

**STUDENT PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE TRANSITION FROM ELEMENTARY
TO MIDDLE SCHOOL: ENGAGING STUDENT VOICE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF
AN IMPROVED, DATA-INFORMED TRANSITION PROGRAM**

by

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Christina F. Cohlhepp, Ed.D.

University of Pittsburgh, 2018

The purpose of this study is to explore student perceptions regarding the transition from elementary school to middle school and to provide an opportunity for student voice to be included in the develop of an improved, data-informed, comprehensive transition program designed to assist all students as they move through this transition. Secondary analysis of an existing data set (responses from the *Franklin Area School District Transition Survey*) will be conducted to develop an understanding of the concerns that existing students have regarding the transition to middle school. Themes that emerge from this analysis will inform further discussions with 7th and 8th grade students regarding the difficulties that they experience throughout the transition. This “student voice” will be interwoven into a plan for improving the transition programming that is offered by the Franklin Area School District.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	XIII
1.0 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....	2
1.2 INQUIRY QUESTIONS	3
2.0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE	4
2.1 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE: STAGE-ENVIRONMENT FIT THEORY.....	4
2.2 TRANSITION EFFECT ON STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT ...	5
2.3 STUDENT PERCEPTIONS.....	9
2.4 CHARACTERISTICS OF MIDDLE LEVEL LEARNERS	11
2.4.1 Physical Developmental Characteristics.....	12
2.4.2 Intellectual Developmental Characteristics.....	12
2.4.3 Social-Emotional Developmental Characteristics.....	13
2.5 CHARACTERISTICS OF A DEVELOPMENTALLY RESPONSIVE MIDDLE SCHOOL	13
2.6 STUDENT VOICE IN SCHOOL REFORM.....	14
2.7 CONCLUSION	16
3.0 APPLIED INQUIRY PLAN.....	17

3.1	INQUIRY SETTING.....	17
3.2	RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS	20
3.3	INQUIRY APPROACH.....	20
3.3.1	Research Question #1	20
3.3.2	Research Question #2	22
3.3.3	Research Question #3	22
3.3.4	Research Question #4	23
3.4	EVIDENCE	23
3.5	ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION	24
3.6	DEMONSTRATION OF SCHOLARLY PRACTICE	27
4.0	DATA, ANALYSIS, AND FINDINGS	29
4.1	SECONDARY ANALYSIS OF SURVEY DATA	29
4.1.1.	The Franklin Area School District Transition Survey	29
4.1.1.1.	Demographic Data	30
4.1.1.2.	Student Concerns – Overall	30
4.1.1.3.	Student Concerns – Overall by Gender	31
4.1.1.4.	Logistic Concerns	33
4.1.1.5.1	Gender and Logistic Concerns.....	35
4.1.1.5.2	Logistic Concerns by Elementary School Attended	38
4.1.1.5.3	Academic Concerns.....	41
4.1.1.6	Gender and Academic Concerns	43
4.1.1.7	Social/Emotional Concerns	48
4.1.1.7.1	Gender and Social/Emotional Concerns	50

4.1.1.8	Social/Emotional Concerns by Elementary School Attended	53
4.1.1.8.1	Open-Ended Responses	56
4.2	STUDENT VOICE ACTIVITY	57
4.2.1	Round Robin Questioning Activity	57
4.2.1.1.1	Procedure	59
4.2.1.1.2	Results of Questioning Activity	60
4.3	CONCLUSION	68
5.0	DISCUSSION.....	69
5.1	RESEARCH QUESTION 1	69
5.1.1	Logistic Concerns.....	69
5.1.2	Academic Concerns	70
5.1.3	Social/Emotional Concerns	70
5.2	RESEARCH QUESTION 2	71
5.2.1	Gender.....	71
5.2.2	Elementary School Attended	73
5.3	RESEARCH QUESTION 3	74
5.3.1	Increased Freedom.....	75
5.3.2	Students are stressed out – and they need help coping.....	76
5.3.3	Instruction Matters	77
5.3.4	Bullying is an Issue.....	77
5.3.5	Orientation was helpful – but could be improved.....	78
5.4	RESEARCH QUESTION 4:.....	79
6.0	CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	81

6.1	IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE.....	81
6.2	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDITIONS AND/OR MODIFICATIONS TO CURRENT TRANSITION PROGRAMMING.....	83
6.3	NEXT STEPS	88
6.4	CONCLUSION	89
6.5	LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	89
APPENDIX A		91
APPENDIX B		95
BIBLIOGRAPHY		103

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 Hart’s ‘ladder of participation’ (Hart 1992)	15
Table 3.1. NCES's urban-centric locale categories. Office of Management and Budget (2000). Standards for Defining Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas; Notice	18
Table 3.2 Demographic Characteristics of the Elementary and Middle Schools of the Elementary and Middle Schools of the FASD	19
Table 3.3 Alignment of Inquiry Questions, Evidence, Methods and Analysis.....	26
Table 4.1 Responses to Q#4 by Gender.....	31
Table 4.2 Responses to Q#4 by Elementary School Attended in Sixth Grade	32
Table 4.3 Student Responses to Logistic Concerns – All.....	33
Table 4.4 Female Student Responses to Logistic Concerns	35
Table 4.5 Male Student Responses to Logistic Concerns.....	35
Table 4.6 Chi Square Analysis for Gender and Logistic Concerns	36
Table 4.7 Responses to Logistic Concerns by Elementary School Attended in 6th grade.....	38
Table 4.8 Mean Responses to Logistical Concerns by Elementary School Attended	40
Table 4.9 Student Responses to Academic Concerns (n=132)	41
Table 4.10 Female Student Responses to Academic Concern.....	43
Table 4.11 Male Student Responses to Academic Concerns (n=66).....	44
Table 4.12 Chi Square Analysis for Gender and Academic Concerns	44

Table 4.13 Responses to Academic Concerns by Elementary School Attended in 6th grade.....	45
Table 4.14 Mean Responses to Academic Concerns by Elementary School Attended.....	47
Table 4.15 Student Responses to Social/Emotional Concerns (n=132)	48
Table 4.16 Female Student Responses to Social/Emotional Concerns (n=66).....	50
Table 4.17 Male Student Responses to Social/Emotional Concerns (n=66)	51
Table 4.18 Chi Square Analysis for Gender and Social/Emotional Concerns	51
Table 4.19 Responses to Social/Emotional Concerns by Elementary School Attended	53
Table 4.20 Mean Responses to Social/Emotional Concerns by Elementary School Attended	55
Table 6.1 Current FASD Transition Activities.....	81
Table 6.2 Attributes of Successful Transition Programs (NMSA, 2002a; Cooke, 1995; Bohan- Baker & Little, 2002).....	74
Table 6.3 Recommended Additional Transition Activities	75

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4.1 Student responses to question #4: Overall, how do you feel about beginning middle school this year?.....	30
Figure 4.2 Most frequently identified logistic concerns	34
Figure 4.3 The percentage of students from each elementary school who responded they were very worried or concerned about each of the logistic issues	39
Figure 4.4 The percentage of students from each elementary school who responded they were not worried or concerned at all about each of the logistic issues.....	39
Figure 4.5 Most frequently identified academic concerns.....	42
Figure 4.6 The percentage of students from each elementary school who responded they were very worried or concerned about each of the academic issues	46
Figure 4.7 The percentage of students from each elementary school who responded they were not worried or concerned at all about each of the academic issues	47
Figure 4.8 Most frequently identified social/emotional concerns	49
Figure 4.9 The percentage of students from each elementary school who responded they were very worried or concerned about each of the social/emotional issues.....	54
Figure 4.10 The percentage of students from each elementary school who responded they were not worried or concerned about each of the social/emotional issues.....	55

Figure 4.11 Number of student responses for activity question #2 – In general, do you spend more or less time doing homework in seventh grade than you did in sixth grade? 62

Figure 4.12 Number of student responses for activity question #2b –How much time do you think you spend on homework on a typical night? 63

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The difficulties that students encounter when transitioning from one school setting to another have long been of interest to practitioners and researchers. This is not surprising given the reality that nearly every student will experience multiple school transitions during their K-12 educational career. Jennifer Symonds (2015) describes school transitions as a “life-changing event” for children (p. 1). She explains that while students’ lives are full of changes and adjustments, few impact students’ individual experiences quite as significantly as a change in schools. Symonds further purports that this impact is magnified by the intensely social nature of moving from one school to another.

Common school transitions include the initial entry to kindergarten and those from elementary to middle or junior high school and the later transition to high school. The transition from elementary to middle school has been an area of particular concern. During the time of early adolescence (ages 10-15), children experience a period of rapid and significant change in their physical, intellectual, moral, spiritual, psychological and social-emotional development (Caskey & Anfara, 2007). It is also during this time of rapid change and development that most students experience the transition from elementary school to middle school.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Students often experience difficulties when they transition to middle school from elementary school. Many of these students experience a decline in academic performance as measured by their report card grades and standardized test scores as well as an increase in negative behaviors and peer interactions. During the time of early adolescence (ages 10-15), children experience a period of rapid and significant change in their physical, intellectual, moral, spiritual, psychological and social-emotional development (Caskey & Anfara, 2007). It is also during this time of rapid change and development that most students experience the transition from elementary school to middle school. Students often struggle and have difficulty navigating the complexities of this transition. The impact of the transition from elementary school to middle school has been the focus of a growing body of literature. For some students, there appears to be a marked decline in student academic achievement (e.g., Bellmore, 2011; West & Schwerdt, 2012), motivation (e.g., Anderman & Maehr, 1994) and engagement (e.g., Skinner, Furrer, Marchand & Kinderman, 2008) when this transition occurs.

The main goal of this study was to inform practice regarding supporting students within the Franklin Area School District and contribute to the existing body of literature by further exploring the attitudes and experiences of students as they prepare for and navigate through the transition from elementary to middle school. This will deepen our understanding of students' needs, concerns and aspirations, further informing our practice as we strive to improve the educational experience for students during this time of great change and adjustment.

1.2 INQUIRY QUESTIONS

The following questions guided the exploration into this problem of practice:

1. What concerns do incoming 7th grade students have regarding the transition to middle school?
2. Do the concerns of incoming 7th grade students regarding the transition to middle school vary depending on gender or which elementary school they attended?
3. What themes emerge when an opportunity is provided for the expression of “student voice” regarding the transition to middle school?
4. What additions and/or modifications should be made to the transition programming offered by the Franklin Area middle school to ensure that the concerns identified by students are addressed?

2.0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The following review of literature provides a foundation for understanding how the transition to middle school can impact students' academic and personal success. A comprehensive summary of relevant literature regarding the transition to middle school is presented. Stage-Environment-Fit theory is cited, purporting that any decrease in student achievement across the transition is likely due to a poor alignment between the needs of students and the characteristics of the learning environment. Generalized characteristics of young adolescents and developmentally responsive middle schools are discussed in an effort to provide foundational understanding of the needs of young adolescents.

2.1 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE: STAGE-ENVIRONMENT FIT THEORY

Stage-Environment Fit Theory was first described in 1989 by Jacquelynne S. Eccles and Carole Midgley in their chapter in *Research on Motivation in Education*. Eccles and Midgley, joined by a group of scholars at the University of Michigan, further developed and described the theory in a 1993 *American Psychologist* article. Stage-Environment Fit Theory suggests that declines in students' academic motivation result when a mismatch exists between the developmental needs of early adolescents and their educational environment (Roeser, 2005). Eccles et al. (1993) posits that many developmentally inappropriate school environment changes accompany the

transition to middle or junior high school. The authors suggest that these changes in the structure and complexity of academic tasks, increased responsibilities and expectations, as well as the nature and quality of student and teacher relationships, can negatively impact students' academic achievement and motivation.

If this misalignment between students' needs and the characteristics of the educational environment leads to decreases in academic motivation as suggested by Stage-Environment Fit Theory, then the implementation of developmentally responsive practices is essential in assisting students through the transition from elementary to middle school. In order to determine how practitioners can better meet the needs of adolescents as they move through this transition, we must look to the current literature to answer the following questions:

- What impact, if any, does the transition to middle school have on students' motivation, academic achievement and engagement in school?
- What are the unique developmental needs of students during early adolescence?
- What are the characteristics of a developmentally responsive educational environment during adolescence?

2.2 TRANSITION EFFECT ON STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

The perceived phenomenon of decreased academic performance across the transition from elementary to middle or junior high school has been of interest to researchers since the 1960s (Mullins & Irvin, 2000). In 1966, Finger and Silverman published a study of nearly 500 seventh grade boys and girls. Their study revealed a decline in achievement as measured by a battery of

intelligence and achievement tests for the majority of these students during the transition from elementary to junior high. Additionally, the researches administered a Personal Values Inventory (PVI) test which inquired about students' interests and values. Their analysis revealed a significant relationship between students' academic motivation and the change in their academic performance.

More recent studies have found similar declines in students' academic performance across the transition to middle and/or junior high schools. Blyth, Simmons & Carlton-Ford (1983) studied the academic adjustment of students as they entered a junior high school in seventh grade. The researchers found a general decline in student grade point averages that were calculated on a core set of academic areas. They also reported this decline appeared to be stronger for males than females.

Alspaugh (1998) investigated the transition to middle school and the later transition to high school when they studied 48 rural and small town school districts. The districts were divided into three equal groups based on grade configurations and number of buildings. Group one included school districts with a K-8 and 9-12 grade configuration that have only one elementary school (K-8) and one high school (9-12). Group two included districts with one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school in which all students transitioned through in linear progression. The third group included districts with multiple elementary schools that fed into one middle school and one high school. An analysis of the district's average Missouri Mastery and Achievement Test (MMAT) scores indicated a statistically significant achievement loss for students when they transitioned to middle school in sixth grade. Alspaugh refers to this phenomenon as "transition loss" and reported that the transition loss in

achievement was more significant when multiple elementary schools merged into a single middle school across the transition.

Much of the most recent literature concerning the transition to middle school investigates student performance relative to other contextual considerations. Bellmore (2011), for example, studied the relationship between an individual student's social functioning and their grade point average (GPA) across the transition to middle school. The author's results supported prior findings that peer rejection and unpopularity negatively impact students' GPAs. Due to the longitudinal design of Bellmore's study, the author was able to suggest that a student's social functioning in elementary school, the year before the transition can have a long-standing impact on their future peer status and GPA. Bellmore also reported a decline in GPAs for both boys and girls across the transition and throughout their middle school years. This decline is significant even when other factors such as race and socioeconomic standing are controlled for. The author cites poor stage-environment fit as the likely cause for this decline, claiming that a poor student-environment fit impacts the academic performance of students not only across the transition but throughout students' middle school careers. Kingery, Erdley and Marshall (2011) also studied student-peer relationships across the middle school transition. Similar to Bellmore, these authors describe a "robust" relationship between peer acceptance and a student's academic achievement.

Akos, Rose and Orthner (2015) studied sociodemographic moderators of the academic impact of the middle school. Their longitudinal inquiry included a cohort of 3,295 students entering sixth grade at 14 middle schools in a socially and economically diverse, urban school district. These authors claim that their findings "demonstrate large, negative, and significant transition effects for both reading and math achievement" (p. 191) as measured by the North Carolina system of assessment. Additionally, the authors found a larger and/or more negative

transition effect for students holding vulnerable sociodemographic characteristics including those who were minorities, from low-income and single-parent families, or were classified as special education students. On the other end of the spectrum, they found that gifted students did not experience an interruption in their growth in reading and showed improvement in math across the transition to middle school.

While the previously mentioned studies found a decline in student academic performance across the transition to middle school, some researchers have found no negative academic impact and even positive changes associated with the transition. Weiss and Kipnes (2006) examined an urban school district that contained both K-8 schools and 6-8 middle schools. When they compared student outcomes in 8th grade, they found few differences. The authors claim that this indicates that the transition itself had little to no impact on student outcomes.

A large, meta-analytic study by Jaekyung Lee (2010) examined trends in reading and math achievement growth trajectories across 30 years of multiple national data sources. Lee reports “remarkable consistency and stability across different tests and cohorts over the long term” (p. 825). The trends emerging from Lee’s study indicate that American students are “gaining ground at the pre/early primary school level, holding ground at the middle school level, and losing ground at the high school level” (p. 800) in both reading and math achievement. Booth & Gerard (2014) found that seventh grade students transitioning to a middle school expressed more positive feelings about school, although they reported that new-found enthusiasm was short lived and generally declined by the end of the seventh grade year. Ryan, Shim & Makara (2013) purport that the transition to middle school is a much more complex phenomenon and their findings “paint a more nuanced picture” (p. 1382) where students’

experience a decline in their academic adjustment, but an increase in their relational self-worth around teachers and peers.

The mixed results yielded by the current body of literature surrounding the effect middle school transition has on students' academic performance warrants further study of this issue. This time of rapid change and development combined with other moderators such as race, socioeconomic status, and the home and family environment make this a complex, multifaceted phenomenon.

2.3 STUDENT PERCEPTIONS

This line of inquiry involves collecting and analyzing student perceptions of the middle school transition. This approach has been previously applied by multiple researchers (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Arowosafe & Irvin, 1992; Bailey, Giles & Rogers, 2015). Gathering perceptual data from students, teachers and parents can provide valuable information and lead to a deeper understanding of what these stakeholders think about the learning environment (Bernhardt, 2003).

In a 1992 article in the *Middle School Journal*, Sandra Odegaard and Jay Heath surveyed 225 fifth and six grade students from five different elementary schools within both urban and suburban school districts. The authors identified the anxieties related to navigating a larger building, getting lost, being late to class, going to school with older, bigger students and heavy homework assignments as the most significant anxieties of prospective middle school students. In addition to these areas of concern, Odegaard and Heath also stated that there were many of the aspects of the transition to middle school that students were looking forward to. Many of these

pertain to an increase in independence and include having their own lockers, changing rooms, having multiple teachers for several subjects, eating in the cafeteria, participating in a wider variety of extracurricular activities and expanded opportunities to make new friends. This supports some of the prior literature that claims there are both positive and negative aspects of the middle school transition.

Akos and Galassi (2004) explored a wider population when they collected perceptual data about the transition from elementary school to middle school. These authors studied the experience of 173 sixth grade students, 83 parents and 12 teachers. They also looked at the later transition to high school, which included perceptual data from 320 ninth grade students, 61 parents and 17 teachers. The students, parents and teachers in this study were given questionnaires that included multiple choice, Likert scale items and open ended response questions. The questionnaires were customized for each of the three groups of respondents. The researchers compared the responses from the three groups and organized them into five categories: transition concerns, positive aspects of transitions, difficulty of the transition, adjusting to the new school, and transition programming. Both students and parents identified the amount of homework and getting lost as their top concerns, while teachers identified fitting in/making friends and getting lost as their primary concerns. The responses about the positive aspects of the transition revealed that students looked forward to choosing more of their classes and making new friends. Parents and teachers shared the same view, expressing student selection of classes as a positive aspect of the transition along with the ability to participate in sports and other extracurricular activities.

Bailey, Giles and Rogers (2015), conducted a quantitative, descriptive study of 225 fifth grade students who were preparing to enter middle school in sixth grade. The authors' aim was

to identify and explain the concerns that these students had regarding their transition to middle school. In addition to identifying these concerns, the researchers examined their concerns with regard to gender, race, and the type of school (rural, urban, inner-city, suburban) they attended. The most frequent, highest rated area of concern for the students in this study was the requirement of students to change clothes for physical education classes when they move to the middle school (something that was not required at any of the elementary schools the students attended). This concern was particularly highly rated for females. The authors state that “this finding is not surprising, given the dramatic physical changes that occur during early adolescence and the self-consciousness middle school students commonly feel about their physical appearance” (p. 8). Other highly rated areas of concerns identified by the students included having more difficult classes, being bullied by older students and using a locker. Pressure from peers to drink or smoke was highly rated as a concern for nearly half of the respondents while the other half cited they were of no concern.

2.4 CHARACTERISTICS OF MIDDLE LEVEL LEARNERS

As previously stated, young adolescents experience profound personal changes between the ages of ten to fifteen. The National Middle School Association (AMLE) states that “early adolescence is also a period of tremendous variability among youngsters of the same gender and chronological age in all areas of their development” (AMLE, 2010, p. 6). This is due in part to the irregularity of the rate that young adolescents enter and progress through puberty. These individual differences as well as compounding differences in race, gender and socioeconomic

status, and other environmental factors result in a student population that exhibits exceptionally diverse personal, social and educational needs (AMLE, 2010).

The following text highlights some of the notable characteristics of young adolescents. This is certainly not an exhaustive list, and it is important to remember that a high degree of variance exists among the development of these characteristics.

2.4.1 Physical Developmental Characteristics

Physical development in early adolescence includes rapid and significant increases in height and weight and changes in the muscular-skeletal systems. These changes often result in coordination issues (Caskey & Anfara, 2014). Proper nutrition, physical activity and other healthy habits are vital to young adolescents, however they “are physically vulnerable because they may adopt poor health habits or engage in experimentation with alcohol and other drugs and high-risk sexual behaviors” (AMLE, 2010, p. 56). The brain also develops significantly during early adolescence, particularly the prefrontal cortex, which is the “area of the brain that handles executive functions such as planning, reasoning, anticipating consequences, sustaining attention, and making decisions” (Caskey & Anfara, 2014, p. 3).

2.4.2 Intellectual Developmental Characteristics

Young adolescents begin to develop the ability to think abstractly, demonstrate curiosity and prefer active, hands-on learning experiences that involve peer interaction. They begin to be more

self-aware in regards to their personal abilities but often experience feelings of inadequacy when they compare themselves to their peers (AMLE, 2010).

2.4.3 Social-Emotional Developmental Characteristics

Caskey and Anfara (2014) describe social-emotional development as “a person’s capacity for mature interactions with individuals and groups” (p. 7). One of the most significant displays of social-emotional development is the strong need that adolescents have to belong – particularly to a group of their peers. This is marked by an increase in the importance of peer approval with a simultaneous decrease in importance in the approval of adults (Caskey & Anfara, 2014). Young adolescents frequently experience mood swings and/or exhibit immature behavior as their “social skills and ability to regulate emotions frequently lag behind their cognitive and physical maturity” (AMLE, 2010, p. 61).

2.5 CHARACTERISTICS OF A DEVELOPMENTALLY RESPONSIVE MIDDLE SCHOOL

Given the complexity of the middle level learner, it is vital that educators strive to create learning environments that are developmentally responsive to the needs of students’. This is of particular importance across the transition to middle school. Based on decades of research, the National Middle School Association has identified four essential attributes of successful middle level education.

AMLE (2010) states:

An education for young adolescents must be

Developmentally responsive

Using the distinctive nature of young adolescents as the foundation upon which all decisions about school organization, policies, curriculum, instruction, and assessment are made.

Challenging

Ensuring that every student learns and every member of the learning community is held to high expectations.

Empowering

Providing all students with the knowledge and skills they need to take responsibility for their lives, to address life's challenges, to function successfully at all levels of society, and to be creators of knowledge.

Equitable

Advocating for and ensuring every student's right to learn and providing appropriately challenging and relevant learning opportunities for every student. (p. 13)

The first attribute listed is that the educational environment for young adolescents must be developmentally responsive. If we are to make all decisions regarding schools with the nature of young adolescents as the foundation, it is important that we have a deep understanding of the students that we serve.

2.6 STUDENT VOICE IN SCHOOL REFORM

In *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, Fullan (2007) describes how students are typically left out of the change process in schools. He purports that while students are thought to benefit from the potential changes, they are rarely active participants in the change process or involved in decisions regarding organizational aspects of the educational environment. Yonezawa &

Jones (2007) similarly state “*Despite the fact that they are the recipients of reformers’ good intentions, students are infrequently asked their opinions as to what enhances or detracts from their learning*” (p. 681). Robinson and Taylor make a further argument in their 2007 article in *Improving Schools*. They state that providing an opportunity for students to be heard, and listening to what they have to say is not sufficient – but that it is what we do with the information they provide us with and how we respond to what they have to say that is the most important piece of engaging student voice. These authors further explain that when students are given opportunities to lead and advise, they can effect positive change in school policies and practices.

The notion of student voice, while gaining momentum among school reformers, is not new. Roger Hart and his *Ladder of Participation* (Hart, 1992) shown in table 2.1 describe the different levels of engaging student voice. The author explains that as you move up the rungs of the ladder, the level of engagement of student voice and influence on practice is strengthened.

Table 2.1 Hart’s ‘ladder of participation’ (Hart 1992)

	Rung	Examples/features
Degrees of participation	Child-initiated shared decisions	Projects initiated out of children’s interests and actively engaged in by adults, genuinely sharing decision-making
	Child initiated and directed	Children working co-operatively together without the intercession of adults
	Adult-initiated shared decisions	Project initiated by adults, but decision-making shared with young people
	Consulted and Informed	Children as consultants
		Feedback provided to participants
	Assigned but Informed	Genuine informed consent
		Children have a meaningful role to play

	Rung	Examples/features
Non-participation		Children as genuine volunteers
	Tokenism	Children asked to lend their voice but without choice regarding the subject or means of communication, and often without a chance to formulate their own opinions
	Decoration	Children used to bolster a cause of adults' choosing
	Manipulation	Coercion of students to participate
		Consultation without feedback to children

This study includes an activity designed to illicit student voice and a plan for implementing student feedback into the comprehensive transition programming offered by the Franklin Area School District.

2.7 CONCLUSION

This review of literature provides a foundation for understanding how the transition to middle school can impact students' academic and personal success. In addition to considering previous research regarding student performance across the transition, it is also essential to develop a thorough understanding of the nature of young adolescents so that schools and educational leaders can provide a developmentally responsive learning environment that best meets the needs of students and supports them across this transition. This inquiry allows for a deeper understanding of students' needs, concerns and aspirations, further informing our practice as we strive to improve the educational experience for students during this time of great change and adjustment.

3.0 APPLIED INQUIRY PLAN

The purpose of this inquiry was to explore student perceptions regarding the transition from elementary school to middle school and to provide an opportunity for student voice to be included in the development of an improved, data-informed, comprehensive transition program designed to assist all students as they move through this transition.

3.1 INQUIRY SETTING

The setting for this proposed inquiry was the Franklin Area School District. The specific schools where this inquiry will take place are: Central elementary school, Sandycreek elementary school, Victory elementary school and the Franklin Area middle school. The Franklin Area School District is a rural school district located in Northwestern Pennsylvania serving approximately 2,000 students. The specific schools serving as the setting for this inquiry include three elementary schools which have a kindergarten through sixth grade configuration that feed into a single middle school consisting of grades seven and eight.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) classifies schools and school districts using an urban-centric classification system. There are four major categories which

include city, suburban, town and rural. Each of these four categories is further divided into three subcategories. Table 1.1 provides the description for each category and subcategory.

Table 3.1. NCES's urban-centric locale categories. Office of Management and Budget (2000). Standards for Defining Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas; Notice

Locale	Definition
<i>City</i>	
Large	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population of 250,000 or more
Midsize	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000
Small	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population less than 100,000
<i>Suburb</i>	
Large	Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population of 250,000 or more
Midsize	Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000
Small	Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population less than 100,000
<i>Town</i>	
Fringe	Territory inside an urban cluster that is less than or equal to 10 miles from an urbanized area
Distant	Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 10 miles and less than or equal to 35 miles from an urbanized area
Remote	Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 35 miles from an urbanized area
<i>Rural</i>	
Fringe	Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster
Distant	Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster
Remote	Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster

Each of the three elementary schools in the Franklin Area School District has a different NCES classification as well as its own unique demographic characteristics, school climate, and culture. The collection and exploration of this demographic data will allow for inquiry regarding how student perceptions may differ between these three specific contexts. Table 1 describes the demographic characteristics of each school.

Table 3.2 Demographic Characteristics of the Elementary and Middle Schools of the Elementary and Middle Schools of the FASD

	Central Elem.	Sandycreek Elem.	Victory Elem.	Franklin Area M.S.
NCES Classification (2015/2016 School Year)	Town: Distant: Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 10 miles and less than or equal to 35 miles from an urbanized area.	Fringe: Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster.	Rural: Distant: Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster.	Rural: Fringe: Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster.
Enrollment (2015/2016 School Year)	428, grades K-6	343, grades K-6	242, grades K-6	288, grades 7-8
Percentage of Students Economically Disadvantaged	71.7%	51.6%	51.7%	52.8%
Percentage of Students Receiving Special Education Services	24.8%	22.2%	25.2%	28.1%
Percentage of Students enrolled in Gifted Program	2.1%	3.2%	0.8%	6.3%
Percent Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity				
<i>American Indian/Alaskan Native (not Hispanic)</i>	0.2%	0.6%	0.0%	0.4%
<i>Asian (not Hispanic)</i>	0.2%	1.2%	0.4%	1.0%
<i>Black or African American (not</i>	5.6%	0.6%	0.8%	3.5%

<i>Hispanic)</i>				
<i>Hispanic (any race)</i>	0.5%	1.5%	0.0%	0.4%
<i>Multi-Racial (not Hispanic)</i>	7.0%	2.6%	1.7%	2.1%
<i>White (not Hispanic)</i>	85.9%	93.0%	97.1%	92.7%
<i>Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander</i>	0.5%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%

3.2 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Specific individuals involved in the inquiry included sixth grade students, and teachers at the Franklin Area School District's three elementary schools and seventh and eighth grade students, parents and teachers at Franklin Area Middle School. Key stakeholders impacted by this problem of practice include all students, parents, teachers, administrators, school board members and community members of the Franklin Area School District.

3.3 INQUIRY APPROACH

Multiple research methods were utilized to address each of the proposed research questions in this study.

3.3.1 Research Question #1

What concerns do incoming 7th grade students have regarding the transition to middle school?

The secondary analysis of an existing data set (responses from the *Franklin Area School District Transition Survey*) was utilized to develop a thorough understanding of the concerns that existing students have regarding the transition to middle school. The survey which was administered to incoming 7th grade students during the first week of the 2017/2018 academic year, collected demographic data including students' age, gender and which elementary school they attended. Perceptual data regarding the students' concerns and aspirations about the transition from elementary school to middle school were also collected. Students were asked the question: *Overall, how do you feel about beginning middle school this year?* and provided one of three answers: *Excited/Happy*, *Worried/Scared* or *Unsure*. Students were then asked to rate their level of concern surrounding logistical, academic and social/emotional aspects of the transition. Responses collected from the *Franklin Area School District Transition Survey* were coded to allow for a quantitative descriptive statistical analysis of student responses. Frequency distribution tables were created for all items in the survey to illustrate the highest rated areas of concern identified by students. It is hypothesized that students who responded to the question: *Overall, how do you feel about beginning middle school this year?* by indicating they were *Worried/Scared* would have significantly more highly rated areas of concern than those students who stated they were *Excited/Happy* about making the transition.

Emerging themes from the analysis of this data set informed further discussions with 7th grade students regarding the difficulties that they experience throughout the transition.

3.3.2 Research Question #2

Do the concerns of incoming 7th grade students regarding the transition to middle school vary depending on gender or which elementary school they attend?

Data collected from the *Franklin Area School District Transition Survey* was disaggregated to allow the examination of any patterns or relationships that may have emerged between the areas of concern identified by students and their gender or the elementary school that they attended. A Chi-Square Test for Independence was utilized to determine if there is a significant relationship between the most frequently identified, highest level areas of concern and student gender. Further analysis was conducted to explore if students' concerns are impacted by which elementary school they attended in the year before the transition.

Given that prior literature has described the heightened concerns that female students have regarding social and emotional aspects of the transition (Citation), it was expected that female students will have more highly-rated areas of concern in the survey sub-category of social/emotional concerns than their same-age male counterparts.

It was also expected that students who attend our district's largest, most diverse elementary school will be less concerned with the logistical issues than their peers who attend schools with smaller buildings and populations.

3.3.3 Research Question #3

What themes emerge when an opportunity is provided for the expression of "student voice" regarding the transition to middle school?

Informed by the secondary analysis of student responses from the *Franklin Area School District Transition Survey*, a series of questions were developed that were designed to dig deeper into understanding the concerns that were identified on the survey. Students then participated in a “*Round Robin*” activity with their peers that allowed the facilitation of the collection of student responses to these questions. All students had the opportunity to answer all questions during this activity. Responses were collected by their peers and were analyzed by the researcher.

3.3.4 Research Question #4

What additions and/or modifications should be made to the transition programming offered by the Franklin Area middle school to ensure that the concerns identified by students are addressed?

Informed by survey data, “student voice” discussions and research-based best practices described by the body of literature that has been reviewed, a variety of changes were explored to strengthen and improve the transition programming offered to students. A team of participant researches including administrators, teachers and school counselors will work collaboratively to identify agreed-upon improvement goals, determine next steps and collect ongoing, formative data to further inform improvement efforts.

3.4 EVIDENCE

The evidence collected in this proposed line of inquiry included student perception data regarding their concerns and aspirations about beginning seventh grade. This included the

secondary analysis of data collected from the *Franklin Area School District Transition Survey*, which was administered to all incoming seventh grade students during the first week of the 2017/2018 academic year. These data provide information regarding students' identified areas of concern, the most frequently identified areas of concern and the highest rated areas of concern. Additionally, demographic data including the type of elementary school they attended and their gender was collected. The data related to areas of concern was disaggregated by gender and the type of elementary school they attended.

In addition to survey data, responses from the discussion activities designed to elicit "student voice" were analyzed and interpreted by the researcher. Informed by this data and research-based best practices described by the body of literature that has been reviewed, a variety of changes were explored to strengthen and improve the transition programming offered to students.

3.5 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

It is of interest to the researcher to determine what students identify as their highest rated areas of concern regarding the transition from elementary to middle school. Secondary analysis of an existing data set from the *Franklin Area School District Transition Survey* was utilized to develop a thorough understanding of the concerns that existing students have regarding the transition to middle school. These data, organized into frequency distribution tables, was then interpreted by the researcher. Interpretation of this data included the exploration of any trends or relationships that emerged from the survey results.

After the secondary analysis, the researcher presented the results and applicable emerging themes and relationships from the *Franklin Area School District Transition Survey* to the current 7th grade students at the Franklin Area Jr./Sr. High School. The researcher developed a series of questions designed to dig deeper into understanding the concerns that were identified on the survey. Students will participated in a “*Round Robin*” activity with their peers that allowed the facilitation of the collection of student responses to these questions. All students had the opportunity to answer all questions during this activity. Responses were collected by their peers and were analyzed by the researcher.

The school district where this study took place includes three distinctly different elementary schools that feed into one middle school. Each of the three schools has marked differences in their location categorization, and enrollment demographics. It is anticipated that these differences may play a role in the concerns that students have regarding the transition. For example, students from the larger, more racially and socioeconomically diverse elementary school may not be as concerned about navigating a new building or meeting and getting along with new people. In contrast, students from the smallest school with a much more homogenous population may experience a high level of concern at the thought of transitioning into a much more logistically and socially complex environment. If such variances are found in the analysis and interpretation of the survey data, there may be implications and considerations for the differentiation of future transition programming activities according to the needs of each elementary school population.

Informed by survey data, “student voice” discussions and research-based best practices described by the body of literature that have been reviewed, a variety of changes were explored to strengthen and improve the transition programming offered to students. A participant team

consisting of the researcher, school guidance counselor and teachers worked collaboratively to identify any gaps that may exist between concerns identified by students and the issues addressed through the current transition activities offered by the Franklin Area School District. Table 3. describes the types of evidence that was collected and the methods of collection and analysis to address each of the four inquiry questions posited in this study.

Table 3.3 Alignment of Inquiry Questions, Evidence, Methods and Analysis

Inquiry Question	Evidence	Method	Analysis
What concerns do incoming 7 th grade students have regarding the transition to middle school?	Student perceptual data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identified areas of concern Highest rated areas of concern 	Secondary Analysis of preexisting data set FASD Middle School Transition Survey	Survey data was analyzed to identify the highest rated areas of concern. Graphical representations of this data was presented.
Do the concerns of incoming 7 th grade students regarding the transition to middle school vary depending on gender or which elementary school they attend?	Student perceptual data disaggregated by gender and elementary school: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identified areas of concern Highest rated areas of concern 	Secondary Analysis of data collected through FASD Middle School Transition Survey.	Survey data was disaggregated to allow the examination of any patterns or relationships that may emerge regarding student perceptions and concerns and the 1. elementary school they attended or 2. their gender. Chi Square test of significance with threshold of $p < .05$ indicating statistical significance.
What themes emerge when an opportunity is provided for the expression of “student voice” regarding the transition to middle school?	Student responses to discussion questions.	Collection of student responses from “Round-Robin” discussion activity designed to elicit “student voice.”	Analysis of student responses to develop a more thorough understanding of student concerns. Exploration of emergent themes or relationships.

What additions and/or modifications should be made to the transition programming offered by the Franklin Area middle school to ensure that the concerns identified by students are addressed?	Identification of gaps or inadequacies between the current transition programming offered by the Franklin Area middle school and the areas of concern identified by students. The researcher, in cooperation with a transition team will identify and focus on agreed upon improvement goals.	Multiple methods will be used to collect ongoing, formative data to inform improvement efforts. This may include: Follow up student focus groups and interviews. Data regarding students' social and emotional adjustment (behavior infractions, referrals to the Student Assistance (SAP) team, bullying reports, etc.)	Practices will be informed by research-based strategies as illustrated in the review of literature. Recommendations for additions, modifications or abandonment of transition program practices will be determined through analysis of the effectiveness of continuous improvement efforts.
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3.6 DEMONSTRATION OF SCHOLARLY PRACTICE

Improving the transition experience for students as they move from elementary to middle school will be an ongoing process with multiple iterations of improvement efforts and evaluation. The line of inquiry of this study describes the initial steps that the researcher will take to address this problem of practice in a specific context while encouraging “*student voice*” in this school improvement effort.

The product of this Dissertation of Practice is a summary report that will inform the planning process for the design of a revised, improved, comprehensive program for middle school transition for the students of the Franklin Area School district. The information contained in this report will assist a team of administrators, teachers and school counselors as they engage in multiple cycles of improvement efforts in future academic years. This product is not designed to be a means to an end, but rather a set of recommended research-based strategies to inform our

future practice in meeting the diverse needs of students across this time of great change and adjustment.

4.0 DATA, ANALYSIS, AND FINDINGS

4.1 SECONDARY ANALYSIS OF SURVEY DATA

4.1.1. The Franklin Area School District Transition Survey

The *Franklin Area School District Transition Survey* was developed by the Franklin Area School District and administered to incoming seventh grade students during the first week of the 2017/2018 academic year. At the time of administration, 141 students were enrolled in seventh grade at the Franklin Area Jr./Sr. High School. Seven of these students were enrolled in the district's life skills and autistic support programs and did not participate in the survey. Two students were absent from school on the day the survey was administered and did not participate in the survey. A total of 132 seventh grade students completed the district-administered paper-and-pencil survey which collected demographic data including age, gender and which elementary school students attended as well as perception data regarding students' logistic, academic and social/emotional concerns. Student responses from the *Franklin Area School District Transition Survey* provide insight into the concerns and aspirations of incoming seventh grade students in the Franklin Area Jr./Sr. High School. The following chapter presents the findings of the secondary analysis of the existing data set from the survey.

4.1.1.1. Demographic Data

Of the 132 students who participated in the study, 128 attended one of the three elementary schools in the Franklin Area School District during their sixth grade year. Fifty-one students attended Central Elementary, forty-three attended Sandycreek Elementary and thirty-four attended Victory Elementary. Four student respondents reported that they attended another school, outside of the Franklin Area School District. The majority of students (82.6%) reported that they were twelve years old on the day the survey was administered with the remaining students (17.4%) indicating they were thirteen years old. The gender of student respondents was identified as fifty percent (n=66) male and fifty percent (n=66) female.

4.1.1.2. Student Concerns – Overall

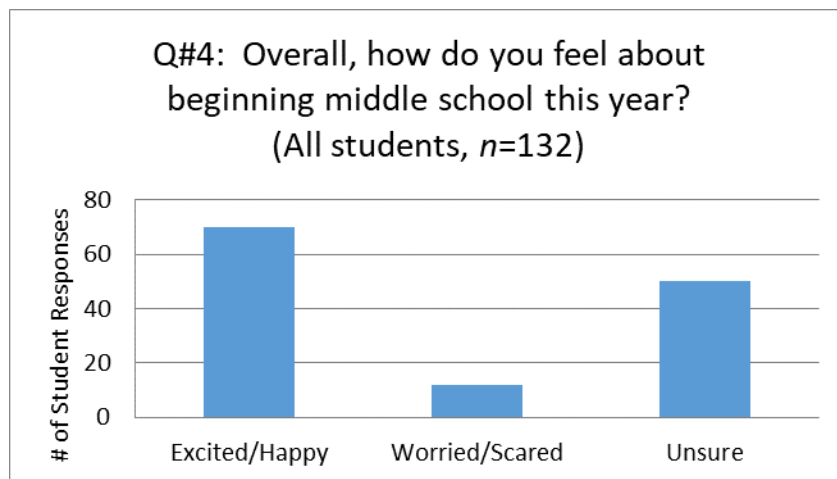


Figure 4.1 Student responses to question #4: Overall, how do you feel about beginning middle school this year?

Question #4 on the survey asked students, “*Overall, how do you feel about beginning middle school this year?*” Students were provided with three multiple choice answers to select

from, including 1. *Excited/Happy*, 2. *Worried/Scared* or 3. *Unsure*. Seventy students (53.0%) responded that they were *Excited/Happy*, while fifty students (37.9%) were *Unsure* and twelve students (9.1%) indicated that they were *Worried/Scared*. The survey did not provide a definition for the response of *Unsure*, so it is not clear if the students who indicated they were *Unsure* were uncertain about how they felt about beginning middle school, or if they simply did not fully understand the question. Figure 4.1 illustrates student responses for this question.

4.1.1.3. Student Concerns – Overall by Gender

Table 4.1 Responses to Q#4 by Gender

Q#4: Overall, how do you feel about beginning middle school this year?				
	<u>Excited/Happy</u>	<u>Worried/Scared</u>	<u>Unsure</u>	<u>Total</u>
Male	42	3	21	66
Female	28	9	29	66
Total	70	12	50	132
$X^2(2, N=132) = 7.08, p = .03$				

It was of interest to explore what, if any influence gender had on students' responses to the question regarding their overall feelings about beginning middle school. More males than females indicated that they were *Excited/Happy* to begin middle school this year, while more females than males claimed to be *Worried/Scared* or *Unsure* about the transition. A chi-square test of independence was performed to determine if a statistically significant relationship exists between gender and students' responses. This analysis did in fact reveal a significant

relationship between these variables, $\chi^2(2, N=132) = 7.08, p < .03$. Table 4.1 illustrates the response variations by gender for question number four.

Table 4.2 Responses to Q#4 by Elementary School Attended in Sixth Grade

Q#4: Overall, how do you feel about beginning middle school this year?				
	<u>Excited/Happy</u>	<u>Worried/Scared</u>	<u>Unsure</u>	<u>Total</u>
Central Elem.	27	3	21	51
Sandycreek Elem.	19	6	18	43
Victory Elem.	21	3	10	34
Other	3	0	1	4
Total	70	12	50	132

4.2 $\chi^2(6, N=132) = 4.69, p = .50$

While responses to question #4: *Overall, how do you feel about beginning middle school this year?* varied according to which elementary school students attended in 6th grade, the relationship between these variables was not statistically significant, $\chi^2(6, N=132) = 4.69, p = .50$. Sixty-two percent (62%) of students who attended Victory Elementary School in sixth grade indicated they were *Excited/Happy* to begin middle school this year, while only fifty-three percent (53%) of students from Central Elementary and forty-four percent (44%) of students from Sandycreek Elementary indicated the same. Fourteen percent (14%) of students who attended Sandycreek Elementary in sixth grade stated they were *Worried/Scared* about beginning middle school while nine percent (9%) of Victory Elementary and six percent (6%) of Central Elementary attendees shared the same response. Table 4.2 illustrates the response variations by elementary school for question number four.

4.1.1.4. Logistic Concerns

Students were asked to describe their level of concern regarding eight different logistic-related issues associated with the transition to middle school. Students selected a response of *1. Not worried or concerned at all*, *2. A little worried or concerned* or *3. Very worried or concerned* for each identified issue. Responses were coded (*Not worried or concerned at all* = 1, *A little worried or concerned* = 2 and *Very worried or concerned* = 3) for the purpose of calculating mean.

Table 4.3 Student Responses to Logistic Concerns – All

<u>Issue</u>	1		2		3		<u>M</u>
	Not worried or <u>concerned at all</u>		A little worried <u>or concerned</u>		Very Worried <u>or concerned</u>		
Getting to class on time	39.4%	52	43.9%	58	16.7%	22	1.8
Finding my way around the school	47.7%	63	43.9%	58	8.3%	11	1.6
Getting lost	57.6%	76	28.8%	38	13.6%	18	1.6
Remembering my class schedule	62.1%	82	29.6%	39	8.3%	11	1.5
Using a lock and locker	64.4%	85	26.5%	35	9.1%	12	1.4
Moving through crowded hallways	71.2%	94	23.5%	31	5.3%	7	1.3
Carrying my books and supplies from class to class	81.1%	107	15.9%	21	3.0%	4	1.2
Riding the bus to and from school	87.9%	116	9.9%	13	2.3%	3	1.1

The data suggest that *Getting to class on time* and *Finding my way around the school* are the highest rated logistic concerns for incoming seventh grade students. Nearly seventeen percent (16.7%) of students indicated they were *Very worried or concerned* and over 43.9% indicated they were *A little worried or concerned* about *Getting to class on time*. Over eight percent (8.3%) of student respondents indicated they were *Very worried or concerned* and 43.9% were *A*

little worried or concerned about Finding my way around the school. Students also frequently identified *Getting lost* (28.8% *A little worried or concerned*, 13.6% *Very worried or concerned*) and *Remembering my class schedule* (29.6% *A little worried or concerned*, 8.3% *Very worried or concerned*) among their top rated logistic concerns. *Riding the bus to and from school* and *Carrying my books and supplies from class to class* are among the lowest rated areas of logistic concerns for the majority of students as over eighty percent of student respondents report that they are not worried or concerned at all with these issues. Table 4.3 illustrates student responses to each question regarding logistic concerns and Figure 4.2 illustrates the most frequently identified areas of concern.

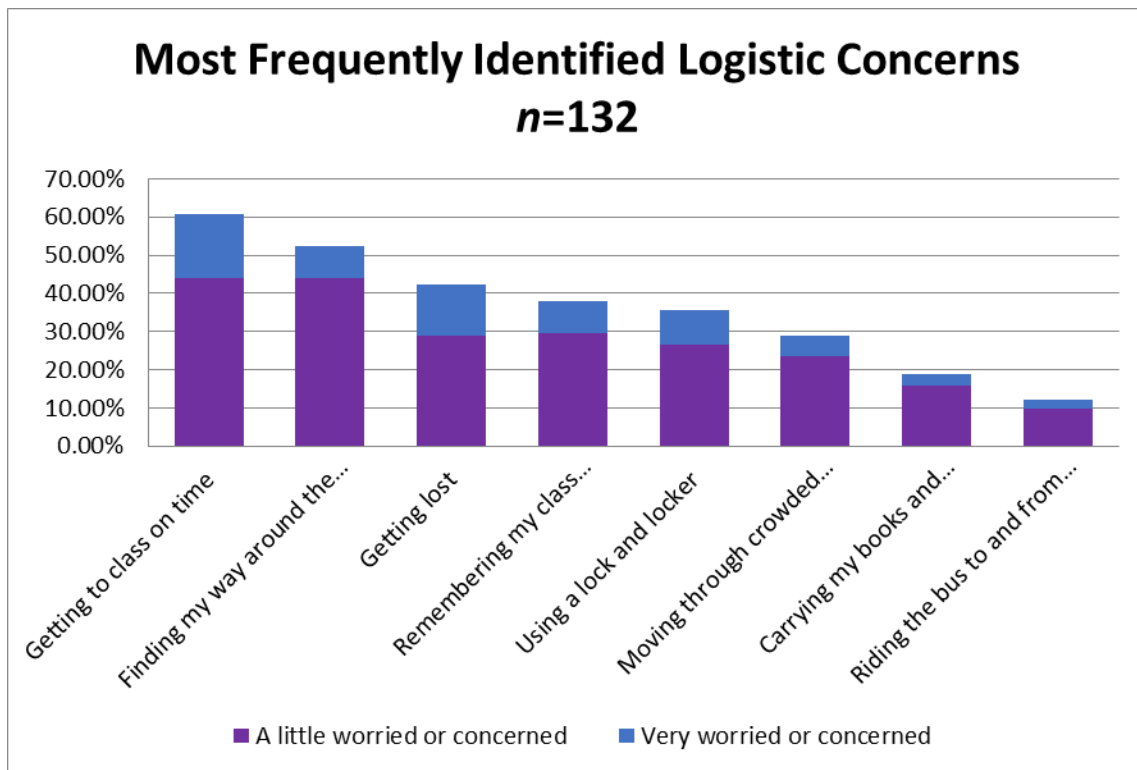


Figure 4.2 Most frequently identified logistic concerns

The above figure illustrates the percentage of students who responded they were “*A little worried or concerned*” or “*Very worried or concerned*” about each logistic issue.

4.1.1.5.1 Gender and Logistic Concerns

Table 4.4 Female Student Responses to Logistic Concerns

<u>Issue</u>	1 Not worried or concerned at all		2 A little worried <u>or</u> concerned		3 Very Worried or concerned		<u>M</u>
Getting to class on time	31.8%	21	45.5%	30	22.7%	15	1.9
Finding my way around the school	34.9%	23	50.0%	33	15.2%	10	1.8
Getting lost	47.0%	31	34.9%	23	18.2%	12	1.7
Using a lock and locker	53.0%	35	30.3%	20	16.7%	11	1.6
Remembering my class schedule	56.1%	37	30.3%	20	13.6%	9	1.6
Moving through crowded hallways	57.6%	38	34.9%	23	7.6%	5	1.5
Carrying my books and supplies from class to class	77.3%	51	18.2%	12	4.6%	3	1.3
Riding the bus to and from school	84.9%	56	12.1%	8	3.0%	2	1.2

Table 4.5 Male Student Responses to Logistic Concerns

<u>Issue</u>	1 Not worried or concerned at all		2 A little worried <u>or</u> concerned		3 Very Worried or concerned		<u>M</u>
Getting to class on time	47.0%	31	42.4%	28	10.6%	7	1.6
Getting lost	68.2%	45	22.7%	15	9.1%	6	1.4
Finding my way around the school	60.6%	40	37.9%	25	1.5%	1	1.4
Using a lock and locker	75.8%	50	22.7%	15	1.5%	1	1.3
Remembering my class schedule	68.2%	45	28.8%	19	3.0%	2	1.3
Moving through crowded hallways	84.9%	56	12.1%	8	3.0%	2	1.2

Carrying my books and supplies from class to class	84.9%	56	13.6%	9	1.5%	1	1.2
Riding the bus to and from school	90.9%	60	7.6%	5	1.5%	1	1.1

Table 4.6 Chi Square Analysis for Gender and Logistic Concerns

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Mean Response</u>		<u>Chi Square Analysis</u>
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	
Finding my way around the school	1.4	1.8	$\chi^2(2, N=132) = 13.05, p = .00$
Using a lock and locker	1.3	1.6	$\chi^2(2, N=132) = 11.69, p = .00$
Getting to class on time	1.6	1.9	$\chi^2(2, N=132) = 4.90, p = .09$
Getting lost	1.4	1.7	$\chi^2(2, N=132) = 6.26, p = .04$
Moving through crowded hallways	1.2	1.5	$\chi^2(2, N=132) = 11.99, p = .00$
Remembering my class schedule	1.3	1.6	$\chi^2(2, N=132) = 5.26, p = .07$
Riding the bus to and from school	1.1	1.2	$\chi^2(2, N=132) = 1.16, p = .56$
Carrying my books and supplies from class to class	1.2	1.3	$\chi^2(2, N=132) = 1.66, p = .44$

Transition survey data suggest that male students have a lower rate of concern for logistic issues associated with the transition to middle school when compared to their female peers. A larger percentage of male students claimed to be *not worried or concerned at all* about all eight of the logistic issues than female students. Additionally, a larger percentage of female students indicated they were either *a little worried or concerned* or *very worried or concerned* about these issues than their male classmates. Tables 4.4 and 4.5 list student responses to logistic concerns for both male and female student respondents.

Female students identified *Getting to class on time* as the highest rated logistical concern (M = 1.9) followed by *Finding my way around the school* (M=1.8) and *Getting lost* (M=1.7).

Using a lock and locker and *Remembering my class schedule* both have a mean of 1.6, however it could be reasonably concluded that *Using a lock and locker* is more of a concern since a larger percentage of female respondents indicated they were *Very Worried or concerned* about it (16.7%) in comparison to the 13.6% of female student respondents who indicated they were *Very worried or concerned* about *Remembering my class schedule*. The three-point Likert-type scale design of the *Franklin Area School District Transition Survey* disallows a more nuanced analysis of calculated means of students' responses. A Likert scale with five or more choices would have provided more definition to the distribution and a more discrete data set. As this study included only a secondary analysis of the preexisting data set, the survey design was outside of the realm of this study. Further study of this nature should include a more carefully constructed survey instrument.

Male students also identified *Getting to class on time* as the highest rated logistical concern (M=1.6). The mean of male responses for *Getting lost* and *Finding my way around the school* are both 1.4, however as previously stated, the three-point Likert-type scale design of the survey does not lend itself to the level of analysis necessary to conclude distinct differences between the two concerns.

It appears that the relationship between students' gender and their level of concern regarding logistic issues is significant for four of the eight identified concerns. Analysis reveals that a statistically significant relationship exists between gender and students' level of concern for *Finding my way around the school*, $\chi^2(2, N=132) = 13.05, p = .00$, *Using a lock and locker*,

$\chi^2(2, N=132) = 11.69, p = .00$, *Getting lost*, $\chi^2(2, N=132) = 6.26, p = .04$, and *Moving through crowded hallways*, $\chi^2(2, N=132) = 11.99, p = .00$.

4.1.1.5.2 Logistic Concerns by Elementary School Attended

Table 4.7 Responses to Logistic Concerns by Elementary School Attended in 6th grade

Issue	Response	Central (n=51)		Sandycreek (n=43)		Victory (n=34)	
Finding my way around the school	Very worried or concerned	5.9%	3	9.3%	4	11.8%	4
	A little worried or concerned	51.0%	26	39.5%	17	35.3%	12
	Not worried or concerned at all	43.1%	22	51.2%	22	52.9%	18
Using a lock and locker	Very worried or concerned	3.9%	2	14.0%	6	8.8%	3
	A little worried or concerned	35.3%	18	23.3%	10	20.6%	7
	Not worried or concerned at all	60.8%	31	62.8%	27	70.6%	24
Getting to class on time	Very worried or concerned	13.7%	7	16.3%	7	17.7%	6
	A little worried or concerned	47.1%	24	41.9%	18	44.1%	15
	Not worried or concerned at all	39.2%	20	41.9%	18	38.2%	13
Getting lost	Very worried or concerned	9.8%	5	16.3%	7	17.7%	6
	A little worried or concerned	31.4%	16	25.6%	11	29.4%	10
	Not worried or concerned at all	58.8%	30	58.1%	25	52.9%	18
Moving through crowded hallways	Very worried or concerned	3.9%	2	7.0%	3	5.9%	2
	A little worried or concerned	29.4%	15	20.9%	9	20.6%	7
	Not worried or concerned at all	66.7%	34	72.1%	31	73.5%	25
Remembering my class schedule	Very worried or concerned	7.8%	4	9.3%	4	8.8%	3
	A little worried or concerned	31.4%	16	32.6%	14	23.5%	8
	Not worried or concerned at all	60.8%	31	58.1%	25	67.7%	23
Riding the bus to and from school	Very worried or concerned	2.0%	1	2.3%	1	2.9%	1
	A little worried or concerned	15.7%	8	4.7%	2	8.8%	3
	Not worried or concerned at all	82.4%	42	93.0%	40	88.2%	30
Carrying my books and supplies from class to class	Very worried or concerned	0.0%	0	7.0%	3	2.9%	1
	A little worried or concerned	17.7%	9	14.0%	6	17.7%	6
	Not worried or concerned at all	82.4%	42	79.0%	34	79.4%	27

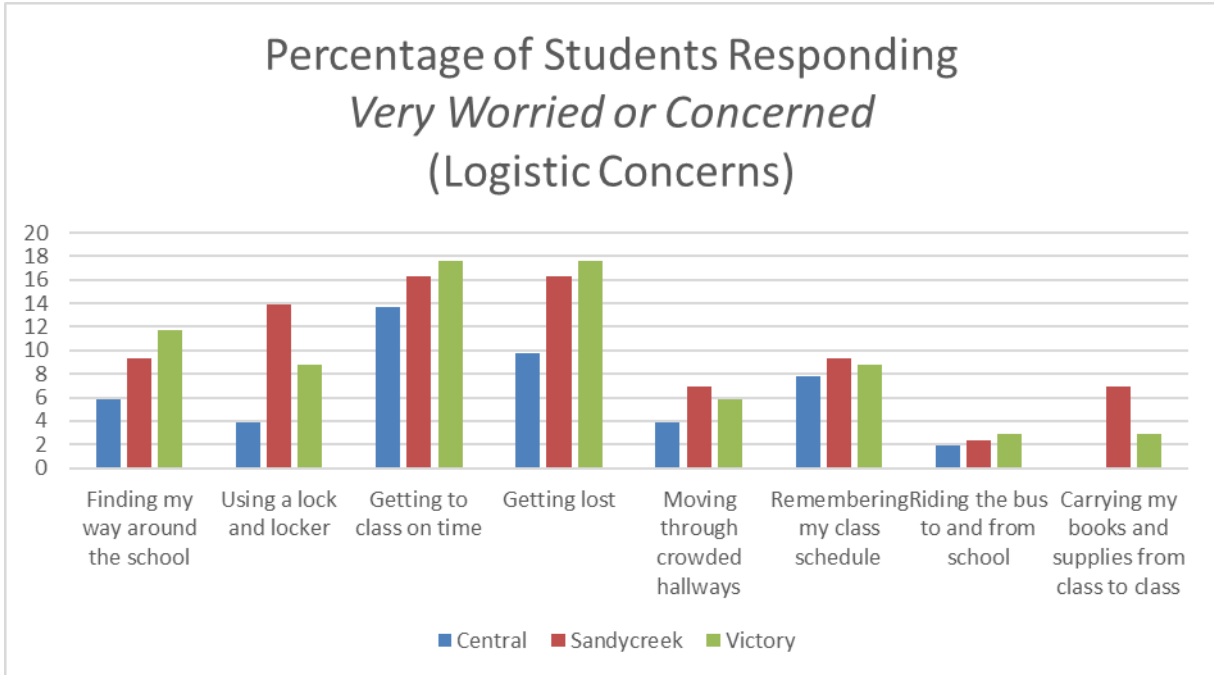


Figure 4.3 The percentage of students from each elementary school who responded they were very worried or concerned about each of the logistic issues

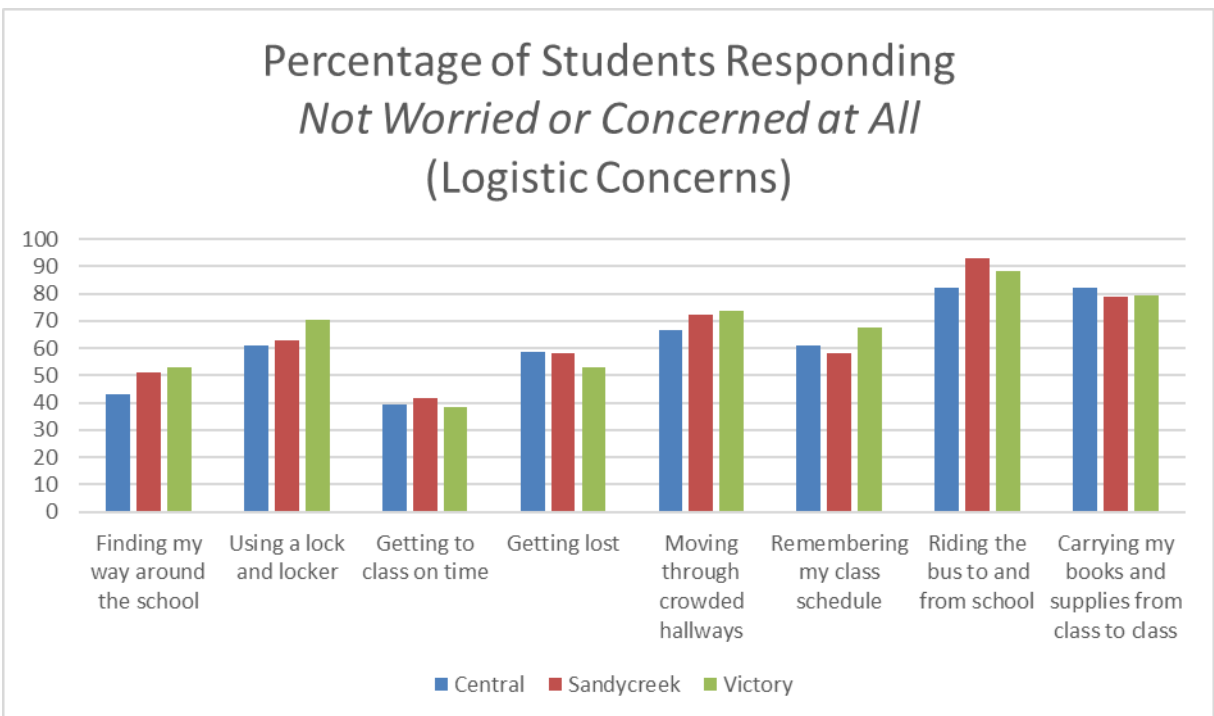


Figure 4.4 The percentage of students from each elementary school who responded they were not worried or concerned at all about each of the logistic issues

Table 4.8 Mean Responses to Logistical Concerns by Elementary School Attended

Issue	<i>M</i>		
	Central	Sandycreek	Victory
Finding my way around the school	1.6	1.6	1.6
Using a lock	1.4	1.5	1.4
Getting to class on time	1.7	1.7	1.8
Getting lost	1.5	1.6	1.6
Moving through crowded hallways	1.4	1.3	1.3
Remembering my class schedule	1.5	1.5	1.4
Riding the bus to and from school	1.2	1.1	1.1
Carrying my books and supplies from class to class	1.2	1.3	1.2

It was hypothesized that students from our largest, most diverse elementary school would indicate a lower level of concern regarding logistic issues related to the transition than their peers who attended the smaller elementary schools. The collected data does not appear to clearly support this hypothesis as no statistically significant relationship exists between these variables, $p > .05$. A smaller percentage of students from Central Elementary school reported that they were *very worried or concerned* about each of the eight logistic issues than the students who attended the other two elementary schools, however, these students were also less likely to respond that there were *not worried or concerned at all* about many of the same issues. Table 4.7 and 4.8 and figures 4.3 and 4.4 illustrate student responses to logistic concerns by the elementary school they attended in 6th grade.

4.1.1.5.3 Academic Concerns

Table 4.9 Student Responses to Academic Concerns (n=132)

<u>Issue</u>	1 Not worried or concerned at all		2 A little worried or concerned		3 Very Worried or concerned		<u>M</u>
Getting good grades	31.8%	42	44.7%	59	23.5%	31	1.9
Taking tests	38.6%	51	50.0%	66	11.4%	15	1.7
The difficulty of my classes	40.9%	54	48.5%	64	10.6%	14	1.7
The amount of homework I will be assigned	41.7%	55	42.4%	56	15.9%	21	1.7
Completing class projects	47.0%	62	40.9%	54	12.1%	16	1.7
Having enough time to complete all of my work	50.8%	67	40.2%	53	9.1%	12	1.6
Staying organized	70.5%	93	25.8%	34	3.8%	5	1.3
Having a different teacher for every subject	90.2%	119	7.6%	10	2.3%	3	1.1

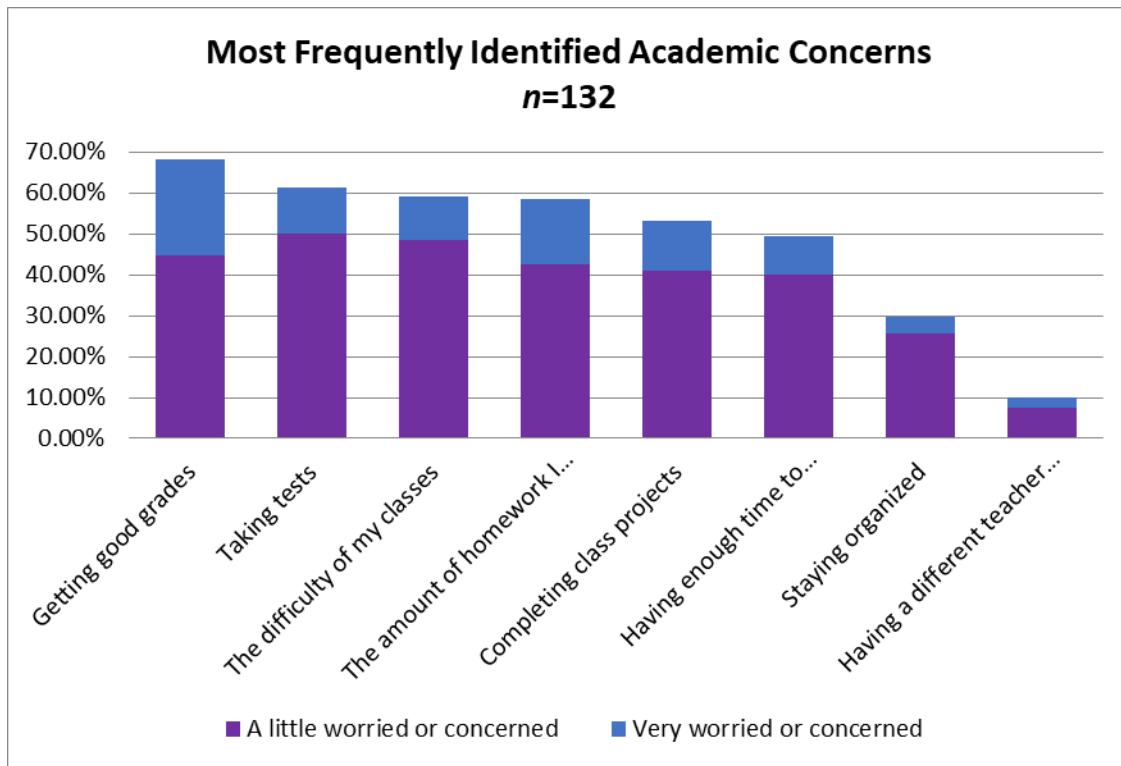


Figure 4.5 Most frequently identified academic concerns

The above figure illustrates the percentage of students who responded they were “*A little worried or concerned*” or “*Very worried or concerned*” about each academic issue.

Students were asked to rate their level of concern regarding eight different academic issues including the difficulty of their classes, the amount of homework they would be assigned, having a different teacher for each subject, taking tests, completing class projects, having enough time to complete all of their work, staying organized and getting good grades. The same Likert-type scale was used for students to rate their level of concern as 1. *Not worried or concerned at all*, 2. *A little worried or concerned*, or 3. *Very worried or concerned*.

The highest rated area of concern was *Getting good grades* with 23.48% of students stating they were *Very worried or concerned* ($M=1.9$). While the mean response to *Taking Tests*, *The difficulty of my classes* and *The amount of homework I will be assigned* were nearly identical

($M=1.7$), 15.9% of students indicated they were *Very worried or concerned* about *The amount of homework I will be assigned*, indicating that issue was significant for a relatively large portion of students. Student responses indicate very little concern regarding *Having a different teacher for every subject*, with over ninety percent (90%) of students indicating they were *Not worried or concerned at all*. Table 4.9 illustrates student responses to each question regarding academic concerns and Figure 4.5 illustrates the most frequently identified areas of concern.

4.1.1.6 Gender and Academic Concerns

Table 4.10 Female Student Responses to Academic Concern

<u>Issue</u>	1 Not worried or concerned at all		2 A little worried or concerned		3 Very Worried or concerned		<u>M</u>
Getting good grades	27.3%	18	42.4%	28	30.3%	20	2.0
Taking tests	34.9%	23	47.0%	31	18.2%	12	1.8
The difficulty of my classes	40.9%	27	42.4%	28	16.7%	11	1.8
Completing class projects	45.5%	30	39.4%	26	15.2%	10	1.7
Having enough time to complete all of my work	45.5%	30	43.9%	29	10.6%	7	1.7
The amount of homework I will be assigned	47.0%	31	36.4%	24	16.7%	11	1.7
Staying organized	75.8%	50	18.2%	12	6.1%	4	1.3
Having a different teacher for every subject	87.9%	58	7.6%	5	4.6%	3	1.2

Table 4.11 Male Student Responses to Academic Concerns (n=66)

<u>Issue</u>	1 Not worried or concerned at all		2 A little worried or concerned		3 Very Worried or concerned		<u>M</u>
Getting good grades	36.4%	24	47.0%	31	16.7%	11	1.8
The amount of homework I will be assigned	36.4%	24	48.5%	32	15.2%	10	1.8
The difficulty of my classes	40.9%	27	54.6%	36	4.6%	3	1.6
Taking tests	42.4%	28	53.0%	35	4.6%	3	1.6
Completing class projects	48.5%	32	42.4%	28	9.1%	6	1.6
Having enough time to complete all of my work	56.1%	37	36.4%	24	7.6%	5	1.5
Staying organized	65.2%	43	33.3%	22	1.5%	1	1.4
Having a different teacher for every subject	92.4%	61	7.6%	5	0.0%	0	1.1

Table 4.12 Chi Square Analysis for Gender and Academic Concerns

<u>Issue</u>	<u>M</u>		<u>Chi Square Analysis</u>
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	
Taking tests	1.6	1.8	$\chi^2(2, N=132) = 6.13, p = .05$
The difficulty of my classes	1.6	1.8	$\chi^2(2, N=132) = 5.57, p = .06$
Staying organized	1.4	1.3	$\chi^2(2, N=132) = 5.27, p = .07$
Getting good grades	1.8	2.0	$\chi^2(2, N=132) = 3.62, p = .16$
Having a different teacher for every subject	1.1	1.2	$\chi^2(2, N=132) = 3.08, p = .21$
The amount of homework I will be assigned	1.8	1.7	$\chi^2(2, N=132) = 2.08, p = .35$
Having enough time to complete all of my work	1.5	1.7	$\chi^2(2, N=132) = 1.54, p = .46$
Completing class projects	1.6	1.7	$\chi^2(2, N=132) = 1.14, p = .57$

Of the academic issues students indicated they were *very worried or concerned* about, *getting good grades* was the most frequently identified for both males (16.67%) and females (30.30%). A larger percentage of female students claimed to be *very worried or concerned* about each of the eight academic issues than male students while male students more frequently indicated they were *a little worried or concerned* about these same academic issues. The relationship between student gender and their responses to the academic concerns only appears to be statistically significant for *Taking tests*, $\chi^2(2, N=132) = 6.13, p = .05$ and marginally significant for *The difficulty of my classes*, $\chi^2(2, N=132) = 5.57, p = .06$. Tables 4.10 and 4.11 list student responses to academic concerns for both male and female student respondents while table 4.12 illustrates the statistical analysis of mean responses according to gender.

Table 4.13 Responses to Academic Concerns by Elementary School Attended in 6th grade

Issue	Response	Central (n=51)		Sandycreek (n=43)		Victory (n=34)	
The difficulty of my classes	Very worried or concerned	5.9%	3	9.3%	4	17.7%	6
	A little worried or concerned	51.0%	26	53.5%	23	41.2%	14
	Not worried or concerned at all	43.1%	22	37.2%	16	41.2%	14
The amount of homework I will be assigned	Very worried or concerned	19.6%	10	9.3%	4	17.7%	6
	A little worried or concerned	43.1%	22	48.8%	21	38.2%	13
	Not worried or concerned at all	37.3%	19	41.9%	18	44.1%	15
Having a different teacher for every subject	Very worried or concerned	0.0%	0	2.3%	1	5.9%	2
	A little worried or concerned	3.9%	2	11.6%	5	8.8%	3
	Not worried or concerned at all	96.1%	49	86.1%	37	85.3%	29
Taking tests	Very worried or concerned	5.9%	3	16.3%	7	14.7%	5
	A little worried or concerned	54.9%	28	46.5%	20	47.1%	16
	Not worried or concerned at all	39.2%	20	37.2%	16	38.2%	13
Completing class projects	Very worried or concerned	7.8%	4	11.6%	5	17.7%	6
	A little worried or concerned	39.2%	20	48.8%	21	38.2%	13
	Not worried or concerned at all	52.9%	27	39.5%	17	44.1%	15
Having enough	Very worried or concerned	7.8%	4	9.3%	4	11.8%	4

time to complete all of my work	A little worried or concerned	49.0%	25	39.5%	17	29.4%	10
	Not worried or concerned at all	43.1%	22	51.2%	22	58.8%	20
Staying organized	Very worried or concerned	2.0%	1	4.7%	2	2.9%	1
	A little worried or concerned	25.5%	13	25.6%	11	29.4%	10
	Not worried or concerned at all	72.6%	37	69.8%	30	67.7%	23
Getting good grades	Very worried or concerned	21.6%	11	27.9%	12	20.6%	7
	A little worried or concerned	41.2%	21	53.5%	23	44.1%	15
	Not worried or concerned at all	37.3%	19	18.6%	8	35.3%	12

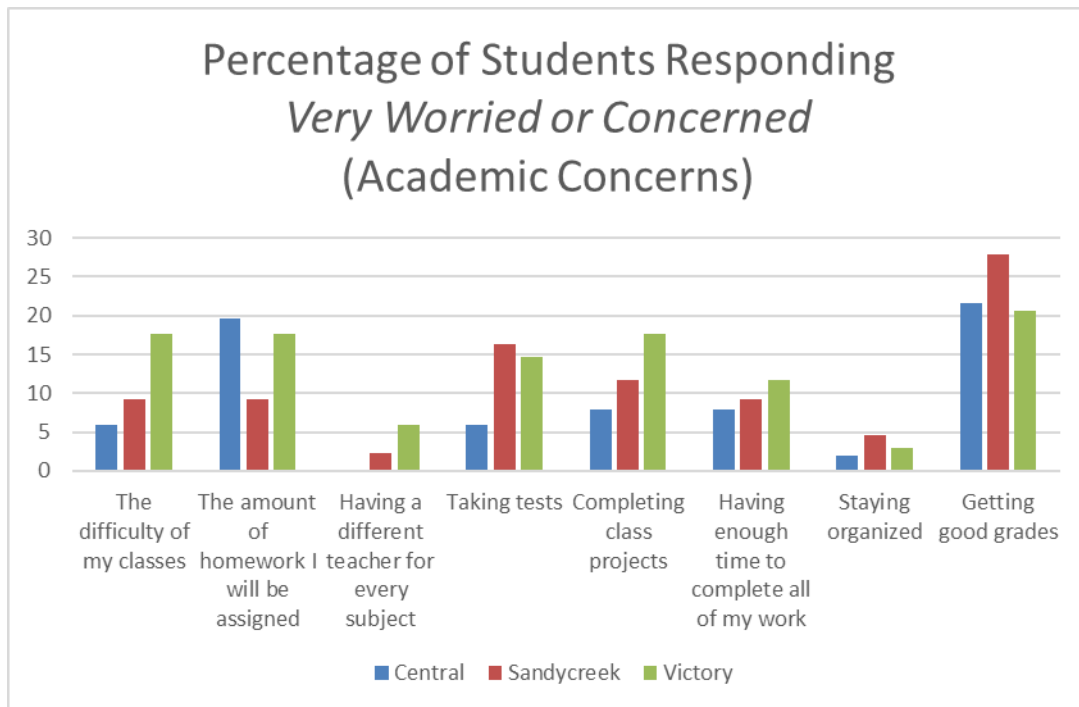


Figure 4.6 The percentage of students from each elementary school who responded they were very worried or concerned about each of the academic issues

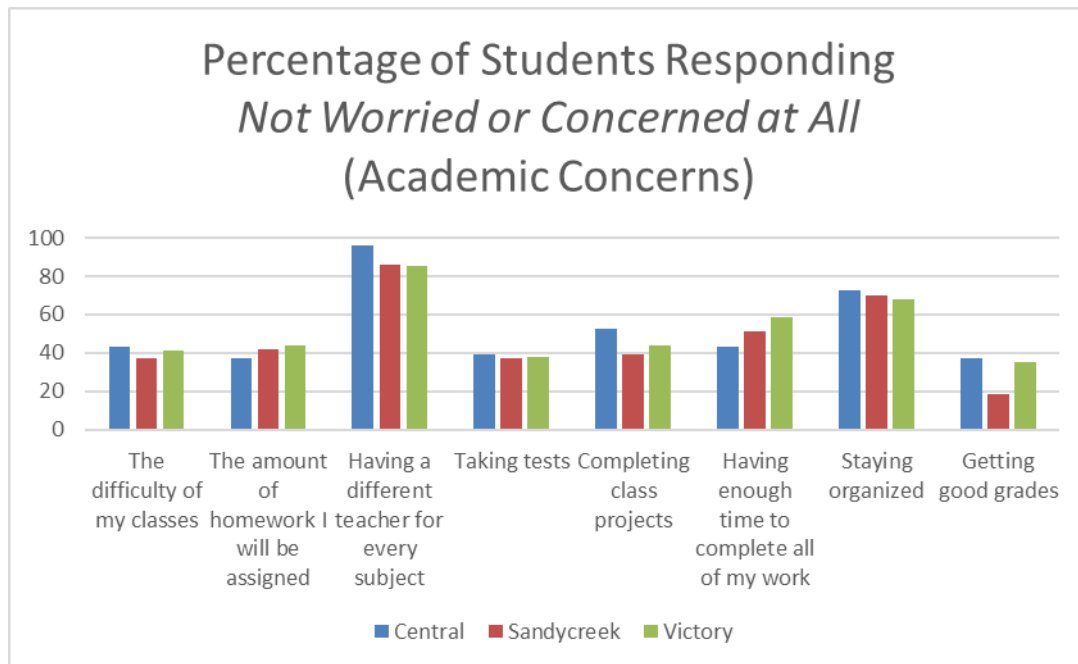


Figure 4.7 The percentage of students from each elementary school who responded they were not worried or concerned at all about each of the academic issues

Table 4.14 Mean Responses to Academic Concerns by Elementary School Attended

Issue	M		
	Central	Sandycreek	Victory
The difficulty of my classes	1.6	1.7	1.8
The amount of homework I will be assigned	1.8	1.7	1.7
Having a different teacher for every subject	1.0	1.2	1.2
Taking tests	1.7	1.8	1.8
Completing class projects	1.5	1.7	1.7
Having enough time to complete all of my work	1.6	1.6	1.5
Staying organized	1.3	1.3	1.4
Getting good grades	1.8	2.1	1.9

A larger percentage of students from Central Elementary than their peers from the other two elementary schools indicated they were *not worried or concerned at all* about six of the eight academic issues on the survey. Additionally, fewer Central students indicated they were *very worried or concerned* about six of the seven areas than their peers. For most issues,

students from Victory Elementary were more likely to respond that they were *not worried or concerned at all* about the identified academic concerns than their peers from Sandycreek Elementary. Statistical analysis of response variation did not reveal any significant relationship between which elementary school students attended and their level of concern regarding any of the eight academic issues, $p > .05$. Table 4.13 and figures 4.6 and 4.7 illustrate student responses to academic concerns by the elementary school they attended in 6th grade. Table 4.14 lists the response mean for each area of concern by elementary school.

4.1.1.7 Social/Emotional Concerns

Table 4.15 Student Responses to Social/Emotional Concerns (n=132)

Issue	1 Not worried or concerned at all		2 A little worried or concerned		3 Very Worried or concerned		<i>M</i>
Managing stress	57.6%	76	27.3%	36	15.2%	20	1.6
Changing clothes for Physical Education (PE) class	65.2%	86	28.0%	37	6.8%	9	1.4
Being bullied by other students	69.7%	92	19.7%	26	10.6%	14	1.4
Being liked by my teachers	70.5%	93	22.0%	29	7.6%	10	1.4
Making new friends	75.8%	100	18.9%	25	5.3%	7	1.3
Fitting in with my peers	79.6	105	13.6%	18	6.8%	9	1.3
Finding someone to sit with during lunch	88.6%	117	8.3%	11	3.0%	4	1.1
Following school rules	90.2%	119	8.3%	11	1.5%	2	1.1

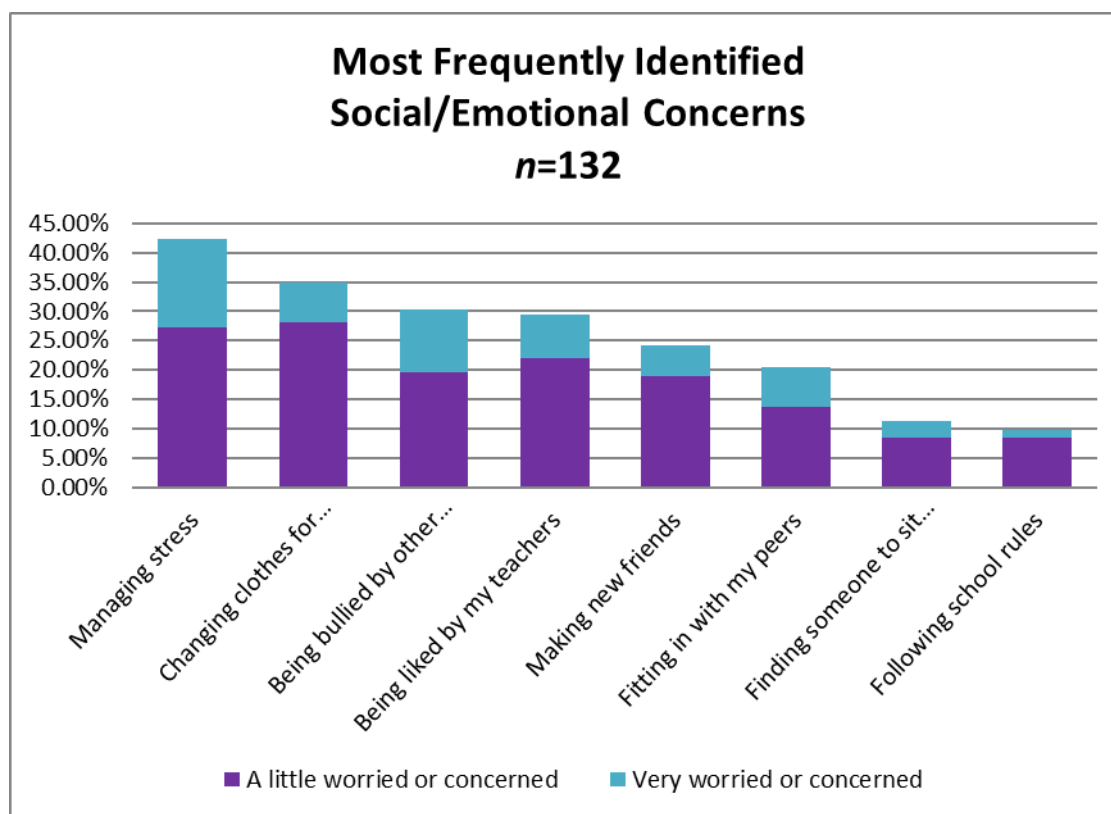


Figure 4.8 Most frequently identified social/emotional concerns

The above figure illustrates the percentage of students who responded they were “*A little worried or concerned*” or “*Very worried or concerned*” about each social/emotional issue.

Students were asked to identify their level of concern with a variety of issues related to social and/or emotional development. These social/emotional concerns include making new friends, fitting in with peers, being bullied by other students, changing clothes for physical education classes, managing stress, following school rules, finding someone to sit with during lunch and being liked by their teachers. Student responses to these questions suggest a lower level of concern with social/emotional issues than the academic and logistic areas surveyed. This is indicated by the high percentage of student respondents who stated they were *Not worried or concerned at all* about many of the social/emotional issues listed.

Of the areas that students identified being Very worried or concerned, *Managing stress* and *Being bullied* stand out as being the most frequently cited. Over fifteen percent of students claim to be *Very worried or concerned* about managing stress and over ten percent of students claim the same about being bullied by other students. Table 4.15 illustrates student responses to each question regarding social/emotional concerns and Figure 4.8 illustrates the most frequently identified areas of concern.

4.1.1.7.1 Gender and Social/Emotional Concerns

Table 4.16 Female Student Responses to Social/Emotional Concerns (n=66)

<u>Issue</u>	1 Not worried or concerned at all		2 A little worried or concerned		3 Very Worried or concerned		<u>M</u>
Managing stress	48.5%	32	30.3%	20	21.2%	14	1.7
Being bullied by other students	60.6%	40	24.2%	16	15.2%	10	1.5
Changing clothes for Physical Education (PE) class	62.1%	41	30.3%	20	7.6%	5	1.5
Making new friends	69.7%	46	19.7%	13	10.6%	7	1.4
Fitting in with my peers	75.8%	50	12.1%	8	12.1%	8	1.4
Being liked by my teachers	69.7%	46	21.2%	14	9.1%	6	1.4
Finding someone to sit with during lunch	83.3%	55	10.6%	7	6.1%	4	1.2
Following school rules	89.4%	59	7.6%	5	3.0%	2	1.1

Table 4.17 Male Student Responses to Social/Emotional Concerns (n=66)

<u>Issue</u>	1 Not worried or concerned at all		2 A little worried or concerned		3 Very Worried or concerned		<u>M</u>
Managing stress	66.7%	44	24.2%	16	9.1%	6	1.4
Changing clothes for Physical Education (PE) class	68.2%	45	25.8%	17	6.1%	4	1.4
Being liked by my teachers	71.2%	47	22.7%	15	6.1%	4	1.3
Being bullied by other students	78.8%	52	15.2%	10	6.1%	4	1.3
Fitting in with my peers	83.3%	55	15.2%	10	1.5%	1	1.2
Making new friends	81.8%	54	18.2%	12	0.0%	0	1.2
Following school rules	90.9%	60	9.1%	6	0.0%	0	1.1
Finding someone to sit with during lunch	93.9%	62	6.1%	4	0.0%	0	1.1

Table 4.18 Chi Square Analysis for Gender and Social/Emotional Concerns

<u>Issue</u>	<u>M</u>		<u>Chi Square Analysis</u>
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	
Making new friends	1.2	1.4	$\chi^2(2, N=132) = 7.68, p = .02$
Fitting in with my peers	1.2	1.4	$\chi^2(2, N=132) = 5.90, p = .05$
Managing stress	1.4	1.7	$\chi^2(2, N=132) = 5.54, p = .06$
Being bullied by other students	1.3	1.5	$\chi^2(2, N=132) = 5.52, p = .06$
Finding someone to sit with during lunch	1.1	1.2	$\chi^2(2, N=132) = 5.24, p = .07$
Following school rules	1.1	1.1	$\chi^2(2, N=132) = 2.10, p = .35$
Changing clothes for Physical Education (PE) class	1.4	1.5	$\chi^2(2, N=132) = 0.54, p = .76$
Being liked by my teachers	1.3	1.4	$\chi^2(2, N=132) = 0.45, p = .80$

While *Managing stress* was the most frequently identified issue that students were very worried or concerned about, it appears to be more of a concern for female students than males. Fourteen (14) female students (21.21%) stated they were very worried or concerned about managing stress and an additional twenty (20) female students (30.30%) stated they were a little worried or concerned about the same issue. Over half of all female respondents indicate that they are at least a little worried or concerned about managing stress, while roughly 34% of their male peers indicate the same.

A larger percentage of male students indicated they were not worried or concerned at all about all eight social/emotional issues than their female classmates. Tables 4.16 and 4.17 list student responses to social/emotional concerns by gender. Table 4.18 illustrates the statistical analysis of mean responses for each social/emotional issue by gender. This analysis reveals a statistically significant relationship between gender and *Making new friends*, $\chi^2(2, N=132) = 7.68, p = .02$, and *Fitting in with my peers*, $\chi^2(2, N=132) = 5.90, p = .05$. *Managing stress* and *Being bullied by other students* were only marginally significant with $\chi^2(2, N=132) = 5.54, p = .06$.

4.1.1.8 Social/Emotional Concerns by Elementary School Attended

Table 4.19 Responses to Social/Emotional Concerns by Elementary School Attended

Issue	Response	Central (n=51)		Sandycreek (n=43)		Victory (n=34)	
Making new friends	Very worried or concerned	2.0%	1	9.3%	4	2.9%	1
	A little worried or concerned	23.5%	12	7.0%	3	26.5%	9
	Not worried or concerned at all	74.5%	38	83.7%	36	70.6%	24
Fitting in with my peers	Very worried or concerned	3.9%	2	9.3%	4	5.9%	2
	A little worried or concerned	19.6%	10	7.0%	3	14.7%	5
	Not worried or concerned at all	76.5%	39	83.7%	36	79.4%	27
Being bullied by other students	Very worried or concerned	9.8%	5	11.6%	5	8.8%	3
	A little worried or concerned	29.4%	15	18.6%	8	8.8%	3
	Not worried or concerned at all	30.8%	31	69.8%	30	82.4%	28
Changing clothes for PE class	Very worried or concerned	7.8%	4	4.7%	2	8.8%	3
	A little worried or concerned	27.5%	14	30.2%	13	29.4%	10
	Not worried or concerned at all	64.7%	33	65.1%	28	61.8%	21
Managing stress	Very worried or concerned	11.8%	6	20.9%	9	14.7%	5
	A little worried or concerned	39.2%	20	20.9%	9	17.7%	6
	Not worried or concerned at all	49.0%	25	58.1%	25	67.7%	23
Following school rules	Very worried or concerned	2.0%	1	2.3%	1	0.0%	0
	A little worried or concerned	9.8%	5	2.3%	1	11.8%	4
	Not worried or concerned at all	88.2%	45	95.4%	41	88.2%	30
Finding someone to sit with during lunch	Very worried or concerned	2.0%	1	7.0%	3	0.0%	0
	A little worried or concerned	7.8%	4	7.0%	3	8.8%	3
	Not worried or concerned at all	90.2%	46	86.1%	37	91.2%	31
Being liked by my teachers	Very worried or concerned	3.9%	2	7.0%	3	8.8%	3
	A little worried or concerned	25.5%	13	20.9%	9	20.6%	7
	Not worried or concerned at all	70.6%	36	72.1%	31	70.6%	24

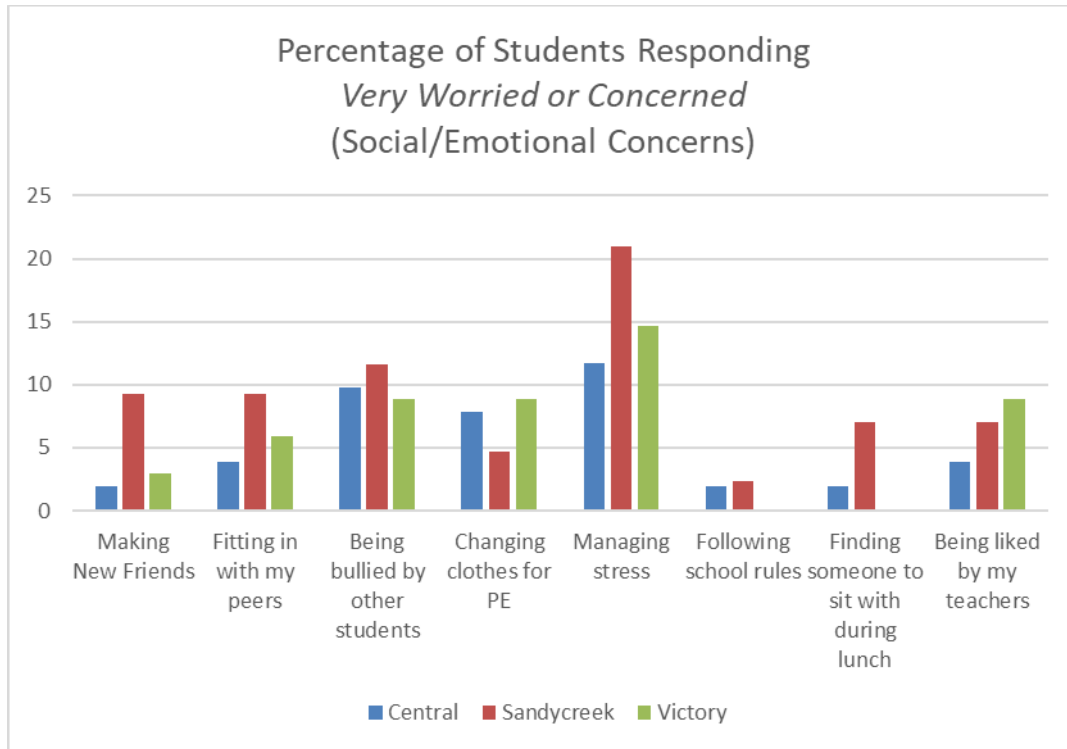


Figure 4.9 The percentage of students from each elementary school who responded they were very worried or concerned about each of the social/emotional issues

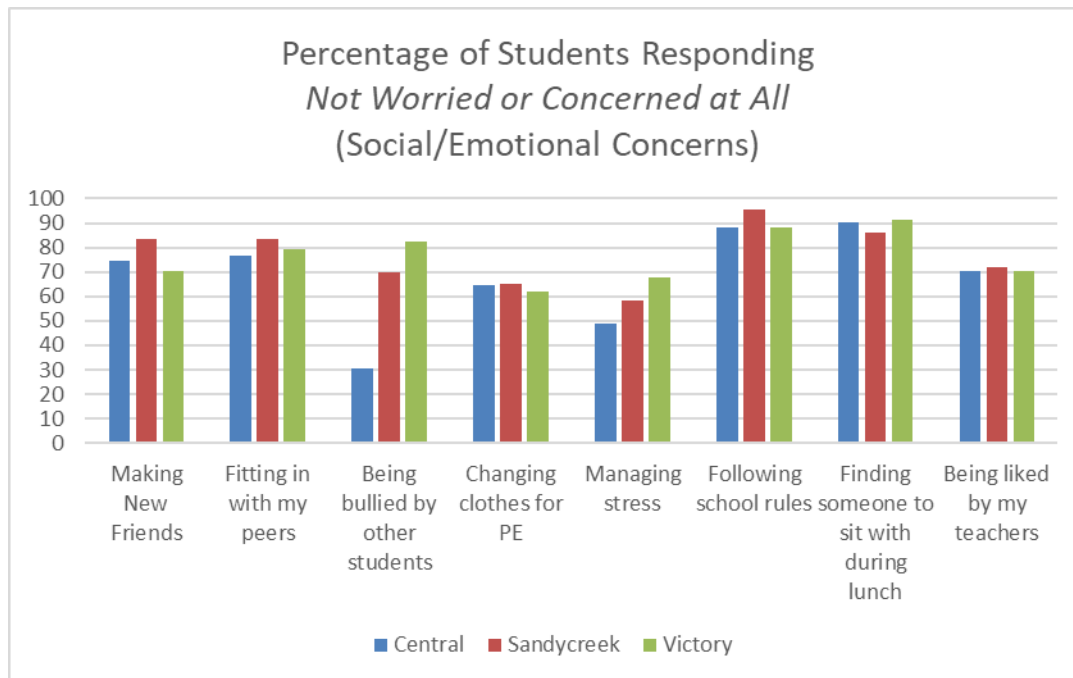


Figure 4.10 The percentage of students from each elementary school who responded they were not worried or concerned about each of the social/emotional issues

Table 4.20 Mean Responses to Social/Emotional Concerns by Elementary School Attended

Issue	M		
	Central	Sandycreek	Victory
Making new friends	1.3	1.3	1.3
Fitting in with my peers	1.3	1.3	1.3
Managing stress	1.6	1.6	1.5
Being bullied by other students	1.5	1.4	1.3
Finding someone to sit with during lunch	1.1	1.2	1.1
Following school rules	1.1	1.1	1.1
Changing clothes for Physical Education (PE) class	1.4	1.4	1.5
Being liked by my teachers	1.3	1.3	1.4

A larger percentage of students from Sandycreek Elementary indicated they were *very worried or concerned* about five of the eight social/emotional concerns than their peers from Central and Victory. This same group of students was also more likely to indicate they were *not worried or concerned at all* about several of those same issues. In most instances, fewer Central

Elementary students indicated they were *very worried or concerned* about each issue than their peers from Victory Elementary. Table 4.19 and figures 4.9 and 4.10 illustrate student responses to social/emotional concerns by the elementary school they attended in 6th grade. Table 4.20 lists response means for each social/emotional concern by elementary school. Chi Square analysis determines that no statistically significant relationship exists between any of the eight social/emotional concerns and the elementary school that students attended in sixth grade, $p > .05$.

4.1.1.8.1 Open-Ended Responses

In addition to the Likert-type question responses, students were asked three open-ended questions on the *Franklin Area School District Transition Survey*. These questions asked students to list one thing they were looking forward to about beginning seventh grade, one thing they were NOT looking forward to about beginning seventh grade, and to then list any other concerns or questions they may have about starting middle school.

Of the things that students claim to be looking forward to about beginning middle school this year, the most frequently identified is making new friends closely followed by meeting new people. Other positive aspects of the transition to seventh grade cited by students included getting good grades, going on trips, doing projects, seeing their friends, and experiencing an increase in freedom when compared to their sixth grade year.

The most frequently identified item that students claimed they were NOT looking forward to about the new school year was homework. These students cited concerns regarding increases in the amount and difficulty of homework as well as their ability to balance completing

their work while participating in extra-curricular activities. Taking tests and concerns regarding being bullied were the second and third most frequently identified issue respectively.

4.2 STUDENT VOICE ACTIVITY

4.2.1 Round Robin Questioning Activity

The first section of this chapter presented data from a secondary analysis of the *Franklin Area School District Transition Survey*. This was a district-designed and administered survey that students participated in during the first week of the 2017/2018 academic year. Subchapter 4.2 will present data from primary research involving a round robin student voice activity. This activity took place a few weeks into the second semester of school (between February 5th, 2018 and February 19th, 2018). This was approximately 23 weeks after students participated in the *Franklin Area School District Transition Survey*. Subjects were the same students who participated in the survey at the beginning of the year.

The purpose of the “Round Robin” activity was to develop a further understanding of students’ concerns, experiences and aspirations regarding the transition to middle school and to provide an opportunity for student voice in the development of an improved, comprehensive transition program to better support students during this time of great change and development.

Six questions were developed for this activity. The interview-style questions were informed by survey results and designed to deepen our understanding of student concerns,

experiences and the difficulties they face during the transition from elementary to middle school.

These questions included:

1. Several students stated that they were looking forward to having increased freedom in seventh grade. Do you feel like you have more freedom now than you did in elementary school? Explain why or why not.
2. The amount of homework students would be assigned was one of the highest rated concerns according to the FASD Transition Survey. In general, do you spend more or less time doing homework in 7th grade than you did in 6th grade? How much time to you spend on homework on a typical night? Are you able to complete your homework independently or do you usually need the help of a parent, guardian or other family member?
3. Incoming 7th graders identified “managing stress” as a significant concern. Do you feel stressed out by school? How do you manage school-related stress?
4. Getting good grades was the overall highest rated area of concern in the survey. How could our school help you to achieve at your highest potential and get the best grades possible for you?
5. Bullying is a concern of many incoming 7th grade students. Have you been the victim of a bully this school year? Have you witnessed other 7th grade students being bullied? If you see bullying happen, what should you do?
6. Did you attend the seventh grade orientation? Did the orientation activity help you to feel more comfortable and/or less worried or concerned about starting middle school? What types of orientation programs or activities could the school provide that you

think would help lessen your concerns about transitioning from elementary school to middle school?

4.2.1.1.1 Procedure

Seventh grade students in the Franklin Area School District are divided up into advisory homeroom groups of 12-15 students and assigned to a faculty advisor. Students meet each day for a thirty-minute advisory period. The Round Robin questioning activity was facilitated with each advisory group of students during advisory period between February 5th, 2018 and February 19th, 2018. The activity began by presenting a summary report of the *Franklin Area School District Transition Survey* to student participants. This presentation included data regarding students' overall feelings about beginning middle school, the most frequently identified and highest rated areas of concern in each of the three categories (logistic, academic and social/emotional) and a summary of student responses about what they were and were not looking forward to about beginning middle school. Students were invited to ask questions and make comments about the presentation. Students were then divided into two groups (row A and row B) and asked to partner with a student sitting across from them. Students in row A then read one of the six questions to their row B partner and recorded their responses. Students rotated through until all students in row B answered each of the six questions. At this time, the two rows traded roles – with row B asking the questions and recording their row A partner's responses. Again students rotated through until they answered all questions. At the conclusion of the questioning activity, student recorders shared out a summary of their responses to the larger group. Students were then invited to participate in a discussion regarding these results. In all, 115 students participated in this activity.

4.2.1.1.2 Results of Questioning Activity

Question #1

Several students stated that they were looking forward to having increased freedom in seventh grade. Do you feel like you have more freedom now than you did in elementary school? Explain why or why not.

Of the 115 students who responded to this question, eighty-eight (76.5%) indicated that they felt like they have more freedom in seventh grade than they did in sixth grade. Twenty-two students (19.1%) claimed they do not have more freedom now than they did in sixth grade, and five students (4.4%) were unsure or felt they had about the same amount of freedom. A text analysis of students' open-ended responses justifying their answer revealed that many students (33) felt they had more freedom because they were permitted to move freely through the halls in between classes rather than walk in straight lines with their classmates and teachers as they did in elementary school. One student remarked, *"I think I have more freedom than I did in sixth grade because we are treated more mature and not walking in lines."* Others said *"We get to walk in the halls with friends," "We get to walk in the halls by ourselves," "We don't have to walk in lines anymore,"* and *"I no longer need to walk in lines to my classes."*

Many students expressed that having different teachers and moving from classroom to classroom gave them more freedom. Some students said they felt increased freedom in middle school because *"We have more classes so we have more space from other teachers," "I'm not trapped in one classroom," "We have more classes and get to see and meet different people in every class,"* and *"We don't have to stay in the same classroom all day and have different (class) periods."* Having choice regarding the classes that they take was another theme that emerged from student responses. One student said *"We get to pick some of our own classes and*

we get to choose what we prioritize.” Others exclaimed, “You can pick your own classes and no one is going to pick up the slack,” “You can decide what classes you take,” and “We got to choose some of our classes.” Having the ability to sit where and with whomever they want at lunch was also cited as justification for a perceived increase in freedom. Students explained, “I have freedom to talk to different people at lunch,” “We have more freedom because we don’t have assigned seats at lunch,” “They treat you differently and you can pick your own lunch,” “You can sit at any table you want during lunch,” and “Last year we had to sit with specific people at lunch. Now we can sit with anyone we want.” Students who indicated they did not experience more freedom as middle schoolers stated it was due to a lack of recess, having more rules and needing to have a written pass to utilize the restroom facility. These students’ responses included, “They (teachers) are on us more about different things and we don’t have enough time between classes,” “We have to take our agenda books everywhere,” “There is more homework and we have sports that take up more time,” “We don’t get breaks,” and “We have no recess.”

Question #2

The amount of homework students would be assigned was one of the highest rated concerns according to the FASD Transition Survey. In general, do you spend more or less time doing homework in 7th grade than you did in 6th grade? How much time do you spend on homework on a typical night? Are you able to complete your homework independently or do you usually need the help of a parent, guardian or other family member?

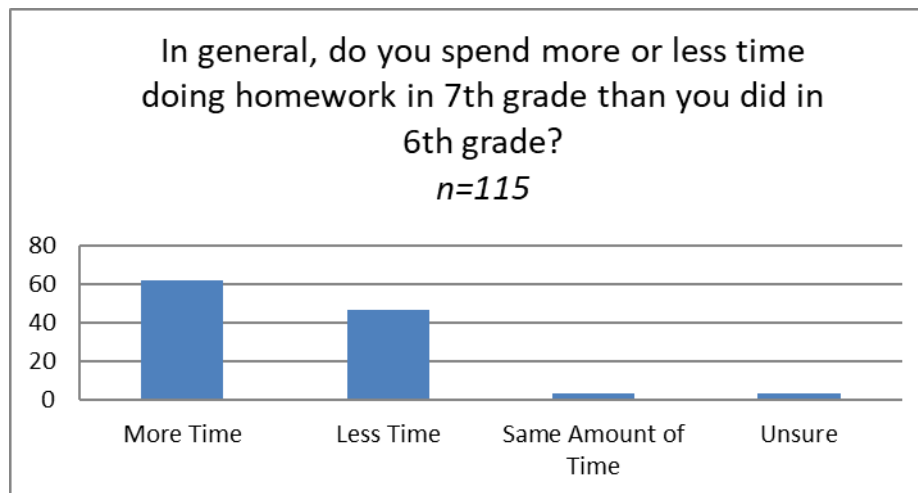


Figure 4.11 Number of student responses for activity question #2 – In general, do you spend more or less time doing homework in seventh grade than you did in sixth grade?

The majority of the students who participated in the round-robin questioning activity indicated that they spend more time on homework this year than they did as sixth grade students last year. Sixty-two (53.9%) student participants stated they spent more time on homework, forty-seven (40.9%) said they spent less time on homework, while only three students felt they spent about the same amount of time and an additional three students were not sure. Figure 4.11 illustrates these responses.

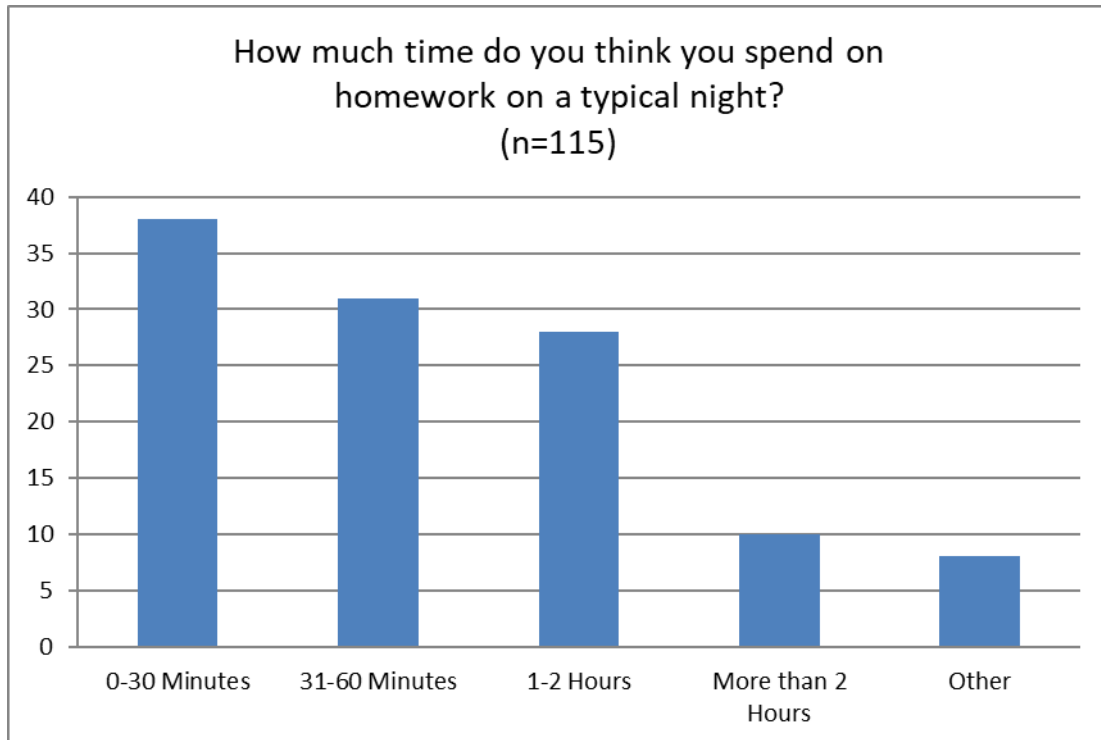


Figure 4.12 Number of student responses for activity question #2b –How much time do you think you spend on homework on a typical night?

The amount of time students self-reported spending on homework appears to vary greatly. Thirty-eight students (33.0%) indicated they spend thirty minutes or less on homework on most nights, thirty-one students (27.0%) spend between thirty-one minutes and one hour, twenty-eight students (24.4%) spend between one and two hours and ten students (8.7%) claimed they spend more than two hours on homework on a typical night. Eight additional students (7.0%) either stated they were unsure or did not answer the question. This data is represented in figure 4.12. The majority of student participants (65.2%) said they were able to complete their homework independently, while twenty-four students (20.9%) indicated they usually need the assistance of a parent, guardian or other family member. Students exclaimed, *“I usually always complete my homework independently,”* *“Generally, I do it (homework) individually,”* *“I do my*

homework independently, but study with my parents,” “It depends on the subject,” and “I need help sometimes.”

Question #3

Incoming 7th graders identified “managing stress” as a significant concern. Do you feel stressed out by school? How do you manage school-related stress?

Managing stress was one of the highest rated areas of concern identified by students who completed the *Franklin Area School District Transition Survey*. When asked if they felt stressed out by school during the round robin questioning activity, forty-nine students (43.4%) responded affirmatively and nine students (8.0%) said they felt stressed out by school “sometimes.” Fifty-four (47.8%) said they did not feel stressed out by school while one student (0.9%) was unsure.

When asked how they manage school-related stress, the most frequently cited strategies included listening to music, talking to parents or other adults, playing video games, sleeping/napping, and participating in sports and other extracurricular activities. Student responses included, *“I talk to friends and parents about it,” “I relax and lay on my bed,” “I relax and play video games,” “I do physical activities,” “I clear my head and listen to music,”* and *“I take a break.”* One student responded with a particularly concerning statement, *“I don’t. I’m falling apart every day.”* It is unclear if that student was communicating that they have a significant struggle in managing school-related stress, or if they were simply being “silly” with their peers.

Question #4

Getting good grades was the overall highest rated area of concern in the survey. How could our school help you to achieve at your highest potential and get the best grades possible for you?

The goal of including this question was to gain insight into how students perceive the school's role in ensuring their success. While the most frequent statement was to give less and/or easier homework, twenty-nine responses included statements related to instructional practices. Specifically, students claimed they would benefit from increased opportunities for teachers to help them with their work during class, structured study halls or advisory periods. Students said the school could help them to be more successful if they would *"Give us more one on one time about our homework or questions," "Give us more time to work on homework in class so the teachers can help us with questions that we don't understand," "give us more time to study or do homework, such as a study hall," "Make advisory longer for studying," and "Have tutoring every day for kids that need help."* Students also referenced teaching with students' varying learning styles in mind. These students exclaimed, *"Teachers go with the students learning style and their academic level," "Move slower and talk about it more," "Teach at a slower pace," "Teachers being more creative with their teaching," and "Make tests easier for people that have trouble learning and remembering."* Other statements students made in response to this question included, *"Give better explanations and more one on one attention if needed," "Spend more time explaining," "Do more activities," "Give us less work so we have more time to learn."* One student even suggested changes to the overall curriculum and current required courses, saying: *"cut down on the number of classes and extend the time of the uncut classes."*

Question #5

Bullying is a concern of many incoming 7th grade students. Have you been the victim of a bully this school year? Have you witnessed other 7th grade students being bullied? If you see bullying happen, what should you do?

Being bullied was among the highest rated areas of concern identified by students who completed the *Franklin Area School District Transition Survey*. Of the 112 student responses collected during the round-robin discussion activity, thirty-six students (32.1%) stated that they had been the victim of a bully this school year while seventy-six (67.9%) said they had not been the victim of a bully this year. Over half of all seventh grade student respondents (51.8%) stated that they had witnessed other seventh grade students being bullied this year, while fifty-four students (48.2%) claimed they did not witness other seventh grade students being bullied this year.

When asked what they should do if they see bullying happen, students frequently answered that they should tell the principal, guidance counselor, teacher or other trusted adult. Several students remarked that they would try to help or stop the bully, stating *“I’d try to make it stop or get a teacher, it depends,” “Tell a teacher or stick up for the person who’s getting bullied,” “Tell them to stop and if that doesn’t work I will inform a teacher,”* and *“Tell them it’s not the right thing to do.”* Others indicated they should report the bullying using the school’s “Bully Button,” (a link on the school website that sends a report directly to the principal and guidance counselor).

Question #6

Did you attend the seventh grade orientation? Did the orientation activity help you to feel more comfortable and/or less worried or concerned about starting middle school? What types of orientation programs or activities could the school provide that you think would help lessen your concerns about transitioning from elementary school to middle school?

The purpose of including this question in the discussion activity was to gain perspective regarding students’ perception of the effectiveness of the current orientation program and

transition activities offered by the Franklin Area School District. Of the 113 students who responded to this question during the discussion activity, ninety-five (84.1%) indicated that they attended the seventh grade orientation program that was held prior to the start of school this year while eighteen students (15.9%) did not attend. Of the students who attended the orientation event, sixty-six students indicated that the activity helped them to feel more comfortable and/or less worried or concerned about starting middle school. Thirty-one students indicated that the event did not help them to feel less worried or more comfortable with beginning seventh grade.

Students were then asked to identify programs or activities that the school could provide that would help lessen their concerns about transitioning from elementary school to middle school. Students outlined several strategies to improve transition programing. It was suggested by multiple students that the school operate a “demo day” where only incoming 7th grade students attend for the entire day before the school year actually starts. One student stated it would be beneficial to *“come to the school a day or two before school starts and go to all of your classes.”* Students described how this would give them an opportunity to become familiar with the building, their teachers and class schedules without the added stress of crowded hallways and the entire student body being present. Another student exclaimed, *“Bring sixth graders over for an entire school day to show them how it works.”* Other suggestions included giving students their class schedules earlier (they received them at orientation) and providing a longer period of time for students to ask individual questions of teachers and staff during the orientation program. A “virtual orientation” program was also recommended for students who are unable to attend orientation in person. Students described this as an online tour or video that could show a day in the life of a seventh grade student. Another student suggested *“have two orientations just in case you can’t make the first one.”* The current orientation program is only

offered once in the evening. These suggestions indicate improvements to the current programing should include strategies to make the activities more authentic and accessible to a larger number of incoming students.

4.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided a summary of findings based on the two data collection activities. In the subsequent chapter (chapter five), a discussion of these findings organized by inquiry question will be presented.

5.0 DISCUSSION

This chapter presents a discussion of the data and analysis of this study. The discussion is organized by research question.

5.1 RESEARCH QUESTION 1

The first research question of this line of inquiry was *What concerns do incoming 7th grade students have regarding the transition to middle school?* For the purpose of this study, student concerns were categorized into one of three areas, *logistic, academic and social/emotional*.

5.1.1 Logistic Concerns

The data suggest that students are most concerned with getting to class on time and finding their way around the school building. These results mirror the findings of previous studies that investigated student concerns regarding the middle school transition (Odegaard, 1992). These are understandable concerns when you consider most of these students are transitioning from a smaller building with self-contained classrooms to a much larger campus where they are

expected to navigate from classroom to classroom. The additional stressor of getting in trouble for being late to a class seems to heighten students' level of concern in this area as well.

5.1.2 Academic Concerns

Students in this study indicated that “*Getting good grades*” was their highest rated area of concern not only in the academic category, but overall. This is of great interest because this is not an area that schools typically focus on through their transition programming even though a growing body of literature suggests that there appears to be a marked decline in student academic achievement across the transition years (Bellmore, 2011; West & Schwerdt, 2012). Students also reported they were quite concerned with taking tests, the difficulty of their classes and the amount of homework they would be assigned. Discussions with students revealed that many of these concerns stemmed from a lack of necessary study and time management skills. This implies students may benefit from programs and activities designed to strengthen these skills.

5.1.3 Social/Emotional Concerns

The student subjects in this line of inquiry indicated a lower level of concern regarding the social/emotional aspects of the transition than academic and logistic issues. This was indicated by the high percentage of student respondents who stated they were *Not worried or concerned at all* about many of the social/emotional issues listed on the *Franklin Area School District Transition Survey*. Of all the identified social/emotional concerns examined in this study, *Managing stress* was the highest rated. Data collected during the discussion activity suggests that

the majority of student participants felt stressed out by school. These students also articulated various strategies that they employed to manage school-related stress. Literature regarding the developmental characteristics of middle level learners sheds light on this phenomenon. In a 2007 research summary on the developmental characteristics of young adolescents, Caskey and Anfara describe the significant brain development that occurs during early adolescence particularly in the prefrontal cortex, which is the “area of the brain that handles executive functions such as planning, reasoning, anticipating consequences, sustaining attention, and making decisions” (p.3). When these developmental characteristics are taken into consideration, it is not surprising that students describe feeling stressed out about school-related activities that require these executive functions.

5.2 RESEARCH QUESTION 2

Do the concerns of incoming 7th grade students regarding the transition to middle school vary depending on gender or which elementary school they attended?

5.2.1 Gender

It was of interest to explore what, if any influence gender had on students’ concerns regarding the transition from elementary to middle school. The previous chapter describing the secondary analysis of responses from the *Franklin Area School District Transition Survey* uncovered a statistically significant relationship between student gender and their overall feelings about

beginning middle school. More males than females indicated that they were *Excited/Happy* to begin middle school while more females than males claimed to be *Worried/Scared* or unsure about the transition.

Transition survey data suggest that male students have a lower rate of concern for logistic issues associated with the transition to middle school when compared to their female peers. A larger percentage of male students claimed to be *not worried or concerned at all* about all eight of the logistic issues than female students. Additionally, a larger percentage of female students indicated they were either *a little worried or concerned* or *very worried or concerned* about these issues than their male classmates.

There did not appear to be marked differences in most of students' academic concerns between male and female students. Both male and female students cited getting good grades as their most prominent academic concern. Female students did rate their level of concern for *Taking tests* and *The difficulty of my classes* higher than their male peers.

Of the three areas of concern (logistic, academic and social/emotional) addressed by the *Franklin Area School District Transition Survey*, it appears that social/emotional concerns were most significantly impacted by students' gender. A larger percentage of male students indicated they were not worried or concerned at all about all eight social/emotional issues than their female classmates. Statistically significant relationships were found for four of those issues, including *Making new friends*, *Fitting in with my peers*, *Managing stress* and *Being bullied by other students*. While *Managing stress* was the most frequently identified social/emotional issue that all students, both male and female were very worried or concerned about, it appears to be more of a concern for female students than males. Over half of all female respondents indicate that they are at least a little worried or concerned about managing stress, while roughly 34% of their

male peers indicate the same. This supports prior research that suggests that female students tend to exhibit a greater level of concern during school transitions in general and their social and academic concerns are more intense than their male peers (Mante, 1991). Additionally, Grills-Taquechel et al. (2010) found that male students tended to report less overall anxiety regarding the transition to middle school than their female classmates.

5.2.2 Elementary School Attended

No statistically significant relationship was found in this course of inquiry between which elementary school a student attended in sixth grade and their overall feelings about beginning middle school, however, there did appear to be some differences when exploring specific areas of concern.

It was hypothesized that students from our largest, most diverse elementary school would indicate a lower level of concern regarding logistic issues related to the transition than their peers who attended the smaller elementary schools. While no statistically significant relationship was found between these variables, it is noteworthy to mention that students from Sandycreek elementary described a higher level of concern for *Using a lock and locker* than their peers who attended other elementary schools. This is understandable, as the other two elementary schools students in the study attended utilize locks and lockers in sixth grade, while Sandycreek does not. This indicates that an extra component in the transition programming for Sandycreek students designed to teach students how to use a combination lock may ease their level of concern. Students from all three elementary schools were concerned about finding their way around the

school while students from Victory elementary, the district's smallest, most rural school rated *Getting to class on time* higher than their peers from Central and Sandycreek.

When analyzing data regarding academic concerns, no statistically significant relationship was found between the elementary school students attended and their level of concern regarding any of the eight academic issues. This suggests that there are similar transition needs regarding academic expectations among all students regardless of which elementary school they attended. This should be taken into consideration when considering changes and improvements to future transition programming.

As described in the previous chapter, no statistically significant relationship was found between any of the eight social/emotional concerns and the elementary school that students attended in sixth grade.

It appears that for most areas of concern, there is no real variation in students' concerns regarding the transition to middle school by which elementary school they attended in sixth grade. Gender, however does play a sometimes significant role in these concerns. This suggests that an improved transition program should include activities designed to more adequately address these differences.

5.3 RESEARCH QUESTION 3

What themes emerge when an opportunity is provided for the expression of "student voice" regarding the transition to middle school?

The student voice component of this study was conducted in February, 2018. This is a few weeks into the second semester of the students' seventh grade academic year. When reflecting on their experiences through this question and discussion activity, several themes emerged from student comments and responses.

5.3.1 Increased Freedom

The overwhelming majority of students who participated in this study explained that they felt like they have more freedom in seventh grade than they did in sixth grade. One student remarked, *"I think I have more freedom than I did in sixth grade because we are treated more mature and not walking in lines."* Others said *"We get to walk in the halls with friends," "We get to walk in the halls by ourselves," "We don't have to walk in lines anymore,"* and *"I no longer need to walk in lines to my classes."*

Many students expressed that having different teachers and moving from classroom to classroom gave them more freedom. Some students said they felt increased freedom in middle school because *"We have more classes so we have more space from other teachers," "I'm not trapped in one classroom," "We have more classes and get to see and meet different people in every class,"* and *"We don't have to stay in the same classroom all day and have different (class) periods."* Having choice regarding the classes that they take was another reason students cited as feeling increased freedom. One student said *"We get to pick some of our own classes and we get to choose what we prioritize."* Others exclaimed, *"You can pick your own classes and no one is going to pick up the slack," "You can decide what classes you take,"* and *"We got to choose some of our classes."* Having the ability to sit where and with whomever they want at

lunch was also cited as justification for a perceived increase in freedom. Students explained, *“I have freedom to talk to different people at lunch,” “We have more freedom because we don’t have assigned seats at lunch,” “They treat you differently and you can pick your own lunch,” “You can sit at any table you want during lunch,”* and *“Last year we had to sit with specific people at lunch. Now we can sit with anyone we want.”*

5.3.2 Students are stressed out – and they need help coping

Galvant & McGlannen (2012) describe early adolescence as a developmental period in which there is a significant increase in actual and perceived stress. It is not surprising then that students describe school and the accompanying transition to middle school as extremely stress-inducing. Managing stress was one of the highest rated areas of concern identified by students who completed the *Franklin Area School District Transition Survey*. When asked if they felt stressed out by school during the round robin questioning activity, nearly half of the students responded affirmatively. When asked how they manage school-related stress, the most frequently cited strategies included listening to music, talking to parents or other adults, playing video games, sleeping/napping, and participating in sports and other activities. It was evident throughout the discussion that students were not always able to manage their stress in a productive manner and this could negatively impact their mental health and wellbeing in addition to their academic success.

5.3.3 Instruction Matters

Students were asked during the round robin activity, *How could our school help you to achieve at your highest potential and get the best grades possible for you?* While the most frequent statement was to give less and/or easier homework, nearly a third of all student responses included statements related to instructional practices. Specifically, students claimed they would benefit from increased opportunities for teachers to help them with their work during class, structured study halls or advisory periods. Students also referenced teaching with students' varying learning styles in mind. These students exclaimed, *"Teachers go with the students learning style and their academic level," "Move slower and talk about it more," "Teach at a slower pace," "Teachers being more creative with their teaching,"* and *"Make tests easier for people that have trouble learning and remembering."* Other statements students made in response to this question included, *"Give better explanations and more one-on-one attention if needed," "Spend more time explaining," "Do more activities," "Give us less work so we have more time to learn."* One student even suggested changes to the overall curriculum and current required courses, saying: *"cut down on the number of classes and extend the time of the uncut classes."*

5.3.4 Bullying is an Issue

It was not surprising that *Being bullied* was among the highest rated areas of concern identified by students who completed the *Franklin Area School District Transition Survey*. Of the 112 student responses collected during the round-robin discussion activity, thirty-six students

(32.1%) stated that they had been the victim of a bully this school year and over half of all seventh grade student respondents (51.8%) stated that they had witnessed other seventh grade students being bullied this year.

When asked what they should do if they see bullying happen, students frequently answered that they should tell the principal, guidance counselor, teacher or other trusted adult. Several students remarked that they would try to help or stop the bully, stating *“I’d try to make it stop or get a teacher, it depends,” “Tell a teacher or stick up for the person who’s getting bullied,” “Tell them to stop and if that doesn’t work I will inform a teacher,”* and *“Tell them it’s not the right thing to do.”* Others indicated they should report the bullying using the school’s “Bully Button,” (a link on the school website that sends a report directly to the principal and guidance counselor).

5.3.5 Orientation was helpful – but could be improved

The majority of students who participated in the discussion activity (84.1%) attended the middle school orientation program that was provided by the Franklin Area School District prior to the first day of seventh grade. Most of those who attended agreed that the activity was helpful and that they felt less worried and more comfortable with beginning seventh grade after participating in the event.

Students were then asked to identify programs or activities that the school could provide that would help lessen their concerns about transitioning from elementary school to middle school. Students outlined several strategies to improve transition programing. It was suggested by multiple students that the school operate a “demo day” where only incoming 7th grade

students attend for the entire day before the school year actually starts. One student stated it would be beneficial to *“come to the school a day or two before school starts and go to all of your classes.”* Students described how this would give them an opportunity to become familiar with the building, their teachers and class schedules without the added stress of crowded hallways and the entire student body being present. Another student exclaimed, *“Bring sixth graders over for an entire school day to show them how it works.”* Other suggestions included giving students their class schedules earlier (they received them at orientation) and providing a longer period of time for students to ask individual questions of teachers and staff during the orientation program. A “virtual orientation” program was also recommended for students who are unable to attend orientation in person. Students described this as an online tour or video that could show a day in the life of a seventh grade student. Another student suggested *“have two orientations just in case you can’t make the first one.”* The current orientation program is only offered once in the evening. These suggestions indicate improvements to the current programming should include strategies to make the activities more authentic and accessible to a larger number of incoming students.

5.4 RESEARCH QUESTION 4:

What additions and/or modifications should be made to the transition programming offered by the Franklin Area middle school to ensure that the concerns identified by students are addressed?

The current transition programming offered by the Franklin Area School District is comprised of a few activities that are steeped more in tradition and prior practice than they are in meeting the specific needs of our student population. These activities are primarily concerned with familiarizing students with the logistic issues of transitioning to a new school building.

While this is certainly a necessary component, a more comprehensive transition program designed to address the demonstrated concerns of incoming seventh grade students would better support these students through this transition. For instance, data from this study suggest that students highest rated and most frequently identified areas of concern are related to academic issues, not logistic ones. “*Getting good grades*” was both the highest rated academic and overall area of concern, yet there is no deliberate programming dedicated to providing students with the knowledge, skills and dispositions to better ensure they achieve at their highest potential. Additionally, there is a demonstrated need to include more opportunities to address social/emotional concerns of students in a thoughtful and deliberate manner. The next chapter will include specific recommendations regarding additions and/or modifications to strengthen the transition programming offered by the school district.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

As discussed in the previous chapter, the current transition activities offered by the Franklin Area School District are geared primarily towards acclimating students to the new physical building and addressing logistic elements of the transition process. It is important to retain some of these activities, as students clearly indicated they had a significant level of concern regarding the difficulties in navigating the building and getting to their classes on time. It is recommended, however, that the scope of the transition programming be widened to more adequately address the multiple areas of concern identified by students. Table 6.1 illustrates the four primary elements of the current transition program.

Table 6.1 Current FASD Transition Activities

Activity	Description	Timeline
Guidance Visits	Middle School Guidance Counselor visits elementary school classrooms to introduce self and talk about expectations in 7 th grade	Early May of 6 th grade year
Move-Up Day	6 th grade students participate in a.m. track and field day at stadium then meet in middle school auditorium for a presentation followed by a tour of the building.	Late May of 6 th grade year

Orientation	Students arrive at Middle School, are given a copy of their schedule, gather in the auditorium for a presentation by the principal and then follow their schedule on an abbreviated bell schedule (8 minute periods).	Two to three days before the first day of school
Advisory	All middle school students are assigned to a faculty advisor who they meet with daily for 30 minutes after lunch. Advisors monitor students' academic and personal success.	Daily during school year.

The middle school guidance counselor visits sixth grade classrooms at each of the three elementary schools in the district in early May of each academic year. During this brief, 20-30 minute presentation, the counselor reviews the types of courses students will be enrolled in and speaks in general terms about what students can expect when they begin middle school in the fall.

Move-Up Day is held in conjunction with the sixth grade field day. Students from each of the three elementary schools travel to the middle/high school stadium and participate in a variety of track and field activities. Students then gather in the school auditorium where the principal provides a brief presentation. The principal's presentation is focused primarily on reviewing procedures for arrival and dismissal and presenting positive behavior expectations. This presentation is followed by a tour of the campus, led by the principal, guidance counselor and available middle school teachers. Students do not have an opportunity to meet all of their teachers at this time, as they are not available because regular classes are still in session. At the conclusion of the tour, students reconvene in the auditorium where they have the opportunity to ask any questions they may have at that time.

The annual middle school orientation is held each year on an evening that is two to three days prior to the first day of school for students. Students enter the lobby, receive a copy of their class schedule and map of the school, and are then directed into the auditorium where the principal presents an informative session to students, parents, and families. This presentation is more in-depth than the move-up day one. A lot of information is given in a very short period of time. At the conclusion of that presentation, an abbreviated bell schedule is followed allowing students to travel from classroom to classroom to meet their teachers and familiarize themselves with their surroundings.

The advisory program offered by the school district is designed to provide continuous and ongoing support for students in seventh and eighth grade. All students are assigned in small groups to a faculty advisor who they meet with each day for 30 minutes. Advisors monitor student academic performance and serve as an advocate and mentor for their advisees.

6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDITIONS AND/OR MODIFICATIONS TO CURRENT TRANSITION PROGRAMMING

The following recommendations are informed by the triangulation of the secondary analysis of data from the *Franklin Area School District Transition Survey*, suggestions made by students during the student voice activity and research-supported practices reflecting developmental responsive schools. This is certainly not an exhaustive list, and the researcher does not imply that all of these suggested activities should be immediately implemented. Rather, these

recommendations should inform a continuous cycle of improvement that should include deliberate planning, implementation, evaluation and assessment.

In the 2015 book, *Promoting a Successful Transition to Middle School*, Patrick Akos et al. provide an extensive review of literature that has investigated student, parent and teacher perceptions of the middle school transition as well as a review of practical, intervention research that evaluates the effectiveness of a variety of transition activities and programs. The authors explain that previous research has revealed three theoretical frames that can help us to better understand this transition – the themes of academic, personal/social, and organizational/procedural needs. This mirrors the three areas of student concern investigated in this study (academic, social/emotional and logistic). The authors state that prior research has suggested that there are three primary attributes of successful transition programs (NMSA, 2002a; Cooke, 1995; Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002).

Table 6.2 Attributes of Successful Transition Programs (NMSA, 2002a; Cooke, 1995; Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002)

Attributes of Successful Transition Programs
➤ Sensitivity to the anxieties accompanying a move to a new school setting
➤ Awareness of the importance of parents and teachers as partners in this effort
➤ Recognition that becoming comfortable in a new school setting is an ongoing

process, not a single event.

A successful transition program at the Franklin Area School District must be aligned to the concerns identified by students in the previous chapters. Akos et al., also explain how multiple different authors have developed models for transition programming based on theory, outcome, and perception research. They caution, however, that schools who are looking for ways to improve their own transition programming must consider the unique context of their own needs, school climate and culture when determining which activities to include in a comprehensive transition program.

The following table illustrates potential transition activities, interventions and strategies that could be included in a comprehensive middle school transition program for students in the Franklin Area School District. The chart aligns each strategy with the demonstrated need identified through the secondary analysis of student responses to the *Franklin Area School District Transition Survey*. Also included in the table is a timeline describing when the activity may be held.

Table 6.3 Recommended Additional Transition Activities

<u>Area(s) of Concern Addressed</u>	<u>Description of Activity</u>	<u>Timeline</u>
Logistic, Academic & Social/Emotional	Formation of a Transition Committee Members will include 6 th and 7 th grade teachers, guidance counselors and administrators. This committee will collaborate to ensure an effective transition for all students. Special considerations will be given to addressing academic and curricular requirements. Students should also be given an opportunity to serve on this committee.	Continuous and ongoing.
Academic & Social/Emotional	Guidance Visits Guidance counselor visits feeder elementary schools to discuss classes, schedules, academic expectations and social emotional concerns .	Multiple visits (2-3) beginning in January - April
Logistic & Academic	Principal Visits Principal and assistant principals visit feeder elementary schools to discuss positive behavior expectations and procedural aspects of transition.	Multiple visits (2-3) beginning in January - April
Logistic, Academic & Social/Emotional	7th Grader for a Day 6 th grade students will spend an entire day shadowing a 7 th grade like-gender peer.	March-April of 6 th grade year (one homeroom per designated day)
Social/Emotional	Summer Picnic All incoming middle school students and their families (and staff) will be invited to a picnic held on campus to foster a sense of community before the school year begins.	Late July/Early August

Logistic, Academic & Social/Emotional	Orientation – Multiple Sessions am/pm Orientation activity with presentation by administration and tour of building/mock run through of schedule. Offered in both a.m. and p.m. sessions to be more accessible to students and their families.	Mid-Late August
Logistic, Academic & Social/Emotional	Virtual Orientation A virtual orientation will be recorded and made available on the school website and social media platforms for students and families who are unable to attend the on-site orientation activity.	Mid-Late August
Social/Emotional	School Expo May be held in conjunction with orientation. Clubs and activities will set up booths in gym. Eighth grade students will man the booths and encourage incoming seventh grade students to get involved in extracurricular activities and clubs.	Mid-Late August
Logistic	Scavenger Hunt A digital scavenger hunt (utilizing QR codes) will be organized that students and their families can participate in during a pre-determined window of time (2 weeks) in which the school will be open and available. The scavenger hunter will be designed to familiarize students with the physical building and the location of classrooms, offices and other areas of importance.	Early August
Logistic, Academic & Social/Emotional	Advisory Program Continuation and further expansion of the advisory program that is already in place. Advisors will meet with advisees for 30 minutes each day and continue to monitor their academic and personal success. Additional activities designed to meet students academic and social/emotional needs will be developed and implemented by the transition team and faculty advisors.	Continuous

6.3 NEXT STEPS

The first step in moving forward with these recommendations will be the formation of a transition team. This team should include both sixth and seventh grade teachers, guidance counselors and administrators. Additionally, seventh and eighth grade students who have already transitioned to middle school should be included on this team and engaged in the development and implementation of transition programming.

An annual survey will continue to be administered to outgoing sixth grade students. The survey instrument will be further refined to allow for a clearer view of incoming student's concerns and aspirations related to the transition. Initially, this would involve expanding the Likert scale from three points to five. This will allow the transition team to gain a more nuanced view of student perception data. Other considerations may include "ranking" questions that ask students to rank specific issues according to the level and/or severity of concern students have. In addition to changes in the survey instrument, the team will consider how and by whom the survey will be administered. Perhaps having seventh or eighth grade students who have already transitioned visit sixth grade elementary classrooms to talk about the transition and having them actually administer the survey would yield more authentic responses from students. This will be a consideration of the team.

6.4 CONCLUSION

Improving the transition experience for students as they move from elementary to middle school will be an ongoing process with multiple iterations of improvement efforts and evaluation. This Dissertation of Practice will inform the planning process for the design of a revised, improved, comprehensive program for middle school transition for the students of the Franklin Area School district. A transition committee consisting of a team of administrators, teachers and school counselors will engage in multiple cycles of improvement efforts in future academic years. This study was not designed to be a means to an end, but rather a set of recommended research-based strategies to inform our future practice in meeting the diverse needs of students across this time of great change and adjustment.

6.5 LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study did not explore the perceptions of parents and/or teachers as related to the transition to middle school. As stated earlier, the awareness of the importance of parents and teachers as partners in the transition effort is a key attribute of a successful transition program (NMSA,2002a; Cooke, 1995; Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002). Further study regarding the attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs of teachers and parents in the Franklin Area School District could inform continued improvement efforts regarding the middle school transition.

Additionally, the transition committee should continue to investigate the needs and concerns of students on an annual basis. A further refined transition survey should be developed

and administered each year to ensure an accurate understanding of each incoming class of students.

APPENDIX A

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT STUDY

July 28, 2017

Mr. Brian Spaid, President
Board of Directors
Franklin Area School District
702 Liberty St.
Franklin, PA 16323

Dear Mr. Spaid,

I am respectfully requesting the permission of the Board of Directors to conduct a research study within the Franklin Area School District. The study will be developed into my Dissertation of Practice, a requirement of my doctoral studies at the University of Pittsburgh. Below are the details of this proposed line of inquiry:

Title of Research Study/Dissertation:

Developing a Data-Informed, Comprehensive Transition Program for Students Transitioning from Elementary to Middle School

Inquiry Questions:

1. What concerns do incoming 7th grade students have regarding the transition to middle school?
2. Do the concerns of incoming 7th grade students regarding the transition to middle school vary depending on race, gender or which elementary school they attend?
3. Does the current transition programming offered by the Franklin Area middle school address the areas of concern identified by students?
4. What additions and/or modifications should be made to the transition programming offered by the Franklin Area middle school to ensure that the concerns identified by students are addressed?

Inquiry Approach/Methods:

The purpose of this inquiry is to develop an improved, data-informed, comprehensive transition program to assist all students as they make the transition from elementary to secondary school. I will work with a participant team which will include our school counselor and teacher volunteers in engaging in a cycle of improvement science to evaluate our current transition program, determine agreed upon improvement goals and collect ongoing, formative data to inform these changes.

Data from the *Franklin Area School District Transition Survey* will be utilized to develop a thorough understanding of the concerns that existing students have regarding the transition to middle school. This data will also be analyzed to determine if students concerns vary depending on the type of elementary school they attended, race or gender. Follow up surveys, focus groups, interviews and other formative data will further inform improvement efforts.

Reporting of Findings

No personally identifiable student information will be disclosed in the reporting of findings of this study. Pseudonyms will be utilized for the district and individual schools for the purpose of maintaining anonymity.

Thank you for your time and consideration regarding this request. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at any time.



Christina F. Cohlhepp
Doctoral Candidate, Education Leadership
University of Pittsburgh

Department of Administrative and Policy Studies

*Permission to conduct study was formally granted by the Franklin Area School Board on Monday, August 21, 2017.
Minutes for meeting available at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B9PIm--d6z8lbnVPZGdMSWhVUGs/view>*

APPENDIX B

PERMISSION TO ADMINISTER SURVEY



Franklin Area Jr./Sr. High School

246 Pone Lane
Franklin, PA 16323
(814) 432-2121
www.fasd.k12.pa.us

Christina F. Cohlhepp, Principal
George S. Svolos, Assistant Principal

7/28/2017

Dr. Pamela Dye, Superintendent
Franklin Area School District
702 Liberty St.
Franklin, PA 16323

Dear Dr. Dye,

I am requesting permission to administer the "FASD School Transition Survey" to incoming 7th grade students during the first week of the 2017/2018 academic year. The purpose of this survey is to collect data regarding the concerns that incoming 7th grade students have regarding the transition from elementary school to secondary school.

The information gained from this survey will deepen our understanding of students' needs, concerns and aspirations, informing our practice as we strive to improve the educational experience for students during this time of great change and adjustment. If you approve of the administration of the survey, please provide written documentation of said permission at your earliest convenience.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Christina F. Cohlhepp, Principal
Franklin Area Jr./Sr. High School

APPENDIX C

FASD TRANSITION SURVEY INSTRUMENT

FASD Transition Survey

Do NOT put your name on this survey.

Demographic Information

1. Which elementary school did you attend in 6th grade?

- ☐ Central Elementary School
- ☐ Sandycreek Elementary School
- ☐ Victory Elementary School
- ☐ Other

2. How old are you?

- ☐ 11 years old
- ☐ 12 years old
- ☐ 13 years old
- ☐ 14 years old

3. What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

4. Overall, how do you feel about beginning middle school this year?

- ☐ Excited/Happy
- ☐ Worried/Scared
- ☐ Unsure

The following questions ask about concerns you may have about starting middle school this year.

For each issue listed, rate your level of worry or concern.

1 = Not worried or concerned at all

2 = A little worried or concerned

3 = Very worried or concerned

Logistical Concerns

	Not worried or concerned at all (1)	A little worried or concerned (2)	Very worried or concerned (3)
Finding my way around the school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using a lock and locker	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Getting to class on time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Getting lost	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Moving through crowded hallways	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Remembering my class schedule	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Riding the bus to and from school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Carrying my books and supplies from class to class	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Academic Concerns

	Not worried or concerned at all (1)	A little worried or concerned (2)	Very worried or concerned (3)
The difficulty of my classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The amount of homework I will be assigned	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Having a different teacher for every subject	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Taking tests	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Completing class projects	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Having enough time to complete all of my work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Staying organized	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Getting good grades	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Social/Emotional Concerns

	Not worried or concerned at all (1)	A little worried or concerned (2)	Very worried or concerned (3)
Making new friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fitting in with my peers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being bullied by other students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Changing clothes for Physical Education (PE) class	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Managing stress	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Following school rules	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Finding someone to sit with during lunch	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being liked by my teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

One thing I am looking forward to about middle school is:

One thing I am NOT looking forward to about middle school is:

List any other concerns or questions you may have about starting middle school this year:

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