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## The Lived Experiences of Students in a Summer Bridge Ninth Grade Transition Program: A Phenomenological Case Study

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THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS IN A SUMMER BRIDGE NINTH GRADE  
TRANSITION PROGRAM: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL CASE STUDY

by

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## ABSTRACT

### THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS IN A SUMMER BRIDGE NINTH GRADE TRANSITION PROGRAM: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL CASE STUDY

Ricardo C. Randall  
Old Dominion University, 2022  
Director: Dr. Steve Myran

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of students in one summer bridge program as they transitioned to high school. Every year, eighth grade middle school students go through the process of making the transition from middle school to high school. For many students, the transition to high school is the most difficult of all transitions. In order to assist students to successfully transition to high school, many school districts in our nation have implemented Middle School to High School Summer Bridge Programs to augment academic achievement and strengthen the essential skills needed for the preparation of attending high school. This qualitative study examined the lived experiences of incoming freshmen who participated in a summer bridge program. Findings show a summer bridge program can provide support of academic assistance, social connectivity, vision planning, and related resources needed with the transition to high school. More specifically, the strategies and interventions implemented of this program decreased the students' fears and anxiety of transitioning to high school and provided a level of growth among different areas of concern that allowed them to be more prepared for the start of their high school journey and beyond.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my late parents, Vernon, and Marlene Randall. Their examples of excellence, service, professionalism, and dedication to the profession of education as teachers and administrators inspired me to become an educator. Along this journey, they constantly supported me, encouraged me to keep pushing, and were never too busy to help me when needed. Within the last conversations of both my parents, they told me to keep working on my dissertation to earn my Ph.D. - or as my father used to say, **“Praise Him Daily”** in reference to the Lord. The years of 2020 and 2021 were life-changing due to their passing, respectively. I know it has been the strength of the Lord and my parents looking down from Heaven that have kept me going. I truly miss them.

Next, I would like to additionally dedicate my dissertation to my wife, Jacqueline, and my daughter, Jamia. They too encouraged me and were there when I needed assistance. I am especially appreciative of them dealing with my sacrifices of time and other activities as I worked on this degree. Love you'll!

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## CHAPTER I

Every year, eighth-grade middle school students go through the process of making the transition from middle school to high school. For many students, the most difficult transition of all is the movement to high school (Bradford, Beier, & Oswald, 2021; Holland & Mazzoli, 2001). Nationally, educational policymakers have been grappling with how to address increasing numbers of students who do not advance beyond ninth grade (Miao & Wheelock, 2005; Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2009). Some attrition rates before the tenth grade are between 11-33 percent, nationally. National estimates put the student attrition rate before tenth grade at between 11 percent and 33 percent (Dedmond, 2008; Education Week, 2007). In terms of graduating from high school, ninth grade students who fail that year have less than 30 percent chance of finishing high school (Bradford, Beier, & Oswald, 2021; Horwitz and Snipes, 2008). In particular, the first month of high school is the most difficult time period as the students are adjusting to the new school environment. The middle school-based, nurturing strategies many students are accustomed to do not exist in high school. In order to assist students to successfully make the transition to high school, many school districts in our nation have implemented Middle to High School Summer Bridge Programs to increase academic achievement and strengthen the essential skills needed for the preparation of attending high school (Abbott and Templeton, 2013).

Summer bridge transition programs are designed and implemented to assist students who demonstrate the indicators of potentially having a difficult transition and being potential dropouts in ninth grade. While these summer transition programs are often open to all rising ninth grade students regardless of academic ability, programs differ in their focus, structure and length (Easton, Johnson, & Sartain, 2017; Grace-Odeleye, 2019; Slade, Eatmon, Staley & Dixon, 2015;

Williams, S., 2009). As a result, these students require additional supports through the transition process with their academic attainment, attendance, and pro-social behaviors (Bradford, Beier, & Oswald, 2021; Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016; Miao & Wheelock, 2005). Summer bridge programs serve targeted populations of students during the summer between eighth and ninth grades, while some programs are open to all incoming ninth-grade students. These programs span for several days or weeks and may occur a half a day or a full day. They are also held at the future high school of attendance or similar school.

### **Middle School to High School Transition**

#### **Effects of Ninth Grade Transition Programs**

Research in the past 20 years has highlighted that that when students participate in transition programs designed to actively involve students, parents, and staff members, students are less likely to drop out of high school even when demographic and other variables are held constant (Bradford, Beier, & Oswald, 2021; Smith, 1997; Hertzog & Morgan, 1999) and can yield short-term and long-term educational outcomes. For example, Allensworth and Easton (2005) found that 81 percent of students who were successful in their ninth-grade year completed the required and/or more credits and graduated in four years. The students who did not earn at least five credits in their freshman year graduated after four years. Likewise, Neild, R. C., Stoner, E. S., & Furstenberg, F. (2008) noted that the academic achievement of ninth graders is a strong predictor of eventual dropout rates.

McCallumore and Sparapani (2010) further report, “ninth graders have the lowest grade point average, the most missed classes, the majority of failing grades, and more misbehavior referrals than any other high school grade” (p. 60). Consequently, many ninth-grade students repeat their first year of high school or drop out as a result of negative educational experiences

(Christle, Jolivet, & Nelson, 2007). Additionally, Legters (2000) presented that many ninth graders experience a difficult time adjusting to the demands and related topics of high school, resulting in lower grades, more disciplinary problems, higher failure rates, and feelings that they do not measure up to be in the high school community. The combination of these characteristics demonstrates effects on the graduation rate of the respective high schools.

For example, if students fall too far behind academically in ninth grade, they may not have the time, motivation or skills to catch up (Blum, 2005). There are 1.2 million high school dropouts each year in the United States, which averages out to 7,000 students per day (Amos, 2008) based on a 180-day school year. The Digest of Education Statistics shows 104,756 dropouts in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, 113,370 in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, 117,536 in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, and 175,806 in 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Research shows, especially during the transition from middle school to high school, that when a student's academic, social, and emotional needs are addressed, they are more willing to be motivated to learn and to achieve success (Jones, 2006; Blum, 2005; Sulkowski, 2012). This number is still high, even though it has decreased in recent years (Doll, Eslami, & Walters, 2013). One way to address this issue and to make certain that all students are successful is through successfully transitioning students from eighth grade to ninth grade. A successful transition program will address these issues and give students the tools and foundation they need to be successful in school.

### **Summer Bridge Transition Programs**

According to McKevitt & Uvass, 2013 "Transition refers to students completing one milestone in an academic setting and progressing to the next phase of their academic career in a new setting" (page 70). The concept of transitioning from eighth grade to ninth grade or middle school to high school establishes the necessity for increased attention and action to assist

students. Due to the number of students who do not succeed in the ninth-grade year and are retained, the ninth grade accumulates a larger population of students. When this occurs, the mass or group of students creates what is called “the ninth-grade bulge” (Williams & Richman, 2007). Likewise, Patterson, Beltyukova, Berman, and Francis (2007) indicated that the “freshman bulge” is composed of students who do not have enough credits to be on-track for graduation.

According to the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (2009), in order to be effective and supportive of the needs of students, summer bridge programs focus on an academic foundation to remediate students on learning deficits, but they also conduct activities to 1) enhance student confidence and self-esteem; 2) improve academic and study skills; 3) provide students opportunities for to meet their high school teachers and to establish positive relationships; 4) ensure that adequate information about policies, programs, courses, etc are provided to students and parents. and 5) encourage social interactions with upperclassmen to serve as peer mentors (. The focus on the efforts of summer bridge programs as a contemporary issue is important due to the short-term goals of assisting students to succeed during the first year of high school and not becoming potential dropouts. Only about 70 percent of ninth graders make it to graduation four years later (Education Week, 2007; Gossage, 2007; Hazel, Pfaff, Albanes, & Gallagher, 2014). The long-term goals are establishing a foundation for the students to successfully progress through high school and then graduate.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Research to date has focused primarily on the challenges that students face in their transition to high school and the organizational and program features that can assist them in improving graduation rates, however, we know little about the actual lived experiences of students within the summer bridge program designed to support them through this challenging

transition, or their perceptions about what they need. Within the managerial paradigm, students are often seen as passive recipients of educational interventions, overlooking the complex, dynamic, and reciprocal role students themselves play in the educational context. Students' engagement, experience, and connectivity is critical to how effective a summer bridge program is in supporting a successful transition to high school. It is the hope that the lived experiences of the students will produce results that can be used to support revisions of the summer program. Additionally, these experiences may provide a snapshot of how future activities of the students will determine their high school careers. Finally, sharing their lived experiences may allow the students to be more reflective and goal-oriented to accomplish the purpose of high school-graduation.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of students in one summer bridge program as they transition to high school. Specifically, how the students experienced the program's features, strategies, interventions, and activities and how they made meaning of the structures and essence of the phenomenon and challenges of transitioning to high school. The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What were the lived experiences of ninth graders who participated in the summer bridge program?
2. What influences did those experiences have on their sensemaking of their transition to high school? How did the students make sense of, and give meaning to their experience in the transition program?

### **Rationale of the Study**

Among the biggest challenges facing the American educational system, both in the past and present, are finding ways of keeping students from leaving school prior to graduation (Bradshaw, O' Brennan, & McNeely, 2008). The increased rigor of high school, especially during the first year, should be addressed and supported by proactive strategies to assist students academically and socially. Moreover, there are notable consequences for leaving school before graduation that include the student's lifelong health (Bonny, Brito, Harnung, Slap & Klostermann, 2000; Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007), reduced earning potential, (Bottoms, 2008; Chen, Boyce, & Matthews, 2002), and higher levels of risky behaviors, including alcohol and drug abuse (Chew, Osseck, Raygor, Eldridge-Houser, & Cox, 2010; Townsend, Flisher, & King, 2007). Dropout rates are the highest during the transition from middle school to high school (Cooper & Liou, 2007). This is a challenging time for all student, even for many academically successful students (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009), and monitoring and supporting struggling students become all the more important. As the demand for our students to be more prepared to compete in a global society, it is imperative to conduct more research to determine how proactive programs such as summer bridge transition programs are effectively assisting students with the tools with the foundation of the last stage of public education of high school.

### **Significance of the Problem**

The transition from middle school to high school is a pivotal one as success in the ninth grade is tied directly to higher graduation rates, and students' overall experience in high school (Nield, 2009; Silverthorn, DuBois & Crombie, 2005). Across the United States, in large cities with the highest dropout rate, 40 percent of students repeat the ninth grade, and of these only 10-15 percent end up graduating (Balfanz & Letgers, 2004; Herlihy, 2007). In high poverty



areas, the attrition rate of ninth-grade students is significant. Ninth grade attrition is more present in high poverty urban schools, where 40 percent of students who become dropouts leave after their first year (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

As ninth grade students continue to address adversities, obstacles, and the potential of becoming dropouts in their respective settings, it is imperative that educators continue to conduct transition programs. Many summer bridge programs are conducted by educators who make the effort to establish supportive and positive relationships with the students and to motivate them to be successful (Abbott & Templeton, 2013). As such, this study will examine the basic concepts of how rising high school students use strategies and interventions to excel in summer bridge programs and to support the goal of making an effective transition to succeed in the ninth grade. An effective summer bridge program should provide more depth than just serving as simple orientation, but on preparing a pathway for ninth-grade students for post-secondary opportunities through academic, social supports, including family and community support (Abbott & Templeton, 2013).

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a thorough understanding of summer bridge transition programs and the relationship they have with students transitioning from middle school to high school. The first section in the literature review will discuss the theoretical framework of the lens of Transition Theory. The second section will discuss the challenges of middle school to high school transition, and the third section will discuss how summer bridge transition programs are designed and implemented to assist students as they transition into ninth grade. Additional information will address how relevant theories are key components within summer bridge transition programs as the framework of this study.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

##### **Review of Research and Theory about Transition Theory**

Transitions are movements or designated times in between fairly stable states (Chick & Meleis, 1986; Ormseth, B., 2010) and can be described by the characteristics of disconnectedness, perception, awareness, and patterns of response (Meleis, 1986; Ormseth, B., 2010). This theory was also expanded with additional work of the same author (Meleis, 2015). No matter the transition, these traits are common and serve as the foundation that captures the essence of the periods between fairly stable states. In relation to the transition from middle school to high school, as previously mentioned, is it the most challenging movement in the K-12 continuum; therefore, it is imperative that students, educators, parents, and other stakeholders recognize the importance of how each characteristic has an influence on this critical movement. The desired outcome of this transition is for incoming freshmen to successfully navigate into uncharted waters and be able to rise to the assimilation of the high school culture.

The most influential characteristic is disconnectedness (Meleis, 1986; Ormseth, B., 2010). A transition is a process. The critical influence of disconnectedness is that it establishes a loss of connection to what is known. When middle school students transition to high school, they lose connections with their support systems, familiar objects, and reference points. This makes it difficult for some to become acclimated to the new environment of high school. The presence of disconnectedness may cause the perception of transitioning to high school to be altered and skewed. Because of the individual variance of perception, this is the most unpredictable characteristic of transition (Meleis, 1986; Ormseth, B., 2010).

Awareness is another component of the Transition Theory. The degree in which an individual has an awareness of the transition will determine its influence on the process. This definition has to be done by the person experiencing the transition (Meleis, 1986; Ormseth, B., 2010). When incoming freshmen transition to high school, how they individually experience the process will determine the response they will conduct during the first year of high school. This characteristic is important because it could potentially have an influence beyond ninth grade and the ultimate goal of graduation.

The final trait of the Transition Theory is the pattern of response, and this trait can be expressed by distress, happiness, and/or other emotions (Meleis, 1986; Ormseth, B., 2010). The foundation of this trait is supported by both observable and non-observable reactions during the process of transition that are not random occurrences (Ormseth, 2010). When middle school students make the transition to high school, there is the potential for them to experience a range of emotions and display observable and non-observable patterns of responses. The combined essence of these traits has the potential to connect and have an effect on the overall transition to

high school for incoming freshmen. The traits may be mitigated during the transition by the interventions and strategies of a transition program such as a summer bridge transition program.

The focus of the research of this specific Transition Theory is primarily medical based, but the concept of the stages of transition and the connectivity to the human response lends itself to this study. (Ormseth, 2010). In relation to the transition to high school, incoming freshmen are faced with the aspects of disconnectedness from the absence of familiar reference points which could lead to the appearance of the inability to meet old needs and the correlation of patterns of response. Each of these characteristics is common in the transition from eighth grade to ninth grade. Table 1 illustrates the Meleis Transition Traits and the stable states before and after the transition from eighth grade to ninth grade.

**Table 1**

*Meleis Transition Theory Traits-8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Transition*

<b>Stable State Before Transition</b>	<b>Unstable State Traits During Transition</b>	<b>Stable State After Transition</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Existing Friendships</li> <li>Know Support Staff and how to access them (i.e., Counselors)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disconnection from previous social connection and supports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New friends Established</li> <li>Learn procedures for accessing support staff.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Know the Physical Design of Building and Location of Classes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Absence of familiar reference points, objects, or persons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Know location of classes within building.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Years of Experience in current building procedures</li> <li>Oldest grade in building and are stable emotionally</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appearance of new needs and/or the ability to meet old needs in accustomed ways</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learn new building procedures</li> <li>Youngest grade in building and have adjusted emotionally.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Known Academic Expectations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Incongruence between former sets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adjustment to Higher Academic Expectations</li> </ul>

	of expectations and those in situation	
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(Source: Ormseth, B., 2010).

### **Middle School to High School Transition**

The transition from middle school to high school is very critical and demands support due to the unique characteristics involved with this major change. Research shows, especially during the transition from middle school to high school, that when a student's academic, social, and emotional needs are addressed, they are more willing to be motivated to learn and to achieve success (Jones, 2006; Blum, 2005; Sulkowski, 2012). Smith (1997) found that the students who were more successful with the transition to high school had participated in a transition program than those who had not (Smith, 1997). Abdulmalik (2010) pointed out that a determining factor for high school graduation can be the transition and acclimation to ninth grade. The importance of providing the appropriate transition interventions is crucial for students to be successful and a summer bridge transition program is just one example of the different types of interventions.

The challenges of transitioning to high school tend to shape the successes and failures of students due to the essence of pivoting from middle school to high school and may cause them to fall behind and not recover (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Cooney & Bottoms, 2002). Ninth grade has been described as a significant year in the K-12 continuum, often being designated as a "make or break" year because of high school transition (Heppen & Therriault, 2008). A substantial number of students are held back and must repeat ninth grade which causes many of them to drop out (Herlihy, 2007). The K-12 continuum in public education is embedded with typically four distinct transitions. They are the transition from Kindergarten to First Grade, the transition from elementary school to middle school, the transition from middle school to high school and

then the transition after graduation to either the workforce, self-employment, higher education, and/or the military.

In a study conducted by the Southern Regional Education Board, data from six of its member states reveal that the percentages of students retained at ninth grade are four to six times higher than the averages for earlier grades (Southern Regional Education Board, 2002).

Statistically, students who fail ninth grade have less than a 30 percent chance of graduating high school (Horwitz & Snipes, 2008). The rising enrollment of ninth grade students in the last 30 years has been due to the trend of them being retained more than any other grade levels (Miao & Haney, 2004; Ormseth, B, 2010). The following table demonstrates the data of the research.

**Table 2**

*Student Enrollment by Grade and Percentage of Total Enrollment, 2017*

8th Grade	9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	12 <sup>th</sup> Grade	Total
3,772,276	3,995,574	3,833,718	3,676,753	3,631,450	18,909,771
19.9%	21.2%	20.2%	19.5%	19.2%	100.0%

(Source: Digest of Education Statistics, 2021)

### **The Characteristics of Ninth Grade Dropout**

The U.S. Department of Education (USDE) (2018) defines the term high school dropout as " the percentage of 15- to 24-year-olds in grades 10 through 12 who have left high school between the beginning of one school year and the beginning of the next (e.g., October 2016 to

October 2017) without earning a high school diploma or an alternative credential, such as a GED.” The National Center for Educational Statistics, (NCES, 2011) and the Institute of Educational Sciences (2018), reports that 10.3 percent (2011) and 6.1% (2016) of students across the nation between the ages of 16 and 24 are considered high school dropouts. However, other studies suggest alarming trends, with rates as high as 25% (Aud et al., 2012; Greene, 2002; Swanson & Chaplin, 2003). Young (2008) states “every nine seconds in this country a teen is making the decision to drop out of school” (Young, 2008, p. 35). The Alliance for Excellent Education (2009) states that “Every school day, more than seven thousand students become dropouts. Annually, that adds up to about 1.3 million students who will not graduate from high school with their peers as scheduled (p. 1).” The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) (2005) states, "about one-third of students entering high school do not graduate and face limited job prospects" (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2005, p.1).

Research has demonstrated a strong relationship between an unsuccessful transition to high schools and dropping out of school. For example, in one study of a large urban school system, researchers studied the relationship between ninth graders experiencing distress and the likelihood of completing high school (Neild, Stoner-Eby, and Furstenberg, 2008). This study showed that almost two-thirds of students who had been promoted at the end of ninth grade dropped out of school, a statistic that amplifies the importance of ninth-grade success as a predictor of high school completion (Neild et al., 2008). Research is clear that ninth grade is a “make or break” year. More students fail ninth grade than any other grade in high school and a disproportionate number of students who are held back in ninth grade subsequently drop out (Herlihy, 2007).

The impact of transitioning to high school is so critical that research of large urban school districts has demonstrated that by the end of the first year, or even the first semester, indicated whether the students are predicted to complete high school (Easton, Johnson, & Sartain, 2017; Heppen & Therriault, 2008). Similarly, research highlights that grades, self-esteem, and self-efficacy tend to decline in the ninth grade (Fuligni, Eccles, Barber, & Clements, 2001), highlighting the need for educators, families, and communities to work proactively to support students through the challenges of adjusting to the new demands of high school.

Oftentimes, the root of high school dropout may be school based. Family and individual issues may be influential factors to cause students to drop out issues (Chavez, Belkin, Hornback, & Adams, 1991). Effective education is a true partnership between home and school; however, the family structure of a student influences how he or she responds to the aspects of school. As with every grade level, the role of parents in the educational process of their children is very important to their success (White & Kelly, 2010). Parents are the first teachers, so it is imperative for them to be essential components when the students transition from high school and keep them focused from considering dropping out of school due to the various pressures of the first year in high school. Including parental involvement in a summer bridge transition program may assist identified students as they prepare and make the transition into high school.

### **Economic Outlook for Dropouts**

Students who do not earn a high school diploma experience higher unemployment rates. The unemployment rate for high school graduates in 2019 was 14.6% whereas it was at 14.8% for a high school dropout in the same year (NCES, 2019). Students who do not earn a high school diploma earn less money. A high school dropout earns \$10,386 less per year than a person with a high school diploma and \$36,424 less per year than a person with a bachelor's



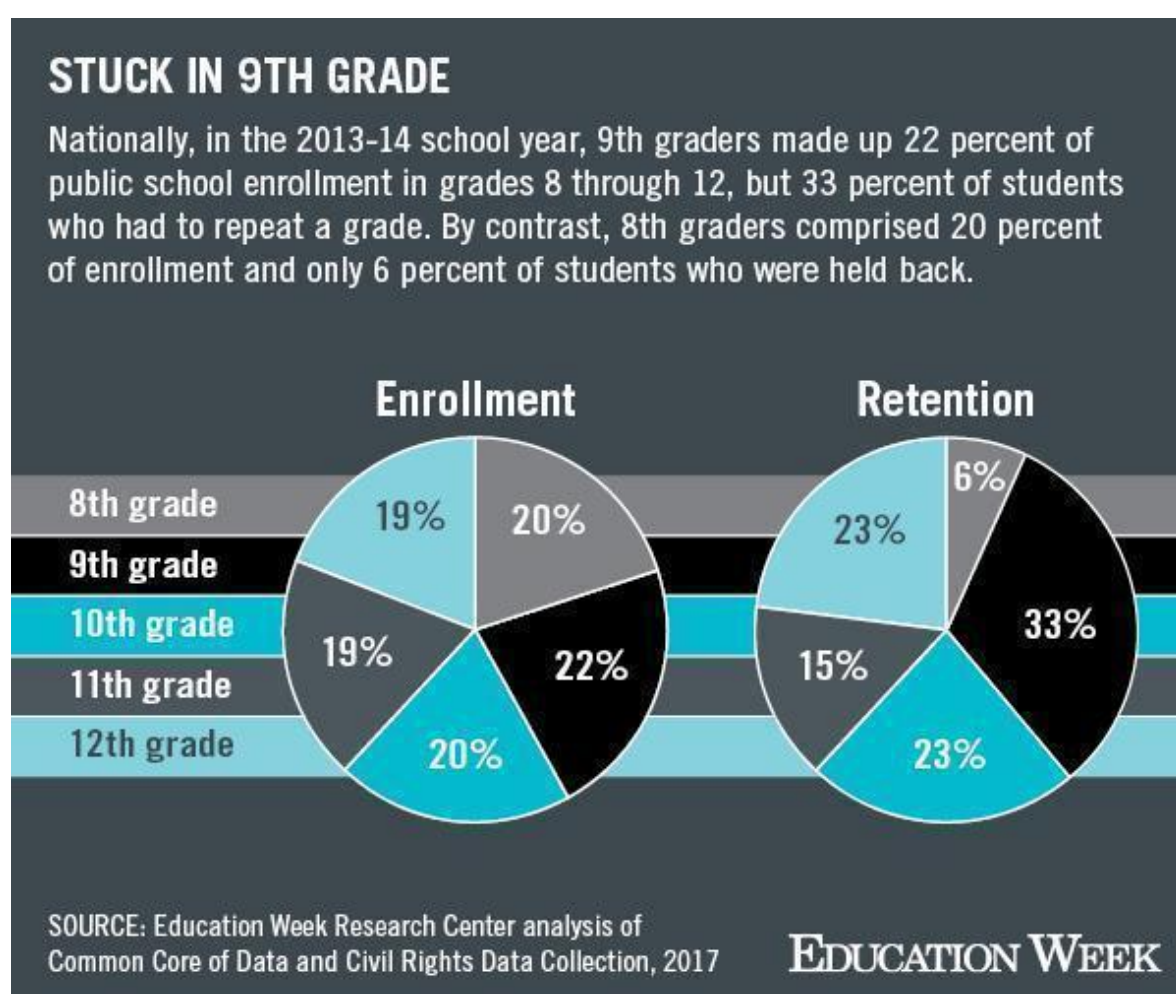
degree (Breslow, 2012). As Young (2008) puts it: “The immense cost of a student dropping out extends far beyond the school walls and cannot be ignored” (Young, 2008, p. 36). The Alliance for Excellent Education (2009) research shows the difference in earning potential between graduates and non-graduates, concluding that if students who dropped out of the Class of 2009 had graduated, the nation’s economy would have benefited from nearly \$335 billions of additional income over the course of their lifetimes ([www.all4ed.org](http://www.all4ed.org), 2009). Students who do not earn a high school diploma are at greater risk of incarceration and make up a higher percentage of the nation’s prison and death row inmates (Laird, DeBell, Kienzl, and Chapman, 2007).

The financial future for high school dropouts tends to look very bleak during the course of their lifetimes. Starting with college graduates, high school dropouts will make an average of \$1 million less and then an average of \$375,000 less than high school graduates (Center for Labor Market Studies, 2007). It has been researched that high school dropouts may account for a loss of billions in the U.S. economy (Achieve Inc, 2006; Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). Referring back to these income gaps, they have increased over the years, for example, high school dropouts were nearly thirty percent lower in 2004 than they were in 1974, and high school dropouts are three times more likely to be unemployed than college graduates (Achieve Inc. 2006). Due to these economic disparities, it is more likely that high school dropouts live in higher poverty rates than high school graduates (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). Not only has it been proven that disparities occur economically, but the less amount of education has a connection to less healthy lifestyles (Lleras-Muney, 2005). Both the individual the larger society suffers economically from dropping out. For example, it has been researched that in the

labor market of drop out-aged youth, 6.7 million youth (aged 16 to 24) are out of school and not employed (U.S. DOE, 2014; Center for Mental Health in Schools-UCLA, 2015, page 1).

### **The Constructs of the Ninth Grade Bulge**

As mentioned previously, due to many ninth-grade students repeating the first year in high school, the grade level has the highest enrollment. Since so many students do not make it to tenth grade directly after the completion of the first year in high school, this group of students creates what is called “the ninth-grade bulge” (Williams & Richman, 2007). The report “*Diplomas Count*” of the EPE Research Center (Education Week 2007) presents its findings in the following graph of how the ninth-grade bulge affects the gateway enrollment of ninth-grade students in high school. The significance of the ninth-grade enrollment and the bulge has a direct correlation to the seeds of the dropout potentiality of students who believe the transition to high school will continue to bring them academic and social problems. A specific population of students within the ninth grade will not transition to tenth grade, not earned credits, and then may drop out of high school. The on-going effects of transition programs are critical for providing all students the tools to be confident and successful in ninth grade.

**Figure 1***Stuck In the 9th Grade*

(Source: Education Week Research Center analysis of Common Core of Data and Civil Rights Data Collection, 2017).

## **The Aspects of Post-Transition Academic Challenges**

The transition from middle school to high school is academically challenging for many incoming freshmen. The accountability of instructing students to excel and to graduate in four years is a major driving force that makes teachers focus on rigorous instructional programs. The new students must increase their focus and commitment to achieve academic success, especially during the first year in high school. Balfanz & Legters (2006) found that high school freshmen who earned all required credits and failed now classes were three times more likely to graduate on time than those who did not. Ninth grade students need assistance before, during, and after the transition to high school to perform as successfully as possible academically. The acclimation to the rigor of high school academics is a huge factor that can affect ninth grade students tremendously. Michael Gard (2014) researched transition programs as a way to improve academic performance. He found that some students who participated in the transition program did see an increase in academic performance. This finding supports Beth Brodie's research, which shows a link between transition programs that fostered student connectedness and academic success (Brodie, 2014). Scales posits that academic success stems from positive relationships between students and adults in the schools (Scales et al., 2000). The trust embedded in this strategy may assist the students to have a better experience after the transition to high school.

Rising ninth graders tend to be concerned about the difficulty of high school coursework (Hussong and Stein, 2007). The pressure to adjust to the load of more rigorous classes and the effort needed to accomplish success among them is extremely important to ninth graders, especially with the potential enrollment of classes they plan to take after their freshman year. Similarly, academic failure can have lasting effects, with students taking a year or more to return

to academic success. (McKevitt and Uvaas, 2013), causing great concerns given “22 percent of ninth-grade students repeat ninth-grade classes” (McCallmure & Sparpani, 2010, p. 60). It is imperative for all the stakeholders of the students to collaborate to assist them in student-centered strategies throughout high school, especially after the transition into ninth grade.

Every school has an academic culture and when ninth graders experience the expectations of a new setting, another academic challenge may occur. Issues around student/teacher relationships, instructional norms/practices, prior knowledge, among other factors, require students to learn this new culture (e.g., Albanes et al., 2014; McCallumore & Sparapani, (2010; Peasant & Styron, 2010). As students move forward into high school, the need for them to address, recognize and participate with school practices are critical with the assimilation into the academic culture of the school.

### **The Aspects of Post-Transition Attendance Challenges**

Attendance is a major component to promoting student success and in the Commonwealth of Virginia, the Virginia Department of Education has recently designated attendance as a component of schools’ accreditation. This is due, in part, to the impact of this transition on attendance, and in turn the impact on achievement, and increased dropout rates (McIntosh, Flannery, Sugai, Braun, & Cochrane, 2008; Mizelle, 1999). Importantly, students who skip feel the academic standards of those classes are lower (Banerji and Pearson, 2004). It is evident that the adverse effects of attendance have a direct influence on student achievement. The attendance factor in high school has always been a critical component of the progress in the high school component of the K-12 continuum.

Ninth grade attendance is a very important component after the transition to high school. Attendance and course passing rates drop dramatically as students transition from eighth grade to ninth grade. Academic performance combined with grade retention is the strongest predictor of dropping out of school, with attendance as the second strongest predictor (e.g., Balfanz, 2007; Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2007; Silver, Saunders, & Zarate, 2008). Additionally, the degree or level of student engagement with transition experiences is influenced by the structural characteristics of the school (Benner & Wang, 2014). As such, attendance interventions need to be implemented in summer bridge programs and related post-transition activities to support students. Attendance patterns of middle school students prior to the transition to high school may identify individuals who may need assistance via a summer bridge program. Transition experiences affect student engagement which influences attendance.

Test scores are significant components of student achievement and school accreditation. Research proves that attendance has an influence on those assessment results. The presence of test scores in high school affects a plethora of academic areas such as credit-bearing classes, placement into Advanced Placement (AP) and Honor classes and related academic culture. The literature highlights that missing more than 10 percent of instructional time, which is roughly equivalent to two weeks of school, is cause for concern (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). Any student, no matter what grade, should be addressed with multiple interventions to decrease the chance of attendance from causing harm to academic performance. Due to the recent addition of attendance being calculated into school accreditation, internal stakeholders are working harder together to collaborate with strategies to assist students (McKevitt, B. & Uvaas, T, 2013).

### **The Aspects of Post-Transition Discipline Challenges**

Discipline plays a notable role in the transition to high school and ninth grade students have more behavioral incidents and as such have a greater risk of dropping out of high school al (Chmelynski, 2004; Nield, Balfanz & Herzog, 2007). Many ninth-grade students struggle with self-esteem issues and much of those deficiencies demonstrate negative behaviors. Eleby (2009) found that students who fail to grasp basic social skills face greater disciplinary issues and become disengaged in school. Common experiences such as lower grades, higher absenteeism, self-esteem concerns and related items are influenced by increased stress and behavior problems (Alvidez & Weinstein, 1993; Barone et al., 1991; Blyth et al., 1983; Gillock, & Reyes 1996; Graber, & Brook 1996; Isakson, 1999; and Reyes et al., 2000). The need to address these behaviors is critical, not only to prevent students from dropping out but also to prevent them from being sent to alternative schools.

Research predicts middle school students' behavior and motivation as indicators in high school transition. Research on students' academic and motivational perceptions highlights that student are concerned about connection with peers, teachers, and structure (Bishop, 2019; Murdock, et al., 2000). Ninth grade students had positive motivational contexts comparatively to seventh grade which highlighted one of the various connections of pre and post transition events (Murdock et al., 2000; Bishop., 2019). This research focuses on early pre-transition predictors of success which highlighted that middle and high school should work in collaboration to identify the predictors and indicators and develop academic or social support systems.

Behavior concerns are common when students must adapt to change. Theriot and Dupper (2009) presented evidence that after two of the major transitions of the K-12 continuum, middle school to high school and elementary to middle school, problem behaviors and discipline referrals increased among students (Smith, K., 2012). Following an educational transition,

behavior referrals, often categorized as classroom disruptions, tend to be subjective in nature.

Being in a new environment, as demonstrated, causes students to express adverse behaviors as they adjust to the new rules and regulations (Theriot & Dupper, 2009; Smith, K., 2012).

Proactive transition interventions may provide students with the appropriate coping skills to demonstrate positive behavior after the transition into a new setting.

### **The Aspects of Post-Transition Social and Connectivity Challenges**

The social and connectivity concerns of ninth-grade students are other areas of concern during the freshmen year. Being disengaged from school is a major issue for roughly half of the students in a freshmen class by the time they get to high school (Blum, 2005). Strong evidence highlights that the period of greatest vulnerability for students dropping out of school is during and immediately following this critical transition period (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009).

Relationship building is a major value that students undertake and implement in the learning process (Yazzi-Mintz, 2007; Smith, K., 2012). The need for belonging in high school is a major component of both the social and connectivity constructs. In this way, the exposure to a summer bridge transition program may equip students with the necessary strategies and interventions to establish more connectivity and socialization in the new setting.

The need for students, in any grade, to stay involved in school is driven by an emotional connection. Hagenauer and Hascher (2010) found that there is a connection with emotions to the learning process. The authors show that emotions such as connectedness, anger, safety, frustration, and happiness have an impact on student learning. Additionally, the authors found that academic success can be impacted by the students' needs for relevance and connection to the



greater school community (Hagenauer & Hascher, 2010). Many ninth-grade students struggle with the transition to high school and the previously mentioned emotions have a direct effect on their achievement. The Wingspread Report (2004) “linked school connectedness to higher grades, higher test scores, and lower dropout rates. (p. 233).” The use of a summer bridge program may provide a great potential of assisting students to establish a better connection during the first year of high school.

The importance of school connectedness is a major factor for students to address when transitioning to a new environment. As research has shown, the transition to a new school may bring along with its negative consequences for students, for example, a decrease in self-confidence and self-esteem (Harter, 1990). Barber and Olsen (2004) found that students perceived teacher support decreasing every year after Grade 6. The presence of caring adults has a major effect on school attrition and preventing students from dropping out of high school impacted (Pittman & Haughwout, 1987; McKeivitt, B. & Uvaas, T. (2013). How well a student is connected to school can serve as an indicator for academic achievement and behavior (Blum & Libbey, 2004b; Klem & Connell, 2004; McNeely & Falci, 2004; McKeivitt, B. & Uvaas, T. 2013). For students, school connectedness is a belief that adults in school care about their education and about them as individuals (Blum & Libby, 2004). It is imperative for educators to demonstrate care for students since relationship-building is a component of establishing a rapport with students to bring the best out of them via the processes of teaching and learning.

Social acceptance into high school has a significant amount of influence after a transition. Social organizational changes and academic work have been found, based on research, as the most challenging constructs of transition (Akos & Galassi, 2004; NASSP, 2006). Creech (2000) found that students perform with more success when they experience connectedness

programming that allows engagement to flourish (McKevitt, B. & Uvaas, T., 2013). Schools that develop transition programming that emphasize connections between students and teachers can mitigate poor academic performance and attendance often seen after a transition.

The parameters in a new environment with a different structure demands the support of meeting the needs of ninth grade students. Transition programs, especially summer bridge programs, are often extended throughout the first year in high school to offer more assistance. Additional research-based interventions that establish and provide a student-centered environment in school and classrooms are instructing study skills and time management, focusing on communication between all stakeholders of the respective middle and high schools, and while also strengthening the foundation of community within the schools (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Lan & Lanthier, 2003; NASSP, 2006). The sense of community being in place is extremely critical because when students are provided with a nurturing environment and have caring adults beyond the realms of the immediate family, personal growth and the educational process proceed in a positive direction (Israel, Beaulieu, & Hartless, 2001; NASSP, 2006). Other aspects of a supportive environment augments students' sense of belonging, ownership of learning, more mature selection of decision-making (NASSP, 2005).

### **Summer Bridge Transition Programs**

Summer bridge transition programs are designed and implemented to assist students who demonstrate the indicators of potentially having a tough transition and being potential dropouts in ninth grade. Summer transition programs are usually to meet the identified needs of a specific segment of the incoming freshmen population, such as with academic ability, but may be

available for all 9th grade students (Williams, S., 2017). Therefore, it is imperative that the core of this programs is implemented to assist ninth graders with the transition to high school, especially with the themes of academics, attendance and positive, social behaviors (Miao & Wheelock, 2005; Williams, S., 2017). For example, Smith (2012) reports that a summer program designed and implemented in one Title 1 school which focused on academics, building relationships with teachers, and addressing transitional issues led to positive impacts on freshman grades, attendance, and behavior. Transition programs held in the summer tend to be very helpful to students as they are exposed to the strategies and activities that support a host of transition factors (Bradford, Beier, & Oswald, 2021).

In Biermann's survey of transition programs of schools throughout the nation, he found that 45 percent wanted to decrease disciplinary issues; 40 percent wanted to increase attendance; and 35 percent wanted to increase students' GPA; 20 percent of the school wanted to impact graduation rates; 45 percent of schools wanted students to build relationships with faculty members; and 25 percent of the schools had other reasons or goals for the program (Biermann, 2010). The goals of a transition program are different from school to school due to the nature of the needs of the incoming freshmen. Each school must use the combined input from the appropriate stakeholders to focus on what works for their community and develop and implement a program around those goals. Revisions of the respective programs are imperative as the different groups of incoming freshmen have unique characteristics and needs. The presence of a summer bridge program should provide a foundation to establish a process for the incoming freshmen to experience to be as successful as possible after the transition.

Mizelle (2005) states that students can be successful if there is a transition program that involves the stakeholders between middle schools and high schools. These programs must be

more than just short-term; they must span between the two levels. Osborne (2012), citing the work of Black (2004), shared: “Many high schools try to pave the way for ninth graders, but one-shot orientation programs or remedial summer school sessions do little to solve ninth grade’s deeply rooted problems” (Osborne, 2012). Biermann shares that “one shot” programs are not successful and that attacking the many issues that students face involves more than just students, it also involves parents, teachers, and community members as the foundation of a successful program (Biermann, 2010). As stated in the lens of the Transition Theory, it is important for students to receive and implement strategies to confront the disconnectedness that occurs with the transition process. An effective summer bridge program should be more than a one-day event; it should be a significant program that equips incoming freshmen with the necessary skills to reconnect with the learning process of a new environment with new teachers and administrators.

The implementation and operation of a summer bridge transition program may serve as a critical link to prepare incoming freshmen for the challenges of the first year in high school. Offering summer bridge programs to rising 9th graders are initiatives that school districts and divisions can provide to support students as they transition from middle school to high school, beyond the aspect of remediation, but for student progress (Miao & Wheelock, 2005, p. 39; Williams, S., 2017). Providing this support for students may deter the occurrence of potential academic, attendance, behavior, and connectivity issues during the freshman year. As stated by Albanes et al. (2014), student motivation and the desire to excel in high school can be increased with the experience of summer transition programs (William, S., 2017). The motivation from a summer bridge program may serve as the catalyst for an incoming freshman to push and excel through obstacles and difficulties.

Summer bridge transition programs are essential in addressing various needs of targeted students, especially those who demonstrate academic difficulties. Adreon and Stella (2001) state that due to the transition from middle school to high school, students tend to experience academic deficits in reading, science, and social studies (Williams, S., 2017). In regard to this finding, it is crucial for transition programs to have an academic component to mitigate the loss of learning. (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010; Williams, S., 2017). In order to provide a sense of realism in summer transition programs, many districts have the students move to different classrooms of subjects to mimic a regular school day and to learn the new school environment. (Williams, S., 2017). Another aspect of summer transition programs is the focus on positive, social behavior as stated by Albanes et al. (2014) by educators conducting instruction to students on such topics as conflict resolution, bullying prevention, respect, and appropriate classroom behaviors (Williams, S., 2017).

School districts around the nation use summer transition programs as means of helping to dissuade ninth graders from dropping out. As McKevitt and Uvaas (2013) report, when students prepare to experience a new high school, it is important that they are provided the proper guidance because poor transitioning produces stress and related issues (Williams, S., 2017). Therefore, school connectedness is a component that transition programs must address to allow the ninth graders to become acclimated to the new school building (McKevitt & Uvaas, 2013; Williams, S., 2017). Successful student-centered, goal-oriented transition programs provide students with experiences for them to strengthen academic attainment; avoid discipline issues and augment self-confidence and self-esteem. (Butrymowicz & Shaw, 2010; William, S., 2017). The exposure to the kind of programming found in summer bridge transition programs could serve as the “tipping point” in the right direction for incoming freshmen.

Since parents are the first teachers, it is important to inform them of the vision and purpose of summer bridge transition programs. Since the transition to high school and all the activities and learning are focused on graduation and beyond, it would behoove educators of summer transition programs to provide information sessions for parents (Brown, 2010; Williams, S., 2017). Schools should be places that allow parents to feel welcomed so they can truly pursue the aspects of supporting their children to increase their likelihood of being successful and be involved in the school community (Cavanagh et al., 2011; Williams, S., 2017). Therefore, summer bridge transition programs also provide an opportunity for parents to explore the school environment. Just as the students are exposed to the new school environment, the same can be done for parents and have a positive effect on student confidence (Hertzog & Morgan, 1998; Williams, S., 2017). The investment of including parents could create a “buy-in” factor for not only the freshmen year, but all the way to graduation.

### **Summary**

The transition from middle school to high school is the most challenging transition in the K-12 sector. After reviewing the literature, pertinent information demonstrates the movement from middle to high school has an influence on academic performance, attendance, behavior, and social connectivity to the new environment. Most students experience a positive transition; however, many do not. The exposure to a summer bridge transition program may be a great intervention to equip students with the skills to better handle the demands and challenges of the first year in high school. The foundation provided by this type of transition program may motivate students and assist them to experience a freshman year with the skills to prohibit the existence of the negative attributes that could spin off from the previously mentioned traits and create a “roadmap” for the rest of their journey in high school. The ninth grade is the most

pivotal year of high school, and the literature shows how summer bridge transition programs may mitigate the inherent stress of this critical juncture.

The data demonstrates that the largest enrollment in high school is in ninth grade. The unsuccessful transition of students during the first year of high school may cause them to not earn enough credits to proceed to the next grade and be retained in ninth grade. The literature states that this “bulge” was caused by poor academic performance, high absenteeism, discipline problems and a lack of connectivity to school. These traits are contributing factors to the high dropout rate of ninth graders. The literature displays the effects of how the lives of high school dropouts may have a bleak future based on employment, health and incarceration data and the connection to the burden on society.

Summer bridge transition programs are transition programs that operate in the summer between middle school and high school. As stated in the literature, these programs serve as opportunities to equip students with the skills to mitigate the negative effects when students move from the eighth grade to ninth grade. These programs assist a target population of students who demonstrate the potential of dropping out of school and/or the entire group of students moving from a feeder middle school to a receiving high school. Educators teach and conduct strategies and activities with the hope that the students will enter the new setting with the motivation, confidence and preparation to excel in the new environment and continue striving for graduation and potential post-secondary opportunities. Finally, as presented in the literature, the existence of summer bridge transition programs has the potential to be game changers for students in high school.

Taken together, the research community has produced a good deal of understanding of the individual structural elements of successful middle to high school transition, but less research on

the students' lived experiences within the complex ecologies of schools. Further study of this area will fill the gap by presenting relationships between the structural and programmatic elements and the students' actual experiences.



## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### Research Design

Given the purpose of this study, that is to explore the lived experiences of students in one summer bridge program as they prepare for the transition to high school, phenomenology was selected as the most appropriate methodology. The term *Phenomenology*, which was initially used by Immanuel Kant in 1764, has its roots from the Greek language stated as, ‘phainein’ which means to appear (Yuksel, P. & Yildinm, S., 2015; Rawson, A., 2021). Phenomenology as a methodological framework has evolved into a process that seeks to understand the reality within the narratives of individuals’ lived experiences of a given phenomenon (Cilesiz, 2009; Husserl, 1970; Moustakas, 1994). The methods used of Phenomenology focus on providing information of individuals by bringing an awareness to their perceptions and experiences while challenging structural or normative assumptions (Lester, 1999). As a phenomenological researcher, it is my goal to seek information from participants to explore and establish a picture of their lived experiences. The phenomenological methods is designed to illuminate the nuanced specificity of the phenomena through seeking to understand the lived experiences of actors in a given context (Lester, 1999; Smith & Nissa, 2022; Nizza & Smith, 2021).

Phenomenology captures the conscious and unconscious knowledge derived from the exploration of the perceived, sensed, and known experiences of the individual (Moustakas, 1994). The knowledge received from experiences is critical when researchers are striving to create an accurate and credible picture of the participants’ responses in a study. The core of the phenomenon is ascertained and defined by conducting research emphasize the essence of the

individuals' lived experiences of the phenomenon (Cilesiz, 2010). To these ends, Max Van-Manen (1990) stated,

*“The essence of a phenomenon is a universal which can be described through a study of the structure that governs the instances or particular manifestation of the essence of that phenomenon... A universal or essence may only be intuited or grasped through a study of the particulars or instances as they are encountered in lived experiences” (p. 10).*

Lived experiences are the driving forces of Phenomenological studies and it is the goal to obtain meaningful and significant information to recognize the presence of the phenomenon (Creswell 2007; Moustakas, 1994. van Manen, 1990). A key distinction between general qualitative methods and phenomenological research is that it is specifically interested in understanding the essence of a given phenomenon from the perspective of participants who have experienced it (Christensen, Johnstone & Turner, 2010, as cited in Eddles-Hirsch, 2015). The focus is on the interrelationships between the context, in this case the summer bridge program, and the research participant's lived experiences therein – that is the meaning of the phenomenon itself is drawn from those who live it (Merriam, 2007).

This work was also influenced by the Constructivists' paradigm, which emphasizes that truth is relative to context, experience, and perspective. The aspect of objectivity is not totally disregarded as the creation of an individual's perspective is formed due to the lens of the Constructivists' paradigm (Baxter, P. & Jack, S. 2008). Therefore, the constructs that involve the circular dynamic tension of subject and object are not focused on relativism, but Pluralism (Miller & Crabtree, 1999, p. 10). The social construction of reality serves as the foundation that establishes the concept of Constructivism (Searle, 1995). When the participants tell their stories of the lived experiences, it creates an opportunity of supportive collaboration between the

researcher and them (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). This lens of collaboration enables the researcher to understand and analyze more thoroughly the actions of the participants and their perceptions of reality (Lather, 1992; Robottom & Hart, 1993).

### **Participant Selection**

Selecting research participants within the phenomenological tradition seeks research participants who have direct experience with phenomenon being researched, along with their willingness to be interviewed and openly share their experiences, and for their interview to be audio recorded (Eddles-Hirsch, 2013). Phenomenological samples do not require a large number of participants, instead the focus is on an in-depth exploration of peoples' experience within the phenomenon under investigation. As Englander (2012) emphasized, "when it comes to selecting the subjects for phenomenological research, the question that the researcher has to ask themselves is: *Do you have the experience that I am looking for?* (p.19)". In addition, the samples should represent the likely range of experiences of the phenomenon under investigation (Moustakas, 1994). There is no agreement on the size of such a sample, with phenomenological scholars emphasizing the goal of obtaining a selection of information rich research participants (Groenewald, 2004). Boyd (2001) considers two to 10 participants as sufficient, Creswell (1998) recommends "long interviews with up to 10 people", while others recommend a sample of between three and fifteen is sufficient (Patton, 2002). However, the appropriate number is determined by data saturation (Groenewald, 2004).

For this study, participants were students involved in a summer bridge program who just completed middle school and were in the program to prepare for the transition to high school. The high school was located in a predominantly Black urban/suburban city with a population of nearly 150,000 people in a mid-Atlantic state, with a median household income of just under

\$50,000. Compared to the city's population, the school district is overrepresented by Black students and underrepresented by White students. The criteria for the chosen high school's summer bridge program are 1) having been implemented for at least three years and 2) being composed of students who demonstrated concern in the areas of academic performance, high absenteeism, adverse behavior, and low social connectivity, which represents the four traits in the literature review that described the type of students who may need additional assistance when transitioning to ninth grade.

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected using in-depth semi-unstructured interviews, real-time observation, field-notes, extemporaneous post-observation field notes, and the collection of relevant documents from the summer bridge program (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982). The main data collection was individual interviews. Qualitative researchers greatly rely on subjective data, such as the testimony of participants and the judgements of witnesses (Denzin, Norman, K. & Lincoln, Yvonne, S., 2008). These multiple sources of data provided a comprehensive picture of the students' lived experiences of the summer bridge program. Phenomenological researchers believe that it is possible to interpret events in many different ways, depending upon the "frame of reference" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997). It is imperative that phenomenological data get at the essence of the research subjects' lived experiences by "diving deep" into the interviews and other data to develop a thorough and meaningful picture of the research subjects' experience.

### **Qualitative Interviewing**

Patton (1990) describes three types of qualitative interviewing: 1) informal, conversational interviews; 2) semi-structured interviews; and 3) standardized, open-ended interviews. The selected participants were interviewed via the formats of semi-structured

interviews, informal conversational interviews, and standardized, open-ended interviews. I presented some questions in the interview that were predetermined; however, more impromptu questions were asked for clarification and to prompt a greater depth of response. This approach allowed me to create a space for the informants to answer from their own frame of reference rather than being confined by the structure of pre-arranged questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997).

This process allowed me to probe more deeply in the interviews (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016), providing an opportunity to learn about what you cannot readily see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see – a particular strength of interviewing in qualitative inquiry (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). During the interviews I worked to assure that the participants felt secure in their respective environments to maximize the potential sharing of information. This approach was informed by sociologist Jack Douglas' (1985) call for the need for researchers to be subordinate to their interviewees as the research participant is the critical knowledge informant that holds the power of their own knowledge and experience. In this way, I sought to be sensitive to the needs of my participants. All interviews were recorded, and field notes were taken during the interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), and post-interview extemporaneous notes were taken immediately afterwards. I also initiated post-interview and post-observation phone calls with my advisor to create a space to process these experiences more thoroughly and to fine-tune my data collection processes for the next day. The interviews were transcribed using Otter A.I. transcription service which I monitored closely and made edits to assure their accuracy.

### **Field Notes and Memoing**

While my primary source of data were student interviews, in addition I took copious field notes and memos throughout my work, prior to, during, and after being embedded in the summer

bridge program. This allowed me to capture my thoughts about what I heard, saw, and experienced which helped me to maintain a running record of thoughts, insights, needs for refinements and improvements that may have been missed if not captured while still in the process of data collection. These notes and memos prompted reflexivity which Hays & Singh (2012) emphasize as a key part of the research. I used a variety of note taking and memoing techniques which included spontaneous field notes of observations I was making using key words and phrases to quickly capture my insights, post-observation, and post-interview extemporaneous notes that built on and refined my spontaneous notes. My focus included spontaneous observations, reflections, methodological notes, reminders, questions for my advisor, potential connections to the literature, insights about potential implications or need for future research, and generally to remain self-aware and reflective. I used these notes to prompt discourse and discovery with my advisor and as a means of capturing insights in as authentic a way as possible.

### **Data Analysis – Explicitation**

Discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4 in the context of the analysis itself, I engaged in a detailed process of phenomenological explication (Hycner, 1985; Jehenson, 1973; Lowes & Prowse, 2001), terminology intended to avoid the connotation of the term *analysis* as dividing the whole into its composite parts, and the risk of the loss of the holistic and contextual meaning. Broadly speaking, Starks (2007) has described phenomenological analysis as a “systematic process for coding data in which specific statements are analyzed and categorized into clusters of meaning that represent the phenomenon of interest” (p. 1375). Extending this perspective, one of the key features of explication is that it involves a reciprocal dynamic between meaning at the

individual research participant and the holistic levels, seeking to honor the unique contributions of the individual, but still identifying overarching themes.

### **Confidentiality**

The importance of maintaining the proper protocol with the privacy of the participants is essential in any study. The same is true for this study. Pseudonyms were given to participants and all names were redacted. Additionally, in the reporting of this research, districts, divisions, schools, participants, and other identifying information were not used.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is the qualitative equivalent to validity and reliability in quantitative research and includes the following features: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility in phenomenological research is defined as the ability to capture the fundamental nature of the phenomena which is rooted in the lived experiences of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I addressed this by maintaining a strong audit trail of all my research materials and utilizing my advisor as an auditor to prompt reflection and refinements throughout the data collection and analysis. Transferability is the feature that deals with external validity and how the results of the work of a study can be applied to a wider population and/or other situations (Merriam, 1998). Moreover, transferability describes the context of the phenomenon and the participants with enough detail which allows readers to assess the transferability of the findings to similar populations or contexts (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). In chapter four, I describe the context and the research participants in great detail. Dependability refers to the consistency and replicability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2003). In this study, dependability was accounted for in the careful execution of the research design and the weekly checking in with my advisor that created a space to reflect, refine, and revise based on

these fine-tuning insights. Furthermore, dependability was achieved through the triangulation of data (interviews, observations, field notes, and collected documents). Most importantly, I maintained an audit trail which included: raw data, all stages of my coding processes, my notes and memos, timelines, emails, and documents relating to the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton 2002). I used this audit trail to iteratively return to the source data and my notes to reflect and assess the dependability of the explication of the data. Finally, confirmability is the feature that focuses on the qualitative investigator's comparable concern to objectivity and the results of the experiences and ideas of the informants are evident, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). I sought to achieve confirmability through the reflectivity offered by the triangulation of data to assure participants voices are strongly present, and the thick description of the phenomenon using quotes to assure research participant voices are evident.

### **Researcher Positionality – Exploring the Limitation of Bracketing**

Early views within the phenomenology traditions sought to make observations as a detached observer, Le Vasseur (2003) called “setting aside” prior understandings and encapsulating preconceptions, theoretical commitments, and experiences. More current perspectives emphasize that rigorous research cannot be achieved by eliminating researcher objectivity (e.g., Eddles-Hirsch, 2015; Gregory, 2019). Instead, these scholars have argued that rigor and trustworthiness are built on making the researchers' preconceptions transparent, and that phenomenological findings are co-created by both researchers and participants (Lowes & Prowse, 2001). In this way, the notion of bracketing can obscure preconceptions held about a population or a topic (Oakley, 2010), and therefore potentially amplifying them. In this way, “bracketing one's lived experiences—whether theoretical, experiential, or mediated through



popular culture—cannot be quartered off for the purpose of studying a population” (Gregory, 2019, p. 8). As such, the researcher’s bias cannot be “bracketed”, but instead should be explored and made transparent (Hammersley, 2000). Acknowledging how one’s theoretical positions, life experiences, and their various privileges may potentially bias their perspectives prepares the researcher to have a keen eye for the seen and unseen (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Gregory, 2019). In terms of the researcher’s bias, the volume of work in my 32-year career as a teacher and administrator in both middle and high schools could potentially lead to assumptions that were obtained from past experiences and trends of both types of schools with the research.

## CHAPTER IV

### Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of students in one summer bridge program as they transition to high school. Specifically, how the students experienced the program's features, strategies, interventions, and activities and how they made meaning of the structures and essence of the phenomenon and challenges of transitioning to high school. The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What were the lived experiences of ninth graders who participated in the summer bridge program?
2. What influences did those experiences have on their sensemaking of their transition to high school? How did the students make sense of, and give meaning to their experience in the transition program?

#### **Description of the Weekly Context Structure-Anywhere High School Summer Bridge 2022**

This description contains the information that I recorded, observed, and participated in with the staff and students at Anywhere High School's Summer Bridge Program. The program was conducted during the week of Monday, August 8<sup>th</sup>-Thursday, August 11<sup>th</sup> from 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. The template of the school's summer bridge program was established by the central office of the school division and each of the four high schools use the identical format. The Summer Bridge Program, as I was told, is held during the latter part of the summer to allow staff and students to complete vacations and to be conducted near the start of the school year.

#### **The Meeting with Mr. Wilson**

Mr. Ernest Wilson was my point of contact and I texted him to set up a meeting. On Tuesday, July 19<sup>th</sup> as I was on a Zoom session with Dr. Myran, Mr. Wilson called me and so I

conducted a 3-way conversation. I was able to establish a meeting with him the following Tuesday at the school.

On Tuesday, July 26<sup>th</sup>, I met with Mr. Wilson. He gave me the details of the program and I shared my desire to volunteer; conduct student interviews; take field observation notes and related activities. He notified me that the new assistant principal, who had been there for two days, would be in charge of the Summer Bridge Program. I was extremely happy to know that Mrs. Emily Godwin, one of my favorite teachers who I worked with at Anywhere Middle School for six years, was that person. Mrs. Godwin joined our meeting near the end of it.

### **The Meeting with the Summer Bridge Staff**

On the morning of Tuesday, August 2<sup>nd</sup>, Mr. Wilson texted me and asked for me to attend the Zoom planning meeting of the Summer Bridge staff later that day. I received the credentials and joined the meeting at 4:00 p.m. Nine faculty members were present, and Mr. Wilson and Mrs. Godwin discussed the following topics. They were:

1. Introductions-I was allowed to introduce myself and briefly explain my role.
2. Expectations & Routines of the Program (G.R.O.W. curriculum, morning arrival and afternoon dismissal).
3. Activities of the Week (Pep Rally, Activity Hour, IB assembly, Athletic Assembly, Former Student Presentation, Scavenger Hunt, Ambassadors' Talk, Parent Program, and related functions).
4. Project Student Enrollment (212), Rosters, Attendance, and other administrative items.
5. The administrators then allowed the teachers to ask questions.
6. The information was briefly reviewed and was adjourned by 4:45 p.m.

**Day 1-Monday, August 8<sup>th</sup>**

On the first day, I “shadowed” Mrs. Godwin, the Freshman Academy Administrator, as she addressed different tasks. Since this was the first day, the staff began to implement the expectations and routines of the next several days of the Summer Bridge Program. This included the instruction of Vision Planning and the G.R.O.W. Summer Bridge Road Map. After the completion of this session, Mrs. Godwin and I met briefly. She gave me a list of 10 names of students to interview. Based on the first day attendance, 71% of the projected students were present and considered to be a good number (150 out of 212). She also shared with me via Google Drive, the Master Schedule, Attendance, and the Summer Bridge Curriculum.

In relation to the students, I observed a mixture of different demeanors. When the students arrived, many of them appeared to be very apprehensive to experience the new school environment but were still excited to be in the program. Other students demonstrated great confidence to be there, and they began to re-establish bonds of their friends from the previous middle schools. They also tried to establish new friendships with the new students, especially during the Activity Hour. According to Albanes et al. (2014), summer transition programs are proven to increase a student’s motivation toward high school. Overall, I felt the students really wanted to be at the school and had high expectations to experience this program as they transitioned to high school.

**Day 2-Tuesday, August 9<sup>th</sup>**

On the second day, the students demonstrated less anxiety and began to demonstrate more engagement with the activities of the program. I believe the students’ experiences with the team building and related strategies of the first day began to provide them with more confidence and engagement with the program. For example, during the first activity of them assembling in the

cafeteria for breakfast, the students began to sit with their respective classes that were formed the previous day without being reminded to do so. Also, whenever the classes had to move to different sections of the school, they demonstrated a high level of energy and connectivity with their groups. They were also attentive when one of the assistant principals conducted an assembly about the school's International Baccalaureate Program. Relationship building is a major value that students undertake and implement in the learning process (Yazzi-Mintz, 2007; Smith, K., 2012).

This observation was clearly evident with two significant activities of the second day-the tour and scavenger hunt of the school. In order to learn more about the physical structure of the school and to ease the huge anxiety of the new school environment, the teachers had the student ambassadors take the new students on tours of the school. As McKevitt and Uvaas (2013) report, when students prepare to experience a new high school, it is important that they are provided the proper guidance because poor transitioning produces stress and related issues (Williams, S., 2017). Upon the return to the classrooms, the teachers then had the students conduct a scavenger hunt of different items in the various sections of the building. When the students returned from both activities, they were extremely excited about what they had experienced, and they compared some of the similarities and differences of the physical structures of their prior middle schools to this school. As a bonus, the student ambassadors, upperclassmen who were students in previous summer bridge programs, shared stories and their experiences with the new students as they conducted the respective tours.

Before the second day ended, I was able to distribute the required paperwork to the ten students identified to interview. After dismissal, I called the students' parents and explained my project. The parents verbally approved the participation of the children and promised to return

the signed paperwork. As a side note, some of the parents mentioned that they were pleased that the school was conducting this program because they knew this transition would be a huge step.

### **Day 3-Wednesday-August 10<sup>th</sup>**

On the third day, I was able to interview six of the students. I went to the respective classrooms to get the students; verified the signatures of the paperwork and then interviewed them individually in the library. The students were excited to share their experiences thus far in the program. Upon the completion of each interview, I issued them gift cards.

I observed the students attend an assembly in which the School Resource Officer, Athletic Director, and a recent graduate spoke. The students were engaged with the trivia-styled presentation that the School Resource Officer presented in relation to school safety. The Athletic Director received many questions about the different sports, especially football and volleyball. The students were extremely excited when they interacted with the recent graduate. He shared very valuable advice and his experiences of high school and college. The title of his presentation was, "Growing with A Purpose." This presentation was great because it supported the constructs of the G.R.O.W. Summer Bridge Road Map of the program.

I was able to catch the last several minutes of the Parent Meeting in the cafeteria. The administrative team had invited parents to learn about high school and the purpose of the Summer Bridge Program. Refreshments were provided and about twenty parents were present. Some of the various questions they asked dealt with class schedules; navigating the different types of credit-bearing classes; auditioning and trying out for the different sports and activities and other related topics. Schools should be places that allow parents to feel welcomed so they can truly pursue the aspects of supporting their children to increase their likelihood of being successful and be involved in the school community (Cavanagh et al., 2011; Williams, S., 2017).

Several of the parents thanked the administrators for allowing their opportunity to participate in the program and felt it would be a “game changer” as they transitioned to high school.

#### **Day 4-Thursday, August 11<sup>th</sup>**

On the last day of the program, the students demonstrated a mixture of emotions. Some were excited that this would be the last day and they could enjoy the rest of the summer vacation, while others were sad it had to end, but knew they would be returning to officially start their freshman year in three weeks. Throughout the four days, the teachers really did a great job of instructing the Vision Planning and G.R.O.W. Summer Bridge Road Map initiatives, respectively. I was able to conduct the last three interviews. One student forgot his paperwork twice, so I could not interview him.

The activities of the last day allowed the students to end the program on a high note with more exposure and experiences of high school. The Deans of Students, one for the male students and the other for the female students, spoke to the students about discipline and behavior expectations. They spoke on the main behaviors that are usually observed and dealt with in regard to freshmen students. The Deans provided proactive strategies and interventions the students should observe to experience positive behavior in the first year and beyond.

After the gender-based assemblies, the students came together for a pep rally. The marching band and cheerleaders performed on the stage. The students were very excited to experience these activities. The groups took this opportunity to recruit the students. Next, the student ambassadors had a Question and Answer with the students. The students did not ask many questions but focused on listening to the stories and advice of the upperclassmen.

Next, the teachers and administrators worked together to issue certificates to the students. The teachers had to choose at least one student of their respective classes to receive the “Most

Spirited Award”. After the completion of the activity, the students made the transition to the gymnasium at which they conducted the final activity hour of the program. They received pizza and ice cream; played activities and socialized and T-shirts which stated on the front, “I CAN BECAUSE I BELIEVE”. On the back, it was stated, “Anywhere High School-Class of 2026”. The student demonstrated joy and enthusiasm to receive them. Successful student-centered, goal-oriented transition programs provide students with experiences for them to strengthen academic attainment; avoid discipline issues and augment self-confidence and self-esteem. (Butrymowicz & Shaw, 2010; William, S., 2017). Based on the observations, I believe the Summer Bridge Program will serve as an effective program to assist the students with academics, social connectivity, and the transition into ninth grade.

### **Philosophical Foundations-Anywhere High Summer Bridge Road Map - G.R.O.W. 2022**

The Summer Bridge Road Map of Anywhere High School was the document that created the framework of the program. In order to assist students to successfully transition to high school, many school districts in our nation have implemented Middle School to High School Summer Bridge Programs to augment academic achievement and strengthen the essential skills needed for the preparation of attending high school (Abbott and Templeton, 2013). This interactive PowerPoint was implemented via the use of various instructional strategies conducted by the teachers. As I observed different classrooms on different days, I noticed that the pedagogy of the teachers allowed the students to be very engaged with the activities. For example, one of the students I interviewed, John, was really into leading his group with a team building activity. Ms. Godwin shared the document with me via Google Drive and she told me each of the four high schools used the same model during the same week. The Road Map was built on the four constructs-**Grace, Responsibility, Ownership, and Worth**, and they provided a



foundation to recognize the characteristics to assist former middle school students as they were preparing to make the transition to high school.

The first ice breaker was an activity in which the students had to identify four people who would represent the type of leader they wanted to be. They had to give a brief description of why they inspired them. They could use text, pictures, and videos. For example, Timothy discussed the admiration and respect he had for Deion Sanders, a National Football League Hall of Famer, and current head coach of the Jackson State University football team. One of the characteristics he highlighted was the level of confidence Coach Sanders has in himself and how that confidence made the other coaches and players better. Timothy chose this person because he aspires to play football for the school.

Another strategy was a quiz that the students had to complete based on their visions and goals. The quiz caused them to reflect and become introspective to support long-term thinking and planning, especially the chapter of learning in high school. This vision-invoking strategy allowed the teachers to ask the students, “What is your vision?” A quote by Timothy Gallwey, “If you have a clear vision of where you want to go, you are not as easily distracted by the many possibilities and agendas that otherwise divert you” was also presented and the students generated discussion as this guiding question and quote helped them to receive a clearer understanding and importance of having a vision when moving forward and making a transition. For example, when presented with this information, I observed Tammy discuss how she felt this activity and the program would serve as a connection for her to complete high school and further her education in college.

Keeping in the theme of having a vision, another strategy that dealt with using the definition of a vision statement to assist the students to research this topic. The definition, “A

vision statement is a sentence or two that briefly describes what an individual would like to do, and the impact they would like to have". The following four questions were used to generate more discussion, "What are your interests?", "What is your biggest dream?", "What are you naturally good at? (Your strengths)?", "What impact do you want to have?". The teachers also threw into this mix, "Do It". I observed Martin expressed his answers with this activity because of his interest in becoming a computer engineer. He spoke on his interest in the profession and someday creating something innovative with computer engineering that would make an impact on the world.

Another strategy that was used was the connection of having the students to focus more on vision planning by creating a roadmap to augment forward thinking. The questions they presented to the students were, "What do I want to be?", "What adjectives describe the person I want to be?" and "What impact do I want to have?" The teachers also provided two sample vision statements for the students to use models of their work. They were, "MY VISION Sample 1: *To be a caring, compassionate, and innovative teacher known for inspiring my students to be more than they thought they could be*". The second example was "MY VISION Sample 2: *To be a socially conscious social media influencer who promotes health, positivity and emotional well-being*". The students had to explore their answers individually; then share them in a group session and then present them to the entire class if they volunteered. For example, I observed Dana talk about how important vision planning had been to her. She stated she used a form of vision planning as she competed in boxing and won a national championship in middle school. She also stated that the question, "What do I want to be?" was relevant when she visualized and trained to win the national championship, but also is related to her goal of completing high school and then going to college to become an entrepreneur.

After the students presented the constructs of their potential vision statements, the teachers had them to use another template provide connectivity of the statement to their goals, descriptive information, future impact to the statements to support thoroughly a rich and well-planned statement for the students to use as a guiding composition as they were going through the transition from middle school and the approaching high school year. I observed different classes go through this process during the four days before the hour dedicated to the word of the day. It was evident that this activity allowed the students to be more engaged and receptive with the information of the word of the day. The teachers ensured the activities were connected and supportive of the main goal of assisting the students to gain powerful tools in the transition process. For example, I observed Darrell say in one of his group sessions, how the vision planning helped him to understand how he should prepare for what he has not learned yet and to be more focused on his academics.

The first construct that was presented on Monday, **Grace**, was addressed with the question, “How can I develop greater empathy/compassion for others?” Additionally, the following supportive statements presented were, “Learn how to build stronger relationships online; “Make a friend from a different culture” and “Build on my existing friendships”. I observed a class, and the teacher had the students volunteer their answers about this question. For example, I observed Iris expressing that getting to know people the first day of the program helped her to be motivated to make an effort to talk to people better. Additionally, she stated it has always been a challenge to her to naturally talk to people, but she knew she had to address this challenge. Zion was in the same class, and I observed her say that the concept of Grace will assist her to be a better listener to learn more about others to understand them better. As

mentioned previously, the teacher had the students to relate their preliminary vision planning information with this construct.

The second construct presented on Tuesday was **Responsibility**. The question posed to the students was, “How can I take on more responsibility in the following areas: Home, Community, School and Friends?”. I briefly observed a class, and the teacher had the students present their thoughts on the word itself. The teacher and the students began to discuss how responsibility looked in the three previously mentioned areas. For example, I observed Jasmine say that this program has helped her to understand how she should be more accountable for learning better than she had done in the past. She focused on the school concept as she gave her answer. Again, this was connected to the work of vision planning to support the process of transitioning to high school.

The third construct presented on Wednesday was **Ownership**. The question posed to the students was, “What does it mean to take ownership?” Additionally, the teachers provided the statement, “An **ownership mindset** is all about taking responsibility for yourself and your actions”. Another question presented was “What decisions do I plan to make this year to ensure I have ownership of my outcome?”. For example, I observed Martin say that he had to be open to talking to his teachers since he felt his classes would probably be harder since he would be taking all Honors classes.

The first statement was, “One thing I’ll do differently from middle school.” This statement dealt with the area of Maturity. The second statement posed was, “One thing I’ll do differently at home.” This statement dealt with the area of Home. The third statement posed was, “One thing I’ll do differently with managing my time.” This statement dealt with the area of Time. The fourth and last statement was, “One thing I’ll do differently when choosing

friends.” This statement dealt with the area of Friends. For example, I observed Tammy state that she had to be more open to talk to people, especially the teachers. She said one of her sisters, who was an upperclassman, said to make sure you talk to your teachers. She went on to say in middle school, that was not one of her natural things to do. Before I left the room, the students began to compose their responses of how they could take ownership of the different topics presented in their lives, especially the effort and mindset to embrace the transition from middle school to high school. Again, the components of vision planning were connected.

The fourth and final construct presented on Thursday was **Worth**. I briefly observed a class and the question posed was, “What qualities do I have that will allow me to be successful?” The students had to address the four subtopics with this question. Before I left the room, the students began to compose and discuss among themselves answers. For example, I observed John say that he had to put the work in and get things done. He said he had to put in the time, be more interactive with the students and teachers and not be intimidated about the new challenges of high school. The teacher also reminded the students to connect their vision planning work with their brainstorming and feedback.

The last slide of the Summer Bridge Road Map was entitled the division’s title and the portrait of a graduate. I did not observe the brainstorming and discussion but was able to hear the teacher’s expectations of the last activity. The statements that were going to be addressed were under the subtitle of “Accomplishment.” The statements under the subtitle were:

- Academically prepared with a diploma that verifies postsecondary readiness
- College credit, a nationally recognized professional certification, or both
- Ten-year academic and career plan
- College-ready PSAT score

- Internship, work-based, service-learning experience, and/or capstone research project
- Completed at least one virtual course
- Professional portfolio aligned with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Employability Skills

The students had to create their own individual slides in which they had to upload their respective pictures and then use the statements that applied to their vision and goals that will be addressed by the time they finish their four years of high school experience.

## Anywhere City Schools' Portrait of a Graduate



### Accomplishment

- Academically prepared with a diploma that verifies postsecondary readiness
- College credit, a nationally-recognized professional certification, or both
- Ten-year academic and career plan
- College-ready PSAT score
- Internship, work-based, service learning experience, and/or capstone research project
- Completed at least one virtual course
- Professional portfolio aligned with the 21st Century Employability Skills

These are the skills and qualities ACS has committed to help develop in each of you. On the following slide, create your own portrait. Upload a picture of yourself. On the LEFT side list all the qualities you want to develop by the end of the 9th grade. On the RIGHT side list all the qualities you want to develop by the end of your four year high school experience.

### **Description of the Research Participants**

Ten students were selected to serve as research participants. As mentioned previously, these students and their families responded to the request of the school's administration to participate in the summer bridge program. The following information highlights the background of the nine students who participated in the interviews. One student failed to return the signed documentation to participate in the interviews. The students will be addressed in alphabetical order.

Martin Brown is a student from Somewhere Middle School of Anywhere School District. He loves playing video games and creating items via arts and crafts. He will be taking all Honors classes during his freshman year to support his quest to attend college to study and prepare to become a computer engineer. He may try out for the school's basketball, baseball, and soccer teams, respectively. Based on my impressions of interviewing and observing Martin, I believe he is very focused on his academics and plans to do well in high school. He displayed a "quiet confidence" and wanted to blend in with the rest of the students and their activities.

Dana Bowman is a student from Nearhere Middle School of Anywhere School District. She is 14 years old and loves cheerleading. Her most proud accomplishment while being in middle school was becoming a national champion in a boxing competition. She plans to try out for the volleyball team and participate in the Yearbook program. Based on my impressions of interviewing and observing Dana, I believe she strives for excellence with everything she does. Being a teenager, she demonstrated a level of maturity and visionary leadership that is not common to most of her peers.

Timothy Beckham is another student from Somewhere Middle School of Anywhere School District. He plans to try out for the school's football team. He may also participate in a

club after the first quarter of his freshman year. Based on my impressions of interviewing and observing Timothy, I believe he just wants to “fit in to blind in” among his peers. His desire to join the football team may help him embrace more the importance of interacting with his peers.

Darrell Dobson is another student from Somewhere Middle School. He also plans to try out for the football team as a running back. Darrell wants to experience different club and activities because he has not decided on his post-high school plans as of yet. Based on my impressions from the interview, he is excited about coming to high school, but has a definite concern about fitting in academically and socially.

Iris Edison is a student from Anywhere Middle School of Anywhere School District. She has the goal of going to college to study how to be an entrepreneur. She plans to establish her own clothing line. She may join a club in high school. Based on my impressions of interviewing and observing Iris, I felt that she is the type of student who tries to “mask” her talents and is shy. One of the things I enjoyed about her was that she demonstrated the trait of being a team player when the students had to complete group tasks.

Tammy Goodman is another student from Somewhere Middle School of Anywhere School District. She is 14 years old and enjoys doing people’s hair. She proudly mentioned that she never had anything lower than a “C” on her report card. She plans to go to community college but has not decided what to study. Based on my impressions of interviewing and observing Tammy, I believe she is also very focused on her academics and plans to maintain a level of excellence to achieve her desired outcomes. She loves learning and that will be one of her strengths and she attends high school and beyond.

John Jimmerson is another student from Nearhere Middle School. He loves playing soccer and loves making new friends. He has two, younger siblings and his father is a teacher.



He wants to go to college and also become a police officer. He wants to help people and demonstrate that there are good police officers who care about others. Based on my impressions of interviewing and observing John, I believe he is a natural leader and enjoys being able to influence others. Due to his servant-leadership, I expect John to accomplish a great deal and give back to others.

Zion Lewis is another student from Somewhere Middle School of Anywhere School District. Her family was highly motivated to get her into the program. She wants to do well in high school because she wants to go to a local college via scholarships and major in either Psychology or Biology. She plans to try out for the school's volleyball team. Based on my impressions of interviewing and observing Zion, I believe she has a high level of faith in her abilities and will push through any challenges that come her way. She is another student who loves learning and actually asked me questions about my work in relation to my research which impressed me.

Jasmine Moore is another student from Somewhere Middle School of Anywhere School District. She is 14 years old and has aspirations to attend college. She plans to work hard and get scholarships to major in Psychology. Based on my impressions of interviewing and observing Jasmine, I believe she is a goals-oriented individual who follows through with her learning objectives and outcomes. It was impressive to hear her talk about her desire to go to college, study within the major of Psychology and operate a practice to help people.

### **Phenomenological Explication of the Data**

As discussed briefly in Chapter IV, for this study I utilized the concept of explication (Hycner, 1985; Jehenson, 1973; Lowes & Prowse, 2001), avoiding the connotations of the term analysis as dividing the whole into its composite parts, which can result in the potential loss of

the overall holistic and contextual meaning. As an overarching ontological framework for guiding my discovery process and to maintain such a holistic and contextual focus, I utilized Hycner's (1985) five phases of explicitation: (1) phenomenological reduction, (2) delineating units of meaning, (3) clustering of units of meaning to form themes, (4) summarizing each interview, and (5) creating composite summaries. This approach loosely parallels the three phases of grounded theory's open, axial, and selective coding (See Table 3). However, the explicitation of data offers a reciprocal means of coding that moves back and forth between the individual research subjects, the units of meaning derived from the exploration of the lived experiences of each individual, and the overarching themes and patterns that are revealed through the data analysis process (Myran, 2022). Without this purposeful means of returning to the foundation of meaning, that is the voices of the individual research participants, there is a risk of losing the uniqueness of individual voices and assuring that we are able to see the individual clearly within the larger explanation of the phenomenon.

**Table 3**

*Relationship between Open, Axial, and Selective Coding and the Explicitation of Data*

<b>Phenomenological reduction:</b> An analytic process designed to explicate underlying units of meaning framed within the ecological and lived context of phenomenon under investigation (Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1999).	<b>Open coding:</b> An open discovery process of reading, re-reading, transcripts sentence by sentence in search the embedded meaning
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**Delineating units of meaning:** Extracting and defining statements made by the research participants that illuminate the phenomenon (Hycner, 1999).

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**Axial coding:** The researcher looks for patterns, relationships, and structure within the open codes, looking for unifying order between and among the participant's statements

**Clustering of units of meaning to form themes:** Here the researcher "interrogates" (Hycner, 1999, p. 153) each unit of meaning, monitoring the voices of the lived experiences of the participants, looking for the essence of meaning within the larger context (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994).

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**Summarizing each interview:** The researcher returns to the individual participant to assure that the individual meaning isn't lost in the above clustering process. This recognizes that each participant is unique and experiences the phenomenon in their own way and seeks to find the appropriate balance between individual and collective experiences.

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**Selective coding:** Seeks to establish an overarching organizational structure that captures the collective meaning.

**Creating composite summaries:** Finally, given the efforts to balance the individual and collective lived experience, The composite summary serves as the final step explicitation of the data.

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*Note. Adapted from Myran's 2022 Notes on Phenomenological Research Methods*

Guided by this framework, I coded data through iterations of discovery, organization, refinement, meaning making, and summarizing using the concept of explication. This afforded me a guided process that supported an evolving coding structure that brought the lived experiences of the students in the summer bridge program into sharper focus, while supporting the emergence of a holistic and ecologically valid picture of the phenomenon.

### **Phenomenological Reduction/Open Coding**

Once my dataset was complete, I initially started the phenomenological reduction phase of the explication by reading the transcripts, however, I quickly realized that the deeper meaning was lost in the coldness of the written word compared to the voices of the students themselves. This led me to read the transcripts while listening to the audio recordings to capture the students' voice, inflections, tone, and word choices. I maintained this approach throughout the explication of the data, including the final phases that were completed in Nvivo qualitative research software. As I engaged in the different levels of explication I put on headphones to listen to students' own voices. In this way, beyond my week of embedded engagement with the students, I spent many hours listening to their voices which helped me to stay focused on honoring their individual and collective stories.

Phenomenological reduction allows the researcher to view the phenomenon in its own space with a specific meaning and structure for the phenomenon (Keen, 1975). Reading the transcripts line by line with careful attention to detail, I captured exploratory notes, any thoughts, ideas, and insights; zooming in on specific words, emotions, and hesitations, asking myself questions and posing possible themes that would help in the next level of analysis (Nizza & Smith, 2021; Smith & Nizza, 2022). Here I used colored highlighters as a means of phenomenological reduction, that is open coding with no predefined assumptions, theoretical

positions, or a prior coding scheme. I made notes in the margins, challenged assumptions as they came up, and read and re-read the transcripts. This resulted in an unorganized set of potential themes, ideas, grouping structures and observations, along with the insights contained in the marginalia. During this phase of analysis, I shared my dataset with my advisor who independently reviewed and took their own notes for later coding brainstorming sessions. We met on a weekly basis to go over emergent coding structures, challenge assumptions, and pose alternative interpretations. These brainstorming sessions created a space to deepen and strengthen the analysis.

### **Delineating and Clustering Units of Meaning/Axial Coding**

Building on the open phenomenological reduction discussed above, I engaged in several rounds of axial coding to delineate and cluster units of meaning to form themes and families of meaning, and to refine, clarify and strengthen the explication of data. Here I was seeking to capture the pithy interpreted statements and summaries of what is happening in the text – that is the individual lived experiences. This was done first on fresh copies of the transcripts to explore the possible thematic structure of the data described above. Next, working with my advisor, I continued the brainstorming sessions to talk through my observations, exploring these unstructured observations, delineating units of meaning, and clustering those units of meaning to form themes. I routinely went back to my coded transcripts, field notes and marginalia, seeking to identify the interrelationships among the coded segments of data and to codify the emergent families of meaning. This phase of the explication of the data served as the foundational building block that allowed me to make connections amongst the codes within each theme (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). The connections within each of these early themes provided the beginning

stages of identifying and understanding the students' lived experiences in the summer bridge program.

### **Individual and Composite Summaries/Selective Coding**

At this point in the explication of the data, it is important to return to the individual interviews in order to ensure that the unique voices and stories of the individual research participants are fully captured and that the “reduction” of data doesn’t lose the forest for the trees (Hycner, 1999). With the emergent structures identified in the earlier phases of the explication of the data capture in my notes, color coding, and marginalia, I turned to a more detailed means of analysis offered in the qualitative research software Nvivo. This software allows for a far more in-depth level of analysis and the ability to order, re-order, and develop tiers of meaning that are all connected to the experiential statements that collectively support a given thematic structure. I loaded all my transcripts into Nvivo and first coded each student’s transcript to identify their individual structure of meaning. This program was extremely helpful by creating a framework and identifying themes and subthemes based on the data obtained to report the findings. Additionally, the program **Otter A.I.** was used to transcribe the interviews and related information to input the data into the Nvivo software.

Working with the individual student’s experiential statements, I looked for structure, order, and connections – that is, ways of clustering these units of meaning at the individual level. I used quotes to maintain my connections to each participant. Here I was looking for connections, the ways that the different experiential statements speak to each other or were in contrast with each other. During this phase, as I was looking for structure, I also remained flexible, allowing new insights, wonderings, or questions to take me back to earlier steps in the process to clarify, refine, add, or change my exploratory notes. This clustering process allowed

me to define and name the personal experiential statements. At this point, I built tables of personal experiential meaning for each case.

Next, I moved into the final phase of explication, returning to the individual interviews and summarized each as a means of validating that the themes elicited so far held up at the individual level and in the holistic context, that is understanding the individual's experiences in relationship to the collective experiences of the students' lived experience in the summer bridge program. Ultimately, these stages of selective/composite coding narrowed and focused on a model that captures the individual themes and their complex, interrelated, and reciprocal interactions with each other (see Figure 2). In order to comply with confidentiality expectations, the students were assigned pseudonym names that were used in the following findings.

## **Figure 2**

### *Summer Bridge Transition Students Lived Experiences Model*

#### **1. Student Fears and Anxieties**

- a. Getting Lost
- b. Keeping up Academically
- c. Knowing other Students
- d. Social Anxiety (Fitting In)
- e. Middle School Performance
- f. Transition Comparisons
- g. Personal Background
- h. Parental Input

#### **2. Scaffolded Support that Helped Students Deal with their Fears**

- a. Confidence Built from Engagement with Teachers

- b. Interacting with Student Ambassadors
- c. Making New Friends and Getting to Know People before the First Day
- d. Team Building
- e. Tour of the Building and Moving between Classes
- f. Visioning (projecting themselves into the future)
- g. Plans After High School

### **3. Indicators of Growth**

- a. Helped Me See What's Coming Next
- b. Helped Me to Get More Focused – Knowing What's Coming Next
- c. Opportunities for Maturation

## **Findings**

### **Student Fears and Anxieties**

Social acceptance into high school has a significant amount of influence after a transition. For many students, the most difficult transition of all is the movement to high school (Bradford, Beier, & Oswald, 2021; Holland & Mazzoli, 2001). Based upon the initial coding and analysis of the interviews, fears and anxieties of the students navigating a new building and the constructs of its existence and components were concerns upon the transition into high school.

### ***Getting Lost***

The first sub theme under student fears and anxieties was their worry of getting lost during the opening days of school. For example, when I asked Darrell, “What do you think may be your biggest challenge as you transition to high school?”, he quickly responded, “I’m not used to how big the school was?”. Similarly, when talking to John about what he felt was most important about the summer bridge program, he emphasized that “Being able to just go around



the school to see where everything is. So that way I'm not lost on the first day, and stuff like that". Expressing the same concerns, Tammy, shared with great concern, "The biggest one for me is like, there was a tour yesterday because, like, I'm still kind of lost!" A final example of this theme can be found in my conversation with Zion, where she shared her concern about the size of the school, expressing "I would say if you're like you have a bigger surrounding than you did in middle school. And it's like, I wouldn't say it's more people pressuring you, but I'll say it's like, you have more people depending on you, they actually get to where you're going to school". We can see here that Zion is not only concerned about the size of the school, but what that suggests about more people and greater pressure to cope with and manage.

### ***Keeping up Academically***

Building on the first theme discussed above, students also expressed concerns about keeping up academically. We can see this subtheme in Darrell's expressed concern about his ability to keep up with the more demanding high school curriculum. Here he speculated that, "I think the program [the summer bridge program] will help me focus more, to focus more, which has been a problem for me." When addressing this subtheme, Dana stated that she is glad that she can start high school in-person. She stated, "In middle school, I had a rocky start because learning virtually because of the Pandemic was not good for me. I am a visual learner, so I feel I will have a better start with my classes in high school, but I know it's going to be tough." When Iris was asked "Did this program prepare you academically better for your freshman year in high school?", she said, "Yeah, this program has helped me to prepare academically better for high school, especially the vision planning part." Jasmine expressed concern when asked the question, "What do you think may be your greatest challenge as you transition to high school?", she stated, "Handling the harder classes." Relatedly, when Jasmine was asked the question, "Did

this program prepare you academically better for your freshman year in high school?”, she stated, “Yes, I think it has because I feel I will be more organized.” Virtual Learning, due to the main part of the global pandemic the students experienced in middle school, definitely had an impact on their academic performance, so being in this program and in-person starting off high school with more rigorous classes and performance were concerns of the students.

As John contemplated and answered the question, “How has your experience been in the summer bridge program?” he stated, “It was, at first, just trying to get back into the groove of like, the mindset of school and now it's, it's actually pretty cool. I like knowing that it feels good to be back. Just being able to experience high school makes me feel like I'm going to be ready for when it actually does come and to excel in my classes.” Similarly, Martin addressed the same question by saying, “Like the classes you need to pass and the work you need to do.” He also stated when asked the question, “What do you think would be your biggest challenge as you transition to high school?”, he said “The fact that taking Honors classes is probably one of the biggest.” Another support of this subtheme, Martin also expressed that when asked the question, “What strategy do you think you’re going to apply the most from this program as you start high school?”, he expressed, “Listening, studying, and asking more questions than I did in middle school. I have to do more because of my dreams of going to college and becoming a computer engineer.”

Tammy felt that when asked the question, “How do you think this program will help you academically prepare for high school?” stated, “The G.R.O.W. Summer Bridge Road Map and Vision planning will help me because if I feel like if I use them, I will be good.” Timothy expressed, in relation to the biggest challenge question, “Taking harder classes is the biggest challenge.” Similarly, when he was asked the question about the program and academic

preparation, he said, “I feel the program has made me more mature about how to do better in school with my classes, attendance and discipline.” When asked the academic preparation question, Zion shared a tremendous amount of thoughts. She said, “Me personally, I thought I did not need the Success Skills class. I am impatient. I heard about it, but I am glad that I am here. This class is essential, and I believe it will help me to pass and put me on path to make it to my senior year. I did have a plan or a path, but this class will help me not to get overwhelmed. This class has been very helpful, and the teacher has done a great job of helping us to grow using the G.R.O.W. Summer Bridge Road Map.” Similarly, when Zion was asked the question about the significant strategies obtained that will be used, she said, “Folks here at the school want us to focus on our schoolwork, so I need to ask questions and talk more in class so I don’t get off track.” She also stated when asked the academic preparation question of the program, she stated, “It has taught me to understand what I need to do academically, but also what I do not need to do to hurt my academics.”

### ***Knowing other Students***

Relationship building is a major value that students undertake and implement in the learning process (Yazzi-Mintz, 2007; Smith, K., 2012). The need of belonging in high school is a major component of both the social and connectivity constructs. The exposure to a summer bridge transition program may equip students with the necessary strategies and interventions to establish more connectivity and socialization in the new setting. When asked the question, “Do you think this program will help you connect with high school better?”, Darrell stated, “I will be okay with others because of the program.” Similarly, when he asked the question, “What activities and clubs do you plan to participate in high school?”, he stated, “I am 50/50 on that because I am not sure how I will meet other students, we will see.” The same subtheme was

viewed as a challenge by Iris. When asked the question, “What do you think may be the biggest challenge as you transition to high school?”, she stated, “Getting to know people and talking to them. I am standoffish with people until I get to know them. I am not good at starting conversations.” However, when she was asked the question about activities and club participation, she stated, “I plan to participate in activities and sports to get to know people better.”

The need to get to know other students better was a priority for Jasmine. She stated when asked the question, “How has the program assisted you with the social and cultural connectivity to high school?”, she expressed a great response, “I believe this program has helped me to understand the importance of seeing the diversity of different types of people. I guess this will help me to get to know them better.” When John was asked the question, “What in this program you think will help you the most as you transition to high school?” he expressed, “I would say being able to talk to teachers, being able to see new students and being able to just go around the school to see where everything is so I am not lost on the first day and stuff like that.” Relatedly when John was asked the question, “What do you think will be the greatest challenge as you transition to high school?”, he expressed, “I would say mostly the work trying to get back into getting the work done, putting it on time. Maybe being interactive with other students, not trying to be intimidated by them and all that.” He also goes on to say when asked the question, “How do you think this program has prepared you academically for ninth grade?”, he expressed, “I would say that it has prepared me to be more talkative and be more interactive with other students. Having to be able to go around the school has really shown me that it's not that big on the inside. It's actually really like it's a good average sized school, so yeah.” Furthermore, John goes on to say when asked the question, “How has the program assisted you with the social and

cultural connectivity to high school?”, he stated, “Talking to people really got me to understand people's feelings and how I'm not able to treat people the same way I do as my best friends, and I got to restart all over with new people. We have this new kid, she's special and so talking to her and getting to know her has been different. She is not very hyper, but actually getting to know her, it's really taught me that like, you know, everybody's different and it's going to be a different situation for everybody, no matter what.”

How well a student is connected to school can serve as an indicator for academic achievement and behavior (Wang, Kiuru, Degol, & Salmela-Aro, 2018). When asked the question about the participation of activities and clubs, Martin expressed that he wants to be on teams as a 3-sports athlete-soccer, basketball, and baseball. He said, “These activities will help me to connect more with other students.” Tammy felt, when asked the question, “What do you believe may be your greatest challenge in transitioning to high school?” she stated, “For me, I would say being more open to talking to more people. I have a hard time with this.” When asked the same question, Timothy responded, “Different classes will be harder, and it may be a little more involved in making new friends.” When he was asked, “How has the program assisted you with the social and cultural connectivity to high school?”, he expressed, “I believe it has because I feel I will be able to connect with students.” Timothy also expressed that he plans to play football and is looking forward to meeting the students on the team. Zion became reflective and stated, “Since being in this program, I have met some interesting people and some of them are just trying to fit in.” As has been stated, this subtheme was a major topic due to the incoming freshmen wanting to feel connected to the school by getting to their fellow students.

### ***Social Anxiety (Fitting In)***

The need for students, in any grade, to stay involved in school is driven by an emotional connection. Hagenauer and Hascher (2010) found that there is a connection with emotions to the learning process which highlight that the feelings of connectedness, anger, safety, frustration, and happiness are related to student learning. In this way, students' needs for relevance and relatedness within the school context is an important feature of academic success (Hagenauer & Hascher, 2010). Darrell stated, "I will be okay with others because of the program." In terms of this subtheme, Iris stated, "I am standoffish with people until I get to know them." Similarly, because of the program, Jasmine stated, "I guess this will help me to get to know them better." John's anxiety was demonstrated by stating, "Maybe being interactive with other students not trying to be intimidated by them and all that." As mentioned previously, Tammy stated, "For me, I would say being like more open to talking to more people. I have a hard time with this." Finally, as Zion stated, "I have met some interesting people and some of them are just trying to fit in." As we can see from the perspective of the students' quotes, social anxiety is present; however, the experience of the Summer Bridge program has assisted to mitigate this feeling.

### ***Middle School Performance***

Summer bridge transition programs are essential in addressing various needs of targeted students, especially those who demonstrate academic difficulties. Adreon and Stella (2001) state that due to the transition from middle school to high school, students tend to experience academic deficits in reading, science, and social studies (Williams, S., 2017). In regard to this finding, it is crucial for transition programs to have an academic component to mitigate the loss of learning. (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010; Williams, S., 2017). This sub theme developed as

the result of asking interview questions that addressed academics, attendance, and discipline of the students from their middle school experience.

When asked the question, “How were your grades, attendance and discipline in middle school?”, Darrell stated, “My grades were okay, but would have been better if we did not have to do Virtual Learning because of the COVID-19 shutdown. Besides the absences due to the shutdown, I had good attendance. I did not have any disciplinary issues in middle school.”

When asked the same question, Dana expressed, “I had a rocky start in middle school with my grades, but then I got it together. I am a visual learner, so when the schools shut down due to the Pandemic, I did not do well. My attendance was excellent and whenever I was absent, I had an excused note. I did not have any discipline issues”. Similarly, Iris stated the following answers for the same question, “I did not do well virtually, but when we went back to school, I started making A’s & B’s. My attendance was okay, but to be honest, I did not like to go to school. My parent talked to me numerous times about attending school and I realized that I should do better with my attendance since my school counselor told me how attendance is a priority. I did not have any discipline issues.” It was evident that Virtual Learning was a struggle for students due to the global pandemic.

Staying with the same sub theme and question, Jasmine stated, “I did not do well virtually, so my grades, but got better. My attendance was good and improved after the school shut down. I did not have any discipline problems.” John, for example, grades did not suffer as much as the other students. When asked the same question, he stated, “I had As and Bs in middle school. I was very teachable in middle school, even with Virtual Learning. When I needed help, I asked. I had great attendance and did not have any discipline issues. I have an advantage because my father is a teacher and kept me focused.” Likewise, Tammy expressed

that she did not drop below average with her middle school grades. When asked the same question about middle school performance, she stated, “I never had any Ds on my report card in middle school. I had good attendance and was that student who got along with my teachers, so I did not have any discipline problems.” Zion had mixed results in middle school. She expressed, “My grades in middle school were good. I never made any D’s or E’s but had several C’s and a few A’s and B’s. I think I would have done better if we did not have Virtual Learning. I had great attendance and was not really a discipline problem. There were times I did get bored after I finished my work and requested to go to the restroom. Sometimes, I would go sit in other classes, but stopped when one of my teachers got on to my game and called my parent.”

### ***Transition Comparisons***

Every year, eighth-grade middle school students go through the process of making the transition from middle school to high school. For many students, the most difficult transition of all is the movement to high school (Bradford, Beier, & Oswald, 2021; Holland & Mazzoli, 2001). According to McKevitt & Uvass, (2013, page 70) “Transition refers to students completing one milestone in an academic setting and progressing to the next phase of their academic career in a new setting” (Williams, S., 2017). Based upon the research referenced, the question was asked, “How do you compare your transition to high school versus your other transitions, like elementary to middle school?” The sub theme of transition comparisons became present due to this question. Dana expressed, “When I went from elementary school to middle school, I was not scared. I feel like the teachers babied us a lot. I know coming to high school is the biggest step because I know the work will be harder and I can already sense there can be drama.” Iris stated her answer to the question through a different lens. She stated, “I feel moving from middle school to high school is the biggest transition, but I feel this move is



bringing me closer to going to college.” John expressed, “I would say that moving elementary school to middle school was easier. In elementary school, my 5th grade teacher started getting harder because she told us that middle school would be different, like not having recess and lunch time would be different. She also said the work would be harder, so I am expecting the same for high school, but on a bigger scale.”

When asked the same question, “How do you compare your transition to high school versus your other transitions, like elementary to middle school?” Zion was very expressive with her answer. She stated, “I felt this transition to high school gets me closer to graduating. I know that I will have to work more because of harder classes and making new friends. I know I will be dealing with the big kids, the big dogs. I believe moving to high school will actually help me to get ready for the real world, so I am excited to see what happens.” Based upon the response of the students, they felt the biggest transition within the K-12 continuum was the transition from middle school to high school. The academic and social constructs were concerns of the students due to the work being more rigorous and getting to know and being accepted by another level of peers.

### ***Personal Background***

The students who participated in the summer bridge program came from primarily three middle schools. Many of them were involved with activities in middle school and planned to continue similar and/or explore other activities in high school. Martin loves to play video games and do arts and crafts. Iris and Jasmine also participate with arts and crafts. Tammy and Zion played volleyball in middle school and plan to try out for the high school team. Additionally, Tammy excelled in boxing and even won a national championship in her category. Timothy and Darrell play football and plan to try out for the school’s football team. Dana was a cheerleader

for a recreational league but plans to try out for the school's squad. John played soccer in middle school and plans to try out for the school's team. He stated he is very close to his younger siblings and does his best to be a role model for them.

### ***Parental Input***

One of the components of success in a student's education in school is the engagement of parental involvement (White & Kelly, 2010). This sub theme evolved based upon the question, "What do your parent or parents think about the program?" Darrell stated, "My parents made me get into the program because they said it would help me to prepare for the harder classes of high school." Michael stated that his parent said, "She likes the program because she can see how this program will help me in high school." Darrell, when presented with the same question stated, "My parent thinks that this program will help me a lot to learn about how to prepare for classes, like how we are doing vision planning and using the G.R.O.W. Summer Bridge Road Map." Dana stated that her parents said, "We suggest you go to the Summer Bridge program so you can learn the building and get to know how high school teachers work". As a parent and an educator, myself, I know it is important to assist your child to buy-in into any resources to meet the expectations of educational needs, so it was good to hear the initial feedback to this question.

Iris' parent was present when conducted her interview, so I was able to ask her father directly the question, "What do you think about the Summer Bridge program?" He said, "I like this program because it has helped Iris to start focusing on high school and understand the importance of using her mind to excel with her education. It is a blessing that this program is helping her move forward with positive activities." It was evident that her father was very appreciative of receiving information from the school to get Iris into the program. Similarly,

Martin's mother expressed to him, "I think this program is nice because it will help him to have a plan to start and get through high school, especially with my goal of wanting to go to college."

Tammy's response was, "My mother said I know this program will help you and you will sign up for it and participate-no option and you can't afford not to do it." Zion had a more insightful answer and she said when asked the question, "My mother said she knows it will help me. I honestly did not want to do it, but since being here, I know now how this program will help me get ahead in high school." Again, the influence of parents was critical to help the students to understand that the sacrifice of taking the time to attend the program would prove to be helpful as they made the transition to high school.

As mentioned previously and related to this sub theme, a Parent Meeting was held on Wednesday in the cafeteria for an hour. I was able to catch the last several minutes of the Parent Meeting and the administrative team basically presented an overview of the school and the unique opportunity provided by the Summer Bridge program. I was able to obtain this information from one of the administrators. Refreshments were present and the audience was composed of twenty parents. Some of the various questions they asked dealt with class schedules; navigating the different types of credit-bearing classes; auditioning and trying out for the different sports and activities and other related topics. Schools should be places that allow parents to feel welcomed so they can truly pursue the aspects of supporting their children to increase their likelihood of being successful and be involved in the school community (Cavanagh et al., 2011; Williams, S., 2017). Therefore, summer bridge transition programs provide an opportunity for parents to also explore the school environment. Just as the students are exposed to the new school environment, the same can be done by parents and have a positive effect on

student confidence and potentially establish and strengthen the partnership between the school, students, and parents. (Hertzog & Morgan, 1998; Williams, S., 2017).

### **Scaffolded Support that Helped Students Deal with their Fears**

Summer bridge transition programs are designed and implemented to assist students who demonstrate the indicators of potentially having a tough transition and being potential dropouts in ninth grade. Summer transition programs are usually designed to meet the identified needs of a specific segment of the incoming freshmen population, such as with academic ability, but may be available for all 9th grade students (Williams, S., 2017). Therefore, it is imperative that the core of this programs is implemented to assist ninth graders with the transition to high school, especially with the themes of academics, attendance and positive, social behaviors (Miao & Wheelock, 2005; Williams, S., 2017). The activities of the vision planning and the G.R.O.W. Road Map strategies used provided structure and tools for the students to address the fears that naturally come with the transition to high school. For example, Martin stated that the team building activities allowed him to be more confident with meeting the students who came from other middle schools. He also stated between the transition challenge and academic preparation questions that he was concerned about the upcoming rigor of the honors classes and stated, “This program has helped me to be more confident to actually go up to teachers and students to ask questions in my classes.” He also stated that the program will help him to connect socially and culturally with the school. Timothy, when asked the transition challenge question said, “My biggest challenges are the classes being harder and making new friends, but I was nervous, very nervous. The things that helped me were the tour of the school, vision planning and learning how to use the G.R.O.W. Summer Bridge Road Map.”

### ***Confidence Built from Engagement with Teachers***

The nine teachers of the program conducted the same activities, and the average attendance enrollment was 27 students. The team building strategies were popular activities that the teachers used effectively. The sense of community being in place is extremely critical because when students are provided with a nurturing environment and have caring adults beyond the realms of the immediate family, personal growth and the educational process proceed in a positive direction (Israel, Beaulieu, & Hartless, 2001; NASSP, 2006). Other aspects of a supportive environment augments students' sense of belonging, ownership of learning, more mature selection of decision-making (NASSP, 2005).

In relation to this sub theme, Darrell stated the responses when he was asked, "What aspects of the program has helped you?", "How do you think this program may help you academically as you get into ninth grade?" and "Do you think this program will help you connect with high school better?", he said, "Working with the teacher has helped me focus more. She also helped me to learn things that I have not learned yet and feel more connected to the school." He also said, "The teachers and administrators have been pretty good". In relation to the teachers and administrators, Dana stated, "I have not had any problems with them, and they have been reasonable people who have been helpful." Relatedly, Iris stated that the teachers and administrators, "Are very good to work with and have been helpful." She also expressed that the staff has helped her to be more connected to the school.

Jasmine referenced the G.R.O.W. Summer Bridge Road Map and the positive nature of her teacher. She said, "My teacher told me to work on this stuff now in the program so I can have a head start. She emphasized the importance of how the G.R.O.W. Summer Bridge Road Map was designed for us to have success as we came to high school and beyond." Jasmine also

stated that she felt the teachers and administrators had been supportive and she was excited that Ms. Godwin was in charge of the ninth graders. They were both new to the school and Jasmine knew her as the assistant principal of the eighth grade at her middle school she just left. Tammy also referenced the G.R.O.W. Summer Road Map. She stated, “I believe by using what I learned of the G.R.O.W. Summer Bridge Road Map from my teacher, it will help me this school year.”

John had a great response when he was addressed with the four questions. He stated, “Being in this program with the teachers helped me to get back into the mindset of school. I feel they have prepared me for high school. I have been able to talk to the staff better than I have had in the past. Everyone has been great, and I have been talkative and interactive because I know I have to be more assertive to do good in high school.” On a similar note, Martin stated, “The teachers have helped us to be more prepared for high school by making me realize I have to ask more questions, listen and study harder. I feel more confident now in my classes this year.” The essence of using effective and caring teachers allowed the students to feel more comfortable to be engaged which supported the importance of “student buy-in.”

Summer transition programs have been shown to increase a student’s motivation toward high school (Albanes et al., 2014). Timothy, when asked the question about the staff, stated, “Everyone has been very nice and supportive.” Similarly, when asked the question about academic preparation for high school due to this program, he stated, “It has helped me to be more mature and motivated.” Zion, when asked about the strategies of the program, she stated, “The teachers keep us focused on the schoolwork. That’s the main thing. Once you lose focus, you can get off track.” She also stated when asked the question about the initial program experience, she stated, “The teachers have been fun, really fun.” She also said when asked about the staff, “They have been helpful and real chill.” Based on my training as a school

administrator and whenever I was able to observe classes, I felt the teachers were engaging and the student's displayed confidence as they participated with the various activities of the lessons.

### ***Interacting with Student Ambassadors***

Relationship building is a major value that students undertake and implement in the learning process (Yazzi-Mintz, 2007; Smith, K., 2012). Each teacher had two "Student Ambassadors" to assist with the activities of the Summer Bridge program. These upperclassmen students were former students of previous Summer Bridge programs. The students, who had to interview for the position, told me that their main job was to assist the incoming students to get acclimated with the school. Some of the activities I observed of their work were 1) conducting tours of the school with the freshmen; 2) socializing with the students during the Activity Hour; 3) assisting with the team building activities and 4) sharing stories of their experiences in high school, just to name a few. I observed that the presence of the student ambassadors was critical to the "buy-in" of the students and potential success of the program.

Iris, when asked about the student ambassadors, said, "They were very helpful with the tour of the school and told us information about their experiences." John also referenced how the student ambassadors helped with the tour also, but also added, "The student ambassadors said if we need something, definitely ask us when you see us in the hallway, on the bus, at lunch, basically anytime. When exchanged cell numbers also. I feel because of their help, I will not be overwhelmed and lost the first week of school." Martin expressed, when asked the question about interactions with the student ambassadors, "No not really, but they were present and appropriate, I did see them." From a different perspective, Tammy stated one of her best experiences of the program was building relationships with the student ambassadors. She expressed, "They have been very nice, and they keep giving up great advice. I really appreciate

that and the tour they gave us of the school.” Relatedly, Zion stated, “They have been really, really fun, especially when they showed us around the school. They told us to take advantage of resources; focus on your schoolwork: talk and interact with your teachers and classmates; don’t let people pressure you and get involved with school activities. They also said to speak to them in the hallways and ask for help if you need it. We also got their cell phone numbers.” As I observed the different classes and activities, the student ambassadors were definitely invested and engaged with the students and the program. On the last day, they conducted an information session within the last assembly and the information that I just shared was reiterated in the presentation.

### ***Making New Friends and Getting to Know People before the First Day***

Many summer bridge programs are conducted by teachers and administrators who make the effort to build caring and positive relationships with the students and to motivate them to excel (Abbott & Templeton, 2013). As the students were participating in the program, I observed many instances when the staff spoke with “self-esteem building language” and conducted actions to reinforce self-esteem. Also, they encouraged the students to establish positive relationships among their classes and with the upperclassmen. Darrell stated, “Yes, because I know other students and teachers before school starts.”

When asked the question, “What do you think may be your biggest challenge as you transition to high school?” Dana expressed, “I believe it is getting to know new people. I am very independent, and I like doing things myself, but this program is helping me to feel like I can get adjusted to high school and do better with connecting with new people.” Similarly, Iris stated, “Talking to new people, but this program has been helpful with that.” In relation to the same question, John stated, “I would say mostly the work, trying to get back into getting the



work done and putting in the time. Maybe being interactive with other students, not trying to be intimidated by them and all that and knowing I have toured the school before school starts.”

Tammy stated, “For me, I will say being more open to talking to people, but I am doing better with that.” Timothy stated, “Different classes may be harder, or it may be a little more involved in making new friends, but this program has helped me socially.” Zion stated, “I would say like you have a bigger surrounding than in middle school. And it's like, I wouldn't say it's more people pressuring you, but I'll say it's like, you have more people depending on you, they help you with coming to this school.” The importance of making new friends was truly an important component to the students as they attended the program and anticipated the opening of school.

As a related question to the challenge of transitioning, “What in this program do you think will help you the most as you transition to high school?” John stated, “I would say being able to talk to teachers, being able to see new students and being able to just go around the school to see where everything is. So that way I'm not lost on the first day, and stuff like that.” Timothy expressed and emphasized with the question, “Making new friends, really making new friends. It really has been fun and a good experience.” Successful student-centered, goal-oriented transition programs provide students with experiences for them to strengthen academic attainment; avoid discipline issues and augment self-confidence and self-esteem. (Butrymowicz & Shaw, 2010; William, S., 2017).

As another component of this sub theme, the question, “Has this program helped you to socially and culturally connect to high school?” Jasmine highlighted the importance of diversity. She stated, “Yes, we have a lot of different types of people. I guess you can say I have experienced diversity”. Martin also emphasized, “Yes, this program has really allowed me to connect better to high school.” As McKevitt and Uvaas (2013) report, when students prepare to

experience a new high school, it is important that they are provided the proper guidance because poor transitioning produces stress and related issues (Williams, S., 2017). Therefore, school connectedness is a component that transition programs must address to allow the ninth graders to become acclimated to the new school building (McKevitt & Uvaas, 2013; Williams, S., 2017). The connectivity to high school is another major concern for incoming students, so the activities of this program are critical as they make the transition to high school by mitigating the stress and concerns of starting school in a new environment with new people.

### ***Team Building***

The teachers used multiple strategies and activities to engage the students and build rapport. One of the strategies was the use of team building activities. For example, I observed John take charge of his group by assigning different tasks based on the directions of the designated activity. John is a natural leader, and he is very receptive to new challenges. Similarly, Dana was very intense and led her group also. She is also a leader. Though there was no question directly asked about team building, some of the questions used highlighted the essence of interactions that supported these activities. For example, John stated, “I would say that this program has helped me to be more talkative and be more interactive with other students.” Martin expressed, “This program has prepared me to actually go up, ask questions to students, peers and teachers and work together with activities.” One of the potential influences of the team building activities was the urge for the students to join teams and clubs of the school.

When asked the question, “Do you plan to get involved with activities and clubs in school?” John aggressively gave his answer, “I will make the soccer team. I also plan to run track and sing in the chorus.” Tammy, Dana and Zion plan to join the volleyball team; both Timothy and Darrell plan to play football; Martin plans to play basketball and baseball and

finally, Iris and Jasmine plan to join the cheerleading squad. The students' experiences with team building may provide them with motivation to pursue activities in which they are part of a unit that strives with a shared vision and common goal to exist and excel with peers and to represent the school.

The team building activities were instrumental in addressing the “unspoken apprehension” of the students. When asked about these activities in the program, Timothy stated, “I was nervous, I was nervous but the things we did in the classes helped.” Relatedly, Zion expressed that the activities were helpful as she thought about facing the challenges of more peer pressure in the new school with new people. She stated, “It’s more pressuring and more people depending on you, but I feel I can actually handle it better because of our activities in the classes.” I observed the teachers effectively use the student ambassadors to enhance the level of student engagement with the team building activities of the classes.

### ***Tour of the Building and Moving between Classes***

As McKevitt and Uvaas (2013) report, when students prepare to experience a new high school, it is important that they are provided the proper guidance because poor transitioning produces stress and related issues (Williams, S., 2017). Therefore, school connectedness is a component that transition programs must address to allow the ninth graders to become acclimated to the new school building (McKevitt & Uvaas, 2013; Williams, S., 2017). The tours of the school and the movement of the students between the classes, auditorium, gymnasium and cafeteria were a “game changer” as the students experienced the program. When asked the question, “What do you think may be your biggest challenge as you transition to high school?”, Darrell shared, “Getting used to how big the school was. The tour really helped. Zion stated, “I would say it’s like you have a bigger surrounding than in middle school.” At the beginning of

her interview, she stated that she liked being shown around the school. Dana, when asked the question, “What do you think has assisted you the most to be prepared for high school?” she said, “Probably the tour of the building, like I'm learning it slowly, but I got a good memory so it's easy for me to remember. So, the tour was very helpful.” The students spoke about the tour through a lens of “Appreciation.”

As mentioned before, the students moved between different parts of the school to conduct different activities. This is supported by research that states, “In addition, most programs require students to transition from one class to the next to experience changing classes throughout the school day (Williams, 2017). In keeping with this sub theme, Iris, when asked the question, “What in the summer bridge program has helped you the most?” she stated, “Now so far in the summer bridge program what has helped you the most?” She said, “Being exposed to the tour to school helped me to learn more about the school setting.” As with the same question, John stated, “Being able to just go around the school to see where everything is so that way, I’m not lost on the first day and stuff like that. Having the ability to go around the school really helped show me it is not too big on the inside. It is an average size high school.” Tammy stated, “The tour has been the biggest one for me is like the tour we took yesterday. I am still kind of lost.” Finally, Jasmine stated, “There are more people and different scenery than middle school, but the tour helped”. As observed, the students were really enthusiastic about touring the school and moving from sections to other sections.

### ***Visioning (Projecting Themselves into the Future)***

Research shows, especially during the transition from middle school to high school, that when a student’s academic, social, and emotional needs are addressed, they are more willing to be motivated to learn and to achieve success (Jones, 2006; Blum, 2005; Sulkowski, 2012). The

curriculum of the summer bridge program was embedded with an intense vision planning instructional strategies. I observed the students work independently and collectively in the classes as the teachers taught and facilitated the aspects of developing visions of high school and beyond. When asked, “What in the program has helped you?” Darrell stated, “It helped me to prepare to learn for things I have not learned yet with a vision.” Similarly, when asked the question, “Do you feel this program will help you prepare academically for the freshman year?” Tammy stated, “I know the vision planning and G.R.O.W. stuff will help me this year. It will help me for high school because I feel like if I use these, I will be good.” Iris said, “Yes this program helped me to really create a vision.” Zion expressed, “It helped me understand, like, what I need to do and what I need not to do with a vision.” I observed how the vision planning activity made the students begin the shift that was needed with the transition.

When the questions, “What do you think will be the greatest challenge as you transition to high school?” John stated, “I would say mostly the work, to get back to getting the work done with a plan.” From a different perspective, Zion stated about the use of vision planning, she stated, “It gave me like, stuff so I get to my senior year and stuff like that. It helped to consider things like the IB program, access to my classes and a bunch of stuff. It helped me know what I should be doing based on the path the teacher recommended. I thought I would not need this class in the program because I am independent and impatient. Just like we are learning through the G.R.O.W. model, I feel better about what we are doing and getting ready for high school.” She also stated, based on the question, “What do you feel so far would be the most significant strategy that will help you transition?”, “Focus on the schoolwork because when you don't, you can get off track.” I observed briefly the last vision planning activity, and it was based on being a successful graduate of the school. The teachers had the students generate a PowerPoint slide

using their own pictures supported by written expectations to project their vision of being a high school graduate and beyond.

### ***Plans After High School***

Success in the ninth grade is strongly correlated with graduation and dropout rates, and the overall positive experience that a student has (Nield, 2009; Silverthorn, DuBois & Crombie, 2005; Healy, T., 2014). The transition to high school and the four years of learning have traditionally served as the “springboard” to postsecondary opportunities for students such as attending an institution of higher education, entering the workforce, joining the armed services and/or becoming a self-employed entrepreneur. When asked the question, “What are your plans after high school?”, some of the students were not sure, but Dana stated, “I want to go to college for maybe two years or the full four years. I know I want to go to college to become an entrepreneur because I want to have my own clothing business. I feel like college will probably help me. When I was in middle school I would never, never see myself going to college but like when I saw my brother go this year and being in this program, I was like, yeah, college is probably for me.” It was apparent that a majority of the students viewed attending college as a high priority after high school.

Iris expressed boldly, in the presence of her father, “I am going to college and get my degree.” He told me that after the second day of the program, Iris told him that the vision activity helped her to begin to think seriously about college and her future. Likewise, Jasmine added additional information about scholarship. She stated, “I want to get a scholarship so I can go to college, like a four year four year college. I don't know what college I want to go to, but I plan to get a scholarship because when you are focused, you can do anything you want to do.” Some of the students knew exactly what they wanted to major in as they discussed plans after

high school in relation to college. Martin stated, “I am going to college because I have a dream of having a career as a computer engineer.” Similarly, Zion stated, “I plan to major in Psychology or Biology and consider going to Hampton University or Old Dominion University.”

John wants to make an immediate impact to the community after he graduates. He said, “I want to become a police officer. I want to help people and do what is right. I also want to show that all police officers are not bad.” Tammy expressed she was not sure she wanted to go to college. She stated, “I have no plans after high school. I don't know if I want to go to college or cosmetology school, I am not sure, but it is going to be one of them.” Timothy was the only student that stated a different answer. He expressed, “I plan to join the military. I want to go to the U.S. Army.” As I reflected on the interviews and re-read the results, it was clear with this sub theme the students demonstrated motivation to continue their education after high school.

### **Indicators of Growth**

The summer bridge program can provide many strategies and interventions to assist incoming freshmen and allow them to chart of course to obtain and implement opportunities, along with family support, to excel in the high school community and culture (Abbott & Templeton, 2013; Healy, T., 2014). Several of the students expressed how the summer bridge program assisted them to develop and grow with different aspects of the transition process. When asked, “What in this program has helped you?”, Darrell stated, “It has helped me to prepare for things I have not learned yet. One example is learning how to ask for help.” Similarly, when asked, “How do you think this program may help you academically as you go into ninth grade? Darrell expressed, “Help me focus, focus more and focus more.” Relatedly, when asked the question, “Do you think this program will help you connect with high school better?”, Darrell expressed, “Yes, it has helped me to prepare to connect better in high school.”

Iris stated, “Yes, I believe it has”. When asked the question, “Do you feel that the summer bridge program has helped you?” she expressed “I believe that I will be more engaged due to what I have been learning this summer.” As a testimony to the teachers, Jasmine gave credit to the teachers for helping to expand her thoughts about the transition and the path in high school. When she asked how her experience had been in the program, she expressed, “The teachers have made me think more about what’s happening right now and what I will probably do in high school.” Likewise, a portion of John expressed was, “I am just trying to get back into the groove of like, the mindset to grow. The program has helped me to be able to talk to teachers, new students and being around a new school. I am putting more time into getting more work done. I know I have to be more talkative and interactive and that will help me grow.”

Other students discussed how the program helped them to grow. For example, when the question, “How do you think this program will assist you as you prepare for academics?” Martin stated, “It will probably mostly prepare me for actually asking questions of students, peers and teachers.” Based on this response, it is evident that Martin had experienced the initial aspects of the program’s strategies and he felt this will allow him to grow with this transition. Similarly, Timothy stated with the same question, “I was nervous, I was nervous, but this program has made it alright. I understand all the things that I have learned will help with all this like the tour and the G.R.O.W. information. Zion expressed the potential about growth with her response to the same question, “I did not think I would learn much from a class in this program about success in high school, but this class has basically helped me to understand the importance of learning things and putting them into place to have a path to become a senior. I can be impatient, so this program has helped me to work with others and be a better listener. I don’t want to get overwhelmed, but my teacher has helped us to grow and try to figure out what we ought to be



doing.” Based on responses from other questions in relation to strategies and academic preparation, Zion also stated, “Folks at your school want you to focus on your schoolwork and I have learned to keep talking and asking questions. I don’t want to lose focus and get off track. I am understanding what I need to do and what I need not to do.’

### ***Helped Me See What’s Coming Next***

Offering summer bridge programs to rising 9th graders are initiatives that school districts and divisions can provide to support students as they transition from middle school to high school, beyond the aspect of remediation, but for student progress (Miao & Wheelock, 2005, p. 39; Williams, S., 2017). When asked the question, “What in this program has helped you?” Darrell stated, “It has helped me learn things that I haven’t yet.” This response implied that he is anticipating learning more to help him with experiences that he is yet to experience. Relatedly, John stated when asked about the questions that dealt with experiences, transition assistance and challenges, he stated, “Just being able to experience high school makes me feel like I’m going to be ready for when it actually does come. Being able to talk to the teachers and students and seeing what’s around the school where everything is so I am not lost on the first day and also being interactive with other students will keep me from being intimidated by them and all that.” Likewise, Zion stated, when asked the question about the assistance of the program’s strategies, stated she wanted to get focused on the upcoming schoolwork. She said, “Focus on the schoolwork, that is the main thing, if you don’t focus on that, you could get off track.” As presented, these students demonstrated that the program had given them a perspective and tools to address social and academic concerns.

### ***Helped Me to Get More Focused – Knowing What’s Coming Next***

Adbulmalik (2010) found that a successful transition to the ninth grade and a successful freshman year can be a determining factor in whether or not a student graduates from high school (Adbulmalik, 2010). The priority to focus on the needs of students as they prepared for the transition to high school was evident as the teachers and administrators implemented the strategies and interventions of the program. When asked the question, “How do you think this program may help you academically as you go into ninth grade?” Darrell stated, “Help me focus, more focus.” Similarly, Jasmine expressed, “Academic preparation.” Relatedly, when asked the question, “How has your experience been in the summer bridge program?”, a portion of John’s response was, “Getting back into the groove of like the mindset of school. Just being able to experience high school makes me feel like I’m going to be ready for when it actually does come.” He also stated when asked about challenges and what was coming next, “I would say mostly the work and trying to get back into getting the work done. Maybe, being interactive with other students and not trying to be intimidated by them and all that.” In relation to the strategies and support for next steps, both Martin and Zion used an academic lens. Martin stated, “I’ll be listening, studying and asking questions.” Zion expressed, “Focus on schoolwork, that is the main thing. Focus on your schoolwork.” The need to excel academically was definitely important as the teachers guided the students through the process of vision planning and the G.R.O.W. Summer Bridge Road Map instruction.

### ***Opportunities for Maturation***

The transition between middle school and high school can prompt lower levels of self-esteem, highlighting that a host of factors during this period can have a negative impact on students (Harter, 1990; Brown, E.S., 2010). The aspects of self-esteem focus with the incoming

students were critical as they experienced opportunities for maturation, academically and socially. As mentioned in the opening statement, the unknown factors of being in a new school can have a significant effect on students after the transition. Being a participant of a summer bridge program may negate these unknown factors and provide students with the confidence and skills to successfully transition to high school and experience a great first year. For example, and related to this sub theme, Darrell expressed the lens of academic maturation when he answered the question, “How do you think this program may help you academically as you get into ninth grade?”, “Help me focus, more focus. It also helped to learn more about how to prepare for my classes.” Along with the same question, Jasmine also expressed academic maturation by stating, “Academic preparation.” John stated, “It has helped me to be more interactive” as a portion of his response. Likewise, Tammy referenced the G.R.O.W. Summer Bridge Road Map by stating, “I know the G.R.O.W. Summer Bridge Road Map will help me for high school because I feel like if I use those, I will be good.”

In terms of social maturation, Iris stated that the program, “Has helped me to think more and be engaged in high school with my peers.” Based on John’s opinion, a portion of one of his responses was, “Being able to interact more with new students.” This is important because most high schools have multiple, feeder middle schools, so the ninth grade is a mixture of former, diverse middle school students who have to trust in the process of relation-building within the new environment. Timothy stated, “It helped me be more mature, I’m sure.” Timothy felt the G.R.O.W. Summer Bridge Road Map helped him academically, but also socially. He stated, “I was nervous, but experiencing the road map and the tour with others helped me to understand and connect.”

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the findings highlighted three primary themes, and a number of sub-themes that focused on student fears and anxieties, scaffolded support that helped students deal with their fears, and indicators of growth. The questions presented to the students in their interviews provided a wealth of qualitative data which allowed them to express the essence of what they were experiencing in the summer bridge program. The responses of the students not only provided feedback of their lived experiences of being in the program, but also gave reflective snapshots of how moving from middle school and then transitioning into high school was more than a process, but an event highlighted by great anticipation and expectations.

Being embedded in the summer bridge program as a researcher and volunteer allowed me to capture rich material via observations and participation. The unique perspective of being an active participant provided me with the opportunities of truly watching the students participate with the various strategies and interventions; how they interacted with their peers; how they responded to the instruction of the teachers and the presentations of other staff members; witness the level of engagement of addressing a former graduate and just displaying the pivot of maturity when presented with the purpose and urgency of the summer bridge program. Though the research was focused on the students, I was able to interact with the staff also and gain more information on the impact they were trying to establish to help the students with the transition process. It was also appreciative that the administrative staff “kept me in the loop” via many activities and gave me access to all the documents the teachers used from Google drive.

The implementation of the summer bridge program was truly, based upon my observation, a “labor of love” for the staff. The levels of professionalism and enthusiasm demonstrated by the staff set the tone for an extremely successful experience. The nurturing and

caring environment was not only beneficial to the students' well-being, but for the staff also. I was received warmly and was never denied any requests as I conducted my research. In relation to the research, the information that I will present in Chapter 5 will offer an overall summary of the findings as well as discussion of their implications for practice and future research.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **Implications**

#### **Summary of Findings**

##### **How Does the Model Answer the Research Questions?**

The thematic model explored above offers a comprehensive picture of the lived experience of ninth graders who participated in the summer bridge program and how they made sense of their experience in this early part of their transition to high school. Take together the lived experiences and sensemaking of the students in relation to the exposure of the summer bridge program were the collective findings to address the research questions. This was done by interviewing 9 students, collecting observation field notes, being embedded in the program as a researcher/volunteer and having access to all the documents the staff used. Two research questions guided this study.

Research Question 1: What were the lived experiences of ninth graders who participated in the summer bridge program?

Research Question 2: What influences did those experiences have on their sensemaking of their transition to high school? How did the students make sense of, and give meaning to their experience in the transition program?

A review of the literature was done to provide a thorough understanding of summer bridge transition programs and the relationship they have with students transitioning from middle school to high school. The findings from the study will be discussed in this chapter, as well as future research and some closing remarks.

### **Limitations of the Study**

A limitation of this study was that only one school of the school division was identified to evaluate the Summer Bridge Program. Examining the Summer Bridge programs of the high schools in the division to compare results might reveal other factors that would be relevant to the lived experiences of the students as they were going through the initial stages of transitioning to high school. Another limitation was that this study was only done in an urban setting. Conducting additional studies in suburban and rural areas in different parts of the country may again reveal comparative information due to the differences in the culture of the respective areas. A final limitation was potentially interviewing more students. Using more qualitative information may have presented more sub themes and/or reinforced the current feedback of the present sub themes.

Chapter IV discussed the findings of the interviews of the students. The findings fall under the following categories: **Student Fears and Anxieties, Scaffolded Support that helped Students Deal with their Fears, and Indicators of Growth.** As these categories and sub themes emerged through the interviews, observations, and related activities, it was evident that the constructs of an Epistemic Culture were providing a unique “tapestry” within the transition process of the program. Webster Dictionary defines “Epistemic” as “of or relating to knowledge or knowing” and “Culture” (multiple definitions-as it relates to this study), “the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization.” Woven together, the knowledge of the lived experiences of the students in the summer bridge program was influenced by the set of shared attitudes, values, goals and practices of the school’s efforts to provide a substantial and significant process for them to embrace, endure and emerge from an

event that would strengthen their movement into a new environment of learning and social hierarchy.

### **Student Fears and Anxieties**

The findings of the first category, student fears and anxieties, presented knowledge that addressed the following sub themes of getting lost, keeping up academically, knowing other students, social anxiety (fitting in), middle school performance, transition comparisons, personal background and parental input. The transition to high school can introduce students to a whole new experience, including new peers, rules, and routines (Day et al., 2014; Haggerty, V.R., 2020). The transition to high school is a major event for many students and this movement can be complicated with fear and anxiety.

#### ***Getting Lost***

The finding of getting lost emerged from the students' fears and anxieties due to anticipation of being immersed into a new environment. This concern primarily was expressed when the students were asked the question, "What do you think will be the greatest challenge as you transition to high school?" The students identified that this challenge would present a level of self-doubt unless they were able to experience a strategy to navigate the school. When asked about helpful strategies of the Summer Bridge Program, three strategies-the tour of the school, the movement to different locations and the self-led scavenger hunt were experiences that the students said would give help them in the hallways and not get intimidated, but also decrease the level of fear and anxiety. These experiences can help students develop a greater sense of belonging and familiarity with the new school (DeLamar & Brown, 2016; Haggerty, V.R., 2020). These experiences addressed the first research question, "*What were the lived experiences of ninth graders who participated in the summer bridge program?*"



### ***Keeping up Academically***

The finding of this subtheme was a concern of students due to the increased rigor and accountability that are intrinsic qualities of high school. For some students, this was also addressed with the challenge question. Likewise, when asked the question, “Did this program prepare you academically better for your freshman year in high school?”, the students expressed their experiences with Vision Planning and the G.R.O.W. Summer Bridge Road Map would assist them to address their academics better. The duration of a summer bridge program can vary, but some of the most recommended items should be based on the expectation of providing potential situations and scenarios that may occur and how the students should respond to them. (DeLamar & Brown, 2016; Haggerty, V.R., 2020). Due to the exposure to the Vision Planning and G.R.O.W. Summer Bridge Road Map, the sense of implementing those strategies addressed the second part of the second research question, *“How did the students make sense of, and give meaning to their experience in the transition program?”*

### ***Knowing Other Students***

The finding of this subtheme was another area of concern of the students. Isolation is a concern that may be a fear of students when they are seeking a sense of belonging in a new environment among their peers, as research has proven. (Hurd, Hussain, & Bradshaw, 2017; Haggerty, V.R., 2020). One of the unique characteristics of a typical freshman class is that it is composed of students from multiple, feeder middle schools. Ninth graders must address a dual social process-bonding within their group and establishing relationships with upperclassmen. When presented with the question, “Do you think this program will help you connect with high school better?”, the students stated their experiences allowed them to understand the importance of connecting with their peers more than they did in middle school and communicating more.

This subtheme was also evident when some of the students addressed the challenge question. Here it can be said the Epistemic Culture of these experiences are connected to the first part of the second research question, “*What influences did those experiences have on their sensemaking of their transition to high school?*”

### ***Social Anxiety (Fitting In)***

Langenkamp (2010) states that one of side effects of the transition to high school for students is the social support that was established in middle school is lost and they have to re-establish that support system with new teachers and peers (Aguada-Halberg, L., 2015). The finding of this sub theme is related to the previous section. “Fitting In” is a huge deal to the incoming freshmen because of the challenge of re-establishing social networks and also being socially accepted. Some of the benefits of attending a summer bridge program are providing incoming students to meet their teachers in future classes and new classmates from other middle schools that will comprise the new ninth grade class and address social and emotional topics. (DeLamar & Brown, 2016; Haggerty, V.R., 2020). The findings of this sub theme demonstrated the experiences of the strategies and interventions of the program provided a venue for the students to gain knowledge to assist them from the Epistemic Culture lens to have an advantage of “fitting in” better as the school year began. A significant testament to this sub theme was when one of the students mentioned that she “would be okay” due to her experiences of the program which connects to the first research question, “*What were the lived experiences of ninth graders who participated in the summer bridge program?*”

### ***Middle School Performance***

The findings of this sub theme were based on the interview question, “How were your academics, attendance and discipline in middle school?” This sub theme connected to the

sections of the literature review that focused on the constructs that are crucial to the transition process for incoming freshman students in relation to the three, previously mentioned areas. Due to the global COVID-19 Pandemic, the students survived the interruptions of the structured learning environment but stated how the virtual learning had an impact on their grades and attendance. The Pandemic also disrupted their connectivity to school and their social networks. The students expressed how it was harder to reconnect to middle school in eighth grade and then prepare for the transition to high school. This was significant because of the influence of middle school to high school. Rutherford (2018) states the middle school and high school connection is important because the influence of middle school can be reflected in a student's high school journey to graduation and beyond (Haggerty, V.R., 2020). This sub theme connected to the second half of the second research question, *"How did the students make sense of, and give meaning to their experience in the transition program?"* Because of the events of the last two years, the students stated that being able to start in a new environment without the extreme COVID protocols was a major relief and may allow them to have a greater desire and motivation to learn in the new school.

### ***Transition Comparisons***

The findings of this sub theme were clearly evident that the students felt that the transition from middle school to high school was the most significant transition between the grade levels they ever experienced. The question, "How do you compare your transition to high school versus your other transitions, like elementary to middle school?", several of the students expressed that the anticipation, stress and anxiety were more prevalent with this transition. The students did express the strategies and activities of the program were helpful to handle the previously mentioned items. Numerous researchers have stated when students are experiencing

the transition to high school in a summer program, various supportive strategies and interventions must address their needs as necessary, being a strong program (Shumow & Schmidt, 2014; Haggerty, V.R., 2020). Again, the Vision Planning and G.R.O.W. Summer Bridge Road Map were highlighted by the students by providing support during the initial transition. This sub theme addressed the first research question, “*What were the lived experiences of ninth graders who participated in the summer bridge program?*”.

### ***Personal Background***

The findings of this sub theme allowed the students to present knowledge about their backgrounds. The students came from the three, feeder middle schools and had experienced similar situations. Most of them were involved with activities in middle school and wanted to continue with the same and/or similar, organized activities. The recognition of addressing college after high school. The team-building activities were helpful because some of the students stated that they were also popular in middle school. Based upon the collective background of the students, this sub theme connected to the first research question, “*What were the lived experiences of ninth graders who participated in the summer bridge program?*”

### ***Parental Input***

The findings of this sub theme were positive of the parents’ input based upon the feedback of the students when asked the question, “What do your parents or parent of the program? The parental component of education is more than most parents give credit. I have always believed that the “first teachers” are parents, so it is critical to value their input as well. Curry and Holter (2019) recommended that school administrators and staff should understand the importance of providing parents more opportunities of collaboration and partnerships since these actions have a direct impact on the academic development of students (Haggerty, V.R., 2020).

An example of developing effective partnerships was when the administrators conducted a Parent Meeting on the third day of the program. Based on my observations, the parents were engaged and appreciative of their children experiencing the strategies and interventions of the program before the school year began. Some of the parents expressed how they could see the initial shifts of their children's thinking about the transition to high school based on feedback from their conversations about the Summer Bridge Program. Based on this information, this sub theme could connect to both research questions.

### **Scaffolded Support that Helped Students Deal with their Fears**

The findings of the second category, scaffolded support that helped students deal with their fears, presented knowledge that dealt with the sub themes of confidence built from engagement with teachers, interacting with Student Ambassadors, making new friends, and getting to know people before the first day, team building, tour of the building and moving between classes, visioning (projecting themselves into the future) and plans after high school. A robust and well-developed transition program can successfully prepare students for high school (DeLamar & Brown, 2016; Haggerty, V.R, 2020). In order to provide the best experiences for incoming freshmen students, many high schools make it a priority to properly plan for the needs, expectations and, of course, the learning process of them (M. A. Somers & Garcia, 2016). The collective work of a summer bridge program should serve as a support mechanism to provide a framework of addressing the fears that are naturally present when the students make the transition to high school.

### ***Confidence Built from Engagement with Teachers***

The findings of this sub theme were extremely important for the students as they experienced the instructional program of the teachers during the program. When students

interact with teachers who establish caring and supportive environments, they tend to perceive the genuine essence of them and are more motivated to meet the teachers' expectations.

(Balagna, Young, & Smith, 2013; Aguada-Halberg, L., 2015). Due to this relationship, support and trust, students are more engaged with the learning process and demonstrate higher academic performance support (Allensworth & Easton, 2012; Aguada-Halberg, L., 2015). Student behavior is influenced by teacher behavior (Myers, Simonsen, & Sugai, 2011; Aguada-Halberg, L., 2015). For example, the question, "What has helped you to prepare for the transition to high school?" Multiple students mentioned how the teachers and administrators treated them well and they felt that the staff really cared about their welfare and related items as they began the transition to high school. This level of student engagement was observed as watched the interactions of the students with the staff in the classrooms; movement as a group in the halls and the spirit of confidence as they addressed the Vision Planning and G.R.O.W. Summer Bridge Road Map activities. Based on the findings of this sub theme, it is evident that the lived experiences the staff provided the students addressed the first research question, "*What were the lived experiences of ninth graders who participated in the summer bridge program?*".

### ***Interacting with the Student Ambassadors***

In the findings of this sub theme, the question about the presence of the student ambassadors produced responses that demonstrated the importance of including upperclassmen in the program. Several of the student ambassadors told me that they had to interview for the Summer Bridge program and were former students themselves of previous programs. Vera et al. (2016) found that "school belonging is defined as students' perceptions that others in the school are on their side and that they matter in the school 42 community" (p. 162). The student ambassadors were critical to the relationship building and success of the program. The incoming

students raised their levels of engagement with the program when the upperclassmen gave them attention and support with the different strategies and interventions of the program. For example, when the freshmen students conducted the first tour of the school, the upperclassmen led them throughout the school. As they conducted the tours, they told the students stories and gave advice that they learned from their lived experiences. I believe the student ambassadors also gained a sense of purpose as they invested into the freshmen. Based on the findings of this sub theme, both research questions were addressed. Finally, all the students interviewed were very appreciative of the upperclassmen.

### ***Making New Friends and Getting to Know People before the First Day of School***

In the findings of this sub theme, social acceptance was a major component of the freshman students as they participated in the program and prepared for the opening of school. As discussed previously, relationship building is a major value that students undertake and implement in the learning process (Yazzi-Mintz, 2007; Smith, K., 2012). This sub theme speaks to the Epistemic Culture lens of how knowledge obtained and implied can be used to address and adapt to the sets of norms, beliefs, attitudes, and related items of high school. The freshmen students knew that they had to adapt to the academic and social constructs of this new journey. Multiple interview questions addressed this sub theme, but the question highlighted the most connection was, “What do you think has the biggest challenge as you transition into high school?” A majority of the students stated making new friends, being able to talk to them and establishing new relationships were the biggest challenges. Likewise, the question, “What strategies do you plan to use in this program?” Some students stated how they plan to use some of the strategies of the program to get to know people since this was an issue in middle school and really try harder to make new friends, especially before the opening of the new school year.

Based upon the findings of this sub theme, the experiences addressed the first research question, *“What were the lived experiences of ninth graders who participated in the summer bridge program?”*

### ***Team Building***

In the findings of this sub theme, it was evident that a high level of student engagement was present as the freshmen students participated in the program. Transition success can be impacted by the students’ needs for relevance and connection to the larger school context (Hagenauer & Hascher, 2010). Moreover, the needs for relevance and relatedness can have an impact on students’ academic success (Hagenauer & Hascher, 2010; Wickert, J., 2015). The constructs of relevance and relatedness were crucial as the students trusted the teachers to establish an environment that allowed them to interact with each other and build a sense of working together. The Vision Planning and G.R.O.W. Summer Bridge Road Map were embedded with various activities focused on team building. I observed how some students took charge, while others just wanted to “go with the flow” and just get through the activities. It was satisfying to see in just four days how the students bonded and worked together. As an indicator of the influence of the team building activities, the students were asked, “Do you plan to participate in clubs and activities of the school. Every student responded that they would try out for an athletic team and/or would be involved in a school club. Based upon the findings of this sub theme, the first research question, *“What were the lived experiences of ninth graders who participated in the summer bridge program?”*.

### ***Tour of the Building and Moving Between Classes***

In the findings of this sub theme, the students really expressed a huge sense of joy and accomplishment after learning the physical structure and the “flow” of the school. Most of the



students when asked, “What strategy has helped the most to transition into ninth grade?” The responses focused on the tours of the school. This lived experience was huge because it allowed the students to decrease the stress and anxiety of learning the new environment of the high school. Relatedly, as Hazel et al. (2014) indicated, “although students entered high school better or less well prepared to succeed, how well the environment met their needs greatly predicted their ninth-grade success” (p. 417). Likewise, as the students moved to the different sections of the school for different activities, I observed that within the four days, they traveled more casually. On the first day, it was obvious they were dealing with anxiety as they moved throughout the school, but on the last day, they seemed to be settled and confident. Based upon the findings of this sub theme, both research questions were addressed.

### ***Visioning (Projecting Themselves into the Future)***

In the findings of this sub theme, the focus of the Vision Planning activities of the four days was a tremendous and powerful strategy to assist the students to begin the “mental shift” to high school. I observed the students working hard individually and in groups to make sense of the forward thinking needed for them to think about short-term and long-term goals of high school and beyond. The combination of the students working with the Vision Planning and G.R.O.W. Summer Bridge Road Map allowed them to reflect on their past experiences and use them as a foundation to strive for more accountability and responsibility. When asked about strategies and activities that helped with the transition process, these two initiatives were discussed as “game changers” by the students. One of the activities observed was that the students had to create their own personal slide that listed the traits of a successful graduate of the school. Each student was required to put his or her picture in the space vacant to display a face. This visual activity was extremely engaging to the students. Based on the findings of this sub

theme, both research questions were addressed, especially making sense of why creating a vision is essential in the transition process.

### ***Plans After High School***

In the findings of this sub theme, the students were able to demonstrate the connectivity of the previous sub theme of Visioning to their plans after high school. When asked the question, “What are your plans after high school?” all the students expressed their respective plans. Most of them plan to go to college; enlist into the military and/or become self-employed. Some of the students referenced the experiences of how the Vision Planning and G.R.O.W. Summer Bridge Road Map gave them motivation to start focusing on plans after high school. All of the students expressed that they did not want to wait until their senior year and create a plan. They wanted to be ahead of the game, especially after getting advice from their teachers and the student ambassadors. Based upon the findings of this sub theme, both research questions were addressed due to the strategies implemented and providing sensemaking of why it was important to focus on a plan after high school.

### **Indicators of Growth**

The findings of the third and last category, indicators of growth presented knowledge of the sub themes of helped me what’s coming next, helped me to get more focused knowing what’s coming next and opportunities for maturation. Successful student-centered, goal-oriented transition programs provide students with experiences for them to strengthen academic attainment; avoid discipline issues and augment self-confidence and self-esteem. (Butrymowicz & Shaw, 2010; William, S., 2017). The exposure of a summer bridge transition program could serve as the “tipping point” in the right direction for incoming freshmen.

### ***Helped Me What's Coming Next***

In the findings of this sub theme, the students primarily addressed what was coming next as they began the transition into high school. When the question was asked, “How has the program helped you?” Many of the students said due to the transition, the program helped them to have a plan to address the upcoming academic rigor; the social pressures of being in a new environment and other related items that are inherent to the high school setting. The implementation of the Vision Planning and the G.R.O.W. Summer Bridge Road Map was the driving force of providing the students experiences to be equipped with the transition and beyond. For example, in relation to academic rigor, several of the students said because of what they experienced in the program, they will ask questions in class, pursue assistance when needed and stay on top of their assignments. Additionally, many of them felt the support of their new friends, teachers and the student ambassadors would help them to face any challenges in ninth grade. Based upon the findings of this sub theme, the second half of the second research question, “*How did the students make sense of, and give meaning to their experience in the transition program?*” was addressed.

### ***Helped Me to Get More Focused – Knowing What Coming Next***

In the findings of this sub theme, the concept of getting more focused to address what was coming next was a key concern of the students as they went through the four days of the program. As highlighted by Benner and Graham (2009) this transition “occurs at a time in adolescents’ lives when they are still exploring their identity and determining who they are and who they hope to become” (p. 300). When asked the question, “How do you think this program may help you academically as you go into ninth grade?” The findings were that the students wanted to be more focused on academic preparation; being successful at the start of the school

year and just simply, being more in-tuned with their teachers and classes than they were in high school. Again, the implementation of the Vision Planning and the G.R.O.W. Summer Bridge Road Map was pivotal to the students transitioning as effectively and successfully as possible. Based on the findings of this sub theme, the sensemaking of the second research question, “*How did the students make sense of, and give meaning to their experience in the transition program?*” was addressed.

### ***Opportunities for Maturation***

In the findings of this sub theme, the students once again focused on the areas of academic and social maturation. When asked the question, “How will this program prepare you for ninth grade?” the students discussed such items as being more focused than they had been in middle school; making it a main priority to be more focus on preparing for the opening of school than they had in the past; making it a major effort to build relationships with fellow freshmen and upperclassmen and focusing of being involved with different clubs and activities of the school. Denham and Brown (2010) found that resources of dealing with emotions with students makes a difference because students who are able to focus on positive emotions stay engaged in the classrooms versus students who do not have the support of addressing negative emotions (Aguada-Halberg, L., 2015). Again, due to the implementation and presence of the Vision Planning and G.R.O.W. Summer Bridge Road Map, I observed and noticed in the interviews, that these initiatives were major influences on the maturation of the students. Based on findings of this sub theme, both research questions were addressed.

### **Implications**

The findings of this study have implications for the implementation of a summer bridge program and how the strategies and interventions provide opportunities for incoming freshmen to

have a successful transition via the lived experiences and sensemaking of them to thrive in ninth grade and beyond. The research explored how the lived experiences and sensemaking of them addressed the three main themes- **Student Fears and Anxieties, Scaffolded Support that helped Students Deal with their Fears, and Indicators of Growth** that were formulated from the qualitative data of the student interviews. Additionally, the unique positioning of myself being embedded in the program allowed the opportunities for obtaining observations to add another layer and support to the information of the interview and depth to the study. Due to the research conducted and the emergence of the themes, I will provide implications for recommendations for future versions of this summer bridge program.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

Being embedded in the Anywhere High School Summer Bridge Program allowed me to gain a unique perspective as a researcher and volunteer. It also was an advantage in my background that I served as a teacher and administrator which gave me the experiences to understand how school improvement strategies are crucial to the evaluation of programs. When the students were asked the question, “Do you have any recommendations for the Summer Bridge Program?” the students overwhelmingly stated that they liked the program the way it was designed and implemented. The following recommendations were provided from the students’ responses to the previously mentioned question and feedback based on my observations while addressing the presence and influence of an Epistemic Culture within the program.

#### ***Student Fears and Anxieties***

- In order to give the summer bridge program and the students, pre-emptive support, it would be helpful if the feeder middle schools could bring over selected

8th graders over to the high school to take a tour of the high school and have a brief assembly about high school.

- In order to address academic support in the program, extend the sessions by two hours and allow the student ambassadors to tutor the students. An alternative to this would be to have a two-week program whereas, the first week would be focused on tutoring and the second week on the current strategies. The first week may also contain a “mini-camp” in which both middle and high school students work with the students.
- Create a cohort of the students that attended the program and have scheduled activities for them each semester and have them meet once a month after school to receive additional information from designated staff members. The student ambassadors would also be involved with this.
- Conduct additional Parent Meetings of the cohort of students after school.
- In order to delve more into cultural and racial data, it would be recommended to conduct surveys to address the needs of the students and parents with a pre-transition reference and after the completion of the first quarter of ninth grade.
- Advertise more about the Summer Bridge Program to gain more students.

***Scaffolded Support that helped Students Deal with their Fears***

- During the last 20 minutes before dismissal, allow the student ambassadors to conduct small group sessions with the students. There could be two sessions of 10 minutes each.

- Schedule a “Tour Week” in which the parents and 8th students could come and tour the school in the evenings. This could possibly be handled by the Parent Teacher Association groups of both schools and the student ambassadors.
- Have a Summer Career Fair during the program.

### ***Indicators of Growth***

- Have the students to research careers in the summer program
- Conduct an assembly with all the school counselors to create an academic road map for the incoming students.

### **Implications for Research**

The findings from this study show there are areas where further research would be beneficial. First, it would be beneficial to conduct the evaluation of other summer bridge programs in the same state. They would be separated by urban, rural and suburban areas. Likewise, the study could be replicated in other states using the same categories. Second, if the cohort model is implemented, the students could be tracked and data could be collected of their progress such as grades, test scores, attendance and discipline. Third, compare the data of the cohort vs. a sample group non-cohort/non-summer bridge students to create a comparison of grades, test scores, attendance, discipline and potentially surveys that deal with social constructs of their ninth-grade year. Lastly, it would be advised to conduct pre and post transition surveys of the students and parents to add another layer of data to determine additional information. This information will also address cultural and racial constructs that may be present in the transition process and could provide additional indicators in the areas such as dropout prevention and post-secondary intentions.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

The essence of the role of the summer bridge programs, when used effectively, can be a vehicle for incoming students to start their journey where they have not gone-high school. As the needs of students change from middle school to high school, there will also be a need for school divisions to conduct programs, such as summer bridge programs. These programs can provide support for academic assistance, social connectivity, vision planning, inter-school collaboration between the middle school and high schools. Also, summer bridge programs can be used to give parents a “snapshot” of what is about to come and support them with gather information for the journey and eventually graduation. Summer bridge programs could be implemented up to three times during a summer to accommodate more rising freshmen and to welcome these new students with the mindset to achieve the best and experience the best of what high school has to offer.



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## **Appendix A:**

### **Summer Bridge Student Participant Protocol**

- 1) Tell me about yourself.
- 2) Tell me about your experience in middle school, particularly in terms of preparation for transitioning to high school?
  - a) What do you think your biggest needs are as you prepare to enter high school?
  - b) What are your biggest fears or concerns as you prepare to enter high school?  
What do you believe will be the greatest challenge with the transition to high school?
    - i) What strategies and/or strategies did you apply from the summer bridge program?
  - c) Describe the summer bridge transition program.
    - i) How long was the program? (days, weeks or months)
    - ii) What time did the program start and end each day?
    - iii) Did the program have a closing ceremony?
    - iv) Did the program involve significant parent participation?
    - v) Is there a follow-up component of the program now in your freshman year?
  - d) How were the teachers and administrators of the program?
    - i) Do they continue to serve as mentors/advisors currently this year?
- 3) How has the program assisted you with your academic preparation for ninth grade?
  - a) How has the program assisted you with the social and cultural connectivity to high school?

- i) What are your comparisons about your transition to high school versus your transition to middle school?
  - ii) How have upperclassmen from the program assisted you in ninth grade?
  - iii) Do you plan to join any of the school's clubs, activities and/or athletics?
- 4) What recommendations do you have for the staff of the program to improve the assistance of helping students as they make the transition to high school?

## CURRICULUM VITAE

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