students’ needs change

from one group of seventh graders to another, the surveying and planning by teachers needs to be an ongoing process for a good transition.

Educational Implications

An ideal transition program for incoming middle school students would be to include all students, not just those who volunteer or parents who sign them up. Teachers and staff need to prepare and plan for the new group of students in order to start the process of transition on the right foot for the new students by incorporating all areas of student concern: social, academics, rules, personnel, extracurricular activities, and daily routine.

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CHANGES FROM ELEMENTARY TO MIDDLE SCHOOL

This survey is part of a study to explore stress upon entering the middle school. DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME ON THE SURVEY. The questionnaire is completely anonymous. Please do not leave any questions blank.

Directions: Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the attitude statements below by selecting a number from 1 to 5. If you agree strongly with the statement, circle the number 5. If you disagree strongly, circle the number 1. If your feelings are not as strong, circle a number between 1 and 5 which is closest to your feelings. If you are undecided, circle number 3. There are no right or wrong answers. Please respond with your own opinion.

1	2	3	4	5
Disagree Strongly	Disagree Slightly	Undecided	Agree Slightly	Agree Strongly

Example: I like making new friends. 1 2 3 4 5

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| 1. Finding new classrooms on the first day of school is difficult. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. I think using my daily planner will help me be organized. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 3. Not making it to class on time worries me. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. I like having a different teacher for each subject. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 5. I like knowing what supplies are needed for each subject. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 6. I feel comfortable joining an after school club. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 7. Knowing where to buy food at lunch time is important to me. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 8. I feel comfortable talking to the principal about a problem. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 9. It's important to wear name brand clothes at our school. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 10. I know what to do if I have a conflict with a teacher. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 11. I know the purpose of PRIDE. | 1 2 3 4 5 |

1	2	3	4	5
Disagree Strongly	Disagree Slightly	Undecided	Agree Slightly	Agree Strongly
12. I know how much school work to expect in each subject.				1 2 3 4 5
13. I am overwhelmed by the new school rules.				1 2 3 4 5
14. I know how to use the library for class projects.				1 2 3 4 5
15. I like knowing what the consequences are if I break a rule.				1 2 3 4 5
16. I know what “allied arts” classes I will be taking during the school year.(Ex.: Health, Tech Ed)				1 2 3 4 5
17. I know whom I can ask to get help with homework.				1 2 3 4 5
18. I know what extracurricular (after school) activities I can join.				1 2 3 4 5
19. Having time to spend with my friends the first day of school is important to me.				1 2 3 4 5
20. Not knowing all the students in my base is scary to me.				1 2 3 4 5
21. Learning to open my locker is important to me.				1 2 3 4 5
22. Making new friends is difficult for me.				1 2 3 4 5
23. I feel comfortable meeting with my counselor.				1 2 3 4 5
24. My parents are worried about me starting middle school.				1 2 3 4 5
25. I find it stressful to have different rules in each class.				1 2 3 4 5
26. I don’t think I’ll have enough time to change clothes after gym to get to class on time.				1 2 3 4 5
27. The homework at the middle school will be too hard to do.				1 2 3 4 5
28. I’m worried that other students don’t like me.				1 2 3 4 5

1	2	3	4	5
Disagree Strongly	Disagree Slightly	Undecided	Agree Slightly	Agree Strongly
<hr/>				
29. I'm worried about my grades.				1 2 3 4 5
30. I feel I'm not good enough to get much playing time in my sport of choice.				1 2 3 4 5
31. I'm worried I'll have too much homework to do.				1 2 3 4 5
32. I like being in class with students from other elementary schools to get to know different students.				1 2 3 4 5
33. I feel that the teachers don't like me.				1 2 3 4 5
34. The style of clothes you wear in middle school is more important than in elementary school.				1 2 3 4 5
35. I am in classes with my best friends.				1 2 3 4 5
36. Being picked on by the older students bothers me.				1 2 3 4 5
37. I think attending school dances is fun.				1 2 3 4 5
38. I feel upset when a teacher does not know my name.				1 2 3 4 5
39. I'm worried about people laughing at me in the hallway.				1 2 3 4 5
40. Understanding my new schedule is easy.				1 2 3 4 5
41. I think three minutes is too short to have time to go to the restroom and get to class on time.				1 2 3 4 5
42. I feel uncomfortable asking my teachers a question.				1 2 3 4 5
43. Overall, I am enjoying my middle school experience so far.				1 2 3 4 5

General Information

Please complete the following information by placing a check on the line which best describes you.

1. I went to the following elementary school:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ashippun | <input type="checkbox"/> Okauchee |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Greenland | <input type="checkbox"/> Park Lawn |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ixonia | <input type="checkbox"/> Summit |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Meadow View | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

2. I am:

- Male
 Female

3. In my family I am:

- the oldest child
 a middle child
 the youngest child

4. I participated in the Moving On summer class:

- Yes
 No

5. Please list any comments or suggestions about your first few days at Oconomowoc Middle School:

Thank you for your cooperation!!!

