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High School Transfer Student Transitions and Changes: Risk, Success, Failure, and the Vital Role of the Counseling Curriculum

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

HIGH SCHOOL TRANSFER STUDENT TRANSITIONS AND CHANGES:
RISK, SUCCESS, FAILURE, AND THE VITAL ROLE OF
THE COUNSELING CURRICULUM

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
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PROGRAM IN CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

BY
BENJAMIN M. GRAIS
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
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William Butler Yeats said, “Education is not filling a pail but the lighting of a fire.” I don’t know exactly when that fire appeared for me but realize my teachers at high
school, at the University of Wisconsin in Madison and at Loyola University held the matches. To all of them I say thank you! Finally, a special thanks to Joanne Cunningham for her incredible patience while helping me to achieve to the best of my ability.

One doesn’t realize how difficult it is to work on a dissertation with the Blackhawk’s on a run to the Stanley Cup.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my amazing family, specifically my wife, kids, parents, sisters, grandfather, mother and father-in-law, and brother-in-law. Without your unconditional love, never-ending support and constant encouragement, this dream would not have become a reality. Charna, Shayna, Gabriel, and Mischka you are my inspiration and I love you.

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ABSTRACT

Transfer students move schools for reasons other than promotion. They typically change residence and can change country, cultures and/or languages of instruction. These students have twice the risk of failure or not graduating and total 15-18% of the United States high school population. Effective means of improving success rates are needed. Achieving this goal requires first understanding the problem(s). Perhaps transfer students themselves can help us in our search. What can we learn from talking with transfer students?

For this mixed method study, the investigator interviewed ten diverse but carefully selected transfer students. The data revealed that transfer students describe intense emotions related to mobility. The significance of this study is that it confirms the literature that each transfer student is unique but adds the need for a robust and diverse support system already in place. This study also highlights the need for the student to be involved in the decision to move, emphasizes that social, emotional and academic problems all create challenges and require balanced solutions, and emphasizes that the diversity of the students corresponds to the need for equally diverse supports with the role of the high school counselor vital and in concert with a school that supports a transfer curriculum.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Overview

Within every high school, there is a large group of particular students at especially high risk of academic and social failure. Yet these exceptional students are often overlooked by the school, despite this increased risk. Who are these students? They are usually those who have transferred from one high school to another. De la Torre and Gwynne (2009) note “…schools typically have few established practices in place to assist mobile students in the transition into their new school” (p. 1). The purpose of this study is to advance the understanding of this group, explain their uniqueness, and identify effective strategies that the recipient school could use to reduce the students’ risk of failure. Central to this report will be an in-depth description of how transfer students experience the transition from their prior school to a suburban high school outside Chicago.

Introduction

High school transfer students are those who move from one school to another for reasons other than promotion (Rumberger et al, 1999). These reasons for transfer are often adverse, and students who fall in this category represent approximately 15-18% of students in any particular high school (Titus, 2007). Research shows that these mobile or transfer students are at a higher risks of failure and not graduating, compared with non-
mobile students (Titus, 2007). This is not surprising since many of these students not only change high schools but also change school districts, counties, states, countries and even languages of instruction (Davis & Bauman, 2008).

There is no single uniformly agreed to definition of the transfer student, sometimes called the mobile student. For a precise definition, one needs to consider more than the fact that the student moved from one school to another, as there are usually other critical variables involved. For example, did the student change residence along with the school? Did the student also change cities, states, or countries? What other socioeconomic, familial, or academic changes occurred? Perhaps we will find that the student is key to the success or failure of the transfer process rather than the act of transferring itself.

Strand (2002) defines pupil mobility as follows: “Pupil mobility refers to movement between or changes of school, either once or on repeated occasions, at times other than the normal age at which children start or finish their education at a school” (p. 63). Note that Strand makes no explicit distinction between transfer for promotion or not, although he alludes to the latter. Rumberger’s (2002) definition of mobility varies from Stand (2002): “…students moving from one school to another for reasons other than being promoted to the next school level…” (p. 1). Black (2006) uses the Rumberger definition as also stated by Charles Walls in a report for the ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education: “Students are considered mobile if they move from one school to another for reasons other than promotion to a higher grade…” (p. 47). No distinction is
made between mobile students who also move residences or make other significant changes.

In their longitudinal study of over 24,000 eighth graders from 1988 to 1992, using the National Education Longitudinal Study data, Pribesh and Downey (1999) concluded that all three kinds of moves (school-only, residential-only, or combined school and residential) showed a decline in the student’s social capital, which in turn led to lower math and reading test scores, as well as educational expectations. In addition, these authors found that combined school and residential moves had a greater negative impact than either alone. Rumberger and Larson (1998) state that 70% of students who are mobile change residence as well.

Because of the large proportion of mobile students who also change residence, some researchers believed that the definition of student mobility should include a distinction between students who only move schools, students who only change residence, and those who change both. To meet this need, Swanson and Schneider (1999) “…developed a new definition of student mobility that treats residential mobility and educational mobility as independent events.” Thus, they “…defined educational mobility as a nonroutine change of schools that is not a result of normal grade promotion within a school system, such as a move from a public middle school to the residentially assigned public high school” (p. 55). For purposes of this study, student mobility is defined as a student moving from one school to another for reasons other than promotion to a higher grade and is of three types: 1) school mobility alone, 2) residential mobility alone, and 3) combined school and residential mobility.
Research Questions

A thorough examination of students’ transfer experiences as perceived by them should help staff, teachers, and counselors characterize features that predict success or failure. The primary research questions that will guide this investigation follow:

- What perceptions do transfer students have about their transition to a new school?
- What do transfer students perceive as reasons for their mobility?
- Did the reasons for mobility have a favorable or unfavorable impact on their academic and social experiences?

The secondary research questions are:

- What were the school resources that specifically helped or hindered success?
- Do students from differing backgrounds (geographic, cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic, family or divergent prior school settings) have resultant academic and social needs that require variant approaches to support?

It is the hope that the answers to these research questions will help educators find better solutions to the transfer students’ often complex problems.

Transfer Data

School’s student transfer rates and causes must be viewed as part of the larger picture of population mobility in the United States since the cause of school transfer is often strategic or compelled family moves. In May 2001 the U.S. Department of Commerce Economics and Statistics Administration U.S. Census Bureau published geographical mobility data based on the most recent national census from 2000:
Between March 1999 and March 2000, 43.4 million Americans moved. Over half (56%) of these moves were local (within the same county), 20% were between counties in the same state, and 19% were moves to a different state. Only 4% of movers came from abroad. (p. 1)

Susan Black (2006), an educational research investigator for the American School Board Journal, has written a description of real life problems associated with student mobility. While Black states that student mobility is the exception in United States high schools, this is not true at all levels: national, state or local. Long (1992) found that the United States had the second highest annual national school age residential mobility statistics at 17.6% with only New Zealand higher at 19.4%. Fifteen years later, Titus (2007) echoed these finding and stated,

Mobility has become a way of life in American society. At 20% the United States has one of the highest national mobility rates in the world. As a result student mobility is widespread. It is increasingly less common for children to attend school from kindergarten through high school in the same district or even the same state. Most students make at least one nonpromotional school change while in basic education. About 15 to 18% of schoolage children change residences each year. (p. 82)

This last percentage compares favorably with United States National statistics: The 2004 Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the U.S. Census, based on a study conducted in 1994 by the U.S. General Accounting Office, found that 15 to 20% of school-aged children changed residence during the previous year. Data from this
supplement show that for school aged children 5-19 years old, 13.8% moved during the 2006-2007 school year. In a separate analysis of high school adolescent students aged 15-19, 13.2% moved.

Black’s assertion is also not supported in the state of Illinois. In the 2006-2007 school year, the mobility rate for all school aged children in Illinois was 14.9% (U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey, 2007). At the Chicago suburban high school of this study, unpublished school data show that 20.7% of the entire student body derives from transfer students. Thus, in the school for this study, student mobility is pervasive and higher than the national and Illinois state averages.

One cannot underestimate the ubiquitous national strategic nature of the problem of student mobility. The U.S. Census Bureau’s data for 2009-2010 reports that 56 million is “[t]he projected number of students to be enrolled in the nation’s elementary through high schools (grades K-12) this fall.” An extrapolation from the statistics stated above regarding numbers of transfer students indicates that approximately 15-18% of enrolled students will be transfer students (Titus, 2007). The absolute number of mobile students calculates to be approximately 8-10 million nationally in the 2009-2010 academic year.

Thus, whether one looks at U.S. residential mobility or student mobility nationally, by state, by age, or by academic level including high school, there is statistical consistency demonstrating a highly mobile population leading to many transfer students. The logistical and social consequences are profound for the both the transfer student and the recipient school and will be discussed below.
Transfer Student Academics

Mobile students are often challenged. While student mobility may occur for favorable reasons or goals, the reasons for transferring are more likely to be adverse, including divorce, school safety, neighborhood lawlessness, financial problems, academic concerns, natural disasters, loss of parental employment, and/or other emergencies. These mobile students have significantly lower achievement test scores, higher failure rates, and decreased matriculation from high school (Titus, 2007, p. 88). Rumberger et al. (1999) state: “Not only is student mobility widespread, it can also be detrimental to educational achievement at both the elementary and secondary levels” (p. 22). Often these students leave long established social ties behind and find themselves in a virtual foreign land of relationships, expectations, academics, school rules and procedures. Indeed, the ninth grade curriculum in one school often differs from that elsewhere, a circumstance called “curricular incoherence” by Rumberger et al. (p. 10).

Why are these students so troubled, needful of support, and characterized by risk of academic and social failure? It is imperative not to assume homogeneity of this group. The students and their reasons for transfer are unique, often complicated, and require an individualized approach so that each student’s particular or categorical needs are met. While some generalizations apply to all mobile students and the applicable usual school supports, each student should be evaluated as his own person with his own unique concerns, feelings, needs, stories and reasons for transfer. The better the schools characterize these particulars, the more likely the student will be provided with the appropriate supports to optimally meet his needs.
Behavioral and Social Impact

Rumberger et al. (1999) also mention that mobile students often report “...lower self-esteem and less self-directed control of their lives” (p. 10). Thus, the changes are no less than cosmic and high school educators, who interact daily with such students, need to be concerned with what the school can offer to help and support these often troubled and needy transfer students. Linda Blakeman (1993), of the University of Southern Maine, in a published guide for counselors and practitioners stresses, “School counselors also need to be aware of the feelings of loss and grief for friends who are left behind” (p. 6). However, Blakeman does believe that “…schools can influence many aspects of an adolescent’s school experience, including achievement and adjustment for those students who are negatively affected by moving” (p. 16).

Blakeman (1993) notes “moving is a stressful event which can cause problems depending on how it is handled” (p. 8). To the transferring student and his/her family the change from one school to another may seem like the solution to a problem, but such a change typically engenders a whole spectrum of new issues. These issues may have a positive or negative impact, depending on what the student brings to the new school and what the new school brings to the student. While Blakeman offers no specific examples of either positive or negative ways of handling transfer stress besides consulting the counselor, Titus (2007) notes,

How mobile students are accommodated by a school will greatly affect how they succeed in that school. Usually student success is measured in
terms of academic achievement, but social and emotional well-being are also important concerns. (p. 93)

Such a transition may be viewed by the student with great anxiety, frank fear, a sense of loss or grief, or perhaps relief, depending on who initiates the idea of change and why (Strother & Harvill, 1986). Blakeman (1993) lists a number of pre-existing influences on student success or failure, including gender (girls tolerate change better), size for age, physical disabilities, relative age to peers, cultural disparities, prior academic difficulties, any special needs, and self-concept (p. 10).

**School Impact**

Transfer students utilize greater school resources, diverting them from other students and requiring a disproportionate amount of teachers’ time. In addition, staff, teachers and counselors need to be aware of the potential issues, behaviors and circumstances that could arise in effectively supporting transfer students (Strother & Harvill, 1986). Despite these issues and concerns, many schools do not acknowledge the transfer students’ special circumstances and needs, and do not provide special programs and support to try to insure transfer student success (Kerbow, 1996).

The transfer student group is not homogeneous. Although such students are often lumped together, they are quite unique from one another, and educators’ understanding this heterogeneity is pivotal to the success or failure of the mobile student. After the transfer student enrolls in the new school, generally the first staff person he or she meets is the high school counselor. This is a crucial event for the student and can set a favorable or unfavorable tone for the transition to the new school. Holland-Jacobsen et al. (1984)
states “…mobility is an issue that school counselors must recognize and address” (p. 49). The counselor has an opportunity to provide academic support, a nonjudgmental ear, and a portal for social and staff contacts. A thorough research review uncovers a wide variety of supports and interventions that can help make the transition easier. By exploring this transition with students who have made the change, this present study hopes to gain insight into what counselors, teachers, staff and the community can do to improve transfer student success rates. This current study also examines the influence of any available counselor and/or transfer curriculum support on ameliorating the negative impact mobility has on most transfer students. Our school’s comprehensive transfer program is listed below.

**Supports and Interventions**

Schools can and should create programs, if they are not already available, to provide support, to make the transition easier, and to increase student involvement in school (Blakeman, 1993). These school services include but are not limited to: (1) use a buddy system with student guides who will provide a tour of the school, help get lockers, and be available to new students throughout the school year (Bartosh, 1989; Blakeman, 1993; Wilson, 1993); (2) provide transfer student support groups facilitated by counselors and social workers to discuss school worries, academics, and relocation concerns, review school rules and procedures, discuss ways to meet new people (social skills training), review clubs and activities (Fisher et al., 2002), stimulate learning about community resources (Fisher et al., 2002), and increase interactions between new students and staff (Blakeman, 1993; Mennes, 1956; Strother & Harvill, 1986; Wilson, 1993); (3) provide
individual counseling (Blakeman, 1993; Mennes, 1956); (4) offer before, during and after school tutoring (Fisher et al., 2002; Onwuegbuzie, 2001); (5) provide information about after school activities (Jason et al., 1992; Wilson, 1993); (6) prepare informational packets with school and community handouts (Blakeman, 1993); (7) offer year round school to give students who are behind a chance to catch-up; and (8) keep class sizes to a minimum to accommodate late arriving transfer students and ameliorate teacher workloads (Titus, 2007).

It is prudent to refer or connect families of transfer students to community service programs. Services could include job training, legal advice, medical assistance, extended daycare, clothing and food banks, and developmental classes for parents such as the General Equivalency Diploma or General Education Diploma (GED), English Language Learner (ELL), or computer training (Fisher et al., 2002; Titus, 2007). The high school can establish a web site exclusively for transfer students and their parents. The goal is for the school and community agencies to create economic and physical stability within the family so there is a greater opportunity for student academic and social success, and less chance for subsequent repeat mobility. It is the initial conversation between the counselors and the transfer students—and ideally his parent(s)—that will start the process and connect him with needed supports. In fact, knowing that the counselor is available to the transfer student might make the difference in reducing some of his anxiety and fear. In addition, a counselor interacting regularly with a student can potentially identify subtle changes in behavior as an early warning system requiring greater supervision or potential intervention.
A thorough review of the counseling literature revealed a paucity of publications dealing with the role of the school counselor supporting transfer students (Blakeman, 1993; Holland-Jacobsen et al., 1984; Strother & Harvill, 1986; Wilson, 1993). These papers represented only theoretical discussions and qualitative research publications specifically in the counseling literature are absent. Such research would offer a valuable and important potential for gaining insight and understanding of the transfer student and what can be done to assist him in dealing with an often challenging or even threatening time of his life. Therefore, this study will include a comprehensive demographic review of the transfer students currently enrolled in the study school, interviews with a number of these students about their transfer experience, and a thorough thematic analysis of dominant patterns associated with school transfer. The purpose of this study is to learn more about the aspects of the transfer process that helped or hindered the transition in order to seek solutions that will favorably impact success rates.

The high school counselors, as well as other educators, need to spend time listening to the transfer students in order to build rapport and this study is designed to help provide information on which supports would be most valuable to the new student. Available literature highlights multiple suggestions but these are mostly untested supports and interventions that might be effective for mobile student success. Some supports merit special consideration: transfer orientations, transfer groups, and initial individual counseling. These services will help the school staff to disseminate information about school resources and evaluate the specific needs of each transfer student at an early time in the transition.
Program Description

The typical high school transfer student confronts many challenges, the most common being feelings of isolation and loneliness (South & Haynie, 2004). By implementing suitable programs, the staff can reduce the student’s emotional stress and help the student establish social relationships, hopefully providing a prescription for overall success. The transfer student would perceive commonality with other transfer students rather than being a stranger who doesn’t fit in. Academic success may be more related to socially-mediated group success rather than scholastic prowess (Wilson, 1999).

The school used for this study, Renaissance Valley High School (RVHS), has evolved many integrated programs and supports to assist our growing number of transfer students. Within the counseling department alone, these programs include transfer student orientations, transfer student group meetings, transfer student study halls, pairing transfer students with peer buddies, a transfer student and family website, comprehensive community resources information for transfer students and their families, a school improvement committee dedicated to focusing on transfer students needs, a college and career resource room, a drop-in center staffed with social workers and school psychologists, and a Student Assistance Program to help with drug, alcohol and other concerns that impact learning. RVHS is unique in that it offers an array of comprehensive transfer student supports and interventions not offered by other school districts in its area.
Transfer Orientation: Prior to First Day of School

For transferring students who move over the summer and enroll prior to the start of school, a comprehensive transfer orientation program is available at RVHS and can help with assimilation to the new school. Transfer students that attend transfer orientation have the opportunity to acquire books, get assigned lockers, and obtain their school identification card (ID) without the pressure of immediately attending classes. The students can meet staff members, complete team building exercises, and mingle with other transfer students. In addition, staff can assist the new student in reviewing important school information and accelerate integration by assigning a peer buddy to help answer questions while improving familiarity with the school environment. This orientation ends with a pizza social for the transfer students, peer buddies and staff. All these activities help ameliorate the newness and potential threat of the first day of school. Such a proactive intervention will help students feel less lost, be known to other students and staff, and be aware of where to go for help.

Transfer Group: After the First Day of School

Once the school year begins, counselors and other staff facilitators run a formal six-week transfer group curriculum. All newly enrolled transfer students are strongly encouraged to attend. In fact, one day a week, these students are assigned to a special transfer student study hall in order to facilitate their transfer group session attendance. These study halls are timed to avoid missing an academic class or lunch.
Transfer Group Curriculum

By completing this comprehensive transfer group activity, the student will carry out many essential tasks. As Bartosh (1989) noted, “Many schools conduct elaborate orientation programs for these students to ease the transition, eliminate stress, reduce opening day confusion, and generate a momentum toward success” (p. 94). Listed below are research supported programs and events that are implemented in our school’s transfer group curriculum.

1. learning the school environment and how to navigate key school resources (Blakeman, 1993; Wilson 1993).
2. beginning to establish social relationships with peers as well as assigned peer buddy (Bartosh, 1989; Holland-Jacobsen et al., 1984; Titus, 2007).
3. introducing students to staff and administrators and their roles in the building. This will allow the transfer student to meet the principal, assistant principals, deans, student activities director, various counselors and other important staff (Wilson, 1993).
4. discussing school policies and procedures (Blakeman, 1993).
5. reviewing school clubs, activities and sports to hopefully become active in the school and meet additional students and personnel. This will help new students more quickly connect to activities they are interested in (Titus, 2007; Wilson, 1993).
6. discussing feelings and concerns about their transfer experience. This allows the students to talk about their difficulties coming to a new school, the things
that made them feel better or more comfortable, and their adjustment to favorite or more difficult classes (Blakeman, 1993; Wilson, 1993).

7. reviewing grading system and policies including marking period, progress report, report card, grading policies and transcripts (Blakeman, 1993; Wilson, 1993).

8. understanding the role of their high school counselor in assisting them and their families (Blakeman, 1993).

9. becoming familiar with the spectrum of community resources (Wilson, 1993).

10. fostering productive study habits by reviewing school tutoring resources, describing after-school study routines, and locating places for doing homework. Also important is learning how to email or meet teachers when students miss school or to get answers to additional questions about assignments, tests or quizzes (Newman, 1988; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2001).

A transfer group allows pertinent lessons to build upon one another from a basic knowledge of the physical environment to a more detailed understanding of the resources available. Moreover, the group supports fundamental social and academic integration. The group takes advantage of the students’ shared newness in the school to gradually build a sense of community and address the adolescent developmental need for peer relationships and acceptance (Holland-Jacobsen et al., 1984). The group size should be small enough for each student to be an essential component and share their own unique story with the group; this allows students to learn from each other and also allows the facilitator to respond to individual questions as they arise (Wilson, 1993). Students also
have an opportunity to explore their own interests and goals (Wilson, 1993). The facilitator and school provide tools and resources for students to explore and develop their individual capacities, an important developmental aspect for young people on the cusp of life in high school. The structure of the group should allow for great flexibility.

**School Improvement Committee Supervision and Innovations**

RVHS’s school improvement committee meets once a week to discuss its at risk school population which includes the transfer population and to review emerging transfer data regarding academics and utilization of school resources. Candid feedback is essential as this can lead to improved or emerging supports. The school improvement committee is actively looking for ways to improve our transfer interventions. For example, we have met with our local cultural groups, created a transfer student biography questionnaire that is provided to teachers, created informational handouts for teachers and staff, and set-up a booth for transfer student families at evening school events and open houses. For parents or guardians who cannot attend such events, we offer phone calls by staff. One of the key creations of this committee is a comprehensive transfer student website for both the students and their families. This site details available school and community resources, answers frequently asked questions (FAQs), and provides pertinent email and phone contacts.

**Student Services**

The college career and resource center is available to help students find informational resources about colleges, careers, the military, and vocational schools. In addition, students can use an all-inclusive computer program called Naviance to help
them navigate through the college and career opportunity process. Students are welcome to visit the college and career resource center before or after school, during study hall, or at lunch. RVHS’s Drop-in Center is a quiet, comfortable, non-judgmental and respectful place where all students can relax, talk, eat, and problem solve. The Drop-in Center is open during all lunch hours and is staffed by counselors, social workers and school psychologists. Connected to the Drop-in Center is the student services department staffed by experienced social workers and school psychologists. These staff members are available to facilitate each student’s intellectual, academic, emotional, personal, social, and career development. The Student Assistance Program’s goal is to provide early intervention and support services to those students identified as having difficulties achieving success in the classroom. In addition, this program focuses on the prevention of and intervention with violence as well as interdicting the use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs.

**Tutoring Center and Additional Resources**

Other programs and supports available at RVHS include a comprehensive tutoring center, a library, an English language learners (ELL) resource center, a math and science resource center, additional teachers’ office hours, a reading specialist and a plethora of extracurricular activities.

Available before, during and after school, the tutoring center provides student tutors and teachers for one-on-one tutoring in all of the school’s subject areas. Students can get help with study skills, note taking skills, test preparation, writing and reading support, vocabulary, and organizational skills. This comprehensive center was visited by
28,424 students during the 2008-2009 school year at RVHS and is expected to surpass this number this year.

Our school library provides a variety of information and learning services to support the curriculum and promote lifelong learning. Computers are available as well as online databases so students can do research for classes and for preparing papers. The library is accessible before, during and after school, being open until 7:00 p.m. weekdays except on Fridays. English Language Learners (ELL) Resource Center has bi-lingual tutors and ELL teachers who provide both one-on-one and small group tutoring services. The Math and Science Resource Center has math and science teachers available to provide tutorial services for their students. In addition, classroom teachers have specified office hours when students can meet with them for help and to ask questions. Teachers’ schedules are available online for students to plan appointments. Students can also schedule one-on-one reading assistance with the school’s reading specialist, who is available in the tutoring center.

To promote social integration, transfer students are encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities. The Athletic and the Student Activities departments provide a wide range of after school activities including over 80 clubs and 23 athletic teams.

**Significance**

The purpose of the study is to thoroughly understand the specific challenges faced by transfer students as perceived by the students themselves. The investigator plans to conduct a detailed demographic review of the group and then gather individual student reflections on their own personal transfer experiences in order to analyze dominant
themes that may be relevant and generalizable to many of these students. The narrative of individuals going through such a seminal experience has a long tradition of providing valuable insight into key issues related to success, failure or significant life experiences. Using the experiences and insights verbalized by transfer students for later thorough analysis, we may be able to better define the factors that contribute to success or failure of the transfer student. With this information, we should be able to identify some of the pivotal factors in the transfer process. The ultimate goal of this study is to learn from the transfer students what interventions are most helpful in ameliorating or solving the difficulties in the transfer process so as to improve the social and academic success rates of these students who are typically at high risk of academic and/or social failure.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A review of the available relevant empirical and theoretical literature demonstrates a plethora of diverse research in the area of student mobility, covering a wide range of topics. This chapter reviews the most salient areas related to this study’s research questions. The research articles include predominantly academic and social factors influencing transfer student outcomes.

Academic achievement before and after transfer (Dunn et al., 2003; Engec, 2006; Heinlein & Shinn, 2000; Kerbow et al., 2003; Newman, 1988; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2001; Rumberger, 2003; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Strand, 2002; Swanson & Schneider, 1999; Titus, 2007) impacts standardized test scores (Rumberger, 1999; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005; Wood, 2005), classroom concerns (Black, 2006; Fisher et al., 2002; Kerbow et al., 2003; Lash & Kilpatrick, 1994), and student dropout (Black, 2006; Fisher et al., 2002; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005).

Many articles examine student mobility in terms of socioeconomic status (Black, 2006; Fisher et al., 2002; Hartman, 2006; Kerbow, 1996; Newman, 1988; Pettit, 2004; Wood et al., 1993), race (Black, 2006; Engec, 2006; Kerbow, 1996; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Wood et al., 1993), ethnicity (Titus, 2007), number of moves prior to a particular age (Crockett et al., 1989; Kerbow et al., 2003), parental marital status (Long,
and the impact of these variables on the student and the family.

Available supports (Bartosh, 1994; Black, 2006; Blakeman, 1993; Fisher et al., 2002; Wilson, 1993) and established interventions (Fisher et al., 2002; Holland-Jacobsen et al., 1984; Jason et al., 1992; Kerbow et al., 2003; Newman, 1988) if available can influence outcomes.

**Common Transfer Concerns**

As detailed below, though coming from disparate backgrounds, transfer students tend to have certain common characteristics. These students usually move for adverse reasons and tend to bring their previous problems with them (Tucker et al., 1998). They are at greater risk of failure than non-transfer students (Black, 2006; Fisher et al., 2002; Kerbow et al., 2003; Rumberger et al., 1999; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). Some schools provide significant resources to support these at-risk students while other schools do not (Kerbow, 1996; Kerbow et al., 2003). One would expect that transfer student support contributes to higher success rates academically and socially, two inter-related and vital aspects in the life of these mobile adolescents (Fisher et al., 2002; South & Haynie, 2004). However, in highlighting aggregate transfer group statistics, few studies address how the individual student perceives his or her transfer experience (Rhodes, 2008; Rumberger et al., 1999).
Theoretical Framework

One theoretical framework that has great pragmatic appeal in working with the transfer student population is Abraham Maslow’s “hierarchy of needs” (Myers, 2008, p. 447). Stated simply, the hierarchy is viewed as a pyramid of individual needs. The first two levels at the base of the pyramid define the physiological and safety needs of the student, including oxygen, nutrition, health and security. Once these needs are met, the student can move on to a sense of belongingness and love needs, followed by esteem needs. Only then can the student move on to the two highest levels of needs which are self-actualization needs and self-transcendence needs, leading to finding meaning and identity beyond the self. By eliciting the student’s personal description of the transfer experience, the researcher can assess where in this hierarchy of needs the student resides and become cognizant of the student’s remedial needs. Maslow’s pyramidal hierarchy (see Figure 1) becomes a valuable tool, an intermediate device to achieve a critical goal of assessing these at risk students as they make the difficult transition to the new school. By exploring the data with Maslow’s hierarchy in mind, educators can better appreciate the student’s basic and higher order needs.
Reasons for Student Mobility

Most student mobility results from adverse circumstances as listed above and expanded below. Blakeman (1993) emphasizes this and projects, “It appears that mobility will continue at a high rate, and although mobility may not be the direct cause of poor achievement or adjustment, it is a complicating factor for a young man or women who have other at-risk characteristics.” These events include parental job loss, relocation or promotion (Strand, 2002; Titus, 2007), parental occupation/lifestyle such as children of diplomats, missionaries, military personnel, migrant farm workers, and executives of international companies (Strand, 2002; Titus, 2007), divorce (Titus, 2007), eviction (Tucker et al., 1998), economic adversity, safety concerns, students being forced to leave a school because of behavioral problems or overcrowding (Rumberger & Larson, 1998),
homelessness (Titus, 2007), school closings and openings (de la Torre & Gwynne, 2009), and natural disasters (Cook, 2006; Titus, 2007). Some of these events tie into Maslow’s basic lower level physiological and safety needs. These related events included homelessness, overcrowding, eviction, and economic adversities.

The mobile student does not exist in a vacuum. His or her personal circumstances, academic prowess, abilities or disabilities, attitudes, motivation and socialization skills are all very important. However, the student moves from one environment to another, with or without a full family, under either favorable or unfavorable conditions, and finds himself or herself in an atmosphere of support and acceptance or not depending on a host of factors that the student has no control over. As Titus (2007) explains,

Because of the many confounding variables which must be considered, investigating the relationship between student mobility and educational attainment is a complex problem. There may be other variables, contained in family background, which explain both family mobility and the achievement of their children. (p. 91)

This may explain some important observations made regarding mobile students. Students with higher than average mobility tend to come from disproportionately low income families (Long, 1992; Titus, 2007). Such students are less likely to be living with both parents (Long, 1992; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Titus, 2007) and more likely to be living in a household where the adult was unemployed and had not completed high school (Long, 1992; Titus, 2007). If the head of the family is younger or a single parent then a move is more likely (Kerbow, 1996; Pettit, 2004). If the family has been a victim
of a violent crime or living in poor quality housing, a move is more likely (Pettit, 2004). Transfer students are more likely to be ethnic minorities (Titus, 2007). For example, African American students are more frequently mobile than Caucasian, Latino or Asian students (Engec, 2006; Kerbow 1996; Rumberger & Larson, 1998). Also mobile students are more likely to receive subsidized meals (Kerbow, 1996), consistent with lower SES.

While all of these differences are significant, Rumberger and Larson (1998) concluded that the poorer achievement of mobile students cannot with certainty be explained by such variables. In other words, there may be no cause and effect relationship. The authors state,

…because poor children are more likely to be mobile and have problems in school, perhaps both their mobility and low achievement are due to underlying family problems related to poverty. (p. 3)

In a sense the children tend to recapitulate the patterns of the parent or parents. Recently in 2009, the documented United States recession and international economic instability have caused seismic social upheavals with dramatic loss of jobs, enormous numbers of home foreclosures, and consequent tax loss to municipalities with potential consequences for school budgets. As noted by de la Torre and Gwynne (2009), “In some cases, economic conditions and public policies also affect student mobility” (p. 2). The effects of these plenipotent changes on family dynamics and student mobility are likely to be significant. As mentioned by the Ohio State Department of Education in a report on urban schools (1998), mobility is not a ‘cause’ of low academic performance” (p. 7). However, it should be considered a significant factor when reviewing a student’s
academic performance. The Ohio State Department of Education (1998) continues that the experience of moving can have “…detrimental effects on the rate of learning of the individual child” (p. 6).

However, not all student moves occur for adverse reasons or are involuntary. According to Swanson and Schneider (1999):

Although also disruptive, a change of schools can afford an important opportunity to improve the quality of a student’s education. In particular, a different school may provide a new learning environment that conforms more closely to a family’s educational values and expectations or better accommodates the academic needs of a specific student. By offering more challenging or individualized instruction, a diverse curriculum, a safer or more supportive environment, or greater opportunities for involvement in extracurricular activities, a new school may promote positive educational outcomes. (p. 56)

Tucker, Marx and Long (1998) agree and also note that some moves are voluntary. The move may provide an opportunity for better housing, employment, schools and neighborhood, or perceived positive family needs. These authors indicate that although these changes may seem favorable, they nevertheless affect the transferring student in myriad ways. It is the change, whether for positive or negative reasons, that is at the crux of the concern for the student as well as the family and the school personnel. Hartman (2006) also notes that not all mobility is detrimental as some families move to obtain better jobs or to find improved schools. Swanson and Schneider (1999) agree,
adding that some families change schools for more challenging and diverse curricula, safer and more supportive schools, or to seek more extracurricular options. However, excessive moves will impact the student and their new classrooms (Hartman, 2006).

Implied in the terms “transfer student” or “mobile student” is that the change of schools is actually unscheduled based on the distinction of Jason et al. (1992, p. 4). In their book entitled Helping Transfer Students, Jason, who is a professor of psychology, and his co-authors state,

A scheduled transition occurs when entire groups of students enter school or graduate from elementary or junior high school. Unscheduled school transitions involve students in isolation changing schools. (p. 4)

Two examples of an unscheduled transfer are a student who moves to a new school after summer break or during the middle of a school year. The authors suggest without specific data that unscheduled transitions are likely to be more difficult and this difficulty can be augmented by the timing of the transfer during the school year. Students who move over the summer are less likely to be impacted academically and socially than those who move during the school year (Jason et al., 1992). The critical operative term here may be “in isolation.” As described below, these students have often lost considerable “social capital” in leaving their prior school and/or neighborhood (South & Haynie, 2004). Doing this alone without peer support adds additional stress as a time already pregnant with emotional strain.

In their detailed study, Rumberger and Larson (1999) analyzed the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) which surveyed parents of eighth graders from 51
schools in California. This pre-high school study is important to a dissertation on high school transfers because such moves just prior to high school impact on later adjustments (Crockett et al., 1989; Kerbow et al., 2003). This survey identified three broad reasons for school changes which are “family-initiated”, “student-initiated” and “school-initiated” moves (p. 84). Within these broad categories are a variety of examples best illustrated by the words of the involved students, parents or teachers as highlighted by Rumberger and Larson (1999) through their interviews.

Rumberger and Larson (1999) note that most Asian families interviewed reported that the majority of their moves were “family-initiated” moves. One Korean-American parent described why she initiated a move: “We focused on [our son] going to college so we moved him to Warrenville High. His cousin graduated from there and then UC Berkeley (p. 93). A Vietnamese-American student described why her mother initiated a family move:

I left South High because my Mom wanted to move to a different area where I could be in the Chinese community and learn Chinese. (p. 93)

However, one family moved due to issues in their prior community: “My mom was afraid of all the gangs at the old place, so that’s why we moved here” (p. 93). The authors found that most African-Americans, Latinos and non-Latino Whites reported that their “family-initiated” moves were typically reactive but one exception was discussed by a non-Latino White parent who stated,

The first time [we moved] we bought a house – we had been renting prior.

And this was a nice, great family house to spend the rest of our lives in. I
was pursuing my dreams and wanted to be somewhere where I wanted to live. (p. 93).

Other “family-initiated” reasons discussed included death or divorce, unsafe communities, unhappiness with school staff, or the family receiving public assistance or federal funded housing that required mobility.

“Student-initiated” changes were often a result of social problems in the school. Some of these problems included problems with teachers, racial tension, or safety issues. A Guatemalan-American student described an issue about safety:

I was from a party crew… and nobody liked me… So I didn’t want to get involved with them. I didn’t want to fight with them. So I avoided that and moved.

A non-Latino White student discussed why he decided to change schools:

I didn’t really have anyone to talk to. I didn’t really have any connections at the school, so I just wanted to leave, basically just for the social problems. (p. 94)

When reviewing interview data, Rumberger and Larson (1999) identified other reasons for “student-initiated” school changes such as trying to join a strong athletic program at a different school or moving to another school to be with friends.

Rumberger and Larson (1999) also looked at “school-initiated” changes by interviewing parents, students and school personnel who discussed fighting, poor grades, attendance problems and inadequate credits as reasons for student mobility. One student’s grandmother mentioned, “Keion [was transferred to another school] because of
his grades. He was canceled out. If he had kept up his grades they would have let him stay” (p. 95). Another student stated,

I went to Johnson High because I got OT’d. It’s like if you have too many absences or like if you have too many tardies or something like that, and if you’re not meeting school expectations then they just like let you go and if you improve in another school then you can come back. (p. 95)

School personnel identified two reasons for “family-initiated” changes which were economic and family disruptions. Examples of economic precipitated school changes are job loss or change. One teacher described this example:

I have students who have to leave my classes because of work. I have a lot of students who change classes because of work. Life sometimes forces these kids to leave school to work. (p. 96)

Some examples of family disruptions can include foster care residency, social-emotional issues, divorce, alcoholism, and pregnancy. A high school counselor observed:

And a lot of them are living with extended families and they need their emotional families back home. What happens is that we find that from one month to the next, a lot of times students move from one house to the next… foster home students tend to change residences quite. (p. 96)

**Impact of Mobility on Students, Family and School**

Whether the moves are voluntary or involuntary, research shows “…students can suffer academically, psychologically and socially from mobility” (Rumberger. 2003, p. 7). The impact on the student’s behavior, his family, and interactions in the classroom
will often be profound and yet such considerations may be ignored by teachers and school staff. Some of these interactions will be so subtle that they may not be noticed on a conscious level by the student and those he/she works with. Perhaps this explains in part why many schools have no specific programs to aid transfer students.

The reader should recall that while many students only change schools, others change both schools and residence. Such domestic changes can be local in the community or county or may involve greater distances or circumstances: state, country, culture, language, living circumstances (such as dual parent home to single parent home), socioeconomic status, and other significant variables. As a consequence, counselors and teachers must consider the cultural background of the student as sometimes affecting males differently from females. The number of previous moves is also an important consideration (Kerbow et al., 2003).

**Academic**

In considering how to assess the academic performance of transfer students, one must identify the standard parameters used to measure academic outcomes. Some of the key measures of academic performance utilized by educators include standardized test scores, grades and grade point average (G.P.A), attendance, behavior, performance, discipline and suspension rates, failure, graduation, drop-out, and demotion or retention.

While the literature on transfer students has many comments about the impact of academic performance, there is a paucity of papers that specifically describe research in this area. These papers are consistent in describing how transfer student suffer academically no matter which of the above parameters is examined. The following
reviews detail seven papers the author was able to find on this topic.

**Number of Transfers**

Dunn et al. (2003) studied 1,888 eleventh graders in a public high school in Pittsburgh using a case study approach. They divided the students into two categories, those who have not transferred and those who transferred at least once in preceding three years. Of the 1,888 total students, 362 students qualified as transfer students by their definition. The authors define absence as how often a student misses a class and measured academic performance by analyzing standardized test scores. The authors emphasize,

Results are given in two stages. First, mobility and absence are shown to have, with high probability, negative relationships with academic achievement. Second, the posterior for mobility is viewed in terms of the equivalent harm done by absence: changing schools at least once in the three year period, 1998-2000, has an impact on standardized tests administered in the spring of 2000 equivalent to being absent about 14 days in 1999-2000 or 32 days in 1998-1999. (p. 269)

The authors conclude that standardize tests scores as a measure of academic performance are negatively associated with absence and mobility although not necessarily by cause and effect. However, the authors suggest that the association is at least in part etiological. In identifying the relationship of mobility to being absent from school, the authors imply that it is especially important to avoid absence in transfer students.
Necati Engec (2006), an associate professor in the Department of Educational Leadership at South Carolina State University, examined the records of 728,466 K-12 students in Louisiana public schools within the 1998-1999 school year. Over 50,000 students moved at least once and the author studied the relationship of student mobility to student performance as measured by Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) and student behavior as determined by suspension rates. The author found that ITBS scores decreased and suspension rates increased in proportion to mobility. Again, the author was unable to establish cause and effect but suggested an etiologic relationship while focusing on poverty (defined as a family income of less than $10,000 a year) as an important factor which warrants further investigation.

Although Engec’s (2006) study was not limited to high school students, the sheer size of the sample and the consistency of results across the spectrum of students supports that the findings would apply to the high school cohort. Thus, the papers by Dunn et al. (2003) and Engec (2006) both conclude that academic performance in general correlates negatively with mobility, retention and suspension rates specifically are also adversely affected. No studies were found examining the effects of high school mobility and school performance in the United States in specific subjects such as reading, writing and mathematics.

At the forefront of student mobility research during the last two decades is the work of Russell W. Rumberger, who is a Professor in the School of Education at the University of California, Santa Barbara. While focusing on many areas of education, he has published a plethora of research on disadvantaged and/or at-risk students. More
specifically and critical to this dissertation are his articles on high school student dropout and student mobility to be highlighted in the following discussion. This review of Rumberger’s work is especially important because of the paucity of papers dealing with high school mobility.

The paper by Rumberger and Larson (1998) entitled “School Mobility and the Increased Risk of High School Dropout” is seminal to our understanding the global nature of the difficulties confronted by most transfer students. Using the National Education Longitudinal Survey of 1988 (NELS: 88) and data from follow-up surveys in 1992 and 1994, the authors followed an initial cohort of 13,120 eighth graders and concluded their study in 1994 with the data available on 11,671 of these respondents—thus, long term follow-up on 88.9% of the initial group. Through student and parent questionnaires in 1988 and 1992, the authors obtained data on student and family characteristics, student academic and social engagement, and academic achievement via test scores with the later confirmed by the schools. Their three research questions were: 1) what is the incidence of mobility by social class groups in high school students, 2) what factors (demographic, family and school) predict mobility and 3) does mobility effect graduation rates?

The authors reached several important conclusions. There is high mobility among high school students with over 25% making non-promotional changes during the four years of the study. Social class factors quantitatively influenced school and residential mobility such that in the lowest socioeconomic status (SES) quartile, 31% of students were mobile while in the highest quartile 25% were mobile. Also in the lowest SES
quartile, 43% of students changed residences while in the highest quartile 35% changed residences. Two-thirds of the highest SES quartile changed neither school nor residence while 43% of the lowest quartile made no such changes. This demonstrates that low SES students are more likely to change both school and residence, placing them at a disadvantage or at-risk.

While factors predicting mobility included lower socioeconomic status (SES), other factors compounded the problem. Race (black and Hispanic students were more likely to change schools than Asian, native American and white students), previous school retention or mobility, nontraditional families (single-parent or step-parent homes), previous types of school (urban, Catholic or private prior school was associated with greater subsequent mobility), previous discipline problems, lower academic and social engagement (determinates being low educational expectations, high absenteeism and misbehavior), and lower grades all had an additional adverse effect on transfer student outcomes. Ultimately, mobile students are more likely to drop out or seek alternative educational programs and this likelihood increases with the number of moves.

In reaching these conclusions, Rumberger and Larson (1998) made a number of other observations:

No scholar has yet proposed a theory to explain specifically the causes or consequences of student mobility. But there are a number of theories on related subjects that can provide insight into secondary-school mobility. (p. 4)
As the authors comment numerous times in their study, other pre-existing factors including specific characteristics of the students and their families may account for increased mobility and lower graduation rates. If these factors are controlled for between stable and mobile students, the effects of mobility are reduced significantly but not eliminated. Even one school move doubles the risk of not graduating from high school compared to stable students. Two or more school moves quadruples the likelihood of a student attaining a GED compared to stable students. Behavioral factors in twelfth graders that predicted failure to graduate included social and academic disengagement, high absenteeism, misbehavior and low academic expectations. The data did not support a causal relationship between mobility and high school graduation despite mobility being associated with increased risk.

The authors made some recommendations based on the literature and their study. Schools should actively pursue policies that will enhance mobile students’ high school completion. Also schools should monitor absenteeism, educational expectations, misbehavior and grades to assess academic and social engagement and highlight students at highest risk of withdrawing from school so that early intervention can be initiated. Helpful interventions include increasing “the student’s sense of membership (i.e., affiliation) and increase the student’s engagement (i.e., social and academic)” (p. 31). The school building climate plays an important role in student success and graduation. Staff and teachers have to be involved and invested emotionally in the students, creating a nurturing and very personal environment.
Heinlein and Shinn (2000) echo Rumberger and Larson in their study of 764 primary school students—kindergarten through sixth grade—using standardized tests as a measure of academic achievement. While this population is younger than the students in our study, the results are meaningful in that the academic performance of transfer students prior to transfer impacted later academic achievement. Heinlein and Shinn (2000) studied the academic impact of mobility using a primary variable of the total number of school moves from kindergarten through sixth grade in a single school district in New York City with a total of three or more moves being subcategorized as highly mobile. The primary dependent variable was third and sixth grade standardized reading and math scores. The authors found that if one controlled for prior academic attainment (third grade), mobility was not a factor in later academic attainment (sixth grade). However, high mobility prior to third grade did influence later academic attainment with subtle but greater predictability than mobility between third and sixth grades. The cause of this pattern was not determined by the study although the authors suggest that earlier mobility disrupts the creation of basic skills, promoting enduring effects. Nevertheless, as also noted by Rumberger and Larson (1998), Heinlein and Shinn (2000) state, “Establishing a relationship between mobility and educational attainment is a complex problem, however, due to the many confounding variables that must be considered” (p. 349). Some of the variables discussed include the relationship of high mobility to poverty, single parent homes, unemployment and lower educational level of the household.
As important and thorough as the Rumberger and Larson (1998) and Heinlein and Shinn (2000) papers are, there still remain multiple other and varied implications of school mobility as discussed below. Heinlein and Shinn (2000) and Wood et al. (1993) note that academically, students who move frequently often have deficits in cognitive development and achievement. These students enter new schools with gaps in their knowledge base that, if not recognized early enough by staff, could lead to continuing problems. Other significant concerns include poor test scores and grades, retention or demotion, and delayed or aborted high school completion (Fisher et al., 2002, p. 318). Titus (2007) found that when students are highly mobile, their achievement test scores are significantly lower possibly due to “curricular inconsistency” (p. 88).

**Impact of Transfer Students on Classroom Dynamics**

The academic consequences of mobility impact transfer students on a variety of levels. In fact, before a transfer student even steps into the new school building, there are already extant differences between schools that can influence their academics. Titus (2007) discusses the concerns regarding differences in schools with respect to scheduling, classes, school calendars, grading systems, class ranks, and curriculum. The transition is never seamless. For example, a student may finish a semester at one school and then transfer to the new school which has already started the next semester. So the transfer student faces the challenges of entering a new school while potentially being behind academically in one or more classes. Once in the new school, there might be dramatic differences between the two environments. Jason et al. (1992) states, “Such discontinuity between old and new schools could influence student adjustment” (p. 18). He continues,
For example, a child could move from a supportive, progressive school to one that is characterized by low teacher morale and few academic and extracurricular enrichment opportunities. (p. 18)

Another concern is the difficulty of receiving and organizing all transfer records. Hartman (2006) notes,

Excessive mobility is also a burden at the school and district levels. Administrators need to transfer records of outgoing students, often not knowing where students have gone, and procure health and curriculum records for newly arriving registrants. (p. 21)

Missing or incomplete information can delay registration in a new school and/or create problems when trying to properly assign classes. Complete academic records are always a critical component to registration and especially so if the student needs special services of any kind.

After the transfer student enters the new classroom, the counselor needs to closely monitor the student’s progress in coordination with the classroom teachers. Communication between the counselor and the student, the counselor and the teachers, and the student and the teachers is crucial. Heinlein and Shinn (2000) stress the importance of teachers monitoring transfer students and staying attuned to gaps in their understanding in order to make necessary changes. If these gaps in knowledge can be identified and managed early, there is a better chance of improving the student’s academic skills and performance. Newman (1988) feels teachers can assist with transfer students by being cognizant and alert to signs of either distress or success. Curricular
inconsistency for highly mobile students can often result from or cause significantly lower achievement test scores (Titus, 2007). The teacher is in the perfect position to assess the student’s level of achievement and to modify any learning plan. Lash and Kirkpatrick (1994) state, “The teacher is generally responsible for the progress of all students in the class, for diagnosing academic problems, and for meeting individual learning needs.”

Just as the classroom can disrupt the transfer student, the transfer student can disrupt the classroom, their classmates and the teacher (Titus, 2007). In his study of student mobility using data from Chicago public elementary schools, Kerbow (1996) describes this dynamic well, stating, “This influx and exit of students places significant constraints on the instructional approach of teachers” (p. 160). This is especially true if the student enters after school is already in session. For example, the introduction of a new student after classes start requires the teacher to divert valuable time from the class in general to working with this one new student. Moreover, the instruction technique and experience may deviate significantly from what the student is accustomed to. Even more disruptive for a teacher is such a student leaving the class early for yet another move or other reasons. Titus (2007) notes, “When students in whom teachers have invested considerable effort depart, teachers can feel loss of accomplishment.” In Lash and Kilpatrick’s (1994) article, the authors quote an urban school teacher’s experience:

New students arrive nearly every month. This year, 13 new students joined my class, and 9 students left. I have to backtrack, review, and reteach topics. Classroom management is difficult when students are moving in
and out. I spend my prep periods completing paperwork for transfers or assessing new students. There’s more work. (p. 814)

Studies of academic achievement as related to mobility emphasize the central nature of the transfer student, however, the demographics and prior home and community environment of the student play a pivotal role in future academic performance. The vicissitudes of introducing a transfer student into the new school and each individual classroom must also be considered (Kerbow, 1996; Titus, 2007).

**Behavioral and Social**

Besides potentially causing academic problems, mobility can also lead to behavioral concerns. Tucker et al. (1998) noted “…hypermobile children did indeed have elevated odds of ever having repeated a grade in school or having four or more behavioral problems” (p. 112). The authors add that frequent moving can be psychologically disruptive, disorienting with loss of friendships, and disconcerting due to the many coexisting uncertainties. The Urban Schools Initiative through the Ohio State Department of Education generated a published report confirming the likelihood of mobile students having behavioral issues. This report describes how the transfer student might act out in order to gain attention and mastery. In addition, the move may have lessened the student’s sense of control on life, causing feelings of powerlessness. This may lead to inappropriate behaviors and possible disruptions in the classroom, interfering with instruction.

Using data from a 1988 National Health Interview Survey, Wood et al. (1993) studied 9,915 students aged six to 17 that had experienced “frequent relocations” and
compared them to students who had never moved or had “infrequent relocations” (p. 1324). They found that “frequent movers” had higher rates of child dysfunction which included repeating grades and having four or more behavioral problems. In addition, Wood et al. (1993) found that early childhood mobility (which probably correlates with later mobility) is associated with twice the risk of behavior problems, delayed growth or development, learning disabilities, repeating a grade and four or more behavior problems compared with families that didn’t move. South et al (2005) found transfer students to be approximately one-third more likely to be sexually active than non-movers as defined by engaging in premarital intercourse. In addition, other high risk behaviors can be attributed to mobility. These include drug and alcohol abuse (Greenblatt, 2000), nutrition and health problems (Rumberger & Larson, 1998), dropout (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005; Titus, 2007), multiple sex partners (Baumer & South, 2001), and other significant behavioral, social and emotional issues (Rhodes, 2008). This suggests that high school transfer students may have a long history of adverse life events that influence overall health and academic performance. So what child has moved may be more important than the move itself in academic success. Moreover, social integration in the high school while helpful may not resolve chronic and pre-existing health, learning, behavioral, developmental and social issues.

When a student transfers schools, he or she is beset by many uncertainties and concerns and one is how to interrelate to other students. He or she is like a stranger in a strange new land and social integration is an important factor in the student’s success in the new school (Rhodes, 2008). In reviewing the available literature on social adaptation
for mobile students, this investigator found five articles specifically dealing with this subject. While other papers touched on aspects of social integration, these five require careful review and will be examined in relation to the above (Heinlein & Shinn, 2000; Rhodes, 2008; Rumberger et. Al. 1999; Rumberger, 2003; South & Haynie, 2004).

What information is available regarding the emotional aspects of a student transferring schools? It is important to note that the student leaving one school and coming to another may undergo a metamorphosis. A student who changes schools may alter outlook, demeanor, attitude, affect, functioning and ability to perform successfully as a result of the move. All relate to the emotional state of the student. In describing transfer student affect, Rhodes (2008) states, “Findings include fear, loneliness, embarrassment, and anxiety in new settings or when faced with another school change” (p. 113). At the high school level, peer pressure is an enormous force affecting all students but mobile students are particularly vulnerable.

In schools with significant numbers of high-mobility students (which is most high schools) it is important to understand the need for structures providing transitional services and community-building environments to counteract the negative academic and developmental effects of frequent mobility. Understanding these students and their hardships should help educators gain a better idea of how to support these highly mobile students. That said, it is important to understand that there is no one standard definition of high mobility so in reading literature on student mobility, each paper must be examined for how the authors define high mobility. Heinlein and Shinn (2000) state,
While number of moves is the most frequently specified mobility factor in the literature, even this apparently straightforward variable has multiple definitions. The “high mobility” group has been defined to include children with as many as 6 or more moves, or as few as 1 or more moves, over varying time periods. (p. 349)

This is well documented by an important qualitative study by Virginia L. Rhodes (2008) who interviewed high school transfer students to learn their personal stories about the difficulties of moving into a new community and high school. After reviewing their transfer records in a large urban Midwest high school, Rhodes interviewed eight students ages 14-17 individually for an hour. Six students were African-American and two were Caucasian and each discussed their transfer experiences by answering open-ended questions and describing their unique stories. The article discussed a common theme of students having a wide range of emotions including fear, loneliness, embarrassment, and anxiety. The transfer process is a constant learning experience for the students as they are continuing to learn about themselves, their new school, their peers and their family. Rhodes (2008) mentions that while students have academic concerns, the social and emotional issues are even more prevalent in their associated individual stories. In fact, this difficulty making new friends is compounded by the other challenges that may negatively impact self esteem. Rhodes found that these students were “…unable to focus on academic studies until they could secure a peer group with which to interact” (p. 113). This concept of a need for a peer group becomes a central theme in other related papers (Rumberger, 2003; Rumberger et. Al., 1999; South & Haynie, 2004).
Rhodes’ (2008) research is relevant to this study as she also used student interviews to better understand the transfer student population. Her qualitative observations and student interviews offer an insightful opportunity to anticipate the social issues transfer students may focus on during this dissertation study. However, Rhodes’ school setting and student selection varied considerably from those parameters in the present study. Rhodes’ school was an urban magnet school serving a largely low-income African-American population while the school in this study is a suburban school serving a diverse population of largely more affluent families of which only 5.2% are African-American. Rhodes selected the students she interviewed from a list assembled from highly mobile students, meaning between 4 and 14 moves. In this dissertation study the students will include but will not be limited to students with high mobility, defined as three or more moves in total (Heinlein & Shinn, 2000). Rhodes (2008) did not describe the support resources made available to her school’s transfer students and used only a single one hour long interview. Our results may vary because of the depth of the school’s transfer student support program and the more in-depth interview process, which involves three separate 42-minute interviews. Her qualitative study is unique and one of the first to highlight how the interviewed students themselves perceive the transfer process. As described below, Rumberger et al. (1999) also comments on the transfer students’ voice although Rhodes fails to reference their work completed nine years earlier.

Especially helpful in the Rhodes (2008) study was her delineation of the dominant interview-derived themes: leaving friends, moving the household, arriving as a new student, first days, meeting and effects on peers, finding friendships, and academics. This
list does not portray the emotions expressed during the interview, however Rhodes often describes students’ crying (p. 116) and feelings of being “weird” (p. 119) or overwhelmed (p. 118) or invisible (p. 119). Though very upset, two students revealed exhibiting outward happiness so as not to distress their moms (p. 117). Rhodes viewed the students as the experts on mobility (p. 115) and wanted the students to share their experiences to help others with the transfer process (p. 115).

Rhodes (2008) study confirms this investigator’s curiosity about what a different population of transfer students in a different high school setting would reveal about their transfer experiences. For example, in the Rhodes study the students mentioned the need for more school transfer supports and activities aimed at ameliorating the enormous stresses of mobility. Following are the words of a student named Angelique:

I know it sounds corny, but I think all schools should have a welcoming committee. I think they should have someone who kind of goes around with you, someone who has the same schedule, and can show you stuff. Maybe the teachers could check in with that student and say, ‘how are they doing?’ The teachers should introduce themselves and let you know what’s going on. (p. 122)

She continues,

Just listen to the students. Especially if the student is acting out in a certain way, there’s usually a reason for it. Like if they’re spacing out in your class, they’re probably having problems, you could be a little more sensitive and aware, stuff like that. (p. 122)
Such references to social adjustment concerns were expressed by the majority of the students Rhodes interviewed. Examining the number of times students referenced specific social theme content, Rhodes found social concerns were spontaneously discussed by the transfer students during 54% of the references to various issues. Rhodes (2008) states,

"Without exception, students identified social concerns as primary. All interviewees identified the need to develop friendships and workable peer relationships as their first priority, more important initially than any academic needs. (p. 123)"

Rumberger et al. (1999) and Rhodes (2008) both mentioned that socialization with other peers is not an easy task. The qualitative Rumberger et al. (1999) article graphically describes the psychological and social consequences of mobility by detailing student stories. One student stated,

"Moving and changing schools really shattered my personality. I feel like there’s all these little things I picked up from all of the different schools and I feel all disoriented all the time. There’s no grounding. I always just feel like I’m floating. It’s psychological damage, really… because you never feel like a complete person. That’s how I feel-I feel fragmented. Every time I moved I felt less and less important. (p. 37)"

Another student discussed his social concerns: “It’s hard to change schools because, well I don’t know about other people… and it’s hard because I’m not the type of person to make friends real quick” (p. 38). These feelings of isolation with the greater
likelihood of academic struggles can lead to misbehavior and youth violence with further adverse academic and social consequences (Rumberger et al., 1999).

When students move residence and also change schools, they distance themselves from social ties and with members of their previous community, loosing social capital. Upon entering the new community they will need to begin fresh school and neighborhood friendships and connections. This is well documented by South and Haynie (2004) who studied 13,000 United States adolescents, grades 7 through 12 from 132 high schools, using questionnaires and surveys from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. The researchers found,

The friendship networks of mobile adolescents are thought to be less complete, less satisfying, and less conducive to prosocial behavior than are the networks of residentially stable youth. (p. 316)

In addition, the unfavorable impact of mobility was more pronounced on older or female adolescents than younger or male adolescents. Moreover, these authors found transfer students may have difficulty making new friends or being able to find a prominent place in the school’s social hierarchy. More specifically, South and Haynie (2004) state,

…mobile youth have denser networks, have less centrality and prestige in their networks, are less likely to have someone they nominate as a best friend reciprocate that nomination, and have as friends youth who themselves are relatively unpopular. (p. 343)

Indeed, parents of mobile students are less likely to know their child’s friends and the parents of those friends. The authors conclude their study with four key findings: 1)
mobile students have fewer friends and are more isolated; 2) older and female transfer students have more difficulty breaking into social networks in a new school; 3) social connections are less likely in schools with higher populations of mobile students as this milieu further interrupts social ties; yet, 4) when these in-movers do socialize, they tend to socialize with other new comers.

The aforementioned stresses of school transfer and loss of social connections appear to be ameliorated by high attachment to parents. Additional favorable attachments to peers may augment these benefits. Tucker et al. (1998) examined the impact of family structure on mobile students in the elementary grades, using data from the National Health Interview Survey from 1988 based on 47,000 households in the United States. This survey had a children’s supplement in which 17,000 parents were interviewed with respect to family and health related characteristics. The authors found that students living with both biological parents at the time of the move had better academic and social performance than with other types of home family structure, such as only the biological mother present or stepparents. Students in the later family structures “…suffer significantly from any mobility” (Tucker et al., 1998, p. 125). Laghi et al. (2008) studied 2,665 adolescents with an average age of 17 across 60 high schools in Italy. Of these students 50.1% were girls and 49.9% were boys. Using a detailed questionnaire administered in class to inventory parent and peer attachment, the authors found that these attachments are linked to positive views of past, present and future. The authors found,
Unlike teens who have an unsecure attachment, those who trust and communicate with their parents and with their peers have a significantly less fatalistic view of the present and a more positive view on memories and the future. Thus, parents represent a secure base for teenagers to lean on, helping the individual to envision his present, past, and future in much more optimistic and hopeful terms. (pp. 190-191)

Neither the Tucker et al. (1998) nor the Laghi et al. (2008) articles specifically address high school transfer students but may be pertinent in the absence of specific literature examining whether types of family structure impact or ameliorate the stresses of high school transfer.

As illustrated above, all the complexity that exists for the adolescent in high school is compounded by residential and/or school changes. These mobile students are at increased risk of failure and dropout (Reyes, 2000; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Titus, 2007; Wood et al., 1993). Swanson and Schneider (1999) state, “Students who move at least once are more likely to repeat a grade, have more serious disciplinary problems, dropout of high school at higher rates, and reach lower levels of educational attainment.” This pattern of increased failure rates for students moving once is augmented by additional moves (Long, 1992). At a time when the adolescent student needs stability, a move often generates or augments instability or even chaos. “Those students who make frequent school changes can experience disruption in their home life as well as in school because of lack of continuity of lesson content, disruption in social ties, and feelings of alienation” (Engec, 2006, p. 168).
Mobile students need insightful support and active interventions known to have a favorable affect on this failure rate. Moreover, these services should also be directed at any of the particular student’s needs, vulnerabilities and challenges whether academic, behavioral, social, or family. The high school counselor is in a key position to favorably influence the outcomes for these exceedingly high risk students. The success of students who do not receive help in adjusting to the new school is jeopardized (Engec, 2006). One would expect transfer students to dilate on this aspect of their mobile experience during the interview planned to answer the primary research questions of this dissertation.

**Role of the School and Counselor**

The transition to a new high school can be an overwhelming and traumatic experience for a student. The student is not only being uprooted from their current school and neighborhood but is expected to become acclimated to a new school and community. In addition, these students have feelings of loss from leaving their friends. Bartosh (1989) mentioned, “Students who enter a new community—and thus, a new school, often feel alienated, alone and unhappy” (p. 94). Clearly, moving is not and easy task and typically there are difficult circumstances that are associated with the move. In addition, the teenager is typically not the primary concern of the family because the parents are usually focused on their own issues and problems related to the move. Thus, the transfer student’s needs may be neglected because of the mobility. This means not only the student’s emotional needs but actually all their needs as described by Maslow (Myers, 2008).
Hierarchy of Needs for Transfer Students

Abraham Maslow has described a hierarchy of needs for each student. Beginning with the basic sustaining physiological needs of food, water and housing, the hierarchy describes progressively more complex and sophisticated levels of needs that would be met to provide optimal support and motivation for social and academic success (Myers, 2008). Figure 1 shows Maslow’s hierarchy of needs as a pyramid. Published in Myers (2008) text, each level is labeled to understand why Maslow feels that lower levels of the pyramid must be achieved for the student to be able to move on successfully to higher levels. Myers states: “Maslow proposed that we are motivated by a hierarchy of needs” (p. 564). For example, a student suffering from hunger would have great difficulty finding the energy and ability to concentrate on academics or interpersonal relationships. The oft present intrinsic alienation felt by transfer students would be enhanced, leading to additional emotional problems that would never resolve until the physiological nutritional needs are met. There may be more subtle issues such as a student not eating because he or she has no social circle to sit with in the cafeteria and so skips lunch to avoid the lunch room and an awkward social situation. Perhaps the student cannot afford lunch and is too embarrassed to inquire about the availability of free or reduced lunch. Going hungry may be less threatening socially but is a prescription for failure due to basic needs not being met as described by Maslow.

According to Maslow, once the student’s physiologic needs are met, he or she can deal with safety needs, leading to a sense of security and the presence of an organized and predictable world. The student needs to feel safe to interact and learn. Concern with
personal safety could lead to truancy. If a student is afraid to walk to school because of gang threats and has no other means of making the trip, attendance is likely to suffer. Once in school if a student feels bullied or teased, these circumstances would act as a disincentive to return to the building.

Myers (2008) describes the third Maslow level as “belongingness and love needs” (p. 447). The student needs “…to love and be loved, to belong and to be accepted; [needs] to avoid loneliness and separation…” Thus, making social connections and not feeling isolated or alone will facilitate a willingness to expose yourself to connections and interactions with peers and adults, leading to a sense of belonging. If you feel unwanted, you are less likely to relate to others or express yourself especially in public such as a classroom. This will in turn interrupt progressing to the next Maslow level of esteem needs: “Need for self-esteem, achievement, competence, and independence; need for recognition and respect from others.” Rhodes (2008) echos Maslow’s concepts by emphasizing that academic focus is unlikely to occur unless social needs are met and illustrates this with a description by a senior student at a large urban high school in the Midwest. While being interviewed, the student named Jason described the following:

You have no idea what the other kids are going to be like, and you have to get yourself together and get ready first…I guess as a kid it was mostly, I would say you had to get to know the people, more than it was to do the work. So, getting to know the people distracted you more than anything else at first. I mean, you don’t know anybody, You know, you kind of feel
alone out there if you don’t know anybody, so that’s kind of like your first thing you want to do. (p. 119)

This statement graphically illustrates why a qualitative assessment gets at the core of major issues and can supersede the limitations of pure statistical evaluations. It anticipates some of the reasoning for the study described in this dissertation. The reader should note how Rhodes (2008) study confirms Maslow’s theory and validates his pyramidal construct. Rhodes emphasizes that “The value of the student voice should not be ignored…., as it will help validate other data” (p. 124). Meeting the social and peer needs leads inexorably to achieving esteem needs. While separated by a line in the Maslow pyramid, the two levels are really inseparable. Only when these levels are successfully negotiated can the student move on to the final two and more abstract hierarchical levels of self-actualization needs and self-transcendence needs. These levels incorporate “Need to live up to our fullest and unique potential” (p. 447) and “Need to find meaning and identity beyond the self” (p. 447) respectively.

School counselors have full student caseloads and are inundated with student issues, meetings, paperwork, scheduling as well as many other job requirements. However, it is critically important to not forget about the needs of transfer students and to take the time to get to know the new student. A meaningful conversation, asking the right questions, can uncover information that will help the student adjust successfully. While having these conversations is time consuming and requires effort to listen carefully and learn the student’s unique story, the counselor may find the insights gained will
alleviate or prevent some future issues. In addition, the counselor can continue to assess what basic needs are lacking and how to support mobile students.

Holland-Jacobsen et al. (1984) states “The high school counselor is in a critical position to ease the child’s adjustment to the new community.” Counselors need to have ideas and information available about school and community resources in order to offer supports and services for the transfer student and their families. The available research has identified a plethora of interventions that can help transfer students academically, socially and behaviorally.

Blakeman (1993) focused much of her article on the importance of the role of the school counselor in facilitating the mobile student’s transition. She states, “The school counselor can be the chief catalyst in the adjustment process.” She continues by explaining that counselors need to have an “adequate familiarity” with mobility, understanding the literature and facilitating open communication for the adolescent, their parents and the teachers. Counselors are ideal resources to help transfer students become acclimated to the new building and to offer support. Moreover, while one cannot change socioeconomic factors or other conditions for a move, schools can have a significant impact on a transfer student’s experience. Blakeman writes,

By incorporating services and resources for relocated students into their comprehensive developmental school guidance plan, counselors will provide a structure in which students, parents, and teachers can work cooperatively toward making relocation a positive learning experience. (p. 16)
Wilson (1993) agrees and feels counselors should meet with parents of transfer students to help educate them about the stress of moving for the student and offer appropriate supports, hoping to avoid subsequent moves.

**Supports and Interventions**

Given the aforementioned detailed description of the academic, social and behavioral challenges confronting the transfer student, it would seem obvious that well-planned supports specifically oriented to these students merit not only consideration but appropriate introduction during and for a time after the transition to the new school. Such assistance should not only be provided to the student but also to his or her family.

Wilson (1999) studied a high school counseling program at a Maryland high school that supports transfer students through their challenging transitions. More specifically, Wilson looked at how one high school’s guidance program can meet needs of increasing numbers of students transferring into school during the course of the year? Seneca Valley High School’s guidance department instituted a new student support group to help students make the transition to a new school and a new community. Wilson examined the impact that school transfers have on these students. He discussed the anxiety of being a new student, the frustration of the student being moved often against their will, and the trauma from lost friendships. In addition, the author found that transfer students of less educated parents had a higher rate of dropping out of high school.

Every year approximately 33% of the 1,300 students who finish the year at Seneca Valley High School are not the same ones who were there when the school year began. The middle schools feeding into Seneca Valley have a mobility rate of 37.8%. The
five elementary schools have mobility rates ranging from 36.4% to 47.8% (Wilson, 1999). Thus, the school guidance department initiated a new student support group which is co-facilitated by two counselors and meets on a weekly basis. The group meets to address two critical needs: 1) to provide information about the school and the community and 2) to provide a setting for students to discuss their concerns about relocating. When students enroll at the new school, they receive detailed information about this new student support group.

Wilson (1999) feels school counselors have the opportunity to help transfer students develop important skills in order to successfully manage the challenges of their mobility. A transfer student program can help to meet the needs of many new students. Increased interaction of the counselors with the new students can help the counselors identify common concerns of the new students. Many of these concerns can not be identified or anticipated without the frequent contact through these transfer group meetings. This contact allowed the counselors to intervene, provide additional help, and make the necessary referrals for students experiencing extreme difficulty in adjusting.

Some interventions that Wilson found especially helpful included:

1. A questionnaire completed by each student at the time of enrollment. This questionnaire detailed demographic and academic information about the student and became a mini-biography which could be given to all relevant classroom teachers.

2. The matching of transfer students with a peer buddy who could provide a tour of the school, a companion during lunch, and help with various concerns.
3. Weekly meetings of transfer students support groups lead by staff facilitators to discuss any difficulties with the transfer process, the new school and/or the community.

An “ice breaker” or team building activity can also be added to the schedule to help transfer students to get to know one another (Wilson, 1994).

In his article, Wilson (1994) describes some common themes that are typically discussed during an ice breaker activity: leaving friends, meeting new people, comparing old and new schools, personal safety and apprehensions about arriving in a new school.

Onwuegbuzi et al. (2001) investigated the academic impact of an afterschool tutoring program on 183 at-risk high school students, defined as students failing one or more subjects. This Georgia school created a program called “Project SAVE (surviving afterschool vulnerability everyday)” (p. 36). These students were tutored in one or more subjects by local university students with the tutoring provided in one or more subjects on a one-on-one afterschool basis. The tutored subjects were English, math, science and/or social studies each for one hour and 15 minutes four days a week. Different subjects were taught on specific days under the supervision of four certified teachers, one for each subject. Academic achievement was measured by class grades.

Onwuegbuzi et al. (2001) describe the hours after school as “a critical period for school-age children” (p. 35). They add that adult supervision is needed for adolescents after school due to a heightened risk for “juvenile delinquency, violent crimes, adolescent pregnancy, vandalism and accidents” (p. 35). Moreover, the authors point out that while many schools offer after-school programs, these are not formally evaluated.
With this in mind, the authors found that the majority of the students in Project SAVE passed the class that they had previously failed. They state, “This indicates that the tutorial program was extremely successful in increasing academic achievement” (p. 37). More specifically, students showed a significantly greater improvement in English over mathematics and social studies. Another benefit of the after school tutoring was that it had a positive impact on student discipline.

High schools have a fundamental obligation to serve individual student needs, however the mobile student is generally underserved. While many studies of this population have been published, the lack of programs for these students in many high schools is a testimony to the need for more work by the schools and society to provide interventions (Kerbow, 1996). Jason et al. (1992) stresses “In an era when school budgets are often shrinking, we believe that school systems can implement cost-effective school transfer programs” (p. 15).

Rumberger (2003) emphasizes this by stating, “Both the causes and consequences of this phenomenon are more complicated than many educators assume” (p. 14). Titus (2007) feels that schools can’t afford to wait for national, state, and local authorities to make decisions; individual schools need to create their own local programs to help mobile students. Blakeman (1993) agrees stating “All schools need to develop procedures for integrating relocated children” (p. 5). Titus (2007) feels that success of a mobile student will be largely determined by how the school accommodates the new student. Moreover, student success should not be solely measured by academic outcomes but also by the social and emotional well-being of the transfer student.
Rumberger et al. (1999) compiled an extensive report analyzing the educational consequences of mobility in California. Their study addressed the impact of mobility on secondary education students. This mixed methods study examined quantitative data from surveys and qualitative data from interviews with students, parents and educators. Using these two research methods, the authors felt they could better explore relevant questions while a single research method would provide insufficient information.

Rumberger et al. stated, “The interview data were particularly useful in helping to better understand how students, parents and school personnel viewed the problem of mobility, such as understanding the reasons why students changed schools and how those reasons varied among different types of students” (p. 9). Their study is germane to developing the methodology of this current dissertation.

In detail, Rumberger et al. (1999) reviewed what specifically should be done for students planning a move. The researchers began by determining whether the student’s move was “strategic”, meaning initiated by the family and student out of their own self interests and educational decisions. If this were the case, the authors felt that there wasn’t much the school could do besides educating the student and family for their move. Moreover, Rumberger et al. felt that “strategic” moves are often beneficial while most moves are not strategic and are adverse. These more reactive moves require school interventions because the authors found that things can be done to either prevent mobility or ameliorate its harmful impact. Specifically, they found,

…many times students change schools in reaction to unpleasant or undesirable situations in their school, often in the middle of the academic
year. Some of those changes are unnecessary as well as detrimental. (p. 14)

This mobility can be evaluated from three perspectives: the student and their family, the school, and the state policymakers. In order to avoid the possible negative consequences of mobility, Rumberger et al. (1999) described ways the student and their family can prevent or lessen the impact. These include:

1) resolving problems at school (i.e. academic or social issues) before they escalate. Sometimes families feel that by simply changing schools all the problems will be solved.

2) making school changes between semesters or, if possible, at the end of the school year. When a student changes in the middle of the semester they can fall behind, fail classes and lose credits.

3) having parents personally take their child to the new school to register and meet the counselor. In addition, parents need to ensure that school records are released to the new school.

4) having parents schedule follow-up appointments with the school counselor and teachers to see how the student is adjusting to the new school. In addition, parents should talk to their son/daughter regularly about their experiences and how things are going emotionally and academically.
While parents can take steps to alleviate the impact of mobility, there are also ways that schools can reduce unnecessary school moves. Rumberger et al. (1999) again describe some strategies that schools can implement include:

1) counselors working with the student and their family to find ways to prevent mobility or at least delay the move until the end of the school year.

2) counselors and administrators becoming proactive by preparing for incoming transfer students. For example, creating extra sections of classes, making an orientation video, using assessment tests to help determine course placement, training student volunteers to mentor transfer students, and creating informational packets describing extracurricular activities.

3) counselors and administrators should help transfer students immediately upon their arrival by encouraging them to join clubs and activities, offering, students the option to enroll in classes without credit or to complete an independent study to remain academically challenged until the new semester begins. In addition, a plan for subsequent meetings after the student starts school to see how things are progressing merits consideration.

4) schools should provide support and activities such as transfer group meetings with a staff facilitator as well as scheduling appointments to meet with parents. If necessary, staff should consider referrals to outside agencies or therapists and/or provide staff or teacher mentors for students who are struggling to adjust academically or socially.
5) schools should analyze transfer student data as well as monitor academic progress.

6) teachers can help accommodate new students by creating learning packets that contain classroom handouts and other materials for late arriving students, by recommending the creation of personal journals to help the staff learn more about the new students and to get a sample of their writing style and aptness of thinking, and by providing the student with a list of class rules and procedures.

7) once the student arrives, teachers can help the transfer process by assessing the student’s ability level, by introducing the student to his or her classmates, by pairing the student with a classmate for extra support, and by allowing for dedicated time to talk with the new student.

Teachers can also ease the transition into their classroom by preparing for these students ahead of time. Teachers can familiarize themselves with new students by a review of pertinent previous records, grades, attendance and other critical information (Bartosh, 1989; Lash & Kilpatrick, 1994). Classroom teachers should consider providing tutoring or review sessions while monitoring the student’s overall academic progress. If the student is struggling academically, socially or behaviorally, the teacher should contact the appropriate professional support in the building.

Rumberger et al. (1999) also reviewed actions states can consider. These include requiring that schools report to the State Department of Education about the status of transfer students and their completion rates. When assessing a school’s academic
efficacy and performance, states should account for the local mobility rate. School
districts should be required to keep track of a student’s location after leaving the school.
This would prevent gaps in learning when students change schools. Moreover, student
records should be sent to the subsequent school in a timely manner so that the receiving
school can register the new student with pertinent old records available. The State
Department of Education should create a comprehensive guidebook for students and their
parents, providing information about typical generic difficulties students have in
transferring schools and ways to make the transition easier. This same guidebook should
be prepared for school districts to keep educators informed about actions they can take to
support mobility and reduce school transfers. Finally, the State Department of Education
should provide funding for schools with high mobility rates to establish support
programs.

This thorough article provides a comprehensive outline of steps that can
ameliorate a transfer student’s integration into a new school (Rumberger et al., 1999). A
decisive emphasis is on communication: the new school with the transfer student and
their parents, the new school with the old school, the new school with the local and
regional community, and the individual teachers and school personal with each and every
transfer student. Anticipatory preparation for receiving the transfer student also provides
for preventive measures and expedited solutions for any problems. Thus, communication
and preparation are key to facilitating mobile student assimilation to a new school.
Counselors’ Perspective

High school counselors find that many transfer students characteristically offer significant social and academic challenges (Holland-Jacobsen et al., 1984). Holland-Jacobsen et al. continue, “Indeed, mobility is an issue that school counselors must recognize and address” (p. 49). Often moving from one school to another for unfavorable reasons, transfer students are at higher risk of academic failure and socially adverse events (Blakeman, 1993; Fisher et al., 2002; Kerbow, 1996; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2001; Rumberger, 2003; Smith et al., 2008). Some schools provide excellent resource support for these students by understanding the immediate need for comprehensive social and academic triage in order to provide assistance while other schools do not (Bartosh, 1994; Blakeman, 1993; Holland-Jacobsen et al., 1984; Mennes, 1956; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2001; Wilson, 1993). Kerbow (1996) suggests that some degree of mobility is unavoidable. He states, “Therefore, schools must explicitly plan for the entrance and exit of a portion of their student body each year” (p. 165). In fact, Blakeman (1993) stresses, “The problem is that the schools are not prepared to deal with mobility” (p. 11).

These students are unique and need extra resources for optimal success. Most of the literature available on transfer students is derived from quantitative or statistical studies (Crockett et al., 1989; Dunn et al., 2003; Engec, 2006; Heinlein & Shinn, 2000; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Strand, 2002). Such studies provide information about the transfer group as a whole but do not portray how the individual student interfaces with the new school. Moreover, this literature ignores the counselor’s role, has a limited number of publications, which are purely theoretical, and only a few of these studies are
purely qualitative. While these counselor-related articles detail a variety of supportive interventions for transfer students, the reader was unable to find any concrete data or evidence to indicate that these recommended efforts were used effectively for particular transfer students.

**Summary and Discussion**

Student mobility is defined as a student moving from one school to another for reasons other than promotion to a higher grade and is of three types: 1) school mobility alone, 2) residential mobility alone, and 3) combined school and residential mobility. Such transfers are typically unscheduled and result largely from adverse events, including divorce, school safety, neighborhood lawlessness, financial problems, academic concerns, natural disasters and other emergencies, and/or loss of parental employment. While the definition is unifying, the transfer students themselves represent a diverse population of great heterogeneity. No two students are exactly alike and each must be addressed as an individual with their own unique needs and supports. Not only does the definition of a transfer student in the literature hide this heterogeneity but this literature is quite mixed regarding favorable and unfavorable effects of the mobility (Jones et al., 1992).

Given this perspective, each unique student becomes a singularity and must be approached individually. By asking these students to discuss their transfer experience, academicians and educators potentially gain critical insight into how each student has experienced their transition whether they have come from another country, culture, school setting, family situation, ethnic background or financial circumstance. The transfer
student himself becomes the expert that we can all learn from in order to help subsequent such students.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Research Overview

In the published qualitative studies, the voice of the student is quite compelling in reflecting emotions, attitudes, and individual transfer experiences (Rhodes, 2008; Rumberger 2003). Knowing such specifics is an essential foundation to finding solutions to transfer student problems. Before a school and its staff can know what interventions should work, they must be aware of what problems need to be solved. Interviewing the transfer students themselves, listening to their stories and reviewing pertinent records would seem to be vital components to understanding this unique and ubiquitous student population’s transfer experience. Thus, the primary research questions for this study are as follows:

- What perceptions do transfer students have about their transition to a new school?
- What do transfer students perceive as reasons for their mobility?
- Did the reasons for mobility have a favorable or unfavorable impact on their academic and social experiences?

The secondary research questions are:

- What were the school resources that specifically helped or hindered success?
• Do students from differing backgrounds (geographic, cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic, family or divergent prior school settings) have resultant academic and social needs that require variant approaches to support?

Research Design

A mixed method design will be used in this investigation. Following creation of a comprehensive database for each participant (see ILP below), the predominant focus will shift to a qualitative case study design. The purpose was to develop an understanding of the participants’ behaviors and decision making by a detailed analysis of a restricted sample of cases in a bounded system. A bounded system is limited by time and place which confine the case to a specific system (Creswell, 2007, p. 244). Thus, this case study is limited to representative transfer students at one particular high school during the 2009-10 school year, the students having transferred from non-sender schools during the summer prior to high school or at any time during high school.

Data Source

Pivotal to comparing the total student population at RVHS to the transfer student group and then later selecting candidates for this study is acquiring a demographic and academic database on all these students. Fortunately at RVHS this is obtained routinely for all students and kept in confidential student files summarized in each student’s Individualized Learning Plan (ILP). The ILP database is a fundamental component of each student’s record and is accurately and systematically maintained by the registrar and the head of the Information Technology (IT) department. The ILP begins with data provided in a comprehensive questionnaire which is filled out by the parent or guardian at
the time of registration. This information, which is largely demographic, is entered into a master database called Pentamation. The ILP synchronizes with the master database and over time accumulates additional information, including attendance records, classes taken, past grades, discipline, test scores, extracurricular activities and current and future goals.

This information must be available to teachers, staff and counselors in order to possess a thorough database for purposes of support, class selection, contacts and curriculum planning. This broad data base is similar to the well known IEP but is tailored for every student in the school and is called an ILP, an acronym for Individualized Learning Plan. The ILP was initially created by the investigator of this study in 2004 based on the perceived needs of the counseling department and was gradually adopted by the entire school district and presented nationally at school technology meetings to favorable review. The ILP contains the following major sections: demographics, class schedule/activities, scores and awards, past grades/current Grade Point Average (GPA), goals, ICARE (a list of volunteer activities), four-year plan, and college and career plans including the Family Connections/Naviance program.

This data is confidential, password protected and maintained online based on established security authorization. Most teachers and staff have access to selective portions of the ILP and grades while counselors have access to all the aforementioned data. The investigator will abstract pertinent data for collection and analysis and this information will be kept in a locked file cabinet in a locked office to secure confidentiality.
Sample

From the 20.7% of the total RVHS student population who are transfer students, the investigator selected a sample of ten students to interview regarding their transfer experience after a detailed analysis of their records in comparison to the entire transfer group. This provided data sets for comparing and contrasting prior academic and social functioning with current performance in the new school. It also provided verifiable reference information to correlate with the students’ recollections and offered points of special attention during the interview conversations.

Choosing the best method for selecting ten students for this study offers a challenge. One potential method requires posting a flyer around the school building, asking for transfer student volunteers. Given the inclusion and exclusion criteria listed below, this method requires screening of a large population of possible participants. Another viable method is to ask the school counselors to identify as many transfer student candidates as meet the criteria and then seek volunteers for the investigator to interview. The ten students selected were from the most numerically predominant demographic subpopulations of transfer students at this school using the ILP.

The interviews were taped and transcribed for thematic analysis using specialized analytic software and an established coding system. After identifying the dominant themes or commonalities, the investigator analyzed and interpreted this data to provide a better understanding of the transfer student experience and how relevant resources provided needed support and services. Combining this experiential data with past
literature, the investigator arrived at conclusions that answered the research questions of this study.

Table 1

*Demographics of the Ten Transfer Students Studied*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Year of Transfer</th>
<th>Current Year in School</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Previous School</th>
<th>Native Language</th>
<th>Free / Reduced Waivers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Asian Pacific Islander</td>
<td>Out of the Country</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Asian Pacific Islander</td>
<td>Out of the Country</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Black Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>Illinois Public</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Black Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>Illinois Public</td>
<td>Jamaican</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Chicago Public</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Chicago Public</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>White Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>Chicago Public</td>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>White Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>Chicago Public</td>
<td>Ukrainian</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>White Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>Out of the Country</td>
<td>Russian and Spanish</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>White Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>Out of the Country</td>
<td>Assyrian</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Setting

Renaissance Valley High School is a large metropolitan school in suburban Illinois. At the midpoint of the 2009-10 school year, RVHS enrolled a total of 2,629 students in grades 9 through 12. The RVHS building has over 300 faculty and staff members. The majority of the teachers in the district are White (91.2%) and thus do not reflect the ethnicity of the student body. As detailed in Chapter I of this dissertation, at 20.7% RVHS has a higher mobility rate than published for United States (15-20% in 2006-2007) or the state of Illinois (14.9% in 2007). Because these students are at increased risk, out of necessity RVHS has investigated methods of providing support and implemented a plethora of appropriate programs and activities as highlighted in Chapter I.

Student Population

The total student population is extremely diverse with over 65 languages other than English spoken in the student homes. Fifty percent (50.1%) of the student population is White, 32.1% Asian/Pacific islander (Asian/PI), 9.1% Hispanic, 5.2% Black, 3.3% Multicultural, and 0.2% Native American. Moreover, within these ethnic backgrounds, there is additional diversity. For example, while both White, one student may be from Croatia while another is from Switzerland. During the 2009-10 school year, 20.7% or 529 students were transfer students. The transfer students’ data differs slightly from the 2007 school year published report card because transfer enrollment is not static and varies throughout the school year. In addition, total enrollment fluctuates due to student transfers or early graduation.
Transfer Students

It is worth analyzing if the spectrum of backgrounds of transfer students at RVHS is similar to the enrolled student body as a whole. During the 2009-10 school year on the last day of the first semester (referred to hereafter as “the index day”, the distribution of ethnicities of the transfer students was as follows: 188 students (35.5%) Asian/PI, 179 students (33.8%) White, 71 students (13.4%) Hispanic, 68 students (12.8%) Black, and 23 students (4.3%) Multicultural.

![Figure 2. Distribution of Ethnicities of the Transfer Students Studied](image)

The total number of transfer students in the above distribution is 529. Since transfer and total student influx and efflux varies constantly, there is no universally accepted time during an academic year to generate transfer student data as described by de la Torre and Gwynne (2009). This is problematic for investigators interested in
consistent and precise data review. The Index Day represents a time of maximum stability of the student population because new students haven’t enrolled yet and early graduates and students transferring out haven’t departed.

These data demonstrate that except for a somewhat greater percentage of Black transfer students and reduced percentage of White transfer students, the transfer student group percentages compared favorably to the overall student population. This is important in attempting to select representative transfer students to participate in the study. The top six home languages spoken by transfer students are English (23%), Spanish (12%), Urdu (10%), Assyrian (10%), Tagalog (6%) and Korean (6%).

Figure 3. Languages Spoken by the 529 Transfer Students at RVHS
This is pertinent since the interviews were conducted in English and the selected students needed to be proficient in that language. While the option of using translators was available, introducing another individual into the conversation conflicts with confidentiality and potentially interferes with the interviewer’s appreciation of verbal and emotional nuances that may be crucial to the discussion. Misinterpreting a foreign language could allow the investigator to accidentally introduce personal bias in the translation.

The participating students’ predominant ethnic and geographic origins should be representative of the transfer student group as a whole. This would favor the ability to reach generalizable conclusions from the study. As with their ethnic backgrounds, the locations of prior student residences are diverse. Of the total transfer student group, 25% are from out of the country, 22% are from the Chicago Public School System (CPS), 14% are from an Illinois public school other than the CPS system, and 9% are from out of the state of Illinois. The remaining 30% of the transfer students come from other locations, including Illinois private schools, parochial schools, alternative placements, or home schooling.

The ethnicity of transfer students from out of the country tends to be Asian/PI (49%) or White (41%). The ethnicity of transfer students from the CPS system tends to be White (33%), Asian/PI (33%), or Hispanic (23%). From Illinois public schools outside Chicago, the transfer students are predominantly Black (38%), White (28%), or Asian/PI (18%).
Another source of diversity among the students at RVHS is their financial circumstances. The state of Illinois uses Income Guidelines to determine which students are eligible for free or reduced meals based on family yearly income and the household family numbers. These guidelines can be found at http://www.isbe.state.il.us/nutrition/htmls/eligibility_listings.htm. Since the financial status of the student’s family is confidential and not known to the investigator and since economic indicators are relevant to student success, utilization of free or reduced meal status seems a reliable surrogate for socioeconomic disadvantage (Heinlein & Shinn, 2000). Heinlein and Shinn state that “…controls for socioeconomic status (SES) are critical in studies in mobility” (p. 349).

Of the total student population at RVHS of 2,629, free or reduced meals were approved for 703 students or 26.7%. Of the total transfer student population at RVHS of 529, free or reduced meals were approved for 232 students or 43.8%. Thus, almost half of the transfer students demonstrate evidence of economic hardship and will need to be proportionately represented among the interviewed students.

Thus, transfer students’ backgrounds are quite diverse in ethnicity, languages, prior residence and school system. These trends will influence student selection criteria for this study. For example, if a transfer student from out of the country is selected, he should be Asian/PI or White to accurately represent this group. Likewise to be selected for the study a CPS system transfer student should be White, Asian/PI or Hispanic. Once the ideal characteristics of the sample population are determined, the RVHS counselors will be asked to identify transfer students who would agree to participate and are likely to thoughtfully articulate their transfer experience.
The students selected to be interviewed for this study will be identified as representative of the largest transfer student subgroups from different geographic and ethnic backgrounds as described below. The purpose of this selection is to interview students with similar backgrounds to the plurality of transfer student groups rather than outliers. For example, since there are many Asian\Pacific Islander students who transferred from out of the country to RVHS, one or two of these students would be appropriate for selection for the study as opposed to the single student who is Native American or home schooled.

**Sample Selection Criteria**

A key consideration in this study is the number of students to interview. Creswell (2007) addresses this question by indicating, “There is not a set number of cases. Typically, however, the researcher chooses no more than four or five cases” (p. 75). The reason he gives for this is the consideration of generalizability. In quoting Glesne and Peshkin (1992), Creswell (2007) notes that generalizability is “…a term that holds little meaning for most qualitative researchers” (p. 76). The more cases studied the less depth the researcher can achieve in any one selected case (p. 76). Moreover, there remains the nebulous answer to the question of how many cases one needs to study for purposes of generalizability (p. 76).

Seidman (2006) emphasizes that an in-depth phenomenological interview requires completing three interviews with each subject for a total of 90 minutes. The purpose of the first interview is to get to know the subject and their history so at the second interview the focus can be on specific details related to the study and the final interview
can be for reflection and clarity. The aim of this three part format is to gain validity by placing comments in context and seeking internal consistency. This also allows the interviewer to gain an understanding of how the subject connects to their experiences and finds meaning in the events (p. 24).

For this case study, data will be systematically collected and analyzed by interviewing a total of ten students who are representative of the transfer population as a whole at a suburban high school. This requires searching the school’s database for the demographics of our transfer student population, using Microsoft Excel 2007 and its PivotTable feature to identify representative student groups as shown above. The specific demographic parameters will include race, ethnicity, location of origin, previous school attended, and current year in school. Ten transfer students identified by counselors and who volunteer and meet the criteria below will be interviewed by the investigator to explain the study and get their verbal assent and then parental/guardian written informed consent.

Inclusion criteria:

- Students at RVHS who have moved residence and transferred from another high school or school district and who have had at least one month in the recipient school district
- Willingness to participate in the study and having parental or guardian consent
- No prior counseling contact with the investigator
- Proficient in English
• Students who are convenient to study and provide critical case illustrations of the types of challenges and successes of transferring schools. (Creswell, 2007, p. 128)

• Diversity but within the common representative groups.

• Unlikely to transfer again during the planned interviews.

Exclusion criteria:

• Unwillingness to participate for any reason

• Lack of parental or guardian consent

• In district less than a month

• Unwillingness to give verbal student assent

• Not proficient in English

• Likely to transfer again during the planned interviews

Once a student is selected, the investigator will meet with the student to explain the study, review the written informed consent, and answer questions. If the student agrees to participate, the investigator will call the parent or guardian to explain the study and get their verbal agreement for the student to bring home an informational letter and consent form to be signed. Attached to the consent form will be a letter summarizing the study along with the investigator’s direct telephone number and email address to answer any emerging questions. When the parental or guardian consent has been signed and received by the investigator, three 42-minute interviews will be scheduled.
Research Procedures

The first step was to identify potential students to study. The ILP database lists all transfer students at RVHS and thus generated a list of 529 total transfer students. The group was further classified according to ethnicity, previous school attended, language spoken at home, current counselor and eligibility for free or reduced lunches. All transfer students of the investigator were eliminated from the pool for study. The remaining students were then reorganized into lists based on ethnicity and previous school attended as follows: African-American from a suburban public school, Asian/Pacific Islander from a school outside of the country, European from a school outside of the country, Latino from Chicago Public School (CPS), and Caucasian from CPS or other in-state school. This recategorized list of candidate students was then reorganized based on the current counselor and that counselor was contacted to help identify those students who fit the inclusion criteria and not the exclusion criteria for the study.

The second step was to contact the counselor-identified student candidates to discuss the study and determine their willingness to participate. If the student agreed to participate, the investigator obtained student written assent and parental or guardian written informed consent. This involved calling the parent or guardian and sending the consent form home with the student.

The third step was to thoroughly review records: the academic file and ILP records of each student interviewed, specifically seeking transcript review, GPA, current grades, attendance, demographics, behavioral record, recognitions, extracurricular activities, hobbies and interests, and pertinent prior school records.
The fourth step was to obtain a reliable digital audio recorder to record the interviews for digital transcription and to upload to Atlas-ti software for analyzing interview thematic responses. This was done after verifying the reliable functioning of the recorder and accuracy of Atlas-ti software through a mock interview session.

Step five was to schedule a time for the first interview and to seek an appropriate meeting room for this interview and the two follow-up interviews with each of ten students.

Step six was to conduct three interviews with each of the ten students during school hours in a pre-assigned room selected for being non-threatening, neutral and comfortable. Each interview will lasted 42-minutes which is one school period. Substitute sessions might have needed, depending on the interview and unforeseeable circumstances: tardiness, illness, and other responsibilities. In fact, no substitute sessions were required. Students were dismissed from a study hall or lunch period rather than an academic class to complete the interviews which were conducted within days of each other.

The interviews were guided by previously created questions (see appendix D) as a guide with the understanding that these were a frame of reference and not all questions needed to be answered as these interviews were meant to be free flowing open conversations. In other words, the students determined the direction of the conversation and which questions were most pertinent to that student.

Step seven was to transcribe the interviews as digital data and input the data into the Atlas-ti data analysis program for determination, listing, and coding of individual
student themes and dominant group themes discussed, using the code system in the Atlas-
ti program. These themes were then identified, analyzed and summarized by the
investigator in order to find, review and interpret the salient ones which helped to answer
the primary and secondary research questions of this dissertation.

Data Collection Procedures

For each student interviewed, the investigator created an actual file folder to hold
paper documents as well as an electronic file folder for all pertinent data for completeness
and analysis. These folders were labeled with the student’s ID number to protect
confidentiality and anonymity. The file folder held the parental\guardian signed
informed consent as well as any written notes: interviewer notes, including observations
of the student’s appearance, demeanor, nonverbal responses and cooperation during the
interview.

The electronic record contained a demographic data summary cover sheet, listing
student name, ID number, age, gender, year in school, transfer date, cultural\ethnic
background, contact information, dates of interviews, GPA, attendance, demographics
including eligibility for free and reduced lunch, behavioral record, recognitions,
extracurricular activities, hobbies and interests, and pertinent prior school records.
Additional information included English Language Learner (ELL) support, special
education services if used, and copies of relevant information from the Academic file and
ILP (described under document review below).

Included in the electronic file were the transcription of each interview from the
digitized recording, the data report from Atlas-\ti scanning of the digitized interview, a list
of themes discussed by the student during the interview with bookmarking of salient student comments, and a list of the investigator’s key observations during the interview.

**Overview and Interview Questions**

A detailed list of the questions for the three interviews is provided in Appendix D. The following is an abbreviated list. The purpose of the first interview was to establish trust through a series of icebreaker questions such as:

- Are you involved here at RVHS in any sports or clubs?
- How are your classes?
- What do you enjoy most about school?
- What do you dislike most about school?
- Where did you attend school before?
- How did you learn you were changing schools?
- What made your family move to this neighborhood and school?
- Looking back, what was the most challenging thing about moving?

In the second interview, the investigator used this established rapport to gain access to more in-depth student responses, observations, concerns and thoughts while hopefully eliciting the intrinsic themes that would help the investigator appreciate the student’s story of his or her move to Renaissance Valley High School. Here are some sample questions:

- I would like you to think back to when you first entered this high school building. What were you thinking when you walked through those doors?
Was there anything more that should have been done to help you as a transfer student?

Reasons for transferring schools.
Were you happy about moving to a new school?
How are your grades now and is there a difference from before?
Can you list any of the resources available in this building?
About how long did it take you to establish friendships?
Was your family involved in the transfer process?

The third interview built further on the aforementioned rapport so that the student could clarify or elaborate on the spectrum of issues related to the move. At the conclusion of this interview the interviewer expressed his appreciation, asked if the student had any questions or concerns, and offered suggestions for any needed support. Some sample questions were:

What are your future plans?
Has this school helped prepare you for those plans?
If I were a transfer student just starting here, what advice or “words of wisdom” would you give me to increase my chances for success at R.V.H.S?
What is the single most important thing that you’ve learned from this transfer experience that you feel will influence the rest of your life?
Data Analysis Procedures

The data collected on each subject was listed above under the heading “Data Collection Procedures.” Documents collected included a demographic information cover sheet for each student, a list of open-ended questions to facilitate discussion, and a transcription of the recorded interview along with the original tape. The interviewer also recorded notes, reflecting the student’s appearance, posture, facial expressions, attitudes, emotions, cooperation, and/or punctuality. Both the original recording and the transcription were carefully analyzed to seek key points expressed by the students as common or distinctive themes. The transcription was further analyzed using the Atlas-ti qualitative analysis software program (http://www.atlasti.com/index.html).

The investigator conducted a thorough content/thematic analysis supported by the above software program, looking for common words, phrases or themes. As defined by Creswell (2007) “…the researcher analyzes the data for specific themes, aggregating information into large clusters of ideas and providing details that support the themes” (p. 244). By identifying common themes described by the transfer students as well as the supports listed as helpful, the investigator interpreted how this information improved understanding of the transfer student’s experience. Hopefully this information provided the students’ perceptions of programs and resources to help improve future transfer student outcomes.

With engaged listening supported by the students past personal and academic history as well as the interview documentation, the investigator found that the students revealed their principle transition problems and successes. By describing their personal
experiences, thoughts and perceptions, these interviewed transfer students offered a better understanding of their journey. It is, after all, the individual student voice that is fundamental to this case study. It was of particular interest to learn that there were common themes expressed by the students and that although each student’s experience was unique, general conclusions could be drawn.

The purpose of the study was to learn from their narratives what perceptions mobile students had about their transition to a new high school, the supports offered and why they utilized some and not others? What did they perceive as reasons for their mobility and its affect on them? Was the reason for mobility a significant factor in their academic and social experiences? In addition, what were the principle school resources utilized to help them succeed? Did the school’s resources help them overcome any difficulties? Which programs or resources impacted these experiences the most? In other words, what could we learn from their story about what helped or hindered their academic and social transfer experiences? It was the hope that in answering this study’s research questions, educators would find better solutions for the transfer students’ complex problems and needs.

**Limitations of the Study**

Three 42-minute interviews may be insufficient to complete the interview process. Additional interviews may be arranged at the discretion of the investigator. In commenting on qualitative interview case studies, Creswell (2007) emphasizes “…unexpected participant behaviors and students’ ability to create good instructions, phrase and negotiate questions, deal with sensitive issues and do transcriptions” (p. 140)
all represent challenges to the interview process. Creswell describes a variety of circumstances that may tax the interviewer: recording and transcribing equipment malfunctions, interviewer experience and maturity, and unexpected interviewee behavior. Creswell wisely points out “…asking appropriate questions and relying on participants to discuss the meaning of their experiences require patience and skill on the part of the researcher” (p. 140).

The investigator interviewed students in only one large Midwest suburban public high school with a plethora of resources and activities available so the results may not be generalizable to other high schools. Perhaps the results would be different interviewing transfer students in a smaller school or a school with fewer activities, options and transfer student resources. Thus, any results of this study may not be generalizable to other school sizes, settings, locations, environments and types of extracurricular activities. Heinlein and Shinn (2000) describe well the difficulty of generalizability with mobility:

Generalizability of data from specialized samples is an issue. Studies based on highly mobile populations of military children or European populations may not extend to civilian American school children, for whom, for example, curricula are likely less uniform. (p. 351)

Our focus is on the student voice and, while other factors outside the school walls merit consideration, pragmatically one cannot investigate or consider all the potentially pertinent information (social, cultural, family, ethnic, economic and environmental) that the student may refer to or even ignore. While the
investigator’s role is essentially to listen, experimenter bias can be an unavoidable factor seeping into the selection and phrasing of any questions.
CHAPTER IV
STUDENT NARRATIVES

Overview

The purpose of this study is to advance the understanding of this group of transfer students, explain their uniqueness, and identify effective strategies that the recipient school could use to reduce the students’ risk of failure. Central to this report will be an in-depth description of how transfer students experience the transition from their prior school to a suburban high school outside Chicago. The ten students interviewed for this study were from five demographic categories: African-American from suburban public schools, Asian/Pacific Islander from a school outside the United States, White Non-Hispanic European from a school outside of the United States, Hispanic from Chicago public school (CPS), and White Non-Hispanic from CPS or other in-state schools. The sample included two students from each category. Each of these five categories was further defined by gender and socioeconomic status (as determined by free and reduced school wavers). Following are detailed descriptions of each of these ten students.

African-American from Suburban Public Schools: Jane and Andrew

Student: Jane

Demographics. Jane is a 17-year old junior at RVHS. She is an African American who was born in Texas and moved to Chicago before kindergarten. She attended a Montessori School through second grade and then stayed at the same Chicago
public school through grammar school graduation, and started at a local Chicago public high school. During the summer after her sophomore year, a decision was made in the family for Jane to move in with her aunt near RVHS, with the aunt becoming her legal guardian. The reasons for this upheaval were three: relationship problems between mother and daughter, her mother’s wish to separate Jane from friends the mother didn’t like, and her father’s desire for Jane to get a better education. Jane’s younger brother remained with the parents so Jane made this move alone.

The circumstances of her move reflect poor communication between Jane and her parents. Jane was led to believe that she would just spend the summer with her aunt and it was the aunt who informed Jane that she would be staying with the aunt as her legal guardian. Jane’s reaction to this was adverse. When she went home to get her belongings, Jane mentioned,

_It was a lot of tension, like, in the house, cause I didn’t wanna talk to my parents, so I was just getting my stuff, and my little brother’s like, ‘Why is Jane leaving?’ And I was just like, ‘Because your parents hate me.’_

She felt her parents were trying to “ruin [her] life.” In addition, she didn’t want to move and leave her friends, from whom she thought, correctly, that her mother was trying to separate her. She felt she had no choice and there was lots of tension. Her brother wondered why she was leaving and her friends offered their homes to Jane. She cried a lot before, during, and after the move. She missed her old friends. There hadn’t been any academic problems at the Chicago public high school and she was in honors classes, but Jane recognized the classes were relatively easy to pass. She was not
challenged to get good grades and her former school’s resources were limited. For example, there were no books or books were out of date. She didn’t need to study to get good grades in her honors classes.

Fortunately, she was living with her favorite aunt who was married but had no children of her own. Jane’s aunt treated her as an only child and the aunt expressed concern about Jane’s activities and social schedule. Given that Jane was very independent, this change took some getting used to.

The transfer into RVHS was challenging, academically and socially. Her parents had taught her to live for the future and she realized this new school was her future. She liked the building when she arrived. It was brightly lit with lots of windows, compared to her dark, former school, and had a pool. However, despite being a junior, she felt like a freshman all over again. On arrival, she met with a counselor and counseling intern, who walked her around the building. She attended transfer orientation, transfer group, and during school, she found the teachers, other students and the tutoring center to be very helpful. She was placed in regular classes and she became aware of many gaps in her knowledge. She realized she had to get caught up, and this would be a struggle as her old school had not prepared her for the more advanced academics in her classes, even though the classes had the same name.

Despite early struggles with curricular inconsistency, Jane was ready for the challenges and utilized school resources, such as the tutoring center and meeting with her teachers for extra help.
Classes are way better because I was in trigonometry and pre-calculus

...like, at the beginning, I was struggling, ‘cause, like, some of the stuff
from my old school they didn’t teach us, and the people in my class knew,

so I had to get help...

She was concerned about the “gaps” and sought extra help from her classroom teachers and the tutoring center. She was driven to meet these challenges, and she was able to catch up and take advantage of the academic rigor in order to get ahead.

Socially, she missed her old friends and she found at RVHS that students were grouped by race and ethnicity, while at her former school, students were grouped by personality. It was difficult for Jane to break into these established social cliques, so she felt isolated.

I still really miss my old school and... I think it’s only because I transferred junior year, and, ya know, like, high school year you develop your friendships and your big group and...I feel like by junior year everybody already has their group, and their clique or whatever that they hang out with. So, I’m coming in new, and it’s, like, people already know, and it’s like...Yeah, ‘cause, like, freshman and sophomore year you’re still trying to, “Oh, okay, who am I gonna hang out with?” still looking for friends, and by junior and senior year, ya know, you have that great bond with people.

She commented that some of her fellow study hall students invited her to sit at their lunch table because she had been sitting alone. Jane appreciated this effort to become friendly,
but still felt isolated, especially because these friends were actually graduating seniors
who are now gone and she feels alone again.

Jane has focused her energies academically and feels it’s also hard to devote time
to socializing when she has all the school work. Furthermore, Jane wants to graduate
early, after the first semester of her senior year. She doesn’t feel connected socially and
wants to get on with college. She had considered returning to her old high school to
graduate with her established friends but realized that she would suffer academically. Her
mother asked about her leaving her new friends at RVHS to do this but Jane’s response
was, “What new friends?”

**Supports.** The supports used were her counselor, her teachers, the deans, the
tutoring center and what few friends she made. To find her way from one class to
another, she would find a student with the same classes and follow or “stalk” that student.
As a result, when we met her for this interview at the end of her full year at RVHS, she
felt much more prepared for the uncertainties of her future and more prepared for college,
as she’d already overcome similar transitional challenges coming to RVHS. She joined a
philanthropic school club, as well as participated in a theater group, and performing a
play. She seems to have done enough to be more socially comfortable but continue to
focus on academics. She obtained additional social support from visiting her old friends
on weekends.

**Transfer experience.** Jane’s will and self determination helped her to overcome
an overwhelming academic and social transition to a new high school, one very different
from her old high school, both socially and academically. She demonstrated great insight
in knowing she personally had to overcome the academic “gaps” and social isolation. She not only resolved the academic inconsistency, but thrived with good grades in tough classes and a realistic anticipation of graduating early.

Jane was caught in a “Catch 22” situation, in the sense that she had one foot in the past socially and one foot in a bright academic future, while dealing with social and academic inconsistency.

I mean, in a way, I still wanna go back to my old school, ‘cause I really do, like, I still miss it… I’m not saying I don’t like this school, like, I like this school, but it’s just, I still miss it. I think the only reason why I would wanna go back to my old school senior year, if I did have the option, because, my friends are all there and I feel like graduation and the time our senior year would be, ya know, it would be... I would feel it more than graduating here ...

Her resiliency and realistic outlook were pivotal to her high school and anticipated future success even though she felt her parents ambushed her. The handling of her transfer was very abrupt and lacking in even a modicum of appropriate communication. A better parental approach would be to have a conversation about the move in advance of the transfer to allow the student an opportunity to discuss their thoughts and feelings. Fortunately, the personal tools Jane brought to RVHS, along with her newly acquired academic accomplishments, served her so well that she feels she can overcome any obstacles when she goes to college.
I’m glad that I did, ‘cause if I, I feel like if I didn’t transfer, academically ... I’m going to college, and I’d be like, “What is this?” like, I wouldn’t be prepared at all. It’s like I’m stuck in the middle.

Student: Andrew

Demographics. Andrew is an African American, Jamaican born, 15-year old boy who was interviewed near the end of his freshman year of high school. When Andrew was 2-years old, his mother left him and came alone to live with her Chicago family in order to get a better job and financial stability. Four years later, she returned to Jamaica to get Andrew from where he lived with his aunt and uncle, Andrew’s biological father residing nearby. A few years after Andrew arrived in Chicago his father came to Chicago as well and was in the U.S. army.

From first through sixth grade (age 11) he was in a Chicago public school. Then, his father was stationed in Texas and Andrew attended the end of sixth grade and the beginning of seventh grade in Texas. Andrew returned to the Chicago area and lived in a northern suburb of Chicago where he attended seventh grade; then he moved to a western suburb for eighth grade, graduating and moving to a residence near RVHS.

My dad got...They wanted him to go to like the biggest military base in the country is like in Texas. So, they wanted him to go over there to get more familiar with the army and stuff. My mom-she actually wanted to move back because my dad had to go. He had to go Afghanistan. So, when we came up here he left to Afghanistan and then we came back.
Thus, by the time Andrew was 14-years old and starting RVHS, he had experienced four different schools, two countries and two states. The initial move was driven by a family desire for improved financial and living conditions while later moves were driven by the military. The final move occurred when the father was deployed to Afghanistan and the mother wanted to leave Texas, which she disliked, to be near family in a Chicago suburb. Andrew had no say in the decisions to move.

*Actually, they came to me together with ‘We have to move to Texas.’ I was like ‘Yeah, whatever.’ I didn’t believe them. I came home one day from school and I just saw boxes. I was like, ‘No way.’ And they were like, ‘Yeah, we will be moving in a week.’ I thought that they were messing with me. Dang! I couldn’t believe it because all of my family is like in this area. [And] they told me that we were moving away from my grandma.*

He became accustomed to moving with a “whatever” type response. He didn’t like the long 17 hour drives to and from Texas and was always sad to leave friends. For the last move back to Chicago, he was very happy to finally be with his family, which celebrated his arrival with a welcoming party.

His mother struggled with the move to Texas, where she was separated from her mother and her sisters. She hated it there. Andrew mentioned,

*It was the most stressful for my mom because she wasn’t going to see her mom for so long. [And] my mom was just in a slump like the whole time we were in Texas.*
Andrew tried to maintain a happy exterior to help his mom so he kept it “chill”, trying not to cause problems by showing his anger and frustration. He remembers leaving his friends after being with them from first through sixth grade.

*It was crazy goodbyes. I remember a lot of people just crying. I was like,*

*‘Man, I really don’t want you to leave’. I was sad but, I was used to it.*

Andrew’s starting RVHS was actually a recapitulation of his other new school moves rather than the typical starting high school experience. His routine was to establish social connections, become involved in sports, and defer academic endeavors.

*I just have to settle down. I know, sophomore year, I am going to do way better. This year I didn’t really care about school work. I wanted to get to know people first then worrying about school....It's just what I always do.*

*I focus on school work but, not much. I meet new people first then worry about school. Just because you are at a new place and the new person.*

*You don’t want to be lonely or not talk to anyone.*

He hung out with a lot of kids and he felt comfortable and connected through his socializing. He had a favorable personality for socializing and this anchored his place in the school. He participated in transfer orientation and transfer group to facilitate his socializing. However, he did poorly academically, with many D’s and failures, requiring summer school between the first and second years. Now that he knows people and is successful in sports, he feels he can emphasize academics. He feels the tutoring center and the library are favorable places to study and do homework. His teacher has built in
extra credit for his going to the tutoring center, where he can get help with his school work.

**Supports.** The important social connections and supports were discussed above. The transfer orientation and group sessions were quite valuable for social introductions. He even found other transfer students who were from Jamaica. He was assigned a senior buddy who showed him around the building. The tours helped orient him to the school’s geography, so he felt less lost. Friends also helped him with this. For academic support, Andrew principally used the tutoring center and the library. He also appreciated the availability of his teachers for extra help. Yet the things that made him feel most at home were meeting friends and socializing and being involved with sports (wrestling, track and football). He was also supported by school waivers for lunch and school fees. His future goal of going into the culinary arts was supported by elective classes in cooking and this pleased him.

At the time of the interview, he had 4 F’s. He felt this was due to “laziness.” Actually, he also becomes fatigued with all his sports. He knows he needs to do better academically but doesn’t seem to have enough time, energy or motivation. He feels if he could just prioritize his homework, instead of emphasizing meeting people and spending time on the computer’s social networks that he would do much better academically. He also feels he should avoid the wrong people, which has been a challenge for him in every school he’s attended.

**Transfer experience.** The loss of social capital caused by his moves made socialization a priority and this detracted from academic pursuits. He likes RVHS better
than his other schools, stating, “It’s interesting. It’s a cool place. I like it better than other places that I’ve been.” He now has enduring social connections as an adolescent. He also feels a strong connection to RVHS and hopes to find a better balance for his sophomore year. He plans to seek more support and avoid circumstances that divert time and attention from academics. His mother has told him she doesn’t want to move again.

She told me that she wanted me to stay. [Because] I went to so many different schools that she wants me to stay in one place until I finish high school. One place-maybe.

A mobile student can overcompensate for his social needs by neglecting academic priorities. He worked so hard to get connected socially that he diverted time and attention from his academics; his grades suffered tremendously. He knew he could do better if he applied himself to school work with the same effort as his socializing.

Asian/Pacific Islander from a School Outside the United States:

April and Ajay

Student: April

Demographics. April is a 17-year old sophomore who moved from Korea at the end of her freshman year. She spoke very little English, but her parents wanted her to get a better education and her grandparents were already here. They had planned to come five years earlier, but the 9/11 attack delayed their emigration. She was not happy about the move because of the language and cultural upheaval. Her younger brother also did not want to move.
I, actually, I didn’t want to come here ‘cause I was kind of nervous, ‘cause of the English, or get used to different culture, so, I really didn’t want to come here...

Moving meant leaving her family, friends, and pet poodle behind. The night before the move, her friends came by and cried with her. They also gave her written letters and a computer memory stick with videos, pictures, and messages to take with her.

Um, the last night, I met friends, and they came to my apartment, and we just talked. Um, most of my friends wrote letters, and gave me mini presents, and...And one of my friends cried, and it just spread...yeah, and they gave me a, like, memory card, it had a video file that my friends recorded... they said, “Oh, goodbye, I'll miss you...” something like that.

Her friends were supportive and encouraged her about the move, which they viewed as good for her.

She arrived in April and spent May and June starting to learn English at a private school. She then went to RVHS for summer school and took an ELL public speaking class. She was a straight A student and gradually learned English, taking ELL classes at RVHS in the fall. The first time she went to RVHS, a cousin who was fluent in English went with her. April and her family provided appropriate residency documentation to the security office and spoke with her counselor to arrange classes and get oriented to begin her sophomore year.

At the initial meeting with her counselor she found it very helpful to receive school information (such as bus schedules, a list of school activities, and a school map)
and take a tour of the building with the counselor. She attended transfer orientation and
the school connected her with a Korean student mentor who was bilingual.

One thing that is really lucky is she was… she’s Korean, so she can speak
Korean. [We] talked about lockers, or classrooms, and just all kinds of
stuff about schools.

This was very comforting, as she had some concerns assuaged such as worries
about racism in the United States. Small things such as learning to use a combination lock
were an effort and the mentor helped with this. In Korea, she had never had a dean or a
counselor and meeting both through orientation was reassuring.

Once school started in the fall, she began to make friends and felt socially more
comfortable.

I was kind of worried about the friends, ’cause at the time, I didn’t know
anybody at this school, and kind of nervous...Thought about loneliness
...Um, after I started school and I started to make friends and the kids in
ELL three/four are really nice, and friendly, and nice, and I really like to
hang out with these kids and I didn’t feel lonely.

Her homeroom was an ELL homeroom and she first made contact with two
Korean girls, one of whom she had met at her local Korean church. By December, as her
English improved, she realized she was happier and liked the academics and the school
system. She did well academically and moved up in some classes from ELL to general
education where again she got straight A’s. She felt that being able to communicate
better in English helped her to feel less lonely, although her brother struggled with the language and socializing with peers.

*If I can’t speak English at all, I can’t communicate, so that makes me feel lonely... and my brother felt lonely, ‘cause his English is worse than me, so he can’t communicate with his friends and that kind of problem, so... he really wanted to go back to Korea.*

April was amazed at the size of the building, as her Korean school building was much smaller. Changing classrooms was a new experience, for in Korea the teachers came to the students’ classrooms. She discovered that the ELL resource room was a comfortable place because her friends were there and she could get academic help from the Korean speaking tutor. This room was also a pleasant place to hang out with other Korean students with whom she enjoyed speaking Korean. She stated during the interview, “It would be ‘really terrible’ if there wasn’t an ELL resource room.”

**Supports.** Initially she had concerns about losing her Korean heritage. She was reassured to find she could maintain many of her Korean cultural roots while attending an American school. For example, she joined the Korean club, brought Korean food for lunch, listened to Korean music on her iPod and performed Korean traditional dance, as well as played the piano, on International Night.

*[At International Night] Um, we performed, like, traditional things, like, we danced, and we played Korean drums, yes, and fan dance. I was really proud of myself, and I liked showing our culture to other people, it’s... yeah... it’s a chance that people can understand our cultures better. The*
International Night offers the opportunity to hang out with other nations and cultures... I like that.

She was proud to share her cultural traditions with other students while having the opportunity to learn the cultural traditions of a plethora of divergent student heritages. She was an excellent pianist and also played on other occasions at school and at church.

Academically, she made rapid progress with the help of her tutors. She has a strong work ethic and was able to start higher level math and science classes. Her counselor and teachers encouraged her to do this although, she was fearful.

I need to be more confident to speak English, like, I’m really nervous to participate in the, like, regular class. I’m... I still don’t like to present something, like, um, in bio class we are doing project and I have to present...I’m kind of nervous and worried about it.

Because of her challenges with the English language, April felt uncomfortable at times in her general education classes that were not part of the ELL program. However, she knew she was wasting time in the lower level classes and wanted to progress for college preparation and the ACT test, so she accepted the challenge. Again, she made straight A’s. She received favorable support and praise from her parents and was pleased by her academic success.

‘Cause, what I like the most is school. I like the system and I’m happy that I’m getting good grades. That makes my parents happy, too.

Because she had learned a good deal of English and was the older child, at home her parents depended on April to manage documents and communication in English. She
found this added to transition pressures but was a responsible young woman and did whatever was required by her family.

**Transfer experience.** By the end of her sophomore year, she had accomplished much. She was fluent in English (though with some accent and some lack of confidence), had made many friends who were both Korean and American, was involved in multiple clubs, and was academically successful while helping at home. For example, her parents could now use her as a translator. She expressed sadness that there would be only two more years remaining at RVHS. She expressed concern that she won’t have the same types of support in college. This summer she plans to take two required classes in summer school and hang out with her friends, demonstrating a good balance between academic and social goals.

The most helpful supports were her counselor, the ELL resource room, her Korean classmates, the school clubs she joined, and her family and church. April proved to be a mature and resourceful person who despite trepidation left her country, her social roots, her extended family, her language and friends to move a vast distance to a strange land where she had to make many adjustments to assimilate at a time of life when age alone requires great changes. She not only made these difficult transitions but has thrived both academically and socially and finds herself actually happy in her new country with laudable goals to attend college and become a professional.

April is a prime example of a student who thrived on the supports provided by a school which is proactive in helping divergent transfer students adjust optimally in order
to achieve both academic and social success. To April’s credit, she took maximal advantage of the various programs and resources dedicated to facilitating her progress.

**Student: Ajay**

**Demographics.** Ajay is a 17-year old junior who was born in Chicago to a family from India. He went to the local suburban school from kindergarten to seventh grade, when his family moved to India so that the four children could acquire a better sense of Indian culture, language and customs. He attended an international school in India for two years (eighth grade and freshman year of high school), and then the family returned to their original home. He entered RVHS for summer school and then continued there for his sophomore year and after. Ajay was upset by this move to India, as it meant leaving his familiar community, relatives and long-term friends.

> We were in a car, and then they [his parents] just said, ‘I think it’s a good idea if we move to India for a year or two, just ‘cause you don’t know anything about your culture and stuff.’ I don’t know, I took it pretty hard at first, like I didn’t want to do it at all. And I thought they were joking, too, at first... and they kept on talking about it, and I realized they were serious about it...I said, I was like, “Oh, God, I really don’t wanna go.”

> And, yeah, I told them, I showed them my discontent, but ya know, didn’t really work, didn’t really work...

He tried to persuade his parents not to move and felt they could simply allow him to spend a couple of summers in India. However, his parents did not feel missing his eighth graduation was as important as their family plan. In the end, he went along with
the journey and was glad to meet many new friends in India while acquiring a better sense of his culture.

His parents liked it in India but returned because the kids wanted to come back to their home and friends. Entering RVHS, he found familiar friends and a building he knew from playing on the seventh grade basketball team, which used the high school facilities.

He met with his counselor to determine which classes to take to avoid curricular inconsistency, however there was some ambiguity in his Indian school’s transcript and he was placed in freshman algebra. To catch up with his same year classmates, he then took geometry during the following summer. He feels a placement test when he first enrolled would have helped him place into the right level of classes.

His parents’ consistency and the familiar home environment provided enough stability during these transitions so that Ajay’s successful path was not diverted. Also, Ajay stayed in contact with his childhood friends while in India, which offered further social stability. On his return, his old friends from junior high helped introduce him to new friends they had met in the high school.

Oh, they [old friends] were helpful, ‘cause they helped me make new friends that went to other schools... and basically just helped me get more adapted to school here...

He attended transfer student orientation, which he found helpful. He enjoyed the school tour and was helped by understanding the school rules and supports, such as the tutoring center and the computers in the library. He specifically mentioned enjoying the pizza with the other transfer students at the end of orientation.
**Supports.** Ajay took maximal advantage of the extracurricular activities, such as basketball and track and field. He felt these activities helped him to meet new people and get acclimated to the school. Ajay discusses how much after school sports helped him to meet his peers.

*Yeah, it did, actually. It helped me a lot. I met all the new people, the people on the team that I became really good friends with. Track, too, I mean, there was a lot of people on my team, a lot of people that have similar interests too.*

However, he needed to utilize study halls during the school day in order to keep up with his class work, sports taking so much of his time. He used the tutoring center often and liked being able to get extra help from the staff. He also received help from a close cousin who also attended high school in the same district.

**Transfer experience.** Ajay successfully maintained a balance between the social and academic imperatives of attending RVHS. He expressed the importance of working hard academically during the week so he could enjoy socializing on weekends. When asked about finding a balance between his academics and socializing with new students, Ajay mentioned,

*Uh, ya know, just try to be nice, and try to make the right friends, and go to, like, clubs or sports that you enjoy so that you make, like, similar friends, and so you are well-off socially, and just actually try to apply yourself in your classes, so, ya know, your future's bright... don’t slack off a lot, try to make the right friends. I mean, don’t try to be someone you’re*
not, then, it’s easy to make the wrong friends, but, if you’re yourself,
you’re gonna be liked by people you like…

The potential turmoil of Ajay’s school interruption and change of countries was assuaged by family stability, maintaining contact with old friends, staying academically focused, and returning to his original home and community. He profited by critically important advice from a seasoned counselor and was willing to attend summer school twice to advance academically to the level of his original classmates. In fact, he even moved up a level in science the following year. His focus and maturity have served him well and he plans to attend college and dental school to become an orthodontist. Ajay was able to avoid losing all the social capital he’d acquired over the many years of primary school. He was willing to defer aspects of immediate gratification socially to insure academic success.

White Non-Hispanic European from a School Outside the United States:

Renee and Marty

Student: Renee

Demographics. Renee is a 21-year old senior who transferred to RVHS as a freshman at age 17. This should have been her junior year; however, Renee is Assyrian from Iran and had to repeat the three and one half years of high school she’d had in Iran. When she arrived at RVHS, she spoke no English and was enrolled in double ELL English classes as well as an ELL reading class. Thus, she transferred schools, countries, homes and languages. In Iran, her father was a college professor and her mother was a
teacher and in school most of the time Renee studied the Qur’an, even though she was
Christian.

The family moved to the U.S. for a better life as they were Christian in an Islamic
country and this would likely have jeopardized the children’s future opportunities. They
made this move even thought they had a good life in Iran with excellent incomes and two
homes.

*Iran is a Muslim country and the government is a Muslim country and
every single thing is based on Islam.[And] us, as Christians, (not only my
family) but, every single person who is Christian don’t have that much
rights in a Muslim country as Iran. So, we had difficulties because of our
religion in our country. My mom and my dad got their job when the Shah
was in Iran and before the revolution. So, if it was for me, I might have
gone to the university and might have not found any job just because of my
religion. So, religion is enormously an issue there. All others, than Islam,
is not accepted at all. Maybe from outside people can not see that but, in
the society and living among them you are going to see that. They put a
really big difference between you, as a Christian, and them as Muslims.
So, that’s a big separation between two groups. So, us, my mom and my
dad thought about us as we were growing up. What if we couldn’t get into
the universities or could not get any jobs. [And] you can not live without
a job or live just without an education. So, for us in order to have a better
future and for us to have a better chance...
She was ambivalent about moving, but did not discuss her concerns with her parents so as to not add problems for the family. She was two months short of getting her high school diploma when the family moved. They had to move quietly when the opportunity presented itself and couldn’t say goodbye to anyone. If someone discovered they were leaving, they might not have been able to leave. They went to Vienna for four months. Her father was unhappy with the behavior of teenagers in that free society. He became depressed and, after talking with clergy, decided to continue as planned to suburban Chicago via Amsterdam, as they had family here. Renee was upset and frustrated as she had to restart high school but kept quiet to avoid putting her family under more stress.

**Supports.** At school, her biggest supports were the staff in the ELL resource room, her counselor and her supportive teachers. She felt well supported. Initially she struggled with English but ultimately mastered the language.

Renee describes the ELL resource room:

_In ELL, I feel as I am sitting exactly in my living room. My mom, my dad, all of those people are around... Support and love. Everything._

_Everything! It’s just like your home. My house is really important to me—really important._

Renee talks about the translator and tutor in the ELL resource room:

_Ms. G is an angel. She’s a real angel. Since we came, then we had no English. They basically told us this is desk. This is chair. This is book._

_This is not book. We started with early basic stuff. We couldn’t make
sentences; we didn’t have the English to express whatever like 2 plus 2.

We would write it but would not know how to say it. So, she tried her best to teach those even the symbols that this is subtraction, this is addition, and this is division.

She continues about Mrs. G:

Lots of patience. Lots of patience. Sometimes I be like, ‘Ms. G, I am so sorry that I didn’t understand the question for the fourth time. Please explain to me.’ She’d be like, ‘No, don’t say sorry. Let’s try one more time.’ She’d be trying the same question for the fourth time and her voice wouldn’t change, her expression wouldn’t change. She would just say as she would be saying as she would be explaining the question like the first time.

She had learned many of her subjects in Iran in Farsi but could not readily translate this information into English. Once she learned English (which took three years), she was recommended for general education senior English class and advanced math and science. This was important, as she had a goal of going to college. Indeed, she did so well on her placement tests that she was able to enroll in all college level classes.

Renee was disappointed and angry about being placed into freshmen classes when she first arrived at the high school. She was much older than the other freshmen and she had already taken many of the classes when she was in Iran. When she met with her high school counselor…
I was like, ‘I took Biology. Why do I need to take it again?’ or ‘I took Math. Why do I need to take it again?’ I am in my third year of high school. I brought all of my transcripts—all of those things. Why is it not working? Why is this happening? My counselor was trying her best to say it in a way where it won’t hurt and get us angry or mad or anything.

However, looking back four years later, Renee mentioned:

Everything was fine. Yes, everything was OK. All of the teachers, as I’ve said, were friendly. My classes were really fine. Thanks to my counselor and all my teachers. The classes that she chose for me are really good. My friends were really good. So, overall I have had a good experience at this high school.

Transfer experience. Coming from a school in Iran with a hard work ethic, Renee displays remarkable resilience, defined as the ability to bounce back from adversity stronger than before. The life she’s had for 17 years, her family and friends, her high school credits, her home and language were all left behind. Her family of five departed with ten pieces of luggage and nothing else. Her travels were tumultuous and she had to relate to and provide support for a depressed and confused father. On arrival here, she knew no one and had to start high school all over again. She understood the stress on her family and tried to reduce that stress by adaptive behavior. At school, she was never a discipline problem. She arrived in August after school had already started and had to spend a few weeks acquiring the documentation to prove residency and take placement tests before she could start classes. Her counselor found a Persian student who
could speak her language, and this provided a great sense of relief, as she felt as though she could now communicate. She felt especially helped by her biology teacher, who explained things so she could understand them and never embarrassed her in class.

As she was older than the other high school students, she had trouble relating to other students but did not feel lonely. Friends were not that important. She was more concerned about academics and seeing her family happy. She did join the Christian Club where her math teacher was the sponsor and got her involved. Her religion was critically important to her. She would actually cry during the wonderful prayer that started the club sessions. She felt very connected.

At the time of the interviews, she was a graduating senior who’d been in the US four years. She thanked God she had moved.

*So, as I am taking the test yesterday, I am thinking ‘thank God’ that we made the decision of coming to RVHS first time. Thanks to all of those people who were so patient with us and who taught us all of those things.*

When I took the Math placement I went to English class and was reading the reading part and was saying, ‘Yes, I learned this word in my English class.’

*Something really important, in America, is happening to us. We are one of the first generations from our family to America and getting our education from America. We are going to be the first generation getting our diploma from America. So, that would be something valuable and something really big to achieve.*
Learning English was decisive to her academic and social success. This success was driven not only by her will and determination to do well, but also to meet the expectations of her family, which had moved to ensure her future success.

**Student: Marty**

**Demographics.** Marty is a 17-year old senior who was born in the Ukraine whose primary school education oscillated between the Ukraine and Peru. His mother is Russian and father Peruvian and the moves were motivated by the family seeking improved opportunities as the Ukraine changed political systems. As a result Marty spoke fluent Russian and Spanish when the family finally immigrated to the United States for Marty to start high school at RVHS. At the time Marty spoke no English.

Although Marty was happy in the Ukraine, he understood that the United States would provide better opportunities for himself and his family including an older sister. Marty described how he felt the night before they left.

> Well, it would be the last night that I would see my grandmother. The last time I would see my city, the house, and the bed I slept on. It was pretty slow moment. I lived there for eight (8) years and leaving that behind for somewhere that I have no idea.

He walked into the new building and immediately felt lost, as his former schools were much smaller; however, he liked the safety of the school with omnipresent security personnel. In Peru, there were often gunfights in the streets. Safety was thus an important issue for Marty.
He enrolled with his parents and his sister in attendance. Also present were his
counselor and the ELL Russian speaking tutor, Mrs. G. Marty went along with whatever
the school recommended for classes and was given a schedule. Then Mrs. G took the
family on a tour of the building, during which the parents made an important connection
with Mrs. G. This connection provided an important contact with the school as the
parents did not speak English or understand the American educational system. Mrs. G
filled this gap so that Marty’s parents could be more involved. The parents knew that they
too can attend adult continuing education classes through the local community college
and thus learn English.

They [his parents] aren’t used to American system. [And] they don’t know
the language. So, it's a challenge on how they understand the system.
They wanted to know the basics and how the system works. I mean they
still didn’t know how the system works pretty much but, they trust me. I am
pretty much independent here. Whatever happens I know what to do and
who to call.

After the first day introduction, his family left and he attended classes which were
largely part of the ELL program. His first friends were other students in the ELL center
and, as he learned English, he found it comfortable trying this English on other ELL
students.

We would always communicate in broken English. I have Syrian friends
and they speak in Syrian. I have friends from Brazil, from Vietnam, from
India. We don’t have a common language so, we spoke in English.
The ELL homeroom was reassuring to him as the other students were also ELL students, typically also from other countries. Since all of these students had made a similar transition, they provided a great resource of information for Marty.

He reported that he initially struggled to get around and that real high school didn’t start until he learned English.

_The first days were sort of plain. It’s the first day when everyone gets lost._

_It’s not fun but, the first few months were plain. It’s when you are learning the language...and you start to realize what you are doing and what you are saying. [And] only after that is when you start to think how you say something in the language in your mind already. [But], once you are really able to understand the language. Even if you had the minimum idea, that’s when it [high school] really starts._

Fortunately, English came easily to him and once he was fluent, he was able to take regular and then advanced classes with straight A’s. Until this time, he was very bright in math but couldn’t communicate as needed or use the graphing calculator, so this stifled his progress. He recalled:

_My Algebra class I didn’t know what they first was doing. I was like,_

“How do you use this?” I never used a graphing calculator.

Socially, he became involved in many extracurricular activities. As a freshman, he worked with Mrs. G to start a recycling program within the high school. He joined the Russian Club and as a junior, joined the gymnastics team and became team captain as a senior. Gymnastics proved to be a wonderful way to meet other students outside the ELL
group. He was nominated and accepted into the National Honor Society and became a volunteer tutor in the tutoring center.

**Supports.** His major supports were the tutoring center, the ELL resource center, the ELL homeroom and, in particular, Mrs. G. His initial social connections were made in the ELL resource room with other ELL transfer students. He commented that once these students learned English, there was a diaspora amongst the group as they gravitated toward their own interests. Marty’s main interest was in gymnastics, where he met a whole new group of friends.

As a result of the cumulative effects of various supports, his intrinsic intelligence and motivation, and his connected family system, Marty scored high on the ACT, was at the top of his graduating class, and was accepted at a four year university where he plans to study political science and join ROTC.

**Transfer experience.** Marty was literally and figuratively walking in circles at RVHS until he was fluent in English and then took off. He was able to capitalize on his native intelligence and drive to excel socially and academically. All this was catalyzed by caring motivated staff and especially Mrs. G and her ability to communicate with him and his family. The school gave him the support he needed early and in return, Marty gave back by initiating the school recycling program and by helping other students in the tutoring center. Being able to connect with the school, its staff and the other students was critical to his progress and all his accomplishments.

When asked to give advice to other transfer students, Marty stated:
Take all of the classes you can. If you think you can do it, do it…if you think the class is too easy change it. Don’t waste your time in easy classes.

Get involved in extracurricular activities like sports, clubs, and the band. You’ll get more connected to the school. I think the best experience [for me] was through joining gymnastics. My advice is join when you have a chance. Don’t wait…do stuff while you are there.

Hispanic from Chicago Public School: Jessica and Cisco

Student: Jessica

Demographics. Jessica is an 18-year old Hispanic senior who was born in Chicago to a Puerto Rican mother and Mexican father. She grew up having to learn both Puerto Rican Spanish and Mexican Spanish, which have significant differences in speech speed and accent. She attended kindergarten through fourth grade in a Chicago Public Elementary School; then, her parents divorced and her mother moved to Orlando, Florida where the mother’s supportive sister lived. Jessica attended the rest of fourth through sixth grades in Orlando. Jessica states,

My parents decided to divorce. So, my mom was like “I’m not dealing with this.” So, we left. She had family there and she’s really close to her sister and she was over there. She felt her comfort zone. She’s always calling her. So, we just moved there. Then it wasn’t such a great idea. Nobody liked it and was miserable.

Her mother and then four siblings (now six) didn’t like living in Orlando so when her parents got back together, they returned to Chicago where she attended a different
CPS for the rest of sixth grade through eighth grade. She recalls leaving Orlando to visit family in Chicago as often as possible and felt it was “ridiculous” to have moved to Orlando in the first place. She felt “jerked around” with the changes in family dynamics and didn’t talk to her father for three months after the return to Chicago. She had no say in any of the moves, which were always abrupt:

_They didn’t tell us. They just said, ‘Go pack your stuff. We are gone.’ I was like, ‘What’s going on? You just can’t do that.’ So, I was holding a grudge against my parents for a very long time._

Yet she was happy to be back in Chicago where she felt close to family and friends and felt this is where she belonged.

Following her eighth grade graduation, the family decided to move to a house in a suburb near RVHS to leave an unsafe neighborhood. This meant not going to the planned high school in Chicago with her friends. So, once again her father uprooted her without discussion. Her father was excited about the move to a new house and school; however she and her siblings were unhappy. She started RVHS in the fall as a 14-year old freshman and the weeks before she moved, she felt were the equivalent of “going into misery.”

_I said, ‘I’m leaving.’ They [her parents] said, ‘Where are you going?’ ‘I have to spend time with my friends before I have to go into misery.’ I decided to run away for a little bit. [Then] I needed clothes. I had to come home._
The night before the move, she was physically ill, miserable, and needed the comfort of her closest girlfriend:

*It was horrible. My friend spent the night though. It was horrible. My stomach was hurting. I didn’t want to go. I started throwing up.*

She felt she was losing all her social attachments. Her parents had promised no more moves and yet they were moving again. In the new school building, she was initially put off by all the “white people” but was encouraged when she found another Hispanic student. She liked to be socially connected and able to speak Spanglish with a student of similar ethnicity.

She has remained at RVHS throughout high school. She has not done well academically with a cumulative GPA of 1.4, failing six classes during the four years. She nearly did not graduate and had to take an extra course second semester of senior year. Her counselor was instrumental in supporting and guiding her. Socially, she had a few close high school friends at RVHS, yet was closest to old friends in the city, whom she visited regularly when staying with her grandmother. She presents with a tough front; however, as you get to know her, you find an honest, frank and articulate young woman. She likes the diversity at RVHS but finds many students are not “real”, while she is open and doesn’t sugar-coat anything. She takes the risk of telling the truth which was evident throughout our interviews.

During her freshman year, she was angry and held a grudge because of the family move. She didn’t want help. She wanted to be left alone and took every opportunity to go back to her old neighborhood. She feels she gets her stubbornness from her mother and
has a short fuse. She will rather fight than run. Yet she has a good sense of humor. The first day of high school her mother stayed by the main entrance doors so she wouldn’t leave the building. Responding to her mother’s concerns, her counselor kept after Jessica, who sometimes felt bothered by this. She preferred to be independent and have the freedom to figure things out for herself, so she did not participate in transfer group or seek help from adults in the building. She did not want to spend one minute longer in the building than she had to. Because she failed two classes her freshman year, she had to go to summer school to make up one class.

Supports. She felt very isolated and did not establish friends until her sophomore year. She adhered to the academic work ethic, which took her time and helped her avoid getting into her usual trouble, such as fighting with other students, an old pattern from her CPS days. Success for her was to graduate, and while her grades were never very good, she did remain in school and graduated on time. Because of her independent nature, she did not avail herself of the many supports RVHS offered. She harbored considerable anger, but was helped by developing a relationship with another girl who had a similar personality. She became frustrated academically and used both the tutoring center and extra help from her teachers.

As a freshman transfer student, she wasn’t ready to connect socially with her peers. She just wanted to run away from school but realized she had nowhere to go. Once she was willing to establish friends as a sophomore, integration became easier for her at the school. She was less angry and was able to open up to others. She continued to return to her old neighborhood to find relief from the residual pressure she was under. Thus, her
major supports were her grandmother and her cousins in the city. Academically her major supports were the tutoring center and extra help from her teachers.

**Transfer experience.** This student’s strong personality and family support were the keys to her success. The grudge with her father was transient for she feels very close to him. She had to personally want something in order to work for it. She was not responsive to adult pressure but had to respect people to open up to them. Her tough outer shell warns people to stay away and so she had a total of five close friends at RVHS. Academic success and pride were measured by graduating and she did well enough academically to achieve this goal. She had to have liked RVHS enough to remain in school and not drop out, as did many of her old friends in the CPS system.

Success is relative. Her transcript fails to reflect her real story. It suggests an unsuccessful four years in high school, which is not the case. For this resilient student, school was a success since she was able to graduate. Had she stayed at her old school, she feels she would have gotten into fights and dropped out and ended up pregnant like one of her closest old friends.

*I think if I would have went to the other high school, I would have totally been in a different direction. I’ve seen some of the friends that I used to be really close to and I’m not now. [And] where they ended up, most likely I would have went along the same path—for sure. Guaranteed. I know it. One of my closer friends ended up pregnant at sixteen and she dropped out.*

*Very close friend. She was the one that spent the night at my house before I moved.*
Student: Cisco

Demographics. Cisco comes from a Mexican immigrant family and transferred from a Chicago public school to RVHS as a 16-year old junior. He was born in Chicago where he has lived his whole life. He was in one Chicago Public School from kindergarten to second grade and then transferred to another Chicago public elementary school where he remained through graduation. He then went to a Chicago public high school and transferred to RVHS as a junior at the time his parents separated; his mother used the opportunity to move to a better school system as Cisco’ brother was just starting high school.

Cisco was not happy about changing schools since this would mean having to meet a new group of people as well as leaving his established group of friends at CPS. Initially, he felt frustrated and angry as his parents gave him no choice. He internalized this.

I don’t think I’d even said anything. I said, ‘OK.’ And walked away. I was frustrated and angry. So, I really didn’t say anything.

My initial thoughts were that I didn’t want to just leave. [And] like try to meet a whole new group of people like in two (2) years. [But], now it’s OK. I met a couple of cool people is fine.

Yet his primary goal was academic and once he went to transfer orientation at RVHS, he realized this new school was “nice.” Cisco is on free and reduced lunch and tries to help his family by working part time at a local hardware store. He is focused academically and has had no scholastic problems.
His initial introduction to RVHS was through transfer orientation where he made contact with a friend who was also a transfer student from his former high school.

*The first week was hard. That was when I was first starting to meet people. It then went more easy and it just went smooth from there. Most of the people we met were in orientation the first two to three weeks of school. [And] from there we just kept meeting people.*

They worked together to help each other through the transition and this helped both of them. For example, a small thing such as arranging to share a locker gave them a chance to make frequent contact. Also their parents became friends, which helped them support each other. Between Cisco’ favorable attitude, strong work ethic, and support system, the transition to RVHS was relatively smooth.

**Supports.** Cisco came to RVHS as a junior and this helped him assimilate as he had a mature sense of his goals. He knew he wanted to go on to college and took advantage of various supports in the high school. He used the college resource room, met with counselors regarding college planning in extended homeroom periods, and used the RVHS college and career website. He also watched video-announcements regarding college planning during homeroom. He attended college night at RVHS where he had access to over 200 college representatives. At the time of our interview, Cisco had been accepted at Bradley University to study business and was using the college career website in search of scholarships. He took advantage of all the transfer supports offered and was active in transfer group, which felt more like a support group to Cisco:
I was glad that the school actually cared and tried to help you out. The groups help. They don’t just throw you in there and have you manage yourself. They help you out throughout. They did enough with the transfer group like during the study hall or whatever for a couple of months and then the orientation. They did a good job in getting me use to the school before I actually started and we did some team building... It was all right.

Met a couple of people there. I did feel pretty good about the school.

He deferred clubs and athletic programs to focus on his academics and working at the hardware store. In effect, Cisco was highly independent, did “his thing” and went to work. He did not need an extensive social base at the school but did take advantage of the transfer student support system. He expressed that if he had not transferred to RVHS, he probably would never have had the options that lead him to a Bradley University opportunity.

**Transfer experience.** Cisco is exceptional in that ordinarily students from a family where parents are divorced have a more difficult adjustment to a new school. Cisco did not experience this type of turmoil. Perhaps this was due to the fact that despite being divorced, his father lived nearby and was active in supporting Cisco. Family and community supports also included active attendance at church.

Cisco created a personal plan for himself and stuck to it. He was open to all that the school offered, and utilized the resources that were important to him effectively.
During the interview, Cisco was asked, if I were just starting off at RVHS, I’m a transfer student, just coming in, what words of wisdom would you give to me to help increase my chances of success? Cisco responded,

*Just be open. Be optimistic. Don’t just, like, stick to yourself, and just be open to, like, meet new people, try new things...you’re a transfer student, nobody really knows you, so you gotta, like, stand out, you have to, like, put yourself out there.*

Cisco and Peter, who also transferred from a Chicago Public School as a junior, offer an insightful contrast. Cisco focused on the academics and de-emphasized the social. Peter did the opposite. Both ultimately succeeded, since the schools transfer student support program is not a cookie cutter system but helps individual students make meaningful contact in their own way.

**White Non-Hispanic from Chicago Public School or Other In-state Schools:**

**Ivy and Peter**

**Student: Ivy**

**Demographics.** Ivy is a 17-year old junior at RVHS. She was born in the Ukraine and speaks Ukrainian, Russian, English and some Polish. Her mother divorced when Ivy was only nine months old and then left Ivy with her paternal grandmother and moved to the United States when Ivy was seven, in order to pave the way for a better life and future for herself and her daughter. (Ivy lived with her paternal grandmother as the father was off “doing his own things.”) When she was twelve and in seventh grade, she emigrated alone to join her mother and her maternal grandmother in a Chicago suburb.
Her new school had no ELL classes and she struggled academically. In eighth grade, the family moved to the Ukrainian Village area in Chicago where she was ethnically connected in her new Chicago public school.

After graduation from eighth grade, she elected to start high school in a Chicago public school with a large Ukrainian population. She fell in with a group of older students who preferred the beach and playing hooky to going to school, and she missed about three months of school that freshman year. Despite her truancy, she managed to pass freshman year with mostly B’s and C’s and only a couple of D’s. Nevertheless, this caused strain with her mother, who threatened to send Ivy back to the Ukraine or to move her to another high school.

She used to always scream at me. She just likes screaming at me. She thought screaming would help me somehow. It just got me mad and I don’t listen to her. That’s it. She gave me so many chances not to ditch. She used to threaten me by saying she’d move me to another school if I didn’t stop ditching. She was sick of it. One time she even said about sending me home [to the Ukraine] if I didn’t stop. She said a lot of threats which I probably thought she wouldn’t do. I knew she was just saying that but, she was scaring me. Yes, she gave me a lot of chances and I was just blowing them off. I just didn’t believe her. The temptation from other people that makes me want to do it [ditch] too.

As a result because of poor attendance, bad social connections, the availability of drugs, incompetent teachers and impaired peer influences, Ivy and her mother moved to a
Chicago suburb and Ivy started her sophomore year at RVHS, which happened to have a number of students from Russia. The ELL center provided pivotal resources for Ivy and supported her both socially and academically.

The transition to RVHS is worth remarking. There was some confusion about the date school started, since RVHS started earlier than the CPS system. Thus, Ivy enrolled two weeks into the semester and did not have all the necessary paper work. This meant returning to her old high school to get the necessary documents. As a result, she saw old friends and her mother asked her if she would rather stay in this high school. Ivy was ready for a change, but appreciated that her mother gave her a choice. She mentioned, “She understands me and stuff. So, I can talk to her always and she’d understand.”

Her RVHS counselor was firm and addressed the attendance issue at their initial meeting. Ivy noted she never actually knew who her counselor was at her former high school and appreciated the interest her new counselor expressed in Ivy’s success. Ivy never missed one day of school and her grades improved. She was also supported by her mother’s faith in her ability to succeed. Ivy felt proud about achieving good grades, knowing intrinsically she had the capacity to do this.

Teachers maintained high standards and required much more effort from Ivy than she was used to. Regular English at the old school had been easy for Ivy; the ELL classes at RVHS were much more difficult and challenging.

*I came here and my grades got so much better. At first, I used to be like in regular English. Here they put me in ESL 5-6 (the last one) my sophomore year. I don’t know why but, it was so much harder than my
regular English for me there. So, I was getting Ds. The teachers were really hard and pressing you. Here they [teachers] do it because they actually like it. This makes a big difference when you see the teacher really wants you to learn and when a teacher cares and you do the work.

Ivy felt that the teachers at RVHS were genuinely invested, liked to teach, and were socially engaging. She mentioned that this helped motivate her scholastic endeavors. This was especially important at a school that had high expectations from its students. For example, Ivy had never completed a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation or written a five paragraph essay. She actually didn’t know what PowerPoint was. She utilized the tutoring center to catch up and was able to advance rapidly. In addition, she liked study hall, where she could complete her homework during the school day.

Integrating socially was also challenging. Ivy wondered:

*How am I going to interact with other people?* I thought, since they came freshman year, people would already be making friends. Freshman year is basically when everything starts. You meet new people and that is probably how you are friends with them. So, since I came as sophomore, I was thinking that they already made friends with each other and it would be difficult.

It required a year to make some good friends. During her sophomore use of the ELL resource room, she met one girl who became a friend. She became so much more comfortable as a junior that she made many new friends in her classes, including some from other countries. Meanwhile, she learned that two of her old friends from the CPS
were expelled and two others were at risk not to graduate. Some old friends “ditched” so much they were demoted and eventually, dropped out of school altogether. Ivy was happy she had moved and attributes her success to her mother’s faith in her and being willing to force her to move to a new high school environment.

Looking back at the end of the interviews, Ivy mentioned that:

*I have much more appreciation for my mom and what she did for me. So I am going to go home today and tell her that I appreciate her.*

The transfer to RVHS was initially traumatic for Ivy. She felt unhappy and frankly, was depressed. She was worried about meeting new people and being culturally connected. She did not tell her old friends she was moving because she felt they’d actually pursue her anyway if they were true friends. It turned out they did not follow her and, thus, she realized these were not truly the good friends she imagined. She discovered that she needed to choose friends more wisely and to be herself, following her own guidelines rather than those of peers.

**Supports.** Major supports that were decisive in helping her through this traumatic upheaval were not only her mother and her counselor, but also the teachers and friendly students in the ELL center. She used the tutoring center often and liked the tutors, especially those student tutors who were on her level in age and classes. In addition, she frequented the library in order to use the computers to type her papers. She realized that if she needed further social or emotional help, there were social workers and psychologists available in the building. She verbalized that she saw no need for this assistance, but was reassured these services were available.
Ivy is extremely comfortable and happy at school and at home. She has a job in the community to help support her mother and yet her school work has not suffered. Her grades are excellent and she is flourishing in the new high school.

**Transfer experience.** Her mother attributed her former unfavorable school issues to her social circle.

*She [her mother] told me that she thinks everything was just the influence of the former school because you’re not ditching now. Why not? I mean, if you were to ditch why not ditch at the new school? .... She says that I am a completely different person and said that’s the influence. [But] I can’t always be here and I am guessing you have the choice. Always keep the choice. When you have a choice you make a better choice.*

Ultimately, Ivy’s mother emphasized that her old friends influenced poor choices which impacted her school and academic focus. Now, Ivy needed to understand that the choices were really hers to make in these new surroundings and hopefully, these choices will provide better outcomes.

Ivy was enjoying her old neighborhood and friends, although regularly missing school and yet still passing her classes. Her mother knew that this “wasn’t her daughter,” and felt that moving to another school was the best solution. Ivy did not want to move but now, in retrospect, is very thankful that her mother made this difficult decision. Ivy embraced all the resources and supports RVHS had to offer, matured, began to gain confidence in her ability and was careful about her choice of new friends. With newfound insight she mentioned:
I know I can do it. I know I can do better. I just don’t know why I didn’t before. I became more responsible. I know you have friends but they aren’t going to take care of you. You have to learn to know what you are doing.

Student: Peter

Demographics. Peter is a 17-year old bilingual senior from a Portuguese family. He was born in California and his parents divorced when he was 14-years old and starting high school. His mother remarried and the family moved to Chicago where Peter transferred into a Chicago public high school. The family moved in order for the step-father to get a pay raise at work. After his sophomore year, the family moved again, this time to a suburb so that Peter could get a better education and for safety issues, as there was gang activity and school fights in their Chicago neighborhood. A close family friend moved to RVHS at the same time.

Peter is a soft spoken, laid-back athlete who arrived at our first interview dressed in Adidas soccer shoes, sweat pants, and a Brazilian soccer shirt. Peter was insightful throughout the interviews and at times you could see he was pondering different events in his life. At one point during the interview, Peter was asked about his use of social and emotional support services. He mentioned that he didn’t talk to people about his problems but kept them inside. It seemed that his personality made him reluctant to talk to adults in general. Nevertheless he spoke openly during the interviews.

His parents’ divorce disrupted Peter’s life. The family dynamics changed, he moved to Chicago, and he lost a very close friend and many social supports in California.
He remained close to his biological father and the family that remained in California. Though happy to move at the time, in retrospect, Peter feels this move was a defining moment which changed a lot for him and he still looks back on those decisions with some ambivalence.

Peter was happy to move to RVHS, as he understood the need for an improved, more challenging educational experience. At the CPS, without doing much school work, he easily got good grades.

*It was just so easy. I really didn’t have to do any work. I really didn’t listen in class. It was like when the teacher walked around, ‘Oh, I see writing on the paper.’ If it’s right or wrong I don’t know.*

He actually asked his parents to make the move to RVHS after seeing the school at a volleyball game, transferring at the start of his junior year. He found RVHS academically challenging:

*When I came here they gave me homework. They made me read. It was totally different. I didn’t [adjust] and I am still trying. It’s not good because I have to go to college and study a lot and I know I would have to. I just wish, and I told my parents, that I went to RVHS for all the four years. It would have been completely different. I would have had four years to know what’s right and wrong. You’d had four years to be accustomed to school here. I came from a school that you didn’t have to do anything. I think that it really affected my whole life and level thinking and everything.*
Peter attended transfer orientation the week before school started at RVHS. He describes the process:

*I went to transfer orientation with my friend. [And] that was nice. That was helpful...really, really helpful. I actually really like that. They showed us where the classes were. When I got here I didn’t feel like the new “new” student where I like had to ask every person to show me where the next class was. They gave us that tour and ‘...this is where classes 200 starts-upstairs on the second floor.’ So, it was nice.*

Upon transfer, he lost sight of his academic goals in favor of socializing with his new friends.

*I just really mentally prepared myself for high school. I knew it was way different. A lot of people just kind of tried to be social. That is what I was preparing for and not school work but, like being social. I know sometimes that helps but, it didn’t [because] I didn’t want to be the kid that didn’t talk to anyone. I knew I had one friend here. It’s nice to meet people and the people are so different here. There’s all different types of people. It’s great to like meet new people. That’s what I like and this school really helped me with that.*

Social emphasis was a continuing challenge for Peter, especially as he spent time with his new girlfriend at RVHS. Socializing continued to undermine his academic efforts which were more demanding than he was accustomed to. This persisted to graduation. A week after our final interview, I ran into Peter in the school hallway. He
was concerned about his grades and thought he might not graduate because of possibly failing a required class. With extra help from his teacher and advice from his counselor, he did graduate on time.

While Peter did not play volleyball at RVHS, he did play in a traveling league outside of school and stayed in contact with his CPS volleyball coach who helped him get a volleyball scholarship at a 4-year college in Chicago. He eventually wants a career in the music field and will study business in college.

**Supports.** Reflecting on enrollment at RVHS, Peter emphasized how comfortable he felt with the process. His counselor was not available, so he met with the summer counselor.

> *I got to spend time with her a little bit. [And] she makes me feel very comfortable. I feel like I can talk to her. She really helped me out with classes that I want or didn’t need. It felt like she was just focused on me even though she has probably thousands of students. It was good.*

Regarding this counselor, he continued, “She actually made it real easy for us. She helped us with the sports and showed us around. She’s real nice.”

At RVHS, Peter’s social contacts were critical to his sense of belonging. When he saw a need for academic help, he sought it from his teachers and the tutoring center, as one on one teaching was important to him. Teachers at RVHS made him more accountable than he was at his old high school. The classes were more challenging, so he had to cope with curricular inconsistency. To graduate, he had to change his routine. He could not be academically passive. Peter found the transfer student curriculum decisive in
knowing where to go for help and in the end, he did graduate though his grades were marginal.

In addition to the staff at RVHS, Peter received support from his CPS volleyball coach. He knew he could go to him to talk when needed and this coach showed great interest in Peter’s future, helping him get a college volleyball scholarship.

**Transfer experience.** Peter is responsive to and appreciative of faculty who connect with him by showing both interest and concern with his progress. This is well illustrated by his former CPS coach. Peter is an excellent example of a student who does not do well left to his own devices, which are to socialize with friends and internalize his problems. He needed to bond with other students to become socially comfortable, which diverted his efforts from academics. At some point, he needed to realize that he had secured his contacts and now had to focus on his school responsibilities.

*I found myself to be strong and just meeting new people. That was very important to me at first. I put meeting people in front of school. That’s why I got backtracked for a while with a lot of schoolwork because I had so many friends. Then I finally learned how to balance it out. Meet people but, still do your work.*

For most high school students socializing is a pivotal part of gaining acceptance and facilitates academic pursuits [Rhodes]. However, some students over-socialize primarily to feel accepted or to compensate for academic struggles. Peter illustrates this over-compensation well. Attending RVHS challenged Peter to work at achieving academic success and did not let him tread water and just get by. He had to learn to
“swim” academically and get help as needed, which he appreciated. This, in turn, taught him how to advocate for himself while seeking support, which are skills he will need in order to be successful at the college level.

Yet his self esteem was predicated on social and athletic success rather than academic accomplishment. In this sense, if he had open, approachable and friendly teachers, he would have no problem accepting their guidance and support. Social connections from both fellow students and teachers were critical to Peter’s achievements in high school. For the typical high school student, balancing both social and academic mandates is pivotal to overall achievement. Peter’s balance was skewed toward the social.

When reflecting on his transfer experience and the choices that he made, Peter noted:

*Be confident and make the right decisions. Especially, the right decisions for there’s going to be a lot of things school wise, friends wise, and socially…Don’t let anyone tell you what to do. Be yourself. It’s really hard in high school if you’re fake and try to make all of these friends like different groups. Some people are thugs and some people think they are too cool. Just know who you are and where you stand with people which is good. I know who I am. I am not going to go off and be in everyone’s little clique here. I have my two sets of friends and I’m happy.*
CHAPTER V

RESULTS

Given that transfer students have a high risk of failing one or more classes and twice the risk of not graduating compared to non-transfer students (Black, 2006; Fisher et al., 2002; Kerbow et al., 2003; Rumberger et al., 1999; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005), the genesis of this research has been to thoroughly examine the self-described transfer experience of a group of transfer students in the hopes of characterizing features that predict success or failure. Ten transfer students who were selected based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria defined in Chapter III were interviewed in three 42-minute sessions, each in an open-ended discussion guided by a series of subsidiary questions derived from the following research questions:

The primary research questions were:

- What perceptions do transfer students have about their transition to a new school?
- What do transfer students perceive as reasons for their mobility?
- Did the reasons for mobility have a favorable or unfavorable impact on their academic and social experiences?

The secondary research questions were:

- What were the school resources that specifically helped or hindered success?
• Do students from differing backgrounds (geographic, cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic, family or divergent prior school settings) have resultant academic and social needs that require variant approaches to support?

The students’ interviews were transcribed and imported digitally into the Atlas-ti software data base to be analyzed and coded for predominant individual and group themes. These themes were compared and contrasted with those described in the literature to either confirm or question what had previously been described about this population. Of particular interest was any emerging information that would clarify methods of improving transfer student success. It is the hope that the answers to these research questions will help educators find better solutions to the transfer students’ complex problems.

What Perceptions Do Transfer Students Have About Their Transition to a New School?

Transfer students are a heterogeneous population with often widely diverse demographic, social, educational, cultural, academic and language backgrounds. Yet these students are often lumped together in the literature as if a homogenous group. A key question that would be expected to result in varying and perhaps seminal responses is “What perceptions do transfer students have about their transition to a new school?”

This question’s importance rests in two domains. One is the responses are unpredictable and yet might be determinative of how the student perceives the new school and his or her interaction with this new environment. Second, if those perceptions are identified earlier by staff, perhaps unfavorable conditions or interactions can be
avoided or ameliorated. Mobile students have such varying backgrounds and emotional-academic makeup that their perceptions can’t be predicted prior to their introduction to the new school. Perhaps the best way to understand their perceptions is through conversation under nonjudgmental circumstances. Thus this is a key question in the process of assimilating a transfer student.

One expects these students to have expectations, some realistic and some not. The school will also have expectations. How well the student understands the school’s expectations would be decisive in attempting to provide the student with realistic expectations. For example, a student may come from a school where academic requirements are minimal or noncompetitive and find himself in the new environment where academic requirements are significantly higher. The opposite could also obtain. Perhaps the student arrives unable to speak English or with limiting gaps in their academic background. Understanding this permits the counselor to intervene so that the student has the best chance of success. In the latter example, an ELL program would be decisive before the student could progress scholastically and develop social contacts.

Another aspect of student perceptions about their transition to a new school relates to their feelings and the intensity of their emotions towards the move and the people involved. Engec (2006) mentioned, “Those students who make frequent school changes can experience disruption in their home life as well as in school because of lack of continuity of lesson content, disruption in social ties, and feelings of alienation” (p. 168).
Social and Emotional Impact

The ten students interviewed in this study were asked, “How did you feel about the move?” or “If you were unhappy about moving to a new school, what bothered you?” Student responses to these open ended questions were carefully coded utilizing Atlas-ti and tabulated. Table 2 lists key student affects regarding moving.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>Nervous &amp; crying</td>
<td>Didn’t want to move from Korea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ajay</td>
<td>Angry on moving to India 3 years earlier but happy to return to USA</td>
<td>Angry about parents insisting on moving to India 3 years earlier (and not graduating from grammar school with his friends) but now happy to return to original USA home and neighborhood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Upset &amp; crying</td>
<td>Didn’t want to move from her old school and close friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>Sad</td>
<td>Didn’t want to move again.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Miserable</td>
<td>Didn’t want to move from her old school, neighborhood, and close friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cisco</td>
<td>Frustrated &amp; angry</td>
<td>Didn’t want to move from his old school and friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Excited to move</td>
<td>Wanted to get socially connected and fell behind on his academics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivy</td>
<td>Upset &amp; crying</td>
<td>Didn’t want to move from her old school and friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marty</td>
<td>Tough &amp; difficult</td>
<td>Didn’t want to move from his home country, friends and family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renee</td>
<td>Angry</td>
<td>Didn’t want to move and was angry that she had to start as a freshman again.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 lists the key emotions described by the ten transfer students in this study. The reason for their feelings as expressed by the students is listed as well. Note that eight out of the ten responders described negative emotions.

Thus, eight out of ten responders described negative emotions with an overwhelming perception of anxiety, frustration and/or anger. These emotions occurred regardless of the cause of the move and fell into two categories, namely related to leaving the old familiar school and neighborhood, and/or related to arriving at the strange new school and neighborhood. The former involved the actual process of moving: finding out about the move, packing, leaving their community and friends, and the physical move. Arriving issues involved the act of entering a new school building full of strangers, and dealing with unknowns and perhaps an unfamiliar language. The exceptions were Peter and Ajay. Peter asked to move to RVHS while Ajay was pleased to be returning to his old peer group and neighborhood after two years in India. Ajay’s previous anger and frustration had been over going to India in the first place.

When asked, “Were you happy about moving to a new school?” “Please explain.” The common response was a threat perceived as anxiety or fear and often resulting in anger.

*Marty:* Well, it would be the last night that I would see my grandmother. The last time I would see my city, the house, and the bed I slept on. It was pretty slow moment. I lived there for eight years and leaving that behind for somewhere that I have no idea.
Ivy: Very hard. The first night I was so anxious. I was so frustrated to come to school. I came to my counselor. She showed me the school and like this is my first class; this is my second and third period. She showed me the classes around and I couldn’t remember everything. The school is so big. It took me two to three weeks to especially get around and figure out where my classes are. It was so hard. It was really, really hard.

April: I, actually, I didn’t want to come here ’cause I was kind of nervous, ‘cause of the English, or get used to different culture, so, I really didn’t want to come here, but, I like it...When I first hear that we got the green card and we have to go to the U.S.A., and I was like, “Oh, no!”

The feelings expressed varied based on particular issues being confronted by the student in the process of moving and starting a new school. Predominant emotions described included feelings of loneliness or sadness, crying (two of the girls), becoming angry at the counselor and wanting to flee from the building (one student), or having to start again as a freshman (one student). These feelings confirm Bartosh (1989) who mentioned, “Students who enter a new community—and thus, a new school, often feel alienated, alone and unhappy”

Cisco and Jessica illustrate Bartosh’s (1989) observation well. In a discussion with his mother about moving, Cisco describes his feelings as follows:

I don’t think I’d even said anything. I said, “OK.” And walked away. I was frustrated and angry. So, I really didn’t say anything.
Jessica also expressed unhappiness along with anxiety, confusion and frustration:

In the beginning of school.... When I first, first came here. I was so nervous. I was like, ‘What if my locker doesn’t open and everyone knows I am new or a freshman or something.’ [Because] I didn’t have lockers at my old school. So, I didn’t even know how to use the lock.

Confusion

Another common perception is that of being lost. This occurred in different degrees to all ten students. Indeed, four students either couldn’t speak English or needed to become more fluent. All had trouble finding their way around and communicating with adults to express their needs. Getting lost in school was common. One student who wasn’t fluent in English approached a security person, pointed at his schedule, and said, “Help.” Another student, Andrew, who had changed schools four times over the course of his schooling, discussed his frustration when trying to navigate in a new building.

On the first day, I was lost like seven times. So annoying. I would look at the sheet. It said like three something like 3-1. [And] I would go to that way instead of that way. [And] I would walk all the way where the signs and realized the numbers are going down. I would have to walk all the way. I would be like six (6) minutes late for class.

When entering the new building as a junior, Jane had concerns about starting over.
I just thought about it, am I gonna even fit in again, or will I have to start from scratch? I felt like a freshman again. Knowing where my locker is, figuring when I can and can’t go to my locker, figuring out different ways to get to class on time...

Renee’s emotions included a spectrum of concerns and confusion involving home, school, and family and, furthermore, a veritable constellation of other issues:

*Renee: Why are we here? Why are we here? Why did we come? What’s going to happen to us? Are they even going to accept our grades that we’ve brought from Iran? Where are we going to go? What’s the classes going to be like? Is my father going to find a job? How about our house? How about our relatives? There were two thousand different questions going through my mind as I looked out the window.*

**Academic Impact**

When students were asked, “How are your grades now, and is there a difference?” their perceptions were focused on the need to succeed academically. All ten students were concerned about class levels and placement. For four of the students, this meant having to become fluent or more proficient in English: Renee, Marty, April, and Ivy. Fortunately, RVHS has an active English Language Learners (ELL) program; however, this program takes time and requires placing the students in ELL classes until they become competent in English. Curricular inconsistency compounded the problems related to academic success in five students. Jane, Andrew, Jessica, Peter and Ivy found themselves at class levels beyond their previous experience typically because of lower
expectations at the prior school which was usually a Chicago public school. Jane mentioned:

*I was in trigonometry and pre-calculus with Ms. D, and at the beginning, I was struggling, ‘cause, like, some of the stuff from my old school they didn’t teach us, and the people in my class knew, so I had to get help so I went to the tutoring center, and also Ms. D. helped me after school on Thursdays.*

The process of moving from one academic environment to another is never seamless. Classes have different curricula and are taught at different paces. Thus, this study’s findings are commensurate with prior research. Heinlein and Shinn (2000) and Wood et al. (1993) note that academically students who move frequently often have deficits in cognitive development and achievement. These students enter new schools with gaps in their knowledge base that, if not recognized early enough by staff, could lead to continuing problems. Other significant concerns include poor test scores and grades, retention or demotion, and delayed or aborted high school completion (Fisher et al., 2002, p. 318).

Jane, one of the students studied who transferred from a Chicago public school, describes the “gaps” that she noticed in her math and science classes.

*I was just like, at my old school they didn’t really teach us everything; they didn’t really prepare us for like college and stuff. So, when I came here when I was in Mr. G’s class, or with Mr. S, I was like, what are they talking about. I’ve seen some stuff, but then some things I’m like, we*
never did this last year, and so that's why I had to go to Mr. G to get help.

Our [former] school didn’t have a lot... at all. That’s why I came here
with gaps. Like, ‘cause they didn’t also have all the resources that we
needed. We didn’t really have books for some classes. And my dad was
like, “Why don’t you guys have books?”

The academic impact wasn’t just significant in the classroom. At the time of these
interviews, Jane had just received her ACT scores. She discussed her frustration,

*I found out my ACT score, and I am disappointed in myself because, I
don’t know, it’s just... ugh...that ACT made me so mad, and...it was so
hard. I cried yesterday.*

Fortunately, she was able to advocate her needs to her English teacher, who added ACT
preparation to the class’ curriculum. In addition, Jane met with her English teacher
outside of class time to help improve her English skills. Jane recalled her conversation
with the teacher:

*...my English teacher, she helped me with the English part, like, she really
helped me. I asked her, ‘When are we gonna do ACT stuff?’ and she just
was like, ‘Okay, well, we’ll do it.’ And we were doing it for like, two
weeks, and it actually, it really helped me, like, better than the class.*

As noted by Jane above, she had access to her classroom teachers to help support
her academic endeavors. In fact, this was a common theme mentioned by most of the
students during the interviews. Students felt that their teachers were approachable and
were genuinely interested in helping them. Students commented that if classroom teachers weren’t available, the tutoring center was also a valued and accessible resource.

Because Chicago public schools sequence their classes differently than RVHS, Cisco needed to take sophomore classes as a junior. Thus, as a junior, he was fulfilling sophomore requirements.

*It was easier at first. When we came back, my counselor told us in my sophomore year that the sophomore and junior classes are switched. So, my junior year, I was taking sophomore classes. It was a lot easier but...it was kind of backwards.*

This difference in the curricular sequencing between school districts is noted in the Titus (2007) article and called “curricular inconsistency.” This can impact a student’s ability to progress academically. A few of the transfer students interviewed were insightful enough to realize that the classroom material was different from their previous school and were motivated to seek out the appropriate resources to get help. This determination to succeed helped them to improve academically. However, while Jane was able to access the necessary resources to decrease her academic “gaps” and achieve positive grades on her report card, she still suffered on her standardize test scores, which might impact her college goals.

Interestingly, previous research describes how teachers need to recognize student gaps in order to help them academically (Heinlein & Shinn, 2000). In the case of Jane, the student herself recognized her limitations and utilized the appropriate resources to help succeed academically. By meeting with her classroom teachers and visiting the
tutoring center, Jane improved her grades, was proud of her accomplishments, and felt more prepared for college. Unfortunately, the prior academic shortfalls interfered with the standardize test score results she expected.

Social, Academic or Both as Priorities

Rhodes (2008) found that transfer students were “…unable to focus on academic studies until they could secure a peer group with which to interact” (p. 113). This concept of a need for a peer group becomes a central theme in other related papers (Rumberger, 2003; Rumberger et al., 1999; South & Haynie, 2004). The ten participants in this research study showed that students might commit to the academic, the social or both. Some students focused on the academic because they had future scholastic endeavors and they felt the social would eventually fall into place. Other students (Andrew and Peter) came into RVHS with the goal of being socially connected and both lost track of their academic responsibilities. This directly impacted their grades and Peter, who was a senior, was at risk not to graduate. This observation varies from Rhodes’ findings. Ideally, there are students who find a balance between the social and academic. This was true for four of this study’s students: April, Ajay, Cisco, and Marty.

Each student needs to make the important choices regarding their personal expectations and responsibilities in school. RVHS resources and supports were repeatedly offered to transfer students for when they sought assistance. However, the students themselves often found their own balance as illustrated by their own words of wisdom:
Ivy: First of all, don’t worry about you are not going to make friends. You will make friends- a lot of them. Just be positive. ... If you like sports then join some sports. That’s a way to make a lot of friends. Try to seek help if you don’t understand something. Other than that just try to be a positive person. Have a nice attitude towards other people.

Peter: Be confident and make the right decisions. Especially, the right decisions for there’s going to be a lot of things school wise, friends wise, and socially...Don’t let anyone tell you what to do. Be yourself. It’s really hard in high school if you’re fake and try to make all of these friends like different groups. Some people are thugs and some people think they are too cool. Just know who you are and where you stand with people which is good. I know who I am. I am not going to go off and be in everyone’s little clique here. I have my two sets of friends and I’m happy.

Summary Regarding Question 1

Despite the heterogeneity of these ten transfer students, all expressed some degree of emotional stress about moving to a new school and community. Feelings of anger, loss, confusion, anxiety, fear, isolation and/or loneliness were universal. Many of the students described or acknowledged academic difficulty both with the curriculum in the classroom and with standardized tests. Students without English started out more slowly but gained academic prowess once they became English speaking. Student heterogeneity was expressed in specific challenges and emotions described by each of the students.
Some of the challenges were extensive and required more intensive discussion for better definition and understanding. It is difficult to imagine any method other than personal discussion to describe these differences.

**What Do Transfer Students Perceive as Reasons for Their Mobility?**

To determine how transfer students perceived the reasons for their mobility, the investigator asked four open-ended questions of each of the ten students: 1) “How did you learn you were changing schools?”; 2) “Can you explain to me specifically who told you and what the conversation was like?”; 3) “Had you been expecting this change or was it a surprise?”; and 4) “Were you given a reason for this change?” Their description of the reason for the move and their major adjustment is summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Reasons for Move and Initial Struggles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Parents initiated move</th>
<th>Reason for move</th>
<th>Major adjustment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Came from Korea. More opportunities for the future.</td>
<td>Initially struggled with language but was academically successful. Able to connect socially with minimal difficulty by using ELL resources, clubs and activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ajay</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Came from India. Had moved back to India to learn about his family heritage and culture.</td>
<td>Minor curricular inconsistency because classes were different in India.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Came from an Illinois public school in search of better academics and to remove her from bad peer influences.</td>
<td>Major anger about move. Could not disconnect from old friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Came from Illinois public school. Had moved 4 times due to divorce &amp; military transfers.</td>
<td>Focused on his social connections and struggled academically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Moved</td>
<td>Reason</td>
<td>Adjustment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Moved from CPS due to divorce and to remove her from bad peer influences.</td>
<td>Major anger about move. Could not disconnect from old friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cisco</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Moved from CPS as a junior because his brother was starting high school and his parents wanted his brother to start a new and safer school as a freshman.</td>
<td>Unhappy about the move but adjusted over time and appreciated the academics and supports.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Moved from CPS as a junior for better academics and a safer school</td>
<td>Focused on his social connections and struggled academically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Moved from CPS because of academic, social and behavior (attendance) problems. Her mother needed to make a change in order to salvage her education.</td>
<td>Academically successful despite more arduous curriculum. No longer truant. Able to connect socially with minimal difficulty by using ELL resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marty</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Moved from Russia and Peru for a better education and more opportunities for the future in the United States.</td>
<td>Initially struggled with language. Academically successful. Able to connect socially with minimal difficulty by using ELL resources, clubs and activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renee</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Moved from Iran to avoid religious persecution and to seek safety, a better education and more opportunities for the future.</td>
<td>Initially struggled with language. Academically successful. Unhappy with starting over as a freshman but ultimately happy about her education.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 lists the students’ description of the reason for their move and their major adjustment. Note the wide array of reasons for moving and the necessary social and academic adjustments.

Student responses indicated that parents initiated the move in 9 out of 10 cases; however, the time it took for the student to adjust academically and socially was largely dependent on the reasons for the move. There was great variability in the students’ adjustments, which would have been largely lost by grouping them all with the umbrella label “transfer students.” The students became disconnected from their old environment.
and needed differing lengths of time to become connected academically and socially in the new school.

The salient observations from the data in Table 3 and the more detailed narratives in Chapter IV are that students who had no English relied on the support of the ELL curriculum and resource room to achieve academic and social balance, students from the CPS system experienced curricular inconsistency and gaps, and the students who were involved in the decision to move made appropriate adjustments more quickly than the others.

Pre-transfer attitude, whether positive or not, was decisive in how the students adjusted. All but two students showed great resiliency. The two exceptions were Jessica and Jane. Jessica was never able to fully adapt and kept returning to her old friends while Jane desired to graduate early because she never found social comfort with her new peers. Note that both Jessica and Jane were quite angry because the move was sprung on them without their involvement. In portraying her generalized anger, Jessica succinctly described her pent-up frustration which was displaced to her new counselor and classmates during the first day of school.

She [the counselor] was scared. She was like, ‘So, umm...’ She didn’t know what to say. You could just tell that I was like infuriated like I didn’t want to be here. She didn’t know how to approach me. She was like, ‘I’ll walk you to your first period class.’ I was like, OK, OK whatever.

They [classmates] were like staring at me. [Because] people come from different schools know each other—at least two or three people in your class. [And]
everyone was like, ‘Who is this girl?’...I was thinking let the bell ring now before
I snap on someone. I was ready...and it was just (laughs) the first period of the
first day.

These reflections are powerful in understanding the unique frustrations of transfer
students. Listening to their stories during focused conversations between a counselor and
the transfer student helps recognize how the student perceives the transfer experience.

Rumberger et al. (1999) mentioned that mobile students often report “...lower
self-esteem and less self-directed control of their lives” (p. 10). Thus, high school
educators who interact daily with such students need to be concerned with what the
school can offer to help and support these often troubled and needy transfer students.

Jessica didn’t want to be at the new school and her mother had to stand guard in
order to prevent her from leaving the building. Blakeman (1993) stresses, “School
counselors also need to be aware of the feelings of loss and grief for friends who are left
behind” (p. 6). However, Blakeman does believe that “…schools can influence many
aspects of an adolescent’s school experience, including achievement and adjustment for
those students who are negatively affected by moving” (p. 16).

The counselor as a consummate professional was understanding and avoided a
power struggle with Jessica while providing continuous support until the day she
graduated four years later. Jessica’s counselor knew when to engage in conversation and
when to just sit back and allow Jessica to vent. Looking back, Jessica appreciated that her
counselor provided enduring support.
Reasons for Move and Associated Challenges

April, Marty and Renee, who were all international transfer students, moved with their families to improve future opportunities as determined by their parents. Andrew moved due to divorce and had previous moves due to her father being in the military. Jane moved because her parents weren’t happy with her friends or with the previous school’s academic rigor. Jessica moved with her mother when her parents divorced and her mother was unhappy with her peer influences. Cisco and Peter moved to be safer and more academically challenged in the new school. In addition, Cisco moved because his brother was starting high school and his parents wanted his brother to start a new and safer school as a freshman. Ivy moved because of academic, social and behavioral (attendance) problems in her former school; her mother wanted the change to salvage her child’s education. Ajay moved to return to his original home in the United States after two years abroad to secure a cultural experience.

Thus, four students (April, Marty, Renee and Ajay) accepted the move and these students came from intact homes consisting of their parents and siblings. The remaining six students moved to avoid social and/or academic problems in the old school and neighborhood. Of these six, five family situations were related to divorce and one (Jane) moved in with an aunt due to unstable family dynamics. Jane’s primary focus when she entered the new school was her academics.

Actually, when I first came here, I’m like, okay I need to meet new people, but then it was like, okay I couldn’t really balance it and I needed to learn how to balance my social life and my academic life. So, I was like okay,
well I’m just gonna focus on my school work, ’cause I don’t have a social

life that much out here, so my school work, that’s like my main priority.

In summary, the parents initiated the move for all the students except Peter, who asked to transfer to RVHS which he felt was a better school. Only two of the students were not involved in the decision to move (Jessica and Jane) and they never accepted the transition. However, it is worth noting that despite taking longer to adjust academically and/or socially, Jessica successfully graduated and Jane will graduate early.

Did the Reasons for Mobility Have a Favorable or Unfavorable Impact on Their Academic and Social Experiences?

The most germane interview questions used to answer question 3 were as follows:
1) How did you learn you were changing schools? 2) Can you explain to me specifically who told you and what the conversation was like? 3) Had you been expecting this change or was it a surprise? 4) How long was it between learning you were changing schools and actually changing? 5) Were you given a reason for this change? 6) Were you involved in the decision? 7) How did you feel about the move? 8) Were you happy about moving to a new school? Please explain. 9) Can you list any of the resources available in this building and have you used any of these resources? 10) Which of these resources has helped you the most? And 11) If you needed academic help, what would you do? 12) About how long did it take you to establish friendships? 13) Are your current friends the kids who you met when you first transferred in or have you developed new friendships over time?
Reasons for Mobility and Impact of the Student’s Subsequent Experiences

As noted in Table 2, eight of the ten students were initially unhappy about the move to a new community and high school. The common denominator for this unhappiness was the uprooting from an established community and school and the loss of associated with peer relationships. Peter was different as he asked his parents about moving when he visited RVHS for a volleyball tournament and loved the school. He was excited about the opportunity to leave his old school and come to a more academically challenging environment. In fact, all ten students were happy to be challenged academically and in a school with teachers and staff who cared about their education while providing a supportive learning environment. Even Jessica and Jane became appreciative of the academic opportunities at RVHS. The perception of the academic milieu was never in question throughout the interviews. In fact, the students appreciated the supports, academic challenges, available electives, dedicated teachers and staff, extracurricular options, and obvious opportunities which weren’t always extant at their former schools. Students also appreciated the culture and climate of the new school. Peter noted:

'It’s been really great. I love the people, the teachers, and the staff.'

Everyone’s really friendly here. The work is really hard but, it’s like, you know, stressful. That’s what high school is about. It’s supposed to be stressful. I like the challenges. I might always say, ‘I hate doing this or don’t like doing that.’ [But], overall, it’s going to help me in life and I know it is.
Even Jessica, who was not happy about the move and was slow to assimilate to the building, students and academics, noted,

*They [RVHS teachers] are more on top of everything here—work, work, work, get good grades. I just got into the habit of work, work, work. They just push you more. While at the other school, they are more focused on trying to keep the kids out of trouble rather than trying to give them an education.*

Wood et al. (1993) studied 9,915 students aged 6 to 17 that had experienced “frequent relocations” and compared them to students who had never moved or had “infrequent relocations” (p. 1324). They found that “frequent movers” had higher rates of child dysfunction, which included repeating grades and having four or more behavioral problems. In addition, Wood et al. found that early childhood mobility is associated with twice the risk of frequent behavior problems, delayed growth or development, learning disabilities, and repeating a grade, compared with families that didn’t move.

Jessica and Andrew moved numerous times throughout grade school. Academically, out of the ten students interviewed, Jessica and Andrew struggled the most—each with an unweighted cumulative GPA less than 1.5. These students felt their academic issues were self imposed and not a failure on the part of the school. They were aware of the available support resources, but personal or emotional concerns interfered with their utilizing them, and this ultimately impacted negatively on their academic success. Andrew was struggling towards the end of his freshman year. He was often late to school because he didn’t want to get out of bed. Also, he had adverse peer influences
and was failing multiple classes. Ultimately, he needed summer school to pass required classes in order to avoid being demoted. Meanwhile, closing herself off, Jessica struggled both academically and socially, wanting to be with her old friends back in the city.

*I was thinking, ‘What am I doing in here? Should I just walk out now and walk to the house?’ [But], then I didn’t know my way around. So, what if I get lost going home? [And] then my mom stood there. She stood there for like five minutes to make sure that I didn’t walk out. (Laughs) I just didn’t want to be there. I just kept seeing all of these random people that I’ve never met and don’t know anything about in the hallways. What am I doing here? This is not my place...I would have just walked, walked, and called someone. Eventually, someone would have came and got me.*

Despite Jessica’s early struggles, she remained at RVHS but needed direct additional support in order to graduate with her class.

With four previous moves, Andrew focused on social rather than academic success:

*I always move a lot so it’s easy to make friends for me. It’s fun at first [to meet new friends] but then when you make really good friends and then you have to move away then it tends to be hard. At my old school I had really, really good friends there. [And] then we just moved away...Then we went here and got registered and then the first day school. When I walked in, it was pretty cool. I made some friends; just a normal day I
guess….This year I didn’t really care about school work. I wanted to get to know people first then worrying about school…It’s just what I always do. I focus on school work but, not much. I meet new people first then worry about school….Just because you are at a new place and the new person. You don’t want to be lonely or not talk to anyone. I’ve made some pretty cool friends here.

During the last interview, Andrew hinted at having self destructive and high risk behaviors, which may have been engendered by his need for social acceptance and being like his friends.

The more accepting the students were about the move; the more ready they were to embrace the social and/or academic challenges of the new school. With regard to the reasons for mobility and their possible impact on social and academic experiences, six students had a favorable balance between the academic and social facets of high school. Thus, April, Ajay, Cisco, Ivy, Marty, and Renee all felt that they were progressing well in their classes and felt socially accepted and comfortable in the school. Two students (Andrew and Peter) were skewed toward the social, one (Jane) toward the academic while de-emphasizing the social, and one (Jessica) was simply globally indifferent in the new school. Jessica preferred to go back to her old neighborhood and hang out with her old friends. The reason for her move was adverse and she was never able to adapt to the new environment. She squeaked by academically but initially felt out of place and wanted to run away from the building. It took a few years for her to warm up to the school and permit friendships; by then, her grades had suffered.
The emotional impact of the transition was profoundly associated with the immediate and long term adaptations of the student to the new school. Therefore, the reasons for mobility do impact the student’s academic and social experiences. The predictor of an unfavorable prognosis was an abrupt change without discussion that took the student by surprise. For example, Jessica was driven from her home in Chicago to her new suburban “Countryville” home by her father who abruptly announced the change.

Next thing you know, he was like, ‘Oh, I have a surprise for you guys. We are going to go eat.’ So, we got to eat and then he stops at the house. I’m like, Where are we? Is this like the Countryville or something? He said, ‘Look, I bought it [this house].’ I was like…I just walked to the car.

Jessica didn’t say a word and just walked back to the car, as she was extremely angry. She had planned to go to a Chicago public school with her friends, and her father had “killed” her dream. In fact, she then ran away from home until her need for clothes forced her to return. Her “grudge” followed her throughout her years at the new school but ultimately, she realized that the move was in her best interests.

Another example is Jane, who went to stay with her aunt for the summer, only to be told later by the aunt that the move was permanent and involved changing schools. At her aunt’s house, Jane cried, felt hurt and withdrew:

I didn’t cry to her [the aunt], I just... like, she heard me crying I was just in my room, just crying. Like, I don’t’ wanna do this, how can they do this to me, and maybe they’re just doing this because they want me to be upset, or... I had a little thought, like, no, I’m not really gonna transfer, they’re
just tricking me, but then again, it just felt like, oh my goodness, my parents are trying to ruin my life.

Jane did not understand why her parents arranged the move. She remained angry and confused when she entered RVHS. Jane was not allowed to participate in the decision to move. Her father wanted her to attend a better school and her mother wanted her to get away from friends she (the mother) felt were a negative influence. In fact, her father lied to her about the move, telling her it would be “…just for a little while [over the summer].” It was the aunt who told her it was going to be more permanent and that she’d be attending a new high school. Jane saw this as a real threat as she could not imagine leaving her friends. She simply could not believe this was happening.

Nevertheless, Jane did transfer to RVHS and accepted the academic challenge but had great difficulty finding a suitable and comfortable peer group. She utilized the tutoring center and asked her teachers for help when needed. Socially, she hung around other students but did not get invested in new relationships. Jane describes her academic focus when she arrived at RVHS:

I would say... socially, just, I mean, to me, schoolwork is more important, so, like, you could easily make friends. Like, people will just come up to you, they’re not just gonna be like, “Ew, you’re a new student,” so...and then if you like sports, join sports, like, there’s a lot of different extracurricular activities here, so... a lot that you can just find, which you’ll really like and your passion.
She really wanted to be with her old friends, though in retrospect, she realized the academic advantages of the curriculum at RVHS. Again, an understanding counselor was pivotal in helping her adjust and continues to support her to this day.

Thus, the academic and social success of these students was less dependent on the reasons for the move and more related to how each student felt about the change. Jessica and Jane were both abruptly removed from their familiar habitat and friends and thrust into a new setting, without preparation or real personal input. They were unable and didn’t want to disconnect emotionally from their old friends, and thus had difficulty making new ones. Indeed, Jessica could not disconnect physically either; she kept returning to the old neighborhood while holding a “grudge” against her parents. Jane made better social and academic contact, but had unresolved issues that prevented total acceptance of new relationships. Both were different from the other eight students in failing to fully accept the changes involved in the move. These eight who had more involvement in the decision to move, had more time for closure and better communication opportunities with the family. Again, the reasons for mobility do impact the student’s academic and social experiences?

For example, Cisco had a discussion with his parents:

*It was actually really short. I was like, ‘Mom, I don’t think we should move.’ ‘Oh, yeah?’ ‘Why?’ [And] then I told them can’t I just finish my four years here for it would make it hard for me to change and all of that and graduation without my friends. ‘Well, oh no. Sorry. We have to do this.’ [And] I was like, ‘OK.’*
Ivy was upset about the move up to the point that her mom gave her a chance to decide:

Yes, I was very upset. I was crying. I said, ‘How can you do this to me? You know how hard it is.’ She told me, ‘It’s been two years and you’ve been skipping more and more… ‘You can’t speak English though it’s not like you don’t know anything at all.’ She’s like, ‘I think it’s going to be better. It’s not you; it’s the influence. I know my child and know you aren’t like that.’

Thinking back on the experience, Ivy stated with great insight,

Actually, I think I kind of agreed with her but, it’s like when someone tells you something you don’t want to agree with them. Deep down I knew she was saying the truth, but it was very hard for me. I had this little piece of ‘home’ and she wanted to take it away from me. It was very hard for me...

Ivy had to go back to her former school to get exit paperwork and she ran into her friends. She mentioned, “I saw my friends and I wanted to cry for I saw everyone together.” At that time, her mom gave her the choice to return to her former school but Ivy said she was ready to transfer.

When I had to transfer out with the papers, my mom was like, ‘Do you want to stay here?’ I said, ‘No, I want to go.’ I guess I saw her opinion she was saying to me. She paid attention to me and asked me if I wanted to stay here. She gave me a choice. I think I made the right choice. Since she gave me an option I think I made the better choice.
Ajay was the one student interviewed who was returning to his familiar home, community and old friends, re-establishing valuable “social capital” (South & Haynie, 2004). Thus, Ajay had the smoothest transition to RVHS because that was his intended target high school even before he went to live in India for the family’s cultural enrichment experience. Ajay had had more difficulty with the move to India than the return to his original community and home. He participated in the family decisions regarding moving, had no difficulty reconnecting academically and socially with his original American peer group, and experienced very little “curricular inconsistency” (Titus, 2007). Interestingly, even while in India, he maintained contact with his old friends.

*I told them that I was gonna come back, so they knew...I kept in touch through like, instant messaging and Facebook, and such, and so when I came back it was pretty normal.*

...probably ‘cause it’s not like I was new to this, like, place, I mean, I was here before this... I used to come to this school a lot for junior high basketball, like back in seventh grade and stuff, so, I mean, I wasn’t, like, it was not a totally new place to me....

It seems that the way the complexities of a move are handled by the family correlates more closely with academic and social adjustment by the student than the actual reason for the move. When you examine all the factors that must be considered in analyzing the move of a transfer student, an overriding facet is the degree of involvement of the transfer student in the decision to make a change. Even if the student has no choice
and the mandate for mobility is out of his control, it is still paramount that the student be included in the decision making process. Each student was able to verbalize the reason(s) for his move and that reason determined how long was needed for the student to adjust. Academic and social success, on the other hand, was determined by how the student felt about the change. Once again, the role of an engaged experienced counselor, particularly one educated regarding the nuances of transfer students, becomes critical to the assimilation of such students into the new school. Since the reasons for mobility do impact the student’s academic and social experiences, the counselor must recognize this association and be prepared to provide related supports.

**What Were the School Resources That Specifically Helped Transfer Students Succeed?**

To focus on the impact of school resources on the integration of these ten transfer students, each was asked the following questions: 1) Can you list any of the resources available in this building? 2) Have you used any of these resources? 3) Which of these resources has helped you the most? 4) If you needed academic help, what would you do? 5) Are you involved here at RVHS in any sports or clubs? If so, what are they? 6) Which of these resources has helped you the most? 7) If you needed academic help, what would you do? 8) I would like you to think back to when you first entered this high school building. What were you thinking when you walked through those doors? 9) Who were some of the first people you met? 10) How was the overall process (registration, meeting your counselor, getting your locker)?
During the interviews, the ten transfer students highlighted school and other resources that seemed most helpful, most used, or most pivotal in providing critical assistance at different times during the assimilation into RVHS. There was no special order in the mentioning of these resources, but an analysis of the dialogues revealed some resources that were universally used, one that was critical only early in the transfer (i.e., counseling curriculum), and one that provided a decisive niche for the four students who were not fluent in English (the ELL center and its staff).

![Figure 4. Self-identified Social and Academic Supports Utilized by the Transfer Students](image)

This bar graph shows the tabulation of the self-identified and coded social and academic supports spontaneously discussed during the interviews with ten transfer students. Supports were mentioned 380 times during the 30 interviews.

As noted in Figure 4, RVHS provides a wide array of supports to help the transfer students. While friends were the most frequent supports mentioned, each student identified other options that met his personal needs. The most commonly mentioned of
these were the teachers and staff, the counseling curriculum and supports, the counselors themselves, and family.

The availability of these choices increased the likelihood that any given student would find help as needed. Different resources were needed at different times after transferring, depending on the individual student’s challenges. This favors the provision of a variety of transfer support resources and the need for individualization based on student characteristics and needs. To quote a line from the movie FIELD OF DREAMS: “If you build it, they will come.”

All of these supports share one common denominator, which is the warmth of human contact and kindness. Handing a transfer student a schedule and providing him with a locker and wish for good luck is no match for a well-planned support system administered by encouraging adults and friendly peers.

**Early Key Resources Mentioned by the Students**

The first contact the transfer students and their families had with RVHS was with the building itself. A few students mentioned the building was clean, open, and full of light and made them felt safe and protected. Jane notes her first impression of the building:

*I really, I just like the building, period. It’s really nice, and I remember saying, ‘This school is so bright,’ because at my old school, I didn’t, I never thought about it at first, but we didn’t have windows, like, we had windows, but you guys have a lot of windows so the light comes in and it shines like really bright. And at my old school it’s just really dark.*
There were no metal detectors. For safety, a police liaison and security personnel were in the building during and after school hours. On entering the building, the first person the students met was the security guard at the entrance, who notified the registrar of the student’s arrival. The registrar is Mrs. H. and she personally comes to the security desk to welcome the student and his family. She has a warm smile and friendly demeanor. She escorts the family to her office and confirms that all records are in order and then administers a placement test before introducing the student to his assigned counselor. Andrew mentioned, “They [the registrar and counselor] were really, really nice. They were just so welcoming.”

Renee noted that even though she wasn’t able to speak English, the registrar was patient.

_We were sitting there [in the registrar’s office]. I was sitting and waiting for someone to just translate to what you people are saying to me. They were talking. They were so nice. They were trying their best to say something in easy words for us to understand. [But], it was just impossible for us to understand. It was my dad, me, and my sister...So, those ladies [registrar and counselor], whenever I see them I just remember my first days...Those days when we came how nice those ladies (who were working there) was. I remember I’d see them in hallways. The only thing I can remember from them is good memories. Our first days, even though we couldn’t communicate with them, but, just how nice they were. They were one of the first people we met in high school._
After meeting with the registrar, the student and family were introduced to the counselor. The counselors at RVHS are all warm, welcoming and outstanding experienced professionals who understand their pivotal role in the students’ success. Peter discussed his first experience with a counselor:

*She actually made it real easy for us. She helped us with the sports [available to join] and showed us around. She's real nice. I got to spend time with her. [And] she makes me feel very comfortable. I feel like I can talk to her. She really helped me out with classes that I wanted to take. It felt like she was just focused on me even though she has probably thousands of students. It was good.*

**Significance of an Orientation Program**

As Bartosh (1989) noted, “Many schools conduct elaborate orientation programs for these students to ease the transition, eliminate stress, reduce opening day confusion, and generate a momentum toward success” (p. 94). Thus, RVHS highly encourages transfer students to attend the end-of-summer, half day, formal transfer student orientation program. This orientation acclimates the new students to the building to make them more comfortable and feel less lost on that very confusing first day of school. Cisco discussed his impression of transfer orientation.

*They gave us a tour and we did some team building—something like that. [And] that’s basically what we did. Everyone looked like they were kind of weirded out like they really didn’t want to be here. So, it was kind of awkward. Everyone seemed like lost or angry…I would probably say the*
orientation is what helped me out the most. I got to meet a couple of people there. I got to see everything and know what’s going on. We walked around the school, and got lockers that day. [And] my locker partner was a transfer student too. We both ended up like being just good friends.

Peter remembers transfer orientation too:

Yes, I went to transfer orientation. [And] that was nice. That was helpful...really, really helpful. I actually really like that. They showed us where the classes were. When I got here I didn’t feel like the new ‘new’ student where I like had to ask every person to show me where the next class was. They gave us that tour and we got books and a locker. Current students showed me around. I think that was some of the first people that I met. They showed me around and were really really nice. I have class with one of them. [And] I still keep in touch with the other one. So, it was nice.

I also got a t-shirt. So, that was pretty cool.

Significance of Transfer Group

Students who arrive after the first day of school receive orientation from their counselors: getting books, an identification card, a locker, a building tour, and so forth. Moreover, all transfer students are assigned to a transfer student group, which will meet during study hall time one period a week for six weeks. Andrew recalled,

*I totally remember that [transfer group]. We would meet like every week.*

*It was cool. I met some people in there. I just like talk to them. When I see*
them in the hall I’d talk to them—the transfer group people. A couple of
them were Jamaican too...We took tours actually. I remember we took
tours around the school. They showed us where everything was. They
showed us the cafeteria and how it is. I didn’t get lost after that. They also
had different people come in and talk to us.
Cisco describes his feelings towards attending transfer group:
I’d say it felt more like a support group like, ‘How are you guys feeling?
Are you doing OK? Any problems?’ Yes, it was cool. It was fine....Well, it
was kind of helpful but, honestly, it felt more like a support group like you
are there and trying to tell them your problems and all of that. I was glad
that the school actually cared and tried to help you out. They don’t just
throw you in there and have you manage yourself. They help you out
throughout.

The counselors assigned each transfer student to a group during their initial
meeting at which time the student is also given his schedule based on the file review and
test scores. Once a schedule is created the counselor escorts the student to the appropriate
class on the schedule, introduces the teacher and arranges a specific follow-up meeting
with the student for later that day.

While this process seems seamless to the students, there has been considerable
organizational anticipation behind the effort for this complex event, the introduction of a
transfer student to a whole new school world. Cisco commented that in his former school,
he was given a schedule and books and wished good luck by his counselor, who then disappeared:

There is just an orientation. They didn’t give a tour or anything. They had a class where a teacher and security talked to you about it. [And] then you get your books and go home.

Contrast Cisco’ experience with Renee’s, who said:

The first day that we came here, it was my father, my sister, and I. We came for registration and we walked through the hallways with Mrs. L. (our counselor) and asked about any of the Persian students and if Mrs. L. could introduce us to him. It was a really, really, really a wonderful feeling when he started talking to us in Persian. I was like, ‘Yes!’ Now my breath is coming up and I can really breathe when he was talking to us in Persian.

Along with the registrar, counselor and teachers, another early key resource was the other students in the building. All transfer students had been assigned a buddy, called a “peer leader,” who worked with them. There were other casual contacts with fellow students who often offered friendship and assistance. Most of the transfer students mentioned that the little things offered by other students were important and meant a lot in feeling welcomed, comforted and supported.

Jane met a few girls while in study hall, and these girls noticed her sitting alone at lunch.
...during study hall, I just... ‘cause I didn’t know we could go anywhere, so

I just go straight to the lunch room and did work and some girls asked

‘Why you sitting by yourself? Come sit with us,’ so I did...

Social Supports for Transfer Students

Social support was also a major component in transfer student success. Many of the students interviewed relied on friends for both social and academic help. When asked about where the student would go if they were feeling sad or upset, most of the transfer students mentioned that they would figure things out themselves or they would call a friend. When asked about academic support when at home, the common response was that they would call a friend or utilize the Internet.

When in RVHS, most students readily asked teachers or visited the tutoring center when they needed academic assistance. Andrew mentioned:

The tutoring center is awesome. It’s amazing... If we are writing a paper, then you go there and get help... So, I usually just go there and let someone read over it and check it out. They re-read your essay and see what’s wrong with it and see if it makes sense. They tell you more detail and what you can do. They have great tutors in there. The students are cool for they do understand. The teachers are cool but, the students (I think) help more. They understand like how it’s tiring after school but, you have to get it done. It’s just something you have to do.

Ivy agrees with Andrew:
I go to the tutoring center because my teacher makes me but, it helps a lot too. It’s so interesting and awkward because it’s students, students, students. It’s like how do you know more than I do? [But] it’s nice. They do help. You can actually talk in the same level.

Cisco noted:

I’ve gone to the tutoring center a couple of times. It’s very helpful for the most times there’s a teacher actually there-like a tutor. One time, I came [to my teacher] and said I needed help. He said OK come to the tutoring center. I didn’t know he was going to be there. A couple of times the teacher was actually there and making sure that I got the information. It’s like you ask questions and whatever you don’t get they will go over and over again until you get it.

Four of the transfer students did not speak English. They were assigned to ELL classes and the resource center for supplementary help. Assigned or not, these students hung out in the resource room. They often mentioned how supportive and welcoming the ELL resource center staff and tutors were. Learning English, of course, was essential to becoming integrated into RVHS. Renee called the ELL center her second home:

...one thing I can never ever forget about. I told you ELL is my second home. I was like, OK, now I am out of my house. [But], as soon as I take the bus, soon as I am off of the bus, I am going to go to my second house.

So, it doesn’t matter even if I left the house or I didn’t.

Ivy describes her experience with the ELL center:
It was totally good [the ELL resource room]. I thought that this school had no stuff like that and it actually did. I saw a teacher at the Russian table. She sat there and teaches a lot of the Russian kids next to her. They were talking and stuff. So, when I came, there were so many Russian students. I was like, ‘Oh, that’s nice. I have someone to speak with.’ It was already concrete in my mind that it was going to be okay.

Other Supports

In time, the students became aware of the other available school resources, supports, and extracurricular activities and gravitated to those that fit their needs and areas of interest. Some of these are highlighted further with the next research question. Common to the students’ stories was the availability of extracurricular activities that helped them feel more connected. April worked with the Korean Club. Renee joined the Christian Club. Marty connected with multiple activities: recycling club, gymnastics team, tutoring center, and National Honor Society. Commenting on the ways he learned about school activities, Cisco said:

*I listened to the daily announcements and teachers always telling you about it all the time. Also, information is posted in the hallways. If you need something it is easy to find here.*

Andrew felt his extracurricular involvement helped promote his connections with other student-athletes:

*I did football. I did wrestling and now I’m in track. It’s an easier way to meet people. You are always with them I guess. I love playing football*
and stuff. It was cool. Wrestling was cool too. I just did wrestling. It was pretty good.

Ivy was trying to help her mom financially so she maintained a job in the community. This did not allow her to join extracurricular activities but she was very connected during the day to the ELL center, as were the other ELL students.

Many of the students focused on the teachers as an important resource. Ivy felt that the teachers were not at RVHS just to get a pay check but rather, were sincerely devoted to making a real difference in the students’ education.

*The teachers there [at her former Chicago public school] really didn’t care. It was just their way of making money. Here they do it because they actually like it. This makes a big difference when you see the teacher really wants you to learn and you do the work. Yes and it’s not only the teachers teaching. It is friendships, too. You like your teacher and you joke around with them.*

Feeling the teachers cared, the students wanted to respond by doing well. The teachers wouldn’t wait for the student to request help. They would offer to provide extra help, and made time available for this purpose. If it appeared that help was needed, they offered it and even called the student’s home to partner with the family to assist the student. Peter mentioned:

*I like the teachers here. They are really good to talk to. They understand what’s going on with teenagers and they try to get to the same level which is cool.*
In addition to the teachers, other staff and administrators were available and ready to help make the transfer students feel comfortable. Jane noted:

*Everybody was so nice. The deans...they weren’t deans like I expected to be deans...some deans are like, argh, like, ya know, serious. Yeah, and they were just like, smiling and all.*

Ivy was asked if she missed as many days at RVHS as she missed at her former school, what does she think would have happened? Ivy answered:

*I probably wouldn’t have finish school here. No! They probably would put me on probation. My dean or the attendance office would call my parents. My dean would give me hundreds of Saturdays and my mom would know in a snap. At my old school they don’t even call. You can come with a little note and sign it yourself. They would say ’put it over there. That’s it. You’re done.’*

Peter felt comfortable with his dean and appreciated the attention he received from the administration.

*Dean R., I like, which is kind of weird. I met him, I think, the first day of school here. They introduced him and I went on to tour the school. I never had a dean at my other school. I never even saw the principal. Unless, if you bring knives and guns or fight someone...I didn’t know I had a dean. I had no clue. I thought it was just the principal. I just had no clue. Never heard anything about him...I never even knew the principal’s name.*
At RVHS, Peter and his parents met the assistant principal during the summer before transfer:

*It was over the summer. My parents set up an appointment. They just told me come. [And] the assistant principal gave us a tour of the school. My parents told me that they felt that the school really cares. [That] the assistant principal took the time to show us around was really cool.*

Despite the schools efforts at making the transfer process as smooth as possible, difficulties inevitably arise. Students may learn English but their parents might need communications from the school translated. April and her parents wanted documents sent home in Korean but this didn’t happen:

...*sometimes RVHS sends the information, like, paper, and they send to the home, and sometimes my parents ask me to translate these words...And I remember that the first, when I first met the registrar, and I put check sign to get Korean, like translated paper...and I checked, and I never got them.*

That’s what my parents and I want.

Peter noted that students learn at different speeds, especially if the school transfer results in curricular inconsistency. He would have liked his teacher to recognize problems and initiate a regular meeting time for tutoring or help:

*I know why a teacher has to teach a curriculum. That’s her job to teach it and move on. [But], maybe just once in a while or once every two weeks to sit down with the student and actually have a conversation and be a little*
closer. I know it’s hard because she has so many students...You know, if they see you struggling.

Ivy made a similar observation but emphasized the student’s role:

_I don’t know. I think that what you’ve [the school] done is what you can do. Everything else depends on you [the student] like how you adjust. It takes two days for some to learn the school. Others it could take a few weeks or a month._

All ten of these transfer students were able to find activities and supports that fit their specific interests and needs. By offering a multitude of supports and structured activities, promoting them effectively, and helping make the connection, each student can find the ones that best fit his interests. Thus, establishing links helps lead students to enhanced opportunities within the school setting.

**Do Students From Differing Backgrounds (Geographic, Cultural, Ethnic, Socioeconomic (SES), Family or Divergent Prior School Settings) Have Resultant Academic and Social Needs That Require Variant Approaches to Support?**

While grouped into five categories based on ethnicity, geography, gender, SES, and previous school attended, the sample in this study displayed wide diversity in their individual backgrounds and responses. Prior to beginning the study, there was a reasonable question about whether such differing backgrounds would have a resultant academic and/or social impact that might influence the school staff’s approach to providing supports. While there were no specific questions asked regarding the students
differing backgrounds and their subsequent success, all of the other questions discussed could have elicited pertinent replies and many, in fact, did.

The following student responses provide compelling examples regarding this complex question. Renee was asked about the difficulty of moving to a new country and school. She discussed the struggles her parents confronted, along with her own feelings towards the move.

*Leaving everything behind was a complete deal. [Because] my parents had the stress about life like what are they going to do. How are they going to live and survive? Renting the house, learning the language, getting used to society, getting used to culture, getting use to all of these things. [And] on top of all that, me being like “Mom, I really don’t want to be here.” You know? They had enough problems for themselves. They had enough things to be concerned about. So, I just had to go along with it.*

Academic and social success was less dependent on the students differing geographic, cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic, family and prior school settings than on becoming socially and academically connected to the new school. There was a single, overriding exception and that was limited to those transfer students who needed to learn English. Renee mentioned:

*I didn’t have that much friends. It really didn’t matter to me, to be honest. I didn’t feel lonely and yes, I couldn’t communicate with these people. It really didn’t matter to me. I was just trying to get what I needed out from school and be out of this place.*
April mentioned:

*If I can’t speak English at all, I can’t communicate, so that makes me feel lonely... and my brother felt lonely, ‘cause his English is worse than me, so he can’t communicate with his friends and that kind of problem, so... he really wanted to go back to Korea...*

Marty mentioned:

*The first few months were plain. It’s when you are learning the language you start to realize what you are doing and what you are saying. [And] only after that is when you start to think how you say something in the language in your mind already. So, those months, when nothing really big happens. [But], once when you get over them real high school life starts.*

**Significance of ELL Program**

In addition to the language barriers, these students also discussed the cultural differences in so far as dress, food, music, academic environment, and length of the school day. For example, April’s Korean school day started at 7:30am and finished at 10:00pm. Marty mentioned that his classes and the work were demanding at his school in Peru, but he didn’t have a choice of all of the extracurricular options. The ELL program was pivotal in allowing the students to communicate and adjust in order to become connected in every aspect of the transition. Not only did this program provide language skills, but the resource room itself became like a second home where these students felt welcomed, comforted and supported, the other ELL students and staff functioning as surrogate family. Renee described the love and support:
Ms. T [ELL tutor] ... she’s an angel. She’s a real angel. Since we came, then we had no English. They basically told us this is desk. ‘This is chair.’ ‘This is book.’ We started with early basic stuff. We couldn’t make sentences...It is the love that she has. You are suppose to see her but with every single student that she has; it doesn’t matter if she has something easy for them to understand or something easy for her to explain or hard for her to explain, she is going to do more than her best. Sometimes she is here until six in the evening after working with us.

The ELL program supported Marty when he arrived at RVHS. He took advantage of the comprehensive curriculum and socialized in the ELL resource room in order to promote and expedite his learning the language. Marty described the social dynamics he experienced while sitting at the round tables in the ELL resource room.

We would always communicate in broken English. I have Syrian friends and they speak in Syrian. I have friends from Brazil, from Vietnam, from India. We don’t have a common language so, we spoke in English.

Once he learned English and felt comfortable with his communication skills, Marty connected with the gymnastics team, excelled, and gained the respect of his peers.

Actually, my friend, when I was a sophomore, told me about it [gymnastics] and he wouldn’t shut up about it. I hated it but decided to try it. I think the best experience was through joining gymnastics. My advice is join when you have a chance. Don’t wait.
In addition to becoming a co-captain on the gymnastics team, Marty also became a tutoring center leader by helping fellow students with their homework, founding the recycling club and becoming a member of the National Honors Society.

**ELL Student Supports at RVHS**

RVHS provided a myriad of supports, and each student gravitated to the ones that best fit their interests and needs. This was facilitated by the counseling staff, other adults in the building, and the transfer student curriculum in helping the student becomes aware of available resources. For example, April was able to express her cultural heritage during International Week by performing traditional Korean dance in dress from her homeland.

*We performed, like, traditional things, like, we danced, and we played Korean drums, yes, and fan dance. I was really proud of myself, and I liked showing our culture to other people, it’s... yeah... it’s a chance that people can understand our cultures better. The International Night offers the opportunity to hang out with other nations and cultures... I like that.*  

*It’s very interesting, and I never experienced this experience in Korea.*

Other things were important to April, such as eating Korean food. She mentioned:  

*I used to think about, like, living American style life, ‘cause I’m here and I am no longer in Korea, so, I never thought that I would eat Korean food. I started to eat it here and...I’m living Korean style...My body and mind is still at the way that I live in Korea, so I’m still living the Korean style life.*
Renee joyously connected with a religious club where she was able to overtly express her religious beliefs, unlike in Iran, where open expression of her Catholicism was actually dangerous and had to be hidden.

*It was like, as I’ve said again, as Christians (living in a Muslim country)*

*you don’t have that much right to practice what you really believe. My religion is really important to me.*

At RVHS, Renee could practice her religion and her math teacher told her about the Christian Club.

*Mr. G, he’s my Math teacher and he comes after school. He starts the [Christian] club with a prayer. I couldn’t stop my tears. I never could stop myself from crying. I mean it wasn’t the first time that I was there. It was the third time, fourth time, fifth time. I just cried. While he was praying. He started the club with prayer and it was just something wonderful. He was talking about the stuff that was really important to me...So that was really touching. It really connected me.*

Before our last interview, Renee completed some college placement tests at the local community college. She describes her feelings…

*[And] we came all the way from there [Iran] just to be happy and successful. So, as I am taking the test yesterday, I am thinking ‘thank God’ that we made the decision of coming to RVHS. Thanks to all of those people who were so patient with us and who taught us all of those*
things….I took the English placement test and was reading the reading part and was saying, ‘Yes, I learned this word in my English class.

Perhaps the best way to illustrate how well transfer student descriptions can teach us about the turmoil of mobility is to quote Renee, whose aggregate problems encompass almost every change a student can experience. She secretly had to leave her country, friends and family without saying goodbye, travel across half the world stopping in two other transitional countries, and changing societies, type of government, religious freedom, language, educational system and curriculum, dress, and culture. Renee summed up the transfer process:

*Changing doesn’t mean like you are just moving your house. Sometimes we do move from one school to another. [But], changing, immigrating—moving from country to country, from a continent to a continent, from a city to a city, from a different society to a different society, from a culture to another culture; I have really tried my best to find the right adjectives, the right words, the right sentences to express the difficulty of that process. [But], I have never been able to find the right things to describe it. [And] I’ve told all of my teachers. You’d never understand through what kind of things we have been. Unless you walk through that path with us. Unless you live in a place for some years of your life. Then you decide to move. Memories you have about that country and the difficulties that you have been through in that country with the things that you are leaving behind—the hopes you that had and the future.*
The last research question asks, “Do students from differing backgrounds have resultant academic and social needs that require variant approaches to support?” Renee’s needs illustrate well that the answer is yes. She needed the ELL center, ELL classes, and the support of her counselor, teachers and another student who spoke Persian. Of particular note is the support of her Christian club and its sponsor. Recall that Renee had to hide her religion in Iran and cried with happiness at being able to freely pray in her new country. April, Marty and Ivy also used ELL supports before moving on to take advantage of other available supports. The ELL center was like a school within a school for these students. Not only did they more rapidly learn English from the tutors but the center provided a safe, secure and comfortable social oasis amidst the turmoil of their transitions. Given RVHS’s significant number of out of the country transfer students speaking a plethora of native languages, having in place a well-functioning ELL program is decisive for improving the academic and social success rates for such students. Four of this study’s ten students demonstrate this critical need.

An essential result of learning English is the ability to feel connected to peers and staff, both socially and academically. April mentioned, “If I can’t speak English at all, I can’t communicate, so that makes me feel lonely…” However, this is not the only support for students from diverse backgrounds. Other supports can provide similar connectiveness as exemplified by Renee’s religious club connection, April’s Korean club connection, and Marty’s gymnastics team connection. Once again having such programs
available gives the students opportunities to gravitate toward the supports and activities that fit their interests and strengthen their ties to the new school.

As already documented in Chapter II, most of the research on transfer students describes them as if they were a single homogenous group. This mixed method study emphasizing conversations with a group of ten transfer students reveals enormous diversity in practically every parameter identified: reason and cause of the move, student involvement in the decision to move, prior academic achievement and environment, socioeconomic status, cultural diversity, native language, previous type of school, supports and resources used in the new school, ease of developing social connections and peer relationships, emotional reaction to the change and general attitude toward the move. While only some students experienced some of these parameters, all experienced at least one of them. Given the plethora of variations among these students, educators will recognize the need for dedicated time to have focused conversations with the mobile students and their family to select the best curriculum and choose appropriate supports and interventions to improve social and academic success for each of these high risk students. The counselor is well positioned to serve as the nexus for these often complex needs.
CHAPTER VI
DISCUSSION, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

High school staff, teachers and counselors interact with many transfer students as nationally approximately one in five high school students have changed schools for reasons other than promotion (Rumberger et al, 1999). These students are at greater risk of failure than non-transfer students (Black, 2006; Fisher et al., 2002; Kerbow et al., 2003; Rumberger et al., 1999; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). The published statistics largely provide data on mobile students as a homogeneous group. However, counselors find transfer students are individually quite different with regard to their origins, academic prowess, behavior, resiliency and ability to adapt to change. Hearing the students describe their stories and experiences is useful in understanding what might be done to provide general and selective supports. Perhaps the best supports vary by student based on the aforementioned variables or others. To verify such counselor insights and potentially seek better methods to facilitate student transitions and success, this mixed method study was undertaken using three primary research questions and two secondary questions.

The three primary research questions of this study are:

- What perceptions do transfer students have about their transition to a new school?
• What do transfer students perceive as reasons for their mobility?

• Did the reasons for mobility have a favorable or unfavorable impact on their academic and social experiences?

The two secondary research questions of this study are:

• What were the school resources that specifically helped or hindered success?

• Do students from differing backgrounds (geographic, cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic, family or divergent prior school settings) have resultant academic and social needs that require variant approaches to support?

**Overview**

A subgroup of high school students at higher risk for failure and/or not graduating are those students who entered the school as a result of transferring, usually alone or abruptly, from another school while also typically changing residence. Such students are doing this during adolescence when change can be particularly stressful and coexist with other adverse circumstances. Indeed the reason for the transfer is often complicated and such students may be left entirely to their own devices to overcome the adversity of moving to an unfamiliar school and neighborhood where they have no or few connections. The more information that the high school staff has about this special group, the more likely the staff and school can provide supports and resources to increase chances of academic and social success. This study was undertaken to learn if the transfer students themselves can describe personal observations and experiences that would help improve understanding of this unique population.

A mixed method study was used to answer the research questions. The
quantitative portion required certain statistical data to properly frame the students selected for the study and to assess the variability of their descriptions. Twenty-one percent (20.7%) of the 2,629 students or one in five students at RVHS were transfer students. In this study, transfer students were selected from the most prevalent yet diverse ethnic and prior school backgrounds: African-American from a suburban public school, Asian/Pacific Islander from a school outside of this country, European from a school outside of the this country, Latino from Chicago public school (CPS), and Caucasian from CPS or other in-state school. Moreover, RVHS has a wealth of established transfer student supports and resources available, which makes it a viable for this type of study.

However, at the core of this study is a qualitative research method. This obviates the need to interview large numbers of transfer students in favor of thoroughly discussing the transfer experiences of a relatively few students (Creswell, 2007, p. 76). The conversations contained rich and compelling descriptions of quite diverse stories of these students’ worlds before, during and after the move. Invariably in discussing their encounters, the students seemed to relive their personal experiences, remembering details in the process otherwise forgotten or perhaps repressed. Despite the elaborate support system available for such students at RVHS, some students still described enormous difficulty in making a successful transition academically and/or socially.

Ten of these students, who met the study’s inclusion criteria and were not disqualified by the exclusion criteria, met with the investigator for three 42-minute audio-recorded interviews. The interviews were transcribed and coded for dominant themes
using the Atlas-TI software. These themes were then quantitated for the aggregate students and correlated with each individual student.

Students detailed a difficult and typically emotional transfer experience related to the reasons for the move, the move itself and/or the entering of a new and unfamiliar school building which confirms much of the literature. Extensive past research has consistently shown that the majority of transfer students move for adverse reasons, such as parental job loss, relocation or promotion (Strand, 2002; Titus, 2007), parental occupation/lifestyle such as children of diplomats, missionaries, military personnel, migrant farm workers, and executives of international companies (Strand, 2002; Titus, 2007), divorce (Titus, 2007), eviction (Tucker et al., 1998), economic adversity, safety concerns, students being forced to leave a school because of behavioral problems or overcrowding (Rumberger & Larson, 1998), homelessness (Titus, 2007), school closings and openings (de la Torre & Gwynne, 2009), and natural disasters (Cook, 2006; Titus, 2007). Such students characteristically face academic, behavioral, and social adversity and conflicts (Rumberger, 2003); these are aggravated by the students being disconnected from their old support systems and not yet connected to any new ones. In this study, every one of the ten students had such issues representative of common transfer student problems. In addition, each had a compelling story about themselves and their transfer experience, which had a direct impact on their assimilation into the new school.
Social and Emotional Impact of Moving

Moving may be viewed by the student with great anxiety, frank fear, a sense of loss or grief, or perhaps relief, depending on who initiates the idea of change and why (Strother & Harvill, 1986). Most of the student interviewed did not want to move and exhibited anger, frustration, crying, anxiety, uncertainty and/or a sense of loss. Peter was the one outlier who asked his mother to move to the new area and school; even he struggled academically. Blakeman (1993) notes “moving is a stressful event which can cause problems depending on how it is handled” (p. 8). The majority of the students also reported participating in the decision to move or at least having some understanding of the reasons for the move ahead of time. This involvement was deemed favorable by the students and helped smooth the difficult transition. Two students (Jessica and Jane) were so shocked by the abrupt move that they held a persistent grudge. Indeed, Jane said, “…my parents are trying to ruin my life.” This lead to transitional turbulence in the social, academic and/or behavioral spheres, resulting in resentment and unresolved conflicts directed primarily at the family but manifested in school struggles. In her qualitative study, Rhodes (2008) confirms this pattern by mentioning that while students have academic concerns, the social and emotional issues are even more prevalent in their associated individual stories. Unmet needs of belongingness or love (Maslow’s third level) appear pivotal in this maladaption.
Review of Transfer Student Supports and Resources

A secondary research question asks, “What were the school resources that specifically helped or hindered success?” Blakeman (1993) stated “All schools need to develop procedures for integrating relocated children” (p. 5). Past research highlights the hypothetical likelihood that the provision of specific supports and interventions should have a favorable effect on the success of these at risk students; however, this empiricism has not been confirmed by the study of such interventions in practice. Emphasizing the transfer student voice to detail each student’s salient recognitions of their transfer experience, this mixed research study confirms that the hypothesis is correct: mobile students benefit greatly from a multifaceted transfer program designed to meet their unique needs. Thus, in exploring the primary research question with these ten students, we learned that a school wishing to help ensure the success of transfer students should provide a dedicated comprehensive transfer student curriculum. This curriculum should be established and in place before transfer students arrive, best begins before school starts and continues indefinitely as needed. The curriculum is not fixed or static but must be capable of evolving to meet the particular and changing needs of each student. Figure 4 in Chapter V shows the number of times a student discussed individual supports available to him or her at RVHS. Almost all of the students discussed and utilized almost all of the supports offered.
Transfer Student Curriculum

Holland-Jacobsen et al. (1984) state, “Indeed, mobility is an issue that school counselors must recognize and address” (p. 49). Some schools provide excellent resource support for these students by understanding the immediate need for comprehensive social and academic triage in order to provide assistance while other schools do not (Bartosh, 1994; Blakeman, 1993; Holland-Jacobsen et al., 1984; Mennes, 1956; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2001; Wilson, 1993). Kerbow (1996) suggests that some degree of mobility is unavoidable. He states, “Therefore, schools must explicitly plan for the entrance and exit of a portion of their student body each year” (p. 165). In fact, Blakeman (1993) stresses, “The problem is that the schools are not prepared to deal with mobility” (p. 11). RVHS is prepared with a plethora of supports and the ten students interviewed utilized these supports selectively and appreciated all that were available to help them succeed.

As recalled by the ten transfer students interviewed, the availability of an extensive and coordinated transfer student curriculum, along with many other supports at RVHS, had a favorable impact on their transition. The mentoring provided by a school-wide, dedicated approach (without diminishing the demanding academic standards for this high risk population of students) resulted in a durable and successful transition for all ten students. While the literature often describes transfer students as a monolithic group, these ten students expressed quite variable problems and needs, suggesting the necessity for a spectrum of alternate supports, depending on the requirements of the student's situation. The supports most often used by the students in this study were shown in
Figure 4 in Chapter V. The most commonly mentioned were friends, teachers and staff, the counseling curriculum, the counselors themselves, and family.

After enrolling with the registrar, the transfer student meets with the guidance counselor who is one of the first adults the student meets when entering the building. This initial contact can be pivotal on the transfer student’s future success or failure. Each of the ten students in this study met for an extended period with his/her counselor, recalling the meeting vividly with favorable reviews. Blakeman (1993) focused much of her article on the importance of the role of the school counselor in facilitating the mobile student’s transition. She states, “The school counselor can be the chief catalyst in the adjustment process.” The participating ten students’ comments confirm her analysis.

Having a broad choice of supports permitted the students to gravitate to the most applicable activity or intervention for that student. In addition, the students related that the staff was not only welcoming but capable of offering continued expert support and guidance. Students discussed a real connection with the school (peers, teachers, staff and building) which anticipated the need to provide resources and support for the individual needs of each transfer student. In their detailed descriptions, these ten transfer students knew the adults in the building and the resources available and how to get the most out of both. This correlates well with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and demonstrates the key role the school has in facilitating success. Transfer students are not all the same. They have widely different backgrounds, interests, abilities, needs and goals. Through detailed conversations with the students, staff can learn enough distinctive information about each student to provide appropriately directed school supports and activities.
**ELL Program**

The last secondary question for this study was, “Do students from differing backgrounds have resultant academic and social needs that require variant approaches to support?” Past qualitative research fails to address this question and no specific discussion by the students clarified the answer except in one very specific area. This is the need for an ELL program, preferably in a welcoming atmosphere and location where students can learn English, get academic support, and socialize with other ELL students.

Once the student has gained these language skills and feels comfortable in the school environment, other options and choices become more accessible, such as joining clubs, teams, and extracurricular activities.

**Discussion**

Transfer students are disconnected from their prior school, community, friends, and often residence, family and country. RVHS provides social and academic connections which the students felt were paramount to their feeling welcomed, less isolated and better supported in the new school. Most of the interviewed students commented favorably on this last observation although they noted that they recognized this only in retrospect. Wilson (1999) feels school counselors have the opportunity to help transfer students develop important skills in order to successfully manage the challenges of their mobility. A formal comprehensive transfer student program along with dedicated counselor interactions can help identify student concerns or questions for timely support or intervention.
Connections or Supports

An analysis of this study’s data reveals that all ten students made favorable connections by meeting with their counselors when needed, attending the comprehensive transfer program, attending at least one transfer group session, utilizing supports (i.e., tutoring and resource centers), joining clubs and/or extracurricular activities, and meeting personally with their teachers. By providing all of these supports and services within the school building, the educators at RVHS were able to guide each transfer student to ongoing connections that best met their individual needs. In addition, these contacts helped the transfer student create trusting relationships with adults in the building. Knowing these at-risk students allows educators to improve the probability of a successful transition, especially by directing students to appropriate services as needed. Actively engaging staff with students is fundamental to students prospering in such supportive settings. This study confirms prior transfer student research; however, it extends the conclusions to emphasize the critical importance of providing for the needs of each individual student in a school prepared to do so. There are universal problems experienced by virtually all transfer students whether the move was voluntary or involuntary, however the distinctive challenges for individual students must also be addressed. The best way to discover these latter problems is through engaged listening to personal stories and asking the right questions. Only then can potential specific solutions be identified by staff who recognize the active evolution of often complex transfer student problems. The school guidance counselor is trained and positioned to serve this
purpose and the school must allow the counselor time and resources to achieve this important task.

**Theoretical and Practical Implications**

What the students brings to the new school is important and so is what the school brings to the student. Titus (2007) notes, “How mobile students are accommodated by a school will greatly affect how they succeed in that school” (p. 93). The new school can provide supports to help transfer students assimilate and feel welcomed and connected. The school also has an ethical mandate to provide as many resources and supports as possible. This is confirmed by Titus, who feels that schools can’t afford to wait for national, state, and local authorities to make decisions; individual schools need to create their own local programs to help mobile students. Another way of looking at this is to wonder how these ten transfer students would have fared without the RVHS plenipotential transfer student program.

Schedules, lockers, and books are a necessity to get the students to where they belong but once there, human contact is pivotal. The ten students studied universally appreciated the formal and informal contacts provided by the staff, the counselors, the counseling curriculum, and the other students, some interacting as part of transfer groups and a buddy system. By RVHS providing these resources as a formal part of the global transfer curriculum, students established connections to the new school as demonstrated by the general themes and specific comments described during the interviews.
Practical Recommendations

Typically, transfer students arrive at high schools unannounced and with a complicated and often undocumented academic and social history. In other words, they just show up. Counselors need to schedule time to meet with the new student and hopefully the family to better understand their academic, social, and emotional needs. In addition,

1. School resources for such students need to be in place and explained to the student and their families. These resources may need modification over time and should be regularly re-evaluated for any needed change.

2. Prior training of counselors and school staff about the challenges of mobility is critical in order to help this vulnerable population.

3. The staff needs to be open and welcoming, taking the time to meet and build meaningful relationships with the new student.

4. The school should provide a safe environment where all students feel welcome and accepted. Students need to know and be able to access the many available staff if needed.

5. Frequent informational calls home will maintain counselor-family communication to show that there is a partnership between the school and the home. Besides discussing favorable and unfavorable aspects of the student’s transition, these conversations may help the family understand how to avoid future, particularly abrupt, moves through use of community resources.
6. Finally, continued monitoring of each student is paramount so that additional supports can be offered if needed.

**Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs**

These resources are consistent with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and his pyramid levels (Myers, 2008). This RVHS study demonstrates the achievement of Maslow’s level three for a group of transfer students at high risk of failure. Level three relates to belongingness and love needs. These words are abstract while the transfer program at RVHS provides concrete, practical referents which the students commented met those needs.

While level three is conceptually pivotal, one should remember that this study was done at a suburban high school where the physiologic needs of level one (food, hunger and thirst) are presumably met either at home, or with free and reduced lunch waivers. Although the students did not refer to nutritional needs, none reported being hungry and half the students in this study were receiving lunch waivers. The safety needs of level two are met with ample security personal and measures. With level three needs being achieved with a comprehensive and coordinated transfer curriculum, these students are more likely to move to level four (esteem needs, etc.) and level five (self-actualization) with greater certainty and confidence. While the study was not designed to provide formal data regarding this assumption, the fact that only two of these ten students failed one or two classes each in the year of the study supports Maslow’s theory. Indeed, the five seniors out of the total ten studied students did graduate. In fact, the students who were struggling in their former schools stated spontaneously that they were doing much
better than the friends they left behind. All ten students expressed optimism about future plans and goals.

**Conclusions**

In conclusion:

1. Transfer students describe intense emotions related to mobility. They fail, struggle or succeed based on the type, number and severity of problems they bring with them to the new school and the corresponding ability of the school to provide meaningful interventions to support their individual needs.

2. Transfer students appear to have less difficulty with the transition if they are included in the decision and process of moving.

3. Students articulated variable reasons for mobility and these reasons did impact the students’ academic and social experiences. The more accepting the students were about the move, the more ready they were to embrace the social and/or academic challenges of the new school.

4. Given the large number of mobile students in the United States, schools should anticipate the planned or abrupt arrival of transfer students and have in place a comprehensive transfer student program. RVHS provides a wide array of supports to help the transfer students. While friends were the most frequent supports mentioned, each student identified other options that met personal needs. The most commonly mentioned of these were the teachers and staff, the counseling curriculum and supports, the counselors themselves, and family.
5. The availability of these choices increased the likelihood that any given student would find help as needed. Different resources were required at different times after transferring, depending on the individual student’s challenges. This favors the provision of a variety of transfer support resources and the need for individualization based on student characteristics and needs.

6. Students from differing backgrounds (geographic, cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic, family or divergent prior school settings) needed variable resources particular to their challenges. For example, the ELL program was paramount for those students not fluent in English. Having a well-functioning ELL program available was decisive for improving the academic and social success rates for the four of this study’s ten students demonstrating this critical need. Other specific supports used were religious clubs, ethnic clubs, and athletic teams. Having such programs available provides the students with connectiveness and strengthens their ties to the new school.

7. Central to the success of the transfer student program is the vital role of a guidance counselor willing and able to listen to what the student reveals in an engaged conversation and then provide the optimal direction to pertinent supports with follow-up.

Recommendations based on this study are as follows:

1. Transfer students are a heterogeneous group, all requiring some supports, but each also requiring specific additional supports to meet their individual needs. A multidimensional and comprehensive transfer student program in place and
available is decisive for guiding these students to improved academic and social success and ultimately graduation. An immediately available ELL program is mandatory for students who are not proficient or fluent in English.

2. The success rate of the transfer student program at RVHS in preventing failure and improving the likelihood of graduation for the students studied merits confirmation by future work. Whether or not a transfer student program will ameliorate the failure rate of the majority of mobile students was not a question for this study.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation was that only a single school was used for this research study. It was a suburban high school adjacent to a large Midwestern city and the findings may not be generalizable to other schools or in other geographic locations. Another limitation was that this school had a robust transfer student program already in place for years along with many nontransfer specific resources such as the tutoring center and a plethora of clubs and activities. A school lacking such resources was not studied.

Another potential limitation was possible selection bias in choosing the ten participating students. Ideally, one would obtain the names of all students meeting the inclusion criteria and having been eliminated by the exclusion criteria. Each potential candidate would be identified randomly with the help of a dedicated computer program. This method had to be balanced with the possibility that the largest group of transfer students (Asian/PI group) would be overrepresented and other groups underrepresented. A less daunting method was the one used, to have counselors suggest candidates meeting
the study criteria so that representative students from each ethnic plurality group could be selected. Thus, in the final group selected half were male and half were receiving free and reduced lunch as a surrogate for socioeconomic burdens. To limit experimenter bias, the investigator purposely did not include his own counselees in the study (see exclusion criteria) and did not personally select any of the students. All students interviewed were being met for the first time.

A further potential limitation was that the interviews were being recorded, potentially resulting in student hesitation to disclose personal, political, or cultural details. Two of the students coming from out of the country almost stopped talking when discussing unfavorable political viewpoints while being recorded. The design of the study with the necessity of recording the interviews and getting the students’ permission to do so could not have prevented this limitation. This constraint might be extrapolated to the students not wanting to say anything critical about the school to a staff member. To limit this potential drawback, each student was advised that in no way would the conversation impact their academic or behavioral records or status. Moreover, there were specific interview questions meant to facilitate mentioning such adverse transfer experiences at RVHS. The interviewer remained neutral and nonjudgmental throughout the thirty interviews.

Data processing and analysis could have introduced bias through the phrasing of the questions, the demeanor of the interviewer, or the failure to recognize a major theme discussed in the interviews. By the investigator, a seasoned counselor, personally conducting the interviews, and then repeatedly reading the professionally recorded
transcriptions, the major themes could be accurately identified, confirmed, coded, and quantitated using the Atlas-TI software. This process is in accordance with Seidman (2006): “The researcher must come to the transcripts with an open attitude, seeking what emerges as important and of interest from the text” (p.117).

**Significance**

The purpose of the study was to thoroughly understand the specific challenges faced by transfer students as described by the students themselves during a series of interviews. Using the experiences and insights detailed by transfer students helped to define the challenges that contributed to each transfer student’s success or failure. This information identified some of the pivotal factors influencing the transfer process. In addition, one of the objectives of this study was to learn from a diverse group of transfer students what supports or interventions were most helpful in ameliorating or solving the difficulties in the transition. Potentially, insights from their responses would improve the social and academic success rates of these students. The goal of this study was achieved.

The students were forthcoming, insightful, and cooperative. The information obtained can be used to guide teachers, staff, administrators, and most particularly, counselors in providing a comprehensive school milieu that embraces the unique challenges of each student in this heterogeneous population. The transferring of schools should not be viewed as a single isolated event but rather as a dynamic unique process for each student. The process begins well before the actual transfer occurs and continues indefinitely after transfer.
**Recommendations for Future Work**

Providing a comprehensive in-place transfer student program to such a diverse population of students merits confirmation in other school settings: inner city, rural, religious, private, and/or technological schools of various sizes. Ideally, one would want to use a control group for comparison but the literature and results of this study are so robust and compelling that it would seem unreasonable to withhold supports from transfer students in the control group. Also, this study did not interview teachers, staff, parents, or other counselors about the issues of interest in this research. Their input and insights should be sought to elaborate on the needs of this population of students. In addition it would be enlightening to conduct a similar mixed study method with even more diverse students such as those in special education classes, attending alternative schools, withdrawing prematurely, or transferring again.
APPENDIX A

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
(Parental Consent)

**Project Title:** High School Transfer Student Transitions and Change: Risk, Success, Failure, and the Vital Role of the Counseling Curriculum

**Researcher(s):** Benjamin M. Grais, BS, M.Ed.

**Faculty Sponsor:** Ruanda Garth McCullough, Ph.D.

**Introduction:**
You are being asked to give permission for your child to take part in a research study being conducted by Benjamin Grais for a dissertation under the supervision of Ruanda Garth McCullough, Ph.D. in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Loyola University of Chicago.

Your child is being asked to participate because he/she transferred into our high school after starting at another school and is interested in volunteering their time. Your child will be one of approximately ten (10) students to be interviewed about their transfer experience. If your child meets any of the following exclusion criteria, you should identify this immediately as this will prevent your child from participating in our study:

- In school district less than a month
- Not proficient in English
- Likely to transfer again within the next two months

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to allow your child to participate in the study.

**Purpose:**
The purpose of the study is to hear directly from transfer students about their transition to a new high school, the supports offered and why they utilized some and not others?

**Procedures:**
If you agree to allow your child to be in the study, he/she will be asked to:

- Spend three 42-minute sessions in conversation with me [Ben Grais] during lunch or study hall to answer questions their high school transfer experience.
- Discuss something about their family history, their reason(s) for transferring, and how the transfer process went. I will be interested in knowing those experiences that were helpful and those which weren’t. I will also be interested in whether particular individuals or experiences influenced the transfer. In this discussion, your child will be able to openly talk about any topics that our meaningful to their transfer experience.
- Your child will be able to decline to continue participating at any time or decline to answer any questions they do not want to answer.
• Our conversation will be audiotaped so that I can reflect accurately on our discussion. The data will be destroyed after this study is completed. During our discussion, I may make occasional notes to help me when I review the audiotape.

• I will ask your permission to review your child’s school records, including the high school transcript, dean’s file and counselor’s file. As a certified high school counselor, I routinely examine such documents professionally and confidentially.

• I will limit my research to these three 42-minute interviews and a document analysis of school records.

Risks/Benefits:
There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life.

There are no direct benefits to your child from participation, but there are potential indirect benefits to your child’s being allowed to express their transfer experience to an experienced counselor. The information gained from this research will hopefully benefit future transfer students who come to our high school and perhaps other high schools.

Confidentiality:
• The interview is entirely private with no one else in attendance. The documentation and audiotape will be kept in a locked cabinet in a locked office. This audio file will be destroyed after this study is completed.

• Your child’s name will not appear on any documents and they will not be identified in any written reports. The data will be coded without any identifying markers.

• Please understand that as a counselor I am a “mandated reporter.” This means that if there is the disclosure of any information about potential or actual harm to your child or others, I am legally obligated to report this information.

Voluntary Participation:
Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want your child to be in this study, he/she does not have to participate. Even if you decide to allow your child to participate, he/she is free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

Contacts and Questions:
If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Benjamin Grais or you may also contact my professor, Ruanda Garth McCullough, Ph.D.

If you have questions about your child’s rights as a research participant, you may contact the Compliance Manager in Loyola’s Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.
Statement of Consent:
Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to your child’s participation in this research study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

____________________________________________   __________________
Parent’s/Guardian’s Signature                                       Date

____________________________________________  ___________________
Researcher’s Signature                                                    Date
STUDENT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
(For students 18 years and older)

Project Title: High School Transfer Student Transitions and Change: Risk, Success, Failure, and the Vital Role of the Counseling Curriculum

Researcher(s): Benjamin M. Grais, BS, M.Ed.

Faculty Sponsor: Ruanda Garth McCullough, Ph.D.

Introduction:
You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Benjamin Grais for a dissertation under the supervision of Ruanda Garth McCullough, Ph.D. in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Loyola University of Chicago.

You are being asked to participate because you have transferred into our high school after starting at another school, you are at least 18-years old and therefore able to sign this consent form, and are interested in volunteering your time. You will be one of approximately ten (10) students to be interviewed about your transfer experience. If you meet any of the following exclusion criteria, you should identify this immediately as this will prevent you from participating in the study:
- In school district less than a month
- Not proficient in English
- Likely to transfer again within the next two months

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether you will participate in the study.

Purpose:
The purpose of the study is to hear directly from transfer students about their transition to a new high school, the supports offered and why they utilized some and not others?

Procedures:
If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to:
- Spend three 42-minute sessions in conversation with me [Benjamin Grais] during lunch or study hall to answer questions their high school transfer experience.
- Discuss something about their family history, their reason(s) for transferring, and how the transfer process went. I will be interested in knowing those experiences that were helpful and those which weren’t. I will also be interested in whether particular individuals or experiences influenced the transfer. In this discussion, you will be able to openly talk about any topics that our meaningful to their transfer experience.
- You will be able to decline to continue participating at any time or decline to answer any questions you do not want to answer.
Our conversation will be audiotaped so that I can reflect accurately on our discussion. The data will be destroyed after this study is completed. During our discussion, I may make occasional notes to help me when I review the audiotape.

I will ask your permission to review your school records, including the high school transcript, dean’s file and counselor’s file. As a certified high school counselor, I routinely examine such documents professionally and confidentially.

I will limit my research to these three 42-minute interviews and a document analysis of school records.

**Risks/Benefits:**

*There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life.*

There are no direct benefits to you for participating, but there are potential indirect benefits to you because you will have time to express your transfer experience to an experienced counselor. The information gained from this research will hopefully benefit future transfer students who come to our high school and perhaps other high schools.

**Confidentiality:**

- The interview is entirely private with no one else in attendance. The documentation and audiotape will be kept in a locked cabinet in a locked office. This audio file will be destroyed after this study is completed.
- Your name will not appear on any documents and you will not be identified in any written reports. The data will be coded without any identifying markers.
- Please understand that as a counselor I am a “mandated reporter.” This means that if there is the disclosure of any information about potential or actual harm to you or others, I am legally obligated to report this information.

**Voluntary Participation:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

**Contacts and Questions:**

If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Benjamin Grais or you may also contact my professor, Ruanda Garth McCullough, Ph.D. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Compliance Manager in Loyola’s Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.
Statement of Consent:

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

____________________________________________   __________________
Participant’s Signature                                                    Date

____________________________________________  ___________________
Researcher’s Signature                                                    Date
APPENDIX C

STUDENT ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
STUDENT ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
(For students under 18 years old)

Project Title: High School Transfer Student Transitions and Change: Risk, Success, Failure, and the Vital Role of the Counseling Curriculum

Researcher(s): Benjamin M. Grais, BS, M.Ed.

Faculty Sponsor: Ruanda Garth McCullough, Ph.D.

Introduction:
You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Benjamin Grais for a dissertation under the supervision of Ruanda Garth McCullough, Ph.D. in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Loyola University of Chicago.

You are being asked to participate because you have transferred into our high school after starting at another school and you are interested in volunteering your time. You will be one of approximately ten (10) students to be interviewed about your transfer experience. If you meet any of the following exclusion criteria, you should identify this immediately as this will prevent you from participating in the study:

- In school district less than a month
- Not proficient in English
- Likely to transfer again within the next two months

I will read and review this form with you carefully. Please feel free to ask any questions you may have before deciding whether you will participate in the study.

Purpose:
The purpose of the study is to hear directly from transfer students about their transition to a new high school, the supports offered and why they utilized some and not others?

Procedures:
If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to:

- Spend three 42-minute sessions in conversation with me [Ben Grais] during lunch or study hall to answer questions their high school transfer experience.
- Discuss something about their family history, their reason(s) for transferring, and how the transfer process went. I will be interested in knowing those experiences that were helpful and those which weren’t. I will also be interested in whether particular individuals or experiences influenced the transfer. In this discussion, you will be able to openly talk about any topics that our meaningful to their transfer experience.
- You will be able to decline to continue participating at any time or decline to answer any questions you do not want to answer.
Our conversation will be audiotaped so that I can reflect accurately on our discussion. The data will be destroyed after this study is completed. During our discussion, I may make occasional notes to help me when I review the audiotape.

I will ask your permission to review your school records, including the high school transcript, dean’s file and counselor’s file. As a certified high school counselor, I routinely examine such documents professionally and confidentially.

I will limit my research to these three 42-minute interviews and a document analysis of school records.

Risks/Benefits:
There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life.

There are no direct benefits to you for participating, but there are potential indirect benefits to you because you will have time to express your transfer experience to an experienced counselor. The information gained from this research will hopefully benefit future transfer students who come to our high school and perhaps other high schools.

Confidentiality:
- The interview is entirely private with no one else in attendance. The documentation and audiotape will be kept in a locked cabinet in a locked office. This audio file will be destroyed after this study is completed.
- Your name will not appear on any documents and you will not be identified in any written reports. The data will be coded without any identifying markers.
- Please understand that as a counselor I am a “mandated reporter.” This means that if there is the disclosure of any information about potential or actual harm to you or others, I am legally obligated to report this information.

Voluntary Participation:
Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

Contacts and Questions:
If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Benjamin Grais or you may also contact my professor, Ruanda Garth McCullough, Ph.D. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Compliance Manager in Loyola’s Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.
Statement of Consent:

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

____________________________________________   __________________
Participant’s Signature                                                    Date

____________________________________________  ___________________
Researcher’s Signature                                                    Date
APPENDIX D

OVERVIEW AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
OVERVIEW AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Comment: The overall purpose of the first interview session is to establish such a positive relation with the student that he or she will feel comfortable and willing to continue because the student trusts the interviewer. The interviewer wants honest and candid responses to enhance the validity of the study.

In the second interview, the investigator will use this established rapport to gain access to more in-depth student responses, observations, concerns and thoughts while hopefully eliciting the intrinsic themes that will help the investigator appreciate the student’s story of his or her move to Renaissance Valley High School.

The third interview will build further on the aforementioned rapport so that the student can clarify or elaborate on the spectrum of issues related to the move. At the conclusion of this interview the interviewer will express his appreciation, ask if the student has any questions or concerns, and offer suggestions for any needed support.

Questions for the first interview
“
I’m so pleased that you agreed to spend some of your valuable time to meet with me. This room will be quiet, and we won’t be interrupted. I’m looking forward to a very informal conversation, so if you need a break or want to pause for any reason, just let me know. At any time, you may change your mind about participating; this will not have any affect whatsoever on your school record. Since this is part of a research study, there is a requirement that you sign an informed assent meaning that you agree to participate. Your parent has already given permission for us to do this interview but you are the one who has the final say. Here is the form for you to sign. Look it over carefully before we begin. I want to answer any questions you may have before we start.”

1. Icebreakers
   a. We’ve not meet until just now, and I would like to get to know you so can you tell me something about yourself?
   b. What are your areas of interest or hobbies or sports you like or play?
   c. What’s your favorite music group or type of music?
   d. What is your favorite movie?
   e. If you had a free Saturday, what would you like to do?
   f. What do you actually do with your Saturdays?
   g. Are you involved here at RVHS in any sports or clubs? If so, what are they?
   h. Any community involvement? (Volunteer work, employment, etc.)
i. Do you have a role model? If so, who is it and why?
j. How long have you been at RVHS?
k. How has it been going?
l. How are your classes?
m. What’s your favorite subject?
n. What’s your least favorite subject?
o. What do you enjoy most about school?
p. What do you dislike most about school?

2. Questions about prior school? (Tell me about the school(s) you have attended.)
a. Where did you attend school before?
b. Was it just one previous school or were there others? Timeline?
c. What year did you transfer to RVHS?
d. How did you learn you were changing schools?
e. Can you explain to me specifically who told you and what the conversation was like?
f. Had you been expecting this change or was it a surprise?
g. How long was it between learning you were changing schools and actually changing?
h. Were you given a reason for this change?
i. Were you involved in the decision?
j. How did you feel about the move?
k. What made your family move to this neighborhood and school?
l. If you were happy about moving to a new school? why?
m. If you were unhappy about moving to a new school, what bothered you?
n. How long was it between the time you learned you were moving and when you actually moved?
o. How did you prepare yourself for the change?
p. How did you tell your friends you were leaving?
q. Looking back, what was the most challenging thing about moving?
r. Last memories about moving—What was the night before your move like?
s. What do you miss the most and what do you not miss?

3. How did your family feel about moving? (Tell me about the family you live with.)
   a. Who do you live with?
   b. Tell me about your family.
      i. Any pets?
   c. Does anybody else live with you?
   d. How did your family handle the move?

**Questions for the second interview**

1. Entering the new building
   a. I would like you to think back to when you first entered this high school building. What were you thinking when you walked through those doors?
   b. What was that like for you?
   c. Who were some of the first people you met?
   d. And what was that like?
   e. How was the overall process (registration, meeting your counselor, getting your locker)?
   f. Was there a particular person, thing or event that helped you in your initial transition? Are you still using those supports?
   g. Was there anything more that should have been done to help you as a transfer student?

2. Reasons for transferring schools
   a. What was the primary reason for the change?
   b. Were you happy about moving to a new school? Please explain.
   c. What kinds of supports did you use in your former school?
   d. Was there a particular person, thing or event that helped you at your former school?
   e. Was there anything more that should have been done for you at your former school?
f. Was this your first transition to a new school district or have you moved in the past?

3. Resources and supports at the new school
   a. How were your grades at your old school?
   b. How are your grades now, and is there a difference?
   c. Can you list any of the resources available in this building?
   d. Where did you find out about these new resources?
   e. Have you used any of these resources?
   f. Which of these resources has helped you the most
   g. If you needed academic help, what would you do?
   h. If you were unhappy or stressed, what would you do and where would you go?
   i. What made the transfer experience easier or more comfortable?
   j. How supportive were other students when you transferred in?
   k. Is there anything else that could have been done to make things better for you as a transfer student?

4. Tell me about your daily routine here at this high school?
   a. Are you or have you been involved in clubs or activities?
   b. Can you take me through your typical school day? What are your typical days like before, during and after school?
   c. About how long did it take you to establish friendships?
   d. Are your current friends the kids who you met when you first transferred in or have you developed new friendships over time?
   e. Who do you usually spend time with on weekends or after school?

5. Was your family involved in the transfer process?
   a. Did your parents come with you to register for school?
   b. To what extent are your parents involved in your education?
c. Is there anything that the school could have provided for your family that could have helped with the transition to this school?

d. Please list any community resources available to you and your family?

e. Does your family access any community resources?

f. If not, do you think your parents know about available community resources?

g. When you are at home, where would you seek academic help?

h. When you are at home, where would you seek help if you were unhappy or stressed?

i. Has your relationship with your family changed since the move?

**Questions for the third interview**

6. What are your future plans?

a. Has this school helped prepare you for those plans?

b. If I were a transfer student just starting here, what advice or “words of wisdom” would you give me to increase my chances for success at R.V.H.S?

c. What is the single most important thing that you’ve learned from this transfer experience that you feel will influence the rest of your life.

d. For clarification, I need to go back and review a few of the questions we have already discussed. Is that okay with you?

e. Do you have any questions for me?
REFERENCES


VITA

Ben Grais was born in Chicago, Illinois on May 25, 1973. He currently resides in a suburb of Chicago with his wife and two children.

Ben attended public schools in a suburb of Chicago. Once he graduated he attended a small liberal arts college until he transferred to the University of Wisconsin at Madison. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin at Madison in 1996 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology. In 2001, Ben earned a Masters degree in School Counseling and an Illinois Type 09, Secondary Teaching Certificate in History and Psychology from Loyola University Chicago. He has also completed a Type 75, School Administrative Certificate, from Loyola University Chicago.

Ben has worked in the field of education for the past 13 years. He began his career in technology support and training at a high school in a suburb of Chicago. Over the past nine years, Ben has been a counselor in that same high school working with freshmen through seniors in the areas of academic, college and career, social-emotional and personal development. In addition, Ben has worked with students in special education including pathways, emotional disorders and learning disabilities. He has also helped design and maintains the comprehensive counseling database as well as the counseling department web site.
DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

The Dissertation submitted by Benjamin M. Grais has been read and approved by the following committee:

Dr. Ruanda Garth McCullough, Director
Assistant Professor, School of Education
Loyola University Chicago

Dr. Leanne Kallemeyn
Assistant Professor, School of Education
Loyola University Chicago

Dr. Barney Berlin
Associate Professor Emeritus, School of Education
Loyola University Chicago