

USING TRANSITION TEAMS TO SUPPORT MIDDLE LEVEL LEARNERS

A Paper
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
North Dakota State University
of Agriculture and Applied Science

By

Aaron Dean Nelson

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
EDUCATION SPECIALIST

Major Program:
Educational Leadership

December 2016

Fargo, North Dakota

North Dakota State University
Graduate School

Title

USING TRANSITION TEAMS TO SUPPORT MIDDLE LEVEL
LEARNERS

By

Aaron Nelson

The Supervisory Committee certifies that this *disquisition* complies with North Dakota State University's regulations and meets the accepted standards for the degree of

EDUCATION SPECIALIST

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

Dr. Thomas Hall

Chair

Dr. Ann Clapper

Dr. Kevin Thompson

Approved:

12/12/2016

Date

Dr. William Martin

Department Chair

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the learning characteristics of young adolescent children and their unique learning needs. The study evaluates the implementation of a transition team to develop interventions in reading and math to support students in transition from an elementary school setting to a junior high school setting. This analysis of the nature of the child in transition from elementary school to a middle level setting, will guide the re-design and improvements necessary to ensure every child is receiving a quality educational experience. The research found measurable improvements in student assessments, particularly math, when compared to previous classes as a result of intervention efforts in reading and math. Transition efforts implemented as a part of this study resulted in improved awareness for seventh grade students and a more positive experience based on survey results of both parents and students.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
LIST OF APPENDIX TABLES.....	vii
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Purpose of the Study	3
Definition of Terms.....	4
Organization of Study.....	4
CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE.....	6
Transition.....	6
Unique Needs.....	6
Implications of Practice	14
Summary.....	24
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY	27
Review of Literature	28
Population	30
Instrumentations and Data Collection.....	30
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS	32
Study Details.....	32
District Assessment Data.....	33
Academic Data.....	36
Student Survey Data	38
Parent Survey Data	40
Teacher Survey Data.....	41

CHAPTER 5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND DISCUSSION	43
Summary of Findings.....	43
Conclusions.....	49
Discussion	51
REFERENCES	55
APPENDIX A. ROSEAU PUBLIC SCHOOL 5 YEAR TEST SUMMARY	59
APPENDIX B. STUDENT SURVEY	61
APPENDIX C. PARENT SURVEY	64
APPENDIX D. TEACHER SURVEY	67

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>Page</u>
4.1. District Assessment Results in Reading and Math.....	35
4.2. 7th Grade Student Academic Failures and Drop-outs 2006-2016.....	37
4.3. Student Survey Average Response.....	39
4.4. Parent Survey Average Response.....	41
4.5. Teacher Survey Average Response.....	42

LIST OF APPENDIX FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page</u>
A1. Roseau High School MAP Summary.....	59
A2. Roseau Elementary School MAP Summary.....	60

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

I've never run into a person who yearns for their Middle School days. ~ Jeff Kinney

In the examination of the progression of a child through the years of their childhood, a few monuments of fear and anxiety stand out amongst the plain of happiness that dominates the landscape of a happy childhood. The start of all day every day Kindergarten and the move to the middle school / junior high are two of those monuments. Nearly every parent can recall a tale of woe from the first days of school when a young child had to be peeled away from their parent and left in tears as their parents walked away. Similarly, tales of life in middle school dominate memories of adults, many of them reflecting on the dread of going to school, the bullying, homework, and other awful moments in the life of a young teenager. Few adults reflect on this moment in time and rank it as a highlight of their schooling experience.

Middle schools / junior highs are difficult by nature. It represents the first school transition for many students since their entry into the school system. Children are changing both physically and psychologically at extreme rates, leading to emotional and intellectual confusion as they try to understand the world around them. This complicated atmosphere can create feelings of excitement and anxiety for children as they attempt to navigate the change in setting while experiencing physical, emotional, and cognitive changes as a result of their emerging adolescence.

Professional educators and schools can play a vital role in assisting students through this difficult transition by creating systems that educate, monitor, and support students and their parents. Transition plans may start as early as a year prior to the transition, and continue to assist students into their high school years as a means of supporting students. These systems may involve parent meetings, exposure to middle schools, monitoring student progress, instructional

practices and routines that ensure students are engaged, and remediation strategies to support students struggling with the transition.

Statement of the Problem

Roseau High School has identified a history of lower student proficiency at the seventh grade level. In the Roseau School system, the seventh grade represents a transition year from elementary to a junior high where students experience hallways shared by grades 7-12 without sharing mixed grade classes. The junior high is largely similar to secondary systems common in most high schools; students follow a seven period schedule, are responsible for getting to classes on time, and meeting homework deadlines; the focus is on cognitive development, and the format of education is teacher-centered. Many of the teachers also teach secondary courses and follow a more traditional educational structure in the classroom. Over the past five years, test data has shown a considerable drop in student proficiency in math and reading as compared to scores at the conclusion of the sixth-grade year. Five year averages of year over year data from the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) *Measure of Academic Progress* assessment shows seventh grade students dropping an average of 36% in the number of students who achieve their expected growth as compared to the same students at the end of sixth grade. Students actually lose ground in math proficiency; five year averages indicate a growth index of -4.78 verses a national growth index for the same grade of +6. Reading scores fair better from sixth to seventh grade but fail to meet the growth students experience through grade five and again in grade nine and above. Based on a five-year average of NWEA year to year assessments, seventh grade dropped an average of 6.2% in the number of students who achieve their expected growth as compared to the same students for grades K-5. The average growth index of seventh grade students as measured by the MAP test is -.8 versus a national average growth index of +4.

Math and reading proficiency is only part of the story of transition difficulties at the Roseau High School. Other difficulties include homework non-completion, difficulties adapting to expectations of school work and attendance, student disengagement, parent communication concerns, and whole class instruction that fails to identify individual student needs. Graduation rates have suffered at Roseau High School and can likely be traced back to the difficulties experienced in 7th grade. Similarly, attendance concerns in grades 10-12 are likely related to difficulties students experienced in 7th grade and disengagement in academic achievement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to develop specific interventions for Reading and Math in grade seven that identify and support student learning needs and evaluate parent, student, and teacher feedback on junior high transition to answer the following questions:

1. Will implementing an Article of the Week program in grade seven, a reading and writing program designed to improve student close reading, citation, and writing skills, using a department team template created to unify language, method, and grading expectations for students, improve reading scores?
2. How will a math elective course designed to meet student learning needs in math through individualized instruction and practice on specific skills needed to assist students in exceeding math growth targets at 7th grade?
3. Are transition efforts effective based on student surveys designed to evaluate program efforts specifically targeting student transition needs from elementary into junior high?
4. Are transition efforts effective based on parent surveys designed to evaluate program efforts specifically targeting student transition needs from elementary into junior high?

5. Are transition efforts effective based on teacher surveys designed to evaluate program efforts specifically targeting student transition needs from elementary into junior high?

Definition of Terms

Education is filled with acronyms and vocabulary unique to educators and the practice of teaching. Many of these terms are common place only in the practice of education. To ensure a common understanding of vocabulary, the following definitions are provided to accurately define the terms as they apply to this research.

Junior High: an educational setting between elementary grades and high school. Teachers are organized by subject-based departments, traditional instruction dominates, 6-8 periods per day, subject-centered, and emphasis is on cognitive development (Powell, 2005, p. 17).

Middle School: an educational setting between elementary grades and high school. Teachers are organized in teams, learning is experiential, allows for flexible scheduling, offers advisor/advisee opportunities, and is student oriented (Powell, 2005, p. 17).

Transition: The process of a period of changing from one state or condition to another

Transescent: young people in transition from childhood to adolescence (Eichhorn, October 1968)

Organization of the Study

This research is comprised of several chapters with the following format:

Chapter 1 presented the history and nature of transition difficulties at the Roseau School and schools in general. It presents a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, significance of the study, definition of terms, and organization of the study.

Chapter 2 contains a review of literature and research related to middle school transitions and biological changes experienced by children entering adolescence. The literature review examines who transescents are, their unique needs physically, emotionally, and cognitively. Chapter 2 examines the implications on practice both in a traditional sense, exploring what does not work effectively, and best practice strategies that prove effective based on study of middle school students. This section also raises questions of the long-term impact of adolescence on both social/emotional development and academic development.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology of the study and the procedures used to gather data for the study. It also examines the population of students to be included in the study, the survey methods to be used to gather information, and the use of student academic data for analyzing the impact of the study.

Chapter 4 contains the findings of the study. This chapter lists the results of the research into the academic data for students in the past ten years. The chapter summarizes the results of the assessment data used in the study as well as the survey results from the parent, student, and teacher surveys.

Chapter 5 summarizes the study, examines the conclusions drawn from the study results and offers some evaluation of the study results. The discussion section of this chapter provides a critical look at the study results and editorializes how these results may be used to improve the transition efforts for a junior high school.

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE

The study of junior high transitions is not a new phenomenon in the research of educational theory. Professionals both in and outside of education have tried to understand the complex nature of the junior high student and explain to parents, teachers, and communities how young adolescents think and function.

Transition

Always in change. “Transescents” – the prefix “trans” meaning “to go across” and the suffix “escent” meaning “to become something” – are young people in transition from childhood to adolescence (Eichhorn, October 1968). For many people, change is difficult. The known is now unknown or no longer certain and the effort to understand the new is complicated by the uncertainty of trying to establish a new equilibrium. The change for a child into a teenager is one of these difficult changes that hold great uncertainty. No longer a child but not a teenager or adolescent, the term transescent attempts to accurately describe the moment of time between these two stages of development. The certainty of childhood gives way to the uncertainty of intellectual growth, moral understanding, and physical and emotional development without the experience of the adolescent who can more expertly harness self-determination. This “going across” moment coincides most consistently with grades 6-8 in most schools in the United States. Most commonly referred to as middle school, this educational environment must account for the all of the physical, emotional, and intellectual factors of child growth while helping to establish a foundation for learning that enables all students to acquire knowledge.

Unique Needs

The transescent learner possesses unique needs from that of a child or adolescent. These needs correlate to the uncertainty the learner is experiencing as they grow beyond the simple

nature of a child into a young adult with the ability to comprehend the complex. While the child's brain is able to begin to intellectually understand complex in many ways they are still a child. Inexperience with adult thinking, physical, and emotional immaturity create uncertainty and expose needs more like that of a child than an adult. Transescents often possess the physical and intellectual attributes of an adolescent while lacking the emotional stability expected of a mature teenager (Williams-Boyd, 2003). More often they possess emotional needs more familiar to a child, resulting in expectations from adults that exceed their emotional capabilities.

Physical Development

Perhaps no other aspect of growth and development in the life of a transescent receives so much attention as that of physical growth and development. Few teens are complimented on their growth in abstract thinking in the past 6 months or receive compliments on their capacity for moral judgment. Physical development is the most objective measure of change for young teens and it impacts both emotional and psychological development as children yearn for the desirable physical attributes that distinguish them from a child and bring them desirable attention. Williams-Boyd (2003) described the difficult struggle for transescents as they try to find the "normal" in the new world in which they find themselves; only discovering that "what is normal developmentally for transescents looks quite different from what is normal at any other stage of growth..." (p. 83). Williams-Boyd further described physical development as a confusing experience "in which difference is the rule and not the exception [which] provokes unease in transescents and understanding in teachers" (p. 83). There is an uncomfortable awareness as young teens experience a different perspective of expectations on them socially and morally as they develop an increasing awareness of their sexuality. Driven by hormones but expected to restrain impulse can create great difficulties for young teens. "All these hormonal

demands, interacting with an increasingly open, diverse, and complicated high-media society, create perceptions and ideals that can be both constructive and destructive” (Judah, 2014, p. 26). This new physical development brings a new struggle for teens, social status and acceptance based on physical development and sexuality. “These young students feel constant pressure to gain acceptance through their appearance, which often results in mood swings, bullying, and frequent changes in opinions” (Akos, Queen, & Lineberry, 2005, p. 19). While physical development may play a diminished role in intellectual learning, it is the stage upon which all other aspects of development play out the drama of creation of a young adult. It is the lightning rod for positive and negative reinforcement, for stereotypes, for sexuality, and for social acceptance. For this reason, understanding of physical development is a key factor in the success teachers can have with students in their efforts to encourage learning. While intellectual growth may be the focus of an educational setting, physical development plays an outsized role in how that happens particularly in the junior high.

Social and Emotional Development

During this stage of puberty, young teens develop a sense of self-consciousness that causes them to question who they are, what they are, what they want to be, and how they want to be seen. Given the constant change that defines this stage of life, they find themselves facing uncertainty with how to project their desired image to others, and interpreting the feedback they receive from their peers and adults (Williams-Boyd, 2003). Not wanting to be stereotyped so as to limit their individuality, yet afraid of the uncertainty of being socially alone or excluded, transescents become vulnerable. The prescription for vulnerability is social attachment; a peer group of similar-minded people that can shield from feelings of isolation, validate emerging moral and social understandings, and protection from bullying or unwanted influences.

A self-centered focus is a defining aspect of a transescent. “To say that students’ self-consciousness or self-centeredness in thinking everyone and everything is about them is at its pinnacle in young adolescence ... [is an] understatement” (Williams-Boyd, 2003, p. 98). Students in this developmental stage seek outward attention from others while constantly trying to understand and validate their own self-perception. This effort to know themselves is not fluid, rather filled with abrupt and sudden changes that create confusion and further complicate a sense of self. Akos, Queen, and Lineberry (2005) described scenarios where teens confound adults with their fluid transitions in social groups, identities, opinions, appearance, and moods; at times abandoning roles or principles with little effort as they seek to fit in. As young teens seek to “find themselves” they expose themselves to social criticism from a society that seeks to stick a label on someone and move on. This makes them vulnerable to bullying, sexual pressures, and alienation as they find themselves shut out from groups due to the stigmas accumulated through their socially curious behavior. In 2011 the Pew Research Center defined some common characteristics of the adolescent:

- They take risks, are curious, and love danger and adventure, yet their feelings can be hurt easily
- This is the time they feel immortal, but they worry what their friends think about them
- They want to be independent from their families, and at the same time, they need to be pampered and protected
- They withdraw and want a private life, but at the same time, they post everything about themselves, including revealing pictures, online

- They withdraw from family and worry excessively about being accepted by peers (pp. 1-2)

The rollercoaster in emotions and pin balling between social groups does not result in a pleasurable experience for transescents. Peer pressure, bullying, and confusion with sexuality create a heightened apprehension for teens, exposing mental health concerns including anxiety, depression, anorexia, thoughts of suicide, and extremely risky behaviors. It is at this moment, vulnerable and exposed, feeling alone and isolated, that the young teen seeks the familiar, the normal, a place of certainty on which they can find firm footing, and a trusted relationship with someone who they trust. “Positive relationships with school personnel ...contribute to lower dropout rates” (Akos, Queen, & Lineberry, 2005, p. 55). Positive relationships with school personnel can lead to success with guidance through the process of education (Super, 2014). At a time when parents feel pushed away, their young teen seeks the comfort of knowing a sense of stability and trust. Similarly, a positive relationship with teachers and coaches is more about having a trusted source to help navigate change than it is about learning a subject or sport. “Research shows that positive relationships between students and teachers, student participation in extracurricular activities, and smaller school size contribute to lower dropout rates” (Akos, Queen, & Lineberry, 2005, p. 55). Frequently, teachers and coaches become confidants for young teens as they try to work through the struggles of puberty, as they fear the loss of family love or alienation they risk confiding in their parents (Williams-Boyd, 2003).

The most effective educators at the middle level are those who “can empathize with students because they remember what it was like when they were that age” (Wormeli, 2011, p. 49). Understanding adults who can empathize with the difficulties of transition is the key for success at the junior high level and an important factor in reducing failure at the high school

level. One way to empathize with students at this level is to reflect on our own adolescent experience, remember our vulnerabilities, passions and friendships, and communicate those experiences with our students (Armstrong, 2016). Teachers who are sensitive to the signs of students who are struggling emotionally and trained with skills to help students deal with their struggles can become the most effective intervention for any transescent.

More importantly, teachers need to recognize that transescents are already anxious about the transition to junior high. The message subtly driven home in Elementary school are the negatives of the next level and how current undesirable behaviors will “not be tolerated” at the next level, creates an angst for young children that permeates their experience during the transition year (Lorain, 2015). Students in elementary school settings typically travel to and from classrooms under the direct supervision of an adult, getting to where they need to be on time is not their concern; in middle school they become responsible for their own movement, leading to concerns about tardiness and missing homework deadlines (Akos, Queen, & Lineberry, 2005). This anxiety combined with increased expectations of responsibility and maturity by teachers and parents can drive transescents to other sources of comfort that may possess higher risk factors. Teachers may intentionally or unintentionally provoke negative or stressful reactions in students by calling them out in front of others, making them feel different or less adequate, and thus provoking angry reactions or aggravating emotional stress (Horner, Wallace, & Bundick, 2015). Junior high teachers must be sensitive to the transition needs of young teens, develop appropriate supports and prevention programs, and reinforce positive messages that encourage and motivate young learners during this difficult phase. The transescent needs to be constantly reminded that their experience is not unique and failure is not permanent.

Moral / Intellectual Development

Transescents are novice teens lacking the experience of their older peers in decision making and wielding the power of responsibility. Failure should be expected and embraced as learning opportunities. Too often education at the junior high level disintegrates into behavior management. It becomes an effort to teach compliance and break resistance to adult authority.

If students struggle with impulsive behaviors, such as making inappropriate noises, sending text messages during a lesson, or making snide remarks, these behaviors should not affect their grade for content knowledge. Academic grades should only report what's in the curriculum. When teachers can separate impulsive, immature behavior from academics, there's hope for students.

(Wormeli, 2011, p. 50)

Impulse behaviors are synonymous with teens. Yet, when confronted by these behaviors, educators often seek to punish the behavior rather than correct or instruct the child on how to avoid future mistakes. One can fall into the trap of focusing on rewarding behavior and compliance rather than learning. Emphasizing homework completion, respectful compliance, obedience, and mandating respect has the effect of de-emphasizing content learning in favor of a well-behaved child. This at a time when brain development is occurring that enables a child to comprehend a grey area between the black and white certainties of elementary school.

Understanding what the world is, consists of understanding what it is not. This is the age where the childish adherence to rules because they are the rules gives way to the individual rationalization of what is right despite what the rules say. Piaget's theory of Cognitive Development suggested that transescents are able to think in the abstract, comprehend theoretical, hypothetical, and counterfactual thinking, and can apply principals of learning

beyond context (Williams-Boyd, 2003). These students are able to think about thinking and trade concrete concepts for those that lack physical or visual reinforcement such as “what if” scenarios experienced in nearly every junior high class discussion. Brain research supports Piaget’s theory to the extent that brain development in the prefrontal and parietal lobes begins in the teenage years and continues into the early 20s (Kuhn, 2006). This region of the brain is associated with executive functioning responsible for impulse control, judgement, organization, and controlling the emotional responses of the limbic system of the brain associated with flight or fight impulses (Spinelli-Nannen & Green, 2014). While transescents are capable of abstract thought and rationality like adults, their brains are only beginning to develop the ability to exercise the ability to act like an adult. Prefrontal cortex development lags that of other areas of the brain, meaning the young teenager is able to think maturely as an adult absent emotional or social factors (Armstrong, 2016). When factors such as feelings or peer pressure are introduced, the thinking of adolescents is driven by more developed areas of the brain such as the limbic system overruling rationality and reason, resulting in impulse and moody reactions.

Kohlberg’s theory of Moral Development proposed that transescents experience changes in their ability to rationalize behavior. Moving beyond conventional levels where rules are followed because they respect rules and seek approval for being well behaved; these young teens are beginning to rationalize behavior. They begin to understand a higher morality, a sense of right and wrong beyond laws and rules. They begin to value doing right by people over rules or choose behavior that is self-centered despite consequences for that behavior. This is a time when students push against barrier and limits set by their parents, teachers, schools, communities (Williams-Boyd, 2003). They demand to be listened to, to be heard, to know why when all the adults hear is that they want their own way. They challenge accepted beliefs, question routines,

and demand explanation for the simplest of tasks. They possess the capacity for complex thought but lack the skills, resulting both in silly and weak rationality coupled with acute insights into conventional wisdom.

Despite the desire for independence, transescents are fairly maladroit at exercising it with responsibility. Research proposes that teachers need to create nurturing classroom environments that allow students to become autonomous and take their own initiative, allow students to have an active role in determining classroom rules and consequences for actions, help students to understand and examine values when solving problems, and democratic systems in classrooms that help students understand both responsibilities and rights (Akos, Queen, & Lineberry, 2005). One study implied that a transition risk introduced in middle school or junior high is a greater level of teacher control and discipline that encourages fewer opportunities for student decision making, choice, and self-management as compared with elementary school (Wigfield, Eccles, Mac Iver, Reoman, & Midgley, 1991). Best practices in developing student's moral understandings and support their need for rationality behind rules would be the creation of shared leadership systems that empower students to make impactful decisions at the classroom or school level, service learning activities based in the local community, or a student tutoring program (Michael, 2014).

Implications of Practice

Traditional Practice

The traditional learning activities imploring students to sit and consume a text-based curriculum and restate their learning on an assessment, lead students to three different conclusions: comply to maintain acceptance, refuse to cooperate due to a lack of relevance, or choose to avoid attention by “doing school” while being intellectually disengaged. Any of these

coping strategies are evident in a teacher-centered classroom absent a mechanism for student engagement. A teacher centered classroom is one where the teacher takes sole responsibility for the learning activities and remains in direct command of the learning environment. Students choose a path of getting through emotionally flat classrooms where the teacher is in control of the learning. The faker, the rebel, or the pleaser are all similar in that they are not engaged though each approaches the task of “doing school” differently. In any case, they do not feel a connection with the content they are learning because the relevance to their own self-conscious existence has not been established. According to Armstrong (2016), these teacher centered classrooms stifle the adolescent brain’s need for peer interaction, self-actualization, creative expression, engaging learning activities, and opportunities for decision making. These emotionally flat classrooms ignore or suppress transescents need for stimulation of the emotional brain to make connections in learning.

Disengagement

Observe a third grade classroom and notice the energy and excitement for learning they possess. Activities are engaging and the students are proud to show their accomplishments. As children age their need for connections to content learning grow as well, unfortunately, teaching methodology does not always adapt appropriately. A series of national surveys describe a trend nationally that suggests that we are stifling the flame of passionate learning in public education:

A large scale national survey of middle and high school students ... revealed that more than half of all 10th grade students were bored in class and less than half enjoyed being at school, while another survey of 14-15 year olds Revealed that only 33 percent of girls and 20 percent of boys were seen by their parents to be actively engaged in school. A national Gallup Student Poll ... found that 75

percent of elementary school students were actively involved and invested in school, while only 44 percent of high school students had the same level of engagement. (Armstrong, 2016, p. 27)

Many of the students refer to themselves as “robo-students” and explain that school is a matter of going through the motions, “doing the lesson”... or “doing school.” ... Although they garner high grades and appear academically successful, students privately concede that they do not actually learn or retain the intended material. (Armstrong, 2016, p. 80)

These survey results would suggest that we are slowly starving students of the air of inspiration as they progress through school. Schools are attempting to force students into a system of doing school that does not motivate or connect to their ways of learning.

Emotionally Flat Curriculums

At an age when the transescent is craving interaction with peers, validation of their ability to create their own understanding, and independence from pointless rules and expectations; we see classrooms that become more teacher centered, less interactive, and involve more rote memorization. Armstrong’s (2016) research advised “at the point when transescents are entering the developmental stage of formal operational thinking and are able to think deeply about their own thinking, curriculums begin to devote more attention to lower-order skills, such as fact recall, formulas, and details” (p. 30). This understanding is further complicated by the fact that most junior high students are novices at reflecting on their own learning and often lack the communication skills to express their needs. Their lack of engagement or learning may be expressed through acting out in class, or behaving inappropriately. Celli (2014) reminds “middle school staff that [they] must always be looking for underlying sources of outcomes and

behaviors” (p.59). Acting out defiantly or refusing to participate may be less of an indication of resistance to the teacher or the lesson and merely a misplaced response to some other struggle involving friends, home, family, or bullying.

Focus of Communication

Communication from the teacher also changes in the junior high for both parent and student. Where elementary schools tend to be more personal in the interactions between teacher, parent, and student; middle and high schools tend to become less personal. Elementary teachers typically have a set number of students for the year and develop a close, trusted relationship becoming the sole source of information for student and parents. Whereas, in a junior high setting, a student may have several different teachers though out the day, none of them having sole responsibility for communication important information to parent and student. “For the parent, this means there is no one go-to teacher with who the parent may have cultivated a supportive and collaborative relationship” (Pickhardt, 2011, para. 6). Furthermore, “parents can feel kept more at a distance by teachers who seem less responsive and harder to reach because they are now responsible for many more students who they know less well” (Pickhardt, 2011). Middle and high school teachers tend to maintain an attitude that students need to take responsibility for their homework, make-up work, absences, etc. “Part of the mission of middle school is helping students learn the self-management and social skills that will be necessary to successfully some with high school ... [such as]... the discipline to keep track of homework and the work ethic to process it on time” (Pickhardt, 2011, para. 9). In elementary schools, teachers approach their students and parents when they notice behaviors that may impair academic success. In junior high, the responsibility is placed on students and parents to seek out teachers to inquire about the needs of the student. The major flaw in this notion at the junior high level is

that we have not taught the student how to do this nor provided them a means for doing so. Parents, who have become accustomed to consistent communication of concerns, are left with a sense of abandonment as they find their child struggling in classes but receiving no information from teachers explaining the areas for improvement. Parent involvement is critical for student success at the junior high level, so keeping parents informed is vital to helping students thrive during transition. Research implied that “students with high level of parental involvement and perceived teacher support had higher grade point averages than peers with high levels of just one or neither of these factors” (Akos, Queen, & Lineberry, 2005, p. 41).

Student Centered Classrooms

Student centered classrooms are classrooms where students are given tasks organized by the teacher where outcomes, learning, and connections to real-life experiences are student led. These classrooms are places alive with activity as students move, interact with peers, and engage with their learning activities. Active learning activities would involve problem solving with a focus on real-world problems allowing students to think both in a practical and abstract sense. “In one study of middle school students perception of learning experiences, most students reported that active learning motivated them more often than lecture, overhead, or textbook learning” (Armstrong, 2006, para. 20). These classrooms are designed to embrace the energy of the transescent and harness their excitement to achieve learning, not stifle it with exercises in conformity and compliance. Lorain (2015) and Armstrong (2015) suggest providing lots of opportunity for students to move around and work in groups on inquiry-based learning activities; projects that involve social awareness and investigations that tap transescents emerging social awareness and concern. Armstrong (2006) proposed that when students are given the opportunity to have a voice in the determination of the learning experiences in the classroom

they become more motivated to learn. The classroom these authors envision is one where the learning needs of individual students is of greater value than curriculum coverage. Classrooms where learning is personal and relevant, accessed through activities that encourage students to engage with peers and explore real-world issues through project or inquiry based learning projects.

Personalized Learning and Interventions

How do we assess the learning of the transescent and remediate learning when goals are not met? Students achieve at different levels for a variety of factors, many of which are not academically related. Too often teachers and some parents diagnose poor performance as laziness or a lack of effort. Homework completion is a common point of conflict for parents and teachers alike when dealing with the poor performance of a young teen. Efforts to teach the child a lesson on responsibility often lead to suggestions to let the student fail and learn the lesson of responsibility as a consequence. Experts would disagree with this logic. In fact, most transescents do not auto-correct, rather they adjust to working less and to accepting more failure as acceptable, or losing competence which may lead to further declines in performance (Pickhardt, 2011). Rather than employing the “sink or swim” strategy for academic success at the junior high and risk long-term disengagement, a more proactive approach to developing an individual program for success is recommended.

Data has become a buzz word in education since No Child Left Behind raised awareness of student achievement scores and led to annual reviews of student test scores. Reviewing data from state administered assessments or whole class data is valuable but not at an individual student level. Wormeli (2011) advocated focusing on how students are moving toward their own learning goals, not how they grow as compared to their peers. This effort addresses two

adolescent concerns, the need to be successful in learning tasks and the vastly different rates of metacognitive development of transescents. Developing individual learning targets for students and monitoring their progress toward these goals is a highly effective practice. In a report on absenteeism, the University of California – Los Angeles submitted three supports for students and learning that relate to this issue of junior high transitions: support transitions for both families and students, increase home and school connections and engagement, and address barriers to learning/teaching through improved personalized instruction, increased accommodations, and by providing special assistance as soon as problems arise (UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2016).

Both the need for transition support and better communication have been highlighted in previous sections, but what of the need for personalized accommodations? How do teachers know when problems arise? Alexander and Nicholas (2014) suggest that this effort to personalize learning and develop effective intervention strategies to support struggling learners is best achieved through an expansion of Response to Intervention in junior highs. Response to Intervention offers a systematic and purposeful means to provide academic and behavior support for all learners (Alexander & Young, 2014). The system consists of four essential components: screening, progress monitoring, multilevel prevention system, and data-based decision making. Students are universally assessed through a universal screening assessment to determine baseline proficiencies for individual students. Progress monitoring, or repeated assessments, look at individual student growth. Interventions are evidence based instructional practices used with groups of students demonstrating learning needs based on the assessments. The model ranks students in three tiers based on the level of intervention support needed. Tier 1 represents the majority of students who are at or above grade level, Tier 2 students may be slightly behind and

at risk of falling further behind, and Tier 3 students are very far behind and require immediate remediation (Alexander & Young, 2014). This model relies on early detection of academic gaps in student learning. As gaps are identified by teachers and diagnosed to determine deficiencies, interventions are put in place to address the specific learning needs of students. These interventions vary depending on the circumstance but increase with intensity as the needs of the students become more pronounced. As learning needs increase, so do interventions including extended time periods for math and reading for low performing Tier 3 students.

Transition Programs

The success of students moving from elementary school to the junior high depends on the transition program and its ability to meet individual student's needs. Transition programs are systems that pinpoint real or potential difficulties students face as they move from the elementary school into the junior high. These programs develop activities, curriculum, strategies, and supports for students, parents, and teachers that support the move. The transition period may span a couple of years to accommodate the physical, emotional, and cognitive needs of students. They typically start a year prior to the transition to build awareness, and conclude when school data shows a decrease in need. Attributes of successful transition programs include; "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, and recognition that becoming comfortable in a new school setting is an ongoing process, not a single event" (Akos, Queen, & Lineberry, 2005, p. 62). A comprehensive program would include helping students form a realistic expectation of what junior high is like, providing positive experiences for students, and a successful introduction to junior high (Lorain, 2015). This may include events and activities for both

parents and students that introduce junior high staff and help students become familiar with the school and develop a sense of the school's environment prior to the transition.

Teachers and staff must be trained in the complexities of the transescent experience and how to address those needs. Junior high teachers should be well versed in the developmental needs of their students and the anxieties of change, including how to neutralize these anxieties (Lorain, 2015). Monitoring students to determine which students are struggling with the transition experience and how they may be assisted is important to ensuring the success of the transition program. The absence of the personal connection with teachers and adult staff will lead students to mask difficulties they may be experiencing for fear their experience is unique. Some junior highs assign students to a homeroom setting where a specific teacher is responsible for a small number of students daily, and monitors their progress including advising and mentoring students to ensure their success at the middle level (Armstrong, 2006). This personal connection is effective at detecting learning, social, or developmental needs early and providing support early for students. Empathetic teachers become the vital link between struggling transescents, parents, and successful learners by uncovering student needs and effectively communicating with parents to ensure support both at home and at school.

Counterpoint

The world of a junior high transescent is a complicated place. Hormones, peer pressure, bullying, growth spurts, brain development, sex, and friends all rolled into a couple of years between the 6th and 8th grade. It would be easy to pick out one factor and create solutions for that one aspect, ignoring all others. Conversely, one cannot simply remove all the distractions from the whirlwind of transescence to focus on learning. While this research focuses on transitions

and the accompanying drop in achievement; some research intimated there is a naturally occurring achievement drop in early adolescence.

With all the ... changes... it is no wonder that for many young people there is a loss of traditional academic focus and motivation, and with this loss an 'early adolescent achievement drop' can occur as schoolwork is resisted, neglected, or forgotten (Pickhardt, 2011, para. 19).

Despite every effort to eliminate the drop in academic performance that accompanies a significant transition like the move from elementary school to a junior high, there will be students who do not make a smooth transition. There are many unknown factors that can subvert the best intervention efforts; divorce, depression, stress, social factors, or disengagement are a few examples.

Some contemporary research would even suggest that the transition difficulties faced by transescents in the junior high are overstated. A study in 2000 found that 40 percent of youth were well adjusted, compared to 33 percent who had problems with the junior high transition (Akos, Queen, & Lineberry, 2005). Other research indicates that "70 to 75 percent of early adolescents negotiate the phase without extreme difficulty" (Akos, Queen, & Lineberry, 2005, p. 26). While there are clearly a few bold examples of students who struggle to make a successful start in the junior high, a majority of students adapt quickly and require very little individual support.

Teachers have a complicated job with many demands on time and focus. Many teacher education programs fail to fully prepare teachers to deal with complex factors such as social and emotional needs of transescents. One report addressed the fact that many teachers and support staff in their professional training or continuing education, were not taught strategies for re-

engaging students who have become disengaged from the school (UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2016). Many schools are not adequately staffed with mental health professionals or other trained to assist teachers and students with the difficulties of transition. These factors can play a significant role in the success of students as they age through the transescent phase even with the presence of quality transition programs.

Summary

The developmental experience of the transescent is a complicated episode that involves physiological, psychological, and cognitive changes that occur rapidly during a short period of time. Other than the first 18 months of life, there is no other period of life that experiences more change than from 10 to 14 years of age (Akos, Queen, & Lineberry, 2005). Research on the subject of the transescent experience describes these few years of the early teen age experience as some of the most difficult years of childhood. This period of extreme change creates a complicated and confusing environment in which a child's body and mind develops, creating uncertainty as well-established patterns of social, educational, and cognitive behaviors change in often confusing ways. The child in transition can become lost in the process of trying to understand this new experience. As more individual and nurturing school experiences give way to more segmented and individually responsible learning environments, children can find themselves grasping for assurances of normality. These can take the form of seeking peer approval, resistance to adult influence, and developing beliefs based on an increased social awareness. The mind of the child also gives way to the more intellectual and connected mind of the adult, capable of rational thought. These learners begin to develop views of the world based on the facts harvested from experience rather than accepting those views handed them by adults.

They experience physical growth, sexuality, and development of moral understanding that expose them to a world previously hidden to their immature minds.

With these changes bring challenges for transescents in the most familiar regions of their life; social, educational, and emotional. Research shows that relationships change, school becomes more impersonal, and social experiences begin to dominate the child's thinking. School is often at the center of these changes. Professional educators can play a key role in assisting transescents through the storm of changes they experience, especially in junior high. The teacher with their training and experience can support students and parents as they experience the uncertainties of the transescent experience. Teachers can develop classroom learning experiences that meet the needs of young learners both physically through active learning projects and opportunities for cooperative learning, and also through learning experiences that allow students to begin to develop their own understanding and exercise the capacities of their developing brain. The early detection of transition difficulties can result in better educational experiences for students leading to fewer students becoming disengaged with the educational experience, resulting in fewer drop-outs.

These efforts by teachers can be supported through coordinated transition programs that begin prior to the student moving to a junior high setting. Experts on transescents find that schools with a well-designed transition program involving parents, teachers, and support staff, are more effective at ensuring a smooth transition for students. Students are prepared for the move though an organized system that involves preparing students for what the junior high will be like and assuaging fears by exposing students to the junior high experience in small amounts, including orientations aimed at familiarizing students with middle level environments prior to having to survive them. Parents are also educated on the nature of junior highs and provided

communications that help them support their child's learning at home. Teachers are provided training to help them understand their students, empathize with their struggles, and provide supportive classrooms that encourage students to reach their potential.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

The difficulty of starting junior high has been well documented. The changes in body chemistry, brain development, social development, and physical location all contribute to the difficulty of beginning a new stage in the education process. In most educational settings, a change as significant as moving to a new building with new peer groups and instructors can bring on a level of anxiety for most students. Moving from the known to the unknown is compounded with the changes in educational delivery and expectations of the middle level education setting. Transitions of this nature have been proven to expose learning difficulties, regression in learned skills, and a shift in focus from academic to non-academic priorities more akin to surviving than thriving.

At Roseau High School this change in setting occurs between 6th and 7th grade. As students move from an elementary setting to a Junior High, data clearly shows it is a difficult change for many students. The historical assessment data has documented a decline in scores after sixth and recovering by ninth grade. This regression, particular to the areas of reading and math, reflects a system flaw in the manner in which students are assisted with this transition.

This research examined the elements of a successful transition program for students moving from an elementary setting to a junior high or middle school setting. It identified the elements of a successful transition program, specifically the formation of a transition team designed to identify and remediate the education experiences unique to the transescent learner, a learner in transition between child and adolescent. The research specifically examined the current transition program used by the Roseau School district and the accompanying assessment data, and compare this to best practice research. Following the literature review and comparison,

a field study involving the implementation of specific interventions in the areas of math and reading was conducted with seventh grade students beginning the fall semester of 2016.

Review of Literature

The examination of the difficulties of transitions between levels of education, i.e. elementary, middle, and secondary, is widely researched. This paper examines more specifically the systems and practices employed at the middle level to target students susceptible to transition difficulties. The Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE) is an excellent repository of articles from educators, researchers, and principals on the unique qualities of middle level learners and educational systems.

A state affiliate of AMLE is the Minnesota Middle School Association (MMSA) is a resource network of practicing and retired professionals with experience in the area of transitions. A number of these professionals have insights into the pitfalls and successes of transition programs that will assist in the development of a program designed to meet the realities of middle level learners.

The Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development is another national organization with an online database of research by practicing principal and educators. This research, typically reviewed and summarized in articles in their publication *Educational Leadership* provide leaders with best practice solutions and supporting data to many of the difficulties experienced by today's learners. Several of these articles focus on learners in the middle and the unique characteristics of learning at this level. *The Middle/High Years / Moving Up to the Middle* (Wormeli, 2011), and *The Best Schools* (Armstrong, 2006) are two ASCD sources on middle level learners and the unique learning characteristics of these students.

The National Education Association, a national teacher's union, has an online database of sponsored research and articles on the subject of middle level learning. Practical classroom practices for teachers from teachers in the profession who have the experience of working in the classroom, these articles give a practical perspective to research theory of junior high education.

The Center for Mental Health in Schools at the University of California Los Angeles, provides valuable resources on addressing mental health concerns for adolescents including difficulties with transitions. Specifically, the center publishes a newsletter which addresses concerns on student engagement, attendance, bullying, and parent support as they relate to transitions to the middle level.

Research on Junior high transitions include *Betwixt and Between* (2014) by Young and Michael, whose research focuses on the social and emotional development needs of students in the junior high years. Akos, Queen, and Lineberry (2005) identify specific elements of a successful transition program in their book *Promoting a Successful Transition to Middle School. Middle Grades Education* (2003) a reference handbook on many aspects of teaching at the middle level, contains several programming and organizational strategies to assist school leaders with successful efforts to support learners.

The practice of research and the methods that accompany the gathering of data to evaluate the effectiveness of programming are informed through academic resources focusing on the practice of research involving human subjects. Specifically, these articles include: "A catalog of biases in questionnaires" written by Choi and Pak, published in the Center for Disease Control and Prevention publication *Preventing Chronic Disease* (2005); "Helping respondents get it right the first time: the influence of words, symbols, and graphics in web surveys" by Christian, Dillman, and Smyth published in *Public Opinion Quarterly* (2007); and

“Demystifying survey research: practical suggestion for effective question design” by Charbonneau and published in *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice* (Charbonneau, 2007).

Population

The focus of this study is on transitions between grade six to grade seven at the Roseau Schools. Grade level populations vary from 74 to 112 students. The current seventh grade has 104 students. The transition experience of these students will be compared with that of previous students dating back 10 years.

Parents of current grade eight students as well as parents of seventh grades students will be surveyed about transitions both before and after the study to examine the effectiveness of the transition program. This process will involve approximately 210 parents of the classes of 2021 and 2022.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

The assessment of the success of an effective transition program relies on several measures. The research into the history of transition difficulties at Roseau High School centers primarily on the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measure of Academic Progress assessment in the areas of Math and Reading. Due to an extensive history of testing data, norms, and trends, this data will provide a baseline for comparing students both historically and currently. A second assessment used in this study is the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) assessment produced by Renaissance Learning. The Roseau School district has used this assessment in Reading and Math for a number of years. This set of data provides a reference for the academic impact of transition programs.

Traditional academic measures such as grades earned, course failures, failing grades, and graduation rates will also be evaluated as a part of this research. Data from the student information system tracking student grades and course failures was collected for the past 10 years, individual student identities removed, and analyzed to compare across cohorts of students. This data will help to eliminate cohort biases that may lead to inaccurate conclusions about the success of the initiatives.

Quantitative data relating to the transitional experience of sixth graders entering seventh grade, parent perspectives of transition concerns, and current seventh grade students were gathered using surveys. These surveys assess student and parents perspectives relating to several factors of the transition process. These surveys assess student's experiences with and without a structured transition program. The survey also gathers quantitative parent feedback data about the transition experience for both students previously in seventh grade during the 2015-16 school year and those who entered seventh grade in the fall of 2016.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

At the conclusion of the 1st Quarter of the Fall 2016 semester; academic, district testing and parent, student and teacher survey data was collected and analyzed. The data was organized and purged of identifying student information to ensure security of individual student identification. The information included in this chapter is divided into 6 sections. The Study Details section describes survey response rate and demographic data of students enrolled in Roseau School. The District Assessment Data section will summarize the results of the reading and math initiatives in 7th grade based on district-wide assessments. The Academic Data section will summarize the history of academic performance of seventh grade students and include current seventh grade academic performance in relevant categories. The Student Survey Data section will summarize the results of the student surveys designed to assess the effectiveness of transition efforts in seventh grade in the 2016-17 school year and compare those results with students who completed seventh grade in 2015-16 when transition efforts were not in place. The Parent Survey Data section will summarize the results of the parent surveys designed to assess the effectiveness of transition efforts in seventh grade in the 2016-17 school year and compare those results with parents whose children completed seventh grade in 2015-16 when transition efforts were not in place. The Teacher Survey Data section will summarize the results of the teacher survey regarding the effectiveness of transition efforts for the 2016-17 school year.

Study Details

Demographic Details

The Roseau School District currently has an enrollment of 1174 students consisting of a majority of white students (96.5%) of which less than one percent (.3%) are English Language Learners, a Special Education population of 15.3% and a Free/Reduced Lunch population of

28.4%. The district has experienced several years of declining student enrollment since peak enrollment in 1995 of just over 1500 students. The Roseau School district trends slightly above the state average in the areas of Reading and Math. Over the past five years the district average proficiency in Reading is 3.1% above the state average while the district average proficiency in Math is 3.9% above the state average.

Response Rate

The participants of the study were divided into three groups; 2015-16 seventh grade students and their parents, 2016-17 seventh grade students and their parents, and teachers of students in grades seven and eight. The seventh-grade class of 2015-16 had 101 students and 107 unique families (unduplicated families tied to each student). The response rate to the survey of seventh grade students in the 2015-16 school year was 13 students; while the response rate for parents of seventh graders in the 2015-16 school year was 14 parents. The seventh-grade class of 2016-17 has 103 students and 107 unique families. The response rate to the survey of seventh grade students in the 2016-17 school year was 39 students; while the response rate for parents of seventh graders in the 2016-17 school year was 21 parents. The response rate for teachers of seventh and eighth grade students at the Roseau School was 11 teachers out of 14.

District Assessment Data

The Roseau School district employees two district wide assessments that measure student performance in the areas of reading and math. The Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment is administered once in the Fall and once in the Spring to each student and measures student growth in specific domains in reading and math. The Fall assessment serves as a benchmark measure of student proficiency, while the Spring test serves as a growth measurement of student learning over the course of the school year. The district also uses the Standardized

Testing and Reporting (STAR) test in the areas of reading and math. Students are assessed using the STAR test at the beginning of the school year to achieve a baseline score, then assessed at the end of academic quarters one, two, and three to benchmark growth in reading and math.

The historical trend for students entering seventh grade indicates limited growth in both reading and math. Appendix A is a five-year summary report of MAP data for students in the Roseau School district. When compared to MAP student growth norms at a national level, this chart provides a better sense of how Roseau students at each grade level compare to student averages nationwide. This data, averaged from the past 5 years of data at each grade, indicates that students in seventh grade experience an average math growth index of negative 4.3 compared to the national average normal growth of 6, and an average reading growth index of negative 0.8 compared to the national average normal growth of 3.7. The MAP data also indicates that students' math scores are consistent with or above national norms for math in grades four through six, and recover in grade nine, the first year where positive growth versus national norms can be observed. MAP data for reading indicates positive growth for students in grades four and five before experiencing negative growth indicators in sixth and seventh grade. Reading growth scores do not significantly recover until the ninth grade based on the past five years of data collected.

Both the MAP and STAR test are nationally normed tests that provide individual student results along with data that compares those results to local and national averages. When compared with the national averages, student scores are divided into four ranges; below the 25th percentile, 25th to the 49th percentile, 50th to the 74th percentile, and the 75th percentile and above. These percentile ranks reflect the individual student scores and how they compare to the national average for students of the same grade.

Testing data for students in seventh grade for the 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years was collected and compared with cohort data for grade six through grade eight to analyze trends, and compiled in Table 4.1. Each year of testing data for reading and math was summarized into four groups based on the student’s proficiency as compared with national norms. Student cohort groups can be tracked from year to year to compare the cohort proficiency.

Table 4.1

District Assessment Results in Reading and Math

School Year & Test	Below 25th percentile	25-49th percentile	50-74th percentile	75th and above percentile	Total students 50% and higher
Fall 2014-15					
Reading Grade 6	17% 17 of 101	34% 34 of 101	36% 36 of 101	13% 13 of 101	49%
Math Grade 6	9% 9 of 101	13% 13 of 101	24% 24 of 101	54% 55 of 101	78%
Fall 2015-16					
Reading Grade 6	10% 10 of 103	15% 15 of 103	41% 42 of 103	34% 35 of 103	75%
Math Grade 6	11% 11 of 103	16% 16 of 103	34% 35 of 103	39% 40 of 103	73%
Reading Grade 7	9% 9 of 101	14% 9 of 101	28% 28 of 101	49% 49 of 101	77%
Math Grade 7	13% 13 of 101	20% 20 of 101	37% 37 of 101	30% 30 of 101	67%
Fall 2016-17					
Reading Grade 7	20% 20 of 102	34% 35 of 102	34% 35 of 102	11% 11 of 102	45%
Math Grade 7	7% 7 of 102	9% 9 of 102	23% 23 of 102	61% 62 of 102	84%
Reading Grade 8	28% 28 of 100	37% 37 of 100	24% 24 of 100	12% 12 of 100	36%
Math Grade 8	9% 9 of 100	12% 12 of 100	22% 22 of 100	57% 57 of 100	79%

For the seventh-grade class of 2015-16, the math proficiency scores track the historical trend reflecting a decline in seventh grade. When this class was in sixth grade, 78% of the students were above the fiftieth percentile in math, with 54% of them at the seventy-fifth percentile and above. When this class entered the seventh grade these proficiency rates dropped to 67% above the fiftieth percentile and only 30% at the seventy-fifth percentile and above. Math scores improved by eighth grade with 79% of students above the fiftieth percentile and 57% at the seventy-fifth percentile and above. Reading scores track directly against the historical trend for seventh grade. Where the trend for reading shows a reduction in proficiency

in seventh grade, the seventh-grade class of 2015-16 experienced a growth of students at or above the fiftieth percentile of 28% from sixth to seventh grade. This is in direct contrast to the 36% drop in students who meet growth targets in seventh grade over the past 5 years according to the study of MAP testing data compiled in Appendix A.

Students from the current year seventh grade (2016-17) had a different experience from the previous seventh grade class. Testing data for the current seventh grade class shows a growth in math proficiency of 73% of students who were above the fiftieth percentile with 39% of the class in the seventy-fifth percentile or above as sixth graders, which balloons to 84% of seventh grade students at or above the fiftieth percentile and 61% of them scoring above the seventy-fifth percentile in seventh grade. This trend is in stark contrast to the historical math trend experienced in seventh grade. The reading data for the current seventh grade class shows a more classic reduction in proficiency with a drop of 30% in the number of students who rank above the fiftieth percentile nationally on the reading test.

Academic Data

To understand the academic performance of students in grade seven and place this information in context with historical performance, data was collected for seventh grade students from the 2006-07 school year to the present. Academic data for each year was collected on the number of students who received a failing grade in a quarterly marking period during the year, students who received a failing grade in the first quarter of the school year, the number of classes failed during the first quarter of the school year, the number of students who received a failing grade in a quarterly marking period in seventh grade that eventually dropped out of school, and the number of students in a cohort that dropped out or did not graduate on time in relationship to

the total number of students in the cohort. This data is compiled in Table 4.2 to create a more visual comparison of the information.

Table 4.2

7th Grade Student Academic Failures and Drop-outs 2006-2016

School year 7th grade student & grad year	Number of 7th grade students with an F during the year	Number of 7th grade students with an F 1st quarter	Number of 7th grade classes failed 1st quarter	Number of 7th grade students with an F who dropped-out prior to graduation	Number of drop-out or non-graduate students for cohort	Graduation rate
2006-2007 (2012)	28	17	28	9	9 of 115	92%
2007-2008 (2013)	31	9	17	10	15 of 110	86%
2008-2009 (2014)	25	15	33	4	10 of 99	90%
2009-2010 (2015)	41	14	26	12	15 of 101	85%
2010-2011 (2016)	14	3	6	4	14 of 100	86%
2011-2012 (2017)	26	13	29	3*	N/A	
2012-2013 (2018)	21	4	5	2*	N/A	
2013-2014 (2019)	23	12	24	1*	N/A	
2014-2015 (2020)	14	8	14	1*	N/A	
2015-2016 (2021)	23	13	19	0*	N/A	
2016-2017 (2022)	N/A	7	11	N/A	N/A	

** Cohort has not reached graduation*

Academic letter grades used in this research follow the traditional A, B, C, D, and F format, with an F representing a failing grade. Seventh grade students who received a failing grade for a quarter at any time in the course of the school year would be included in the first column of Table 4.2. The second column of Table 4.2 included only those students who received a failing grade in the first quarter of their 7th grade year. The third column indicates the number of classes failed during the first quarter by students with an F during the first quarter. The fourth column of the table tracks the students who received a failing grade in seventh grade to the conclusion of their educational experience. Any student who failed to successfully complete their secondary school and achieve a high school diploma was included in the drop-out

number. The final column of the table compares the total number of drop-outs or non-graduate students for a cohort irrespective of their academic performance in seventh grade.

Historical trends are used to place current data in context and to establish a reference for what the current data could demonstrate. The assumption of this research is that the transition from sixth to seventh grade is a difficult step for students, with the most difficult period being the first quarter. When examining the historical data on seventh grade student failures for first quarter, the current year ranks as the third lowest in ten years. When comparing the number of students with a failing grade in the first quarter to those seventh-grade students that failed any of the four marking periods over the school year, the data indicates that first quarter failures, second column, accounted for 44% of the total course failures, first column, when averaged for the past ten school years. Examining the long-term impact of failing in seventh grade, student progress was tracked to the graduation of the cohort. One valuable comparison of the data is to examine the number of seventh grade students who received a failing grade for the year, the first column of Table 4.2, and examine the eventual conclusion of their high school educational experience, the fourth column of Table 4.2. More specifically, if there is a relationship between academic success in seventh grade and success in high school. Of those students who receive a failing grade in seventh grade, first column of Table 4.2, 27.6% of those students drop-out of school prior to graduation, fourth column of Table 4.2, based on an average of the previous five years of graduates. These students, first column of Table 4.2, accounted for 63.2% of all drop-out or non-graduate students, fifth column of Table 4.2, in a given cohort based on a five-year average.

Student Survey Data

Student surveys soliciting feedback on the experience of seventh grade were conducted at the conclusion of the first academic quarter. These surveys, Appendix B, were given to all

students in grade seven (2016-17 seventh grade students) and grade eight (2015-16 seventh grade students) and offered them the opportunity to provide quantitative feedback on their experience in seventh grade. Most of the survey questions consisted of a question with a Likert Scaler response requesting students respond with a choice of 1 to 5 with 1 representing “Not at all” and 5 representing “Very much”. The response rate for current seventh grade students was much higher at 38% versus the previous year seventh grade students at just 13%. These responses were averaged for each question and included in Table 4.3. The average response for students from each year are placed side-by-side to allow for comparison between two different cohort experiences.

Table 4.3

Student Survey Average Response

Survey Question	2015 Student	2016 Student
Did you feel you were ready for 7th grade?	4.2	4.1
Did your experience in 6 th grade help prepare you for 7 th grade?	3.2	3.8
Did you feel prepared for grade 7 on the first day of school?	3.2	3.5
Did you find the RHS students helpful on the first day of school?	3.6	4.1
Were the teachers helpful on the first day of school?	3.6	4.4
Were the homework expectations clear in your classes?	4.2	4.5
Was the difficulty of the homework just right?	3.8	4.0
Were the expectations of the classroom teachers just right?	3.2	4.3
Was the amount of homework too much?	3.2	2.9
Were the tests, projects, or papers too hard?	2.8	2.7
Did you feel safe at school in 7 th grade?	4.3	4.5
Did you have an adult in school you felt you could trust?	3.5	4.4
Did you enjoy 7th grade?	4.1	4.4
Do you feel you did (doing) your best in 7 th grade?	4.1	4.4

Most survey data returned similar results when compared between the two different cohorts of students. Student survey data highlighted in Table 4.3, indicate a few areas of improvement in the seventh-grade experience over the previous seventh grade class experience. Of particular note, students in the current year's seventh grade highlighted most notably that they felt teachers held very reasonable expectations, that they felt they had a trusting adult in the building, that teachers were helpful, and the student helpers in the hallways the first week of school was valuable. Each of these areas were scored significantly higher than the previous seventh grade class.

Parent Survey Data

Parent surveys soliciting feedback on the experience of their seventh-grade student were conducted at the conclusion of the first academic quarter. These surveys, Appendix C, were given to parents of students in grade seven (2016-17 seventh grade students) and grade eight (2015-16 seventh grade students) and offered the opportunity to provide quantitative feedback on their child's experience in seventh grade. Most of the survey questions consisted of a question with a Likert Scale response requesting parents to respond with a choice of 1 to 5 with 1 representing "Not at all" and 5 representing "Very much". These responses were averaged for each question and included in Table 4.4. The response rate for parents of current seventh grade students was much higher at 21% versus the parents of previous year seventh grade students at just 13%. The average response for parents of students from each year are placed side-by-side to allow for comparison between two different cohort experiences.

Most survey data returned similar results when compared between the two different cohorts of parents. Parent survey data highlighted in Table 4.4, indicate only two areas of difference when evaluating their child's experience in seventh grade. Parents of current seventh

grade students felt more positive about the fact that homework, tests, projects, and papers in seventh grade were of appropriate difficulty for the students. The question asking if tests, projects, or papers were too hard, would indicate a positive response if the number were lower given that the Likert Scale indicates 1 being “Not at all” and a 5 being “Very much”.

Table 4.4

Parent Survey Average Response

Survey Questions	2015 Parents	2016 Parents
Did you feel your child was ready for 7th grade?	4.3	4.2
Did your child’s experience in 6 th grade help prepare them for 7 th grade?	4.1	3.9
Did you feel your child was prepared for grade 7 on the first day of school?	4.3	4.3
Did you find the RHS Hallway Helper students helpful on the first day of school in grade 7?	3.8	4.1
Were the teachers helpful on the first day of grade 7?	4.3	4.4
Were the homework expectations clear in your child’s classes?	4.1	4.2
Was the difficulty of homework just right?	3.4	3.9
Were the expectations of the classroom teachers just right?	3.8	4.0
Were the tests, projects, or papers too hard?	2.5	2.0
Did your child enjoy 7 th grade?	4.3	4.0
Do you feel your child did or is doing their best in 7 th grade?	4.3	4.3

Teacher Survey Data

Teachers of students in grades seven and eight, junior high, in the Roseau School district were invited to participate in a survey requiring them to reflect on the seventh-grade experience for students. Eleven of fourteen teachers responded to the survey. The survey, Appendix D, consisted of open ended questions, Likert Scale questions, and multiple choice questions. The results of the teacher responses to the question with a Likert Scale response requesting teachers

to respond with a choice of 1 to 5 with 1 representing “Not at all” and 5 representing “Very much”. These responses were averaged for each question and included in Table 4.5.

Most of the teacher responses were closer to neutral on the Likert Scale, in this case a value of 3. When scores were near 1 point lower or higher they could be considered to represent a stronger opinion. In the case of the teacher survey responses, the areas that returned higher values was the value of the 7th grade orientation efforts benefiting the students, and the value of having high school students help seventh grade students in the hallway during the first week.

Table 4.5

Teacher Survey Average Response

Survey Questions	Teacher Response
Did you feel your students were ready for grade 7?	3.2
Are students prepared for 7 th grade by activities in 6 th grade?	3
Were 7 th grade students adequately prepared for the first day of 7 th grade?	3.7
Did you find the RHS Hallway Helper students helpful on the first day of school in grade 7?	4.5
Were the orientation activities helpful in preparing students for 7 th grade?	4
What is your familiarity with the unique needs of 7 th grade as compared with senior high students?	3.9

CHAPTER 5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND DISCUSSION

This section evaluates the results of the study and provides analysis of the study results.

The evaluation of research on transitions as found in this study will be divided into three sections; summary of findings, conclusions, and discussion of relevance to practice.

Summary of Findings

Introduction

This study examined the issue of student transitions from an elementary school K-6 setting into a junior high setting. Both the age of the child, transitioning from child to adult, and the change in setting and expectations, more academic expectations and less familiar relationships with teachers, result in a reduction in student success at the seventh-grade level. These drops are most notably observed in the areas of math and reading as measured in district wide assessments. In an effort to remedy this issue and support students in their transition, a transition team was created. The purpose of this team is to examine the learning environment of seventh grade and work towards better communication, consistency of expectations, and prepare students better in upper elementary. Specifically, the team identified two areas of need in math and reading. As students entered seventh grade, they were exposed to an algebra curriculum with expectations of foundational knowledge established in elementary; and students were not provided consistent expectations for reading and writing in grade seven resulting in confusing expectations and inconsistent practice. To address these two specific areas this research paper examined these learning needs and proposed interventions in the math and English curriculums in an attempt to support learners in grade seven. This study also examined the effectiveness of transition efforts put in place by the transition team through surveys of students, parents, and

teachers in both the year before transition efforts (2015-16) and the current year with transition efforts in place (2016-17).

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to develop specific interventions for Reading and Math in grade seven that will identify and support student learning needs and evaluate parent, student, and teacher feedback on junior high transition to answer the following questions:

1. Will implementing an Article of the Week program in grade seven, a reading and writing program designed to improve student close reading, citation, and writing skills, using a department team template created to unify language, method, and grading expectations for students, improve reading scores?
2. How will a math elective course designed to meet student learning needs in math through individualized instruction and practice on specific skills needed to assist students in exceeding math growth targets at 7th grade?
3. Are transition efforts effective based on student surveys designed to evaluate program efforts specifically targeting student transition needs from elementary into junior high?
4. Are transition efforts effective based on parent surveys designed to evaluate program efforts specifically targeting student transition needs from elementary into junior high?
5. Are transition efforts effective based on teacher surveys designed to evaluate program efforts specifically targeting student transition needs from elementary into junior high?

Literature Review

The developmental experience of the transescent is a complicated episode that involves physiological, psychological, and cognitive changes that occur rapidly during a short period of time. Other than the first 18 months of life, there is no other period of life that experiences more change than from 10 to 14 years of age (Akos, Queen, & Lineberry, 2005). Research on the subject of the transescent experience describes these few years of the early teen age experience as some of the most difficult years of childhood. This period of extreme change creates a complicated and confusing environment in which a child's body and mind develops, creating uncertainty as well-established patterns of social, educational, and cognitive behaviors change in often confusing ways. The child in transition can become lost in the process of trying to understand this new experience. As more individual and nurturing school experiences give way to more segmented and individually responsible learning environments, children can find themselves grasping for assurances of normality.

Professional educators can play a key role in assisting transescents through the storm of changes they experience, especially in junior high. The teacher with their training and experience can support students and parents as they experience the uncertainties of the transescent experience. Teachers can develop classroom learning experiences that meet the needs of young learners both physically through active learning projects and opportunities for cooperative learning, and also through learning experiences that allow students to begin to develop their own understanding and exercise the capacities of their developing brain. The early detection of transition difficulties can result in better educational experiences for students leading to fewer students becoming disengaged with the educational experience, resulting in fewer drop-outs.

These efforts by teachers can be supported through coordinated transition programs that begin prior to the student moving to a junior high setting. Experts on transescents find that schools with a well-designed transition program involving parents, teachers, and support staff, are more effective at ensuring a smooth transition for students. Parents are also educated on the nature of junior highs and provided communications that help them support their child's learning at home. Teachers are provided training to help them understand their students, empathize with their struggles, and provide supportive classrooms that encourage students to reach their potential.

Methodology

This study was an analysis of the impact of specific interventions on student learning. The study examined the effect of the implementation of two interventions in the areas of math and reading to address the historical decline in math and reading growth in seventh grade. The study used three areas of analysis to examine the research questions. First, district testing data in reading and math was examined. This data from district wide assessments provided individual student growth scores which could be compared to national norms provided by the test developer. This provided clear data at an individual student level that could be compared to historical data sets and trends. Secondly, the academic data of student success in seventh grade as measured by academic letter grades was evaluated. Specifically, data for the past ten years was examined and evaluated. Student failures for term grades in seventh grade courses were computed and compared to student longitudinal success in high school by linking students to the achievement of high school graduation. Thirdly, evaluation of the success of transition efforts were achieved by soliciting feedback from students, parents, and teachers. Student surveys asked students in grade seven in both the current and previous year to evaluate their experience.

This provided data that could be compared between students whose experience was unmodified by the transition efforts and those students whose experience included transition activities; establishing both control and experimental groups. Parent surveys were provided to parents of both current year seventh grade students and those students who completed seventh grade the previous school year. Parent surveys asked similar questions as those asked of the students, but were modified to gain perspective from parents as to the effectiveness of transition efforts. This provided data that could be compared between parents whose students' experience was unmodified by the transition efforts and those parents whose students' experience included transition activities; establishing both control and experimental groups. Teacher surveys were conducted to solicit teacher evaluation of the success of transition efforts. Teachers were asked to evaluate the impact of transition efforts and provided the opportunity to provide narrative feedback on the impact of these improvements.

Results

The research study findings are grouped into three areas: academic data, testing data, and survey data. The result of the research and the impact of the interventions in reading and math were based on a nine-week implementation in seventh grade. With this limitation, some long-term results are absent in this research.

Academic testing yielded some interesting trends between student academic success in seventh grade and long term success at the secondary level. Based on the theory that the start of seventh grade is the most impactful academic experience for transescents; the first quarter is expected to be the toughest for most seventh-grade students. Research of data found that on a ten-year average first quarter failures accounted for 44% of the total grading period failures for grade seven. The current first quarter failures were the third lowest in the ten-year history at

seven with the lowest being three. Of those students who receive a failing grade in seventh grade, 27.6% of those students drop-out of school prior to graduation based on an average of the previous five years of graduates. These students accounted for 63.2% of all drop-out or non-graduate students in a given cohort based on a five-year average.

Testing data has shown over time that a regression in student growth exists between grades six and seven. Five year averages of year over year data from the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) *Measure of Academic Progress* assessment shows seventh grade students dropping an average of 36% in the number of students who achieve their expected growth as compared to the same students at the end of sixth grade. Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) and Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) test results for cohort groups were summarized into percentile rankings based on the national norms for those tests. Testing results showed that students in grade seven performed better in math as compared with their scores in sixth grade and when compared with the previous year seventh grade students, but reading scores declined when compared to the same student proficiency from the previous year.

Student survey data highlighted a few areas of improvement in the seventh-grade experience over the previous seventh grade class experience. Of particular note, students in the current year's seventh grade highlighted most notably that they felt teachers held very reasonable expectations, that they felt they had a trusting adult in the building, that teachers were helpful, and the student helpers in the hallways the first week of school was valuable. Each of these areas were scored higher than the previous seventh grade class.

Parent survey data highlighted only two areas of difference when evaluating their child's experience in seventh grade. Parents of current seventh grade students felt more positive about

the fact that homework, tests, projects, and papers in seventh grade were of appropriate difficulty for the students.

Teacher survey data reflected teacher's opinions of the effectiveness of transition efforts on improving student readiness and success in seventh grade. Teachers survey responses were generally neutral to positive on the transition efforts after quarter one. Of particular note were their positive opinions of the effectiveness of the student hallway helpers during week one, the effectiveness of the seventh-grade orientation, and their improved familiarity of seventh grade student needs.

Conclusions

This study asked five research questions relating to developing support for seventh grade students as they enter junior high. These questions are defined below in the areas of intervention efforts and survey responses. The research questions are evaluated in light of the results of the study and conclusions are discussed based on these results.

Intervention efforts

The first research question sought to determine the impact on student learning in the area of reading with the application of an Article of the Week program across multiple disciplines in seventh grade. The conclusions drawn here was there appeared to be little measurable impact on the reading growth scores of students after 9 weeks. Seventh grade students still experienced a regression in growth that mirrored the district average over 5 years. Many factors are at play in this data but most significantly, the impact of learning reading skills takes time. Perhaps the end of the year results will indicate a more positive impact of this intervention effort.

The second research question sought to determine the impact on student learning in the area of math with the application of a math elective in seventh grade that would target student

learning needs in math. The results of student testing in this area is quite remarkable. In defying the five-year trend, students experienced a growth in proficiency after nine weeks of instruction. While it is hard to draw conclusions from just two data points, it is a refreshing change from the typical drop experience by the previous seventh grade classes.

As with any set of data, there exists a cohort bias that can be factored into the testing results. The previous seventh grade class experience nearly identical growth in the area of reading after one quarter when no interventions were in place. However, another encouraging study result was the number of student failures for the current seventh grade class at the end of the first quarter. This was the 3rd lowest number of students with an F at the end of the first quarter in the past ten years. This statistic in combination with a strong start in math would tend to point to some success in creating a successful network of support as they start the seventh grade. This would be further confirmed if reading and math growth are both positive by the Spring test window, indicating that students continued to grow in both reading and math, breaking the five-year trend in seventh grade.

Survey Responses

The surveys of students and parents highlighted a number of positives regarding the transition efforts of the seventh-grade transition team. There were no survey responses that indicated negative attitudes towards the efforts in seventh grade. On the contrary, there were several initiatives that received positive marks. Perhaps the most encouraging were the opinions of the students toward the helpfulness of teachers and the trust they place in the teachers. These scores reflect the increased awareness of seventh grade teachers as a result of specific training regarding young adolescent learners. Several teachers also graded themselves as having above

average knowledge of the unique nature of these learners, a nod to the efforts of the transition team to bring awareness of student learning needs at the junior high level.

While students focused on the teacher as an improvement, parent survey results highlighted the improvement in the homework expectations and difficulty of papers, tests, and projects. This too reflects the specific staff development training prior to the start of the school year. Teacher training on homework load, time requirements, and general homework use was provided by the transition team. These efforts appear to have had a positive impact on the learning experience of the seventh-grade students.

One other area of common agreement was the value of the high school students who assisted students in the hallway during the first week of school. The parents and students tended to show appreciation for these efforts, while teachers responded positively to this effort. There also was support in the survey data for the seventh-grade orientation efforts and the help they provided students in getting ready for seventh grade.

Discussion

The period of transition from elementary school to junior high is complicated by many factors; from puberty, to social/emotional awareness, to academic transitions. With so many factors at play, it is important to isolate, as much as possible, the contributing factors to academic struggle at the seventh-grade level. The development of a transition team tasked with developing strategies and systems to support students is just the first step of a long journey. The many efforts of the transition team at the Roseau High School were in response to specific needs identified in the past few years. Attempting to isolate the contributing factors proved to be more difficult than the team first believed. The transition team developed a number of efforts to help

create systems of support for students in seventh-grade. Although these efforts certainly impacted this study, they were not so easily isolated so as to be measured by this study.

Since reading and math scores have been a historical measure where the Roseau seventh grade students have been deficient, it was much easier to isolate the intervention efforts in reading and math and measure their impact against the reading and math test scores from previous years. Similarly, the availability of academic history for seventh grade students provided the study a measure against which a baseline could be established to make current results more relevant.

The reading and math score results from this study opposed each other in their measure of success. While the math scores indicated a significant improvement, the reading scores were disappointing in their lack of improvement. It is highly probable that the nature of the subject studied contributes to this outcome. The national tests used in the assessments measure student growth in sub areas of the test. Interventions in math could be measured in a short period of time due to the nature of the learning. With a few short lessons on a math process, a student could demonstrate proficiency on an assessment within a few days. Reading, on the other hand, typically is a skill that takes time, repetition, and re-teaching to develop mastery. It may take weeks of repeated effort to achieve similar success on a reading test that could be achieved in a few days in math.

This study was part of a program requirement for a graduate degree and was subject to the influence of timelines independent of those necessary to answer these questions completely. A December deadline meant that assessments of the success of intervention efforts had to be taken after 9 weeks to finish the study in time. A more relevant measure of the success of these intervention efforts would be a spring assessment that would measure student growth over a

seven or eight-month period. A long-term study of nine months, involving several periodic assessments would more accurately reveal the success of intervention efforts in reading and math.

Similar to the collection of assessment data, the measure of academic data would be more informative if collected at the end of an academic year rather than one term. Students tend to cycle in their academic performance. Rarely do students perform at the same level for an entire year, meaning, if a student does well in one quarter that does not indicate their performance in the successive quarters will be at a similar level. This study would benefit from a yearlong assessment of student academic performance that would measure the success of students over the school year, encompassing the cycles of performance reflected in comparison data.

The study does reveal the complexity of the issue it tries to examine. The success of students is rarely tied to a single factor. Uncovering the root cause of student success can only be achieved one student at a time. What is informative about the study is the impact of academic systems on student success. When examining the success of transition efforts through this study, it has become clear that districts can create an environment that can make it difficult for certain students to succeed. Whether it be creating homework expectations, parent involvement expectations, or technology requirements; the success of students is based on the assumption that parent are actively involved in their child's education. When parents are not a partner in the education of their child, the child is held to the standard of all other students where a nurturing learning environment exists beyond the school walls. Communication efforts, homework policies, intervention efforts, and the feedback from parents were all influenced by those families who value the education system and who are more likely to validate its value to their children.

A necessary post-script to this study is the review of student data at the conclusion of the current school year. This data collection would more accurately reflect a year of intervention efforts and the impact of these efforts on student academic success and learning. The short-term results indicate mixed results. As with any system change, it takes time to see the impact of change. In just a few weeks the greatest success of this study was the revelation of need that exists for students who are in a complicated transition in life.

REFERENCES

- Akos , P., Queen, J. A., & Lineberry, C. (2005). *Promoting a successful transition to middle school*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.
- Alexander, J. D., & Young, N. D. (2014). Expanding the application of response to intervention strategies to address social-emotional difficulties in Middle School. In N. D. Young, & C. N. Michael, *Betwixt and Between: Understanding and meeting the social and emotional needs of students during the Middle School transition years* (pp. 99-103). Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Education.
- Armstrong, T. (2006). Middle Schools: Social, emotional, and metacognitive growth. In T. Armstrong, *The best schools: How human development research should Inform educational practice*. Alexandria: ASCD.
- Armstrong, T. (2016). *The power of the adolescent brain: Strategies for teaching Middle and High School students*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Charbonneau, D. H. (2007). Demystifying survey research: Practical suggestions for effective question design. *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, 2(4), 46-56.
- Choi, B. C., & Pak, A. W. (2005, January). A catalog of biases in questionnaires. *Preventing Chronic Disease*, 2(1).
- Christian, L. M., Dillman, D. A., & Smyth, J. D. (2007). Helping respondents get It right the first time: The influence of words, symbols, and graphics in web surveys. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 71(1), 113-125.

- Eichhorn, D. H. (October 1968). *Planning programs for transescents*. Buffalo: University of New York at Buffalo.
- Horner, C. G., Wallace , T. L., & Bundick, M. J. (2015, May 15). Adolescents' interpretations of the role of emotion in high school. *Teachers College Record*, *117*, 1-34.
- Judah, R. D. (2014). The pivotal years: How educators can assist students with the tasks and perils of Middle School. In N. D. Young, C. N. Michael, & editors, *Betwixt and between: Understanding and meeting the social and emotional development needs of students during the Middle School transition years* (pp. 23-32). Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Education.
- Kuhn, D. (2006, March). Do cognitive changes accompany developments in the adolescent brain? *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *1*(1), 59-67.
- Lorain, P. (2015, December 30). *Transition to Middle School: Are swirlies for real?* Retrieved from National Education Association: <http://www.nea.org/tools/16657.htm>
- Michael, C. (2014). We've got each others backs: Promoting social-emotional development through inclusive leadership. In N. D. Young, & C. N. Michael, *Betwixt and between: Understanding and meeting the social and emotional development needs of students during the Middle School transition years* (pp. 67-82). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.
- Pickhardt, C. E. (2011, April 18). *Adolescence and the transition to Middle School*. Retrieved from Psychology Today: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/surviving-your-childs-adolescence/201104/adolescence-and-the-transition-middle-school>

- Powell, S. D. (2005). *Introduction to Middle School*. Pearson Allyn Bacon Prentice Hall.
- Spinelli-Nannen, T., & Green, R. (2014). The preadolescent and adolescent brain, current research and understandings. In N. D. Young, & C. N. Michael, *Betwixt and between: Understanding and meeting the social and emotional development needs of students during the Middle School transition years* (pp. 13-22). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.
- Super, J. (2014). Middle School parenting: Graduation is just around the corner. In N. D. Young, C. N. Michael, & editors, *Betwixt and between: Understanding and meeting the social and emotional development needs of students during the Middle School transition years* (pp. 41-54). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.
- (2011). *Teens, kindness and cruelty on social network sites* . Pew Internet. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2011/11/09/teens-kindness-and-cruelty-on-social-network-sites/>
- UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools. (2016, Spring). Absenteeism: Beyond reporting and beyond another special initiative. *Addressing Barriers to Learning, 21*(2). Retrieved from <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/news.htm>
- Wigfield, A., Eccles, J. S., Mac Iver, D., Reoman, D. A., & Midgley, C. (1991). Transitions during early adolescence: Changes in children's domain-specific self-perceptions and general self-esteem across the transition to junior high school. *Developmental Psychology, 27*, 552-565.
- Williams-Boyd, P. (2003). Pedagogical Perspectives. In Pat Williams-Boyd, *Middle grades education: A reference handbook* (pp. 63-121). Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO.

Wormeli, R. (2011). The middle/high years / movin' up to the middle. *Educational Leadership*, 68(7), 48-53.

APPENDIX A. ROSEAU PUBLIC SCHOOL 5 YEAR TEST SUMMARY

Roseau High School																								
Growth Index - The average number of points students exceeded their growth target																								
Percent of Projection by Grade - The percent of the Project growth target achieved by a whole grade																								
Percent of Students Meeting Projection - The percentage of individual students in a grade that achieved their growth																								
NWEA MAP																								
Mathematics																								
	2011			2012			2013			2014			2015			2016			5 Year Average					
Grade	% Grade	% Students	Grade	% Grade	% Student	Grade	% Grade	% Student	Grade	% Grade	% Student	Grade	% Grade	% Student	Grade	% Grade	% Student	Total % Meeting Projection	Average Growth Index					
7	-3.1	43.2	35.6	7	-5.9	1.7	22.8	7	-8.2	-36.7	15.2	7	-5	15.3	29.8	7	-1.69	16	22.7	-0.92	69	44	26.76	-4.342
8	-2.7	46	38.8	8	-4.7	6	21.9	8	-3.9	22	37.8	8	-0.3	94	52.2	8	0.27	117.1	61.8	-0.57	77.4	49	42.26	-1.84
9	0.6	130	62.4	9	2.5	230	65.3	9	2.9	246	76.7	9	2.4	225	71.4	9	0.43	166.7	89.9	-0.47	72.5	95	65.28	1.552
10	0.4	118.2	53.8	10	-1.6	26.1	51	10	-1.5	36.4	41.8	10	-1.1	64.5	48.7	10	0.61	188.9	60	0.74	167.9	68	53.9	-0.57
RHS Av	-1.20	85.85	47.60		-2.425	65.95	40.23		-2.68	66.68	42.88		-1.00	97.20	50.53		-0.095	122.18	47.75	-0.31	96.70	54.00	47.08	-1.30
Reading																								
	2011			2012			2013			2014			2015			2016			5 Year Average					
Grade	% Grade	% Students	Grade	% Grade	% Student	Grade	% Grade	% Student	Grade	% Grade	% Student	Grade	% Grade	% Student	Grade	% Grade	% Student	Total % Meeting Projection	Average Growth Index					
7	-0.6	85.3	51.7	7	-1.9	50	42.3	7	0.3	108.8	58.5	7	-1.8	47.1	40.5	7	-0.01	100	47.7	-0.8	59.5	47	47.1	-0.842
8	-1.9	47.2	44.1	8	-2.5	26.5	41.2	8	-2.1	44.7	43.4	8	0.1	106.1	57.4	8	0.12	110.3	55.8	-0.01	100	52	49.74	-0.878
9	2.6	230	71.9	9	2.7	235	69.9	9	2.5	225	70.2	9	2.3	215	70.5	9	0.28	177.8	84.9	0.82	218.8	60	66.66	1.72
10	-3.2	40	43.9	10	-1.8	10	41.5	10	-0.7	65	46	10	-0.3	85	54.4	10	0.67	259.3	59	1.4	890	64	52.98	-0.146
RHS Av	-0.78	75.63	52.58		-0.88	80.38	48.70		0	110.88	54.53		0.08	113.30	55.63		0.27	161.60	56.25	0.35	314.58	55.75	54.17	-0.04

Figure A1. Roseau High School MAP Summary

Roseau Elementary

		Growth Index - The average number of points students exceeded their growth target																
INTEA MAP		Percent of Projection by Grade - The percent of the projected growth target achieved by a whole grade																
Mathematics		Percent of Students Meeting Projection - The percentage of individual students in a grade that achieved their growth target																
		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015		2016		5 Year Average				
Grade	Growth %	% Grad	% Student Grade	Growth Ind %	% Grade	% Students Grade	Growth Ind %	% Grade	% Student Grade	Growth Ind %	% Grade	% Student Grade	Growth Ind %	% Grade	% Student	Total % Meeting Projection	Average Growth Index	
1	4.5	71.6	20.4	-6.8	69.9	21.1	-4.8	78.7	-2.8	82.6	30.1	-1.1	83.2	30.1	43.2	47	-3.988	
2	2.6	117.1	68.7	0.3	102	48.5	0.9	106.1	-1.1	93	45.3	-0.31	77.9	43.2	91.4	40	-0.25	
3	0	100	51.4	-1.3	90.1	48.9	-0.1	98.5	54.1	98.5	53.3	2.13	150	84.3	0.29	104.5	0.164	
4	4	139.6	74.4	2.2	121.6	66.7	2.1	120.6	62.4	125.7	70.8	1.39	149	82.4	1.82	133	89	2.142
5	1.7	117.5	62.5	-0.4	95.9	51.7	0.5	105.2	55.5	112.5	63.4	0.52	117.6	62.5	0.42	110.4	86	0.448
6	4.8	180	76.6	3.9	185	69.1	0.2	103.3	53.6	86.7	46.2	-0.07	95.4	50.6	0.8	121	66	0.806
RES a	1.10	120.97	59.02	-0.35	107.42	51	-0.20	102.07	51.32	99.83	51.48	0.425	112.18	58.5	0.41	108.87	60.83	-0.01
Reading		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015		2016		5 Year Average				
Grade	Growth %	% Grad	% Student Grade	Growth Ind %	% Grade <td>% Students Grade</td> <td>Growth Ind %</td> <td>% Grade <td>% Student Grade</td> <td>Growth Ind %</td> <td>% Grade <td>% Student Grade</td> <td>Growth Ind %</td> <td>% Grade <td>% Student</td> <td>Total % Meeting Projection</td> <td>Average Growth Index</td> </td></td></td>	% Students Grade	Growth Ind %	% Grade <td>% Student Grade</td> <td>Growth Ind %</td> <td>% Grade <td>% Student Grade</td> <td>Growth Ind %</td> <td>% Grade <td>% Student</td> <td>Total % Meeting Projection</td> <td>Average Growth Index</td> </td></td>	% Student Grade	Growth Ind %	% Grade <td>% Student Grade</td> <td>Growth Ind %</td> <td>% Grade <td>% Student</td> <td>Total % Meeting Projection</td> <td>Average Growth Index</td> </td>	% Student Grade	Growth Ind %	% Grade <td>% Student</td> <td>Total % Meeting Projection</td> <td>Average Growth Index</td>	% Student	Total % Meeting Projection	Average Growth Index	
1	-0.6	97.1	52.1	2.7	112.9	68.1	1	104.8	59.7	99	50.8	0.32	104.6	58.1	0.22	104	51	0.888
2	0.9	105.7	63.2	0.4	102	56.2	-0.5	96.5	57.2	90.6	53.3	-0.99	76	47.2	-0.49	90.6	44	-0.576
3	-1.9	81.9	48.3	0	100	47.7	-0.8	92.7	46.3	103.8	60.3	0.55	112	67.3	-0.82	82.7	56	-0.114
4	-0.4	95	50.5	0	100	53.8	-0.6	93.7	43.4	98.8	59.8	0.15	102.9	54.4	0.86	118.7	69	0.062
5	-0.9	86.2	50.5	1.7	127.9	66.5	0.3	105	45.5	85.5	45.3	0.7	121.4	52.5	0.86	117	61	0.472
6	-2.1	52.2	37.2	-0.3	99.6	52.6	-1.5	65.1	43.2	68.2	44.3	-0.85	63.2	45.6	-0.77	68	48	-0.924
RES a	-0.83	86.18	50.7	0.75	106.4	57.18	-0.35	92.97	49.42	90.98	52.2	0.03	96.68	53.5	-0.07	96.83	54.83	-0.05

Figure A2. Roseau Elementary School MAP Summary

APPENDIX B. STUDENT SURVEY

Grade 7 Transition Survey

Student Survey

* Required

1. What year did you complete 7th grade? *

Mark only one oval.

2015-16

2016-17

2. Did you feel you were ready for grade 7? *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Very much

3. Did your experience in 6th grade help prepare you for 7th grade?

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Very much

4. What was the most helpful in 6th grade to prepare you for 7th grade? check all that apply *

Check all that apply.

switching classes

practicing locks

High School tour

7th grade Orientation

Other

5. Did you feel prepared for grade 7 on the first day of school? *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Very much

6. Did you find the RHS students helpful on the first day of school in grade 7? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very much

7. Were the teachers helpful on the first day of grade 7? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very much

8. What was the most helpful to your start in 7th grade? Check all that apply *

Check all that apply.

- Planners
- Teachers
- Senior High Students
- Clear classroom / hallway rules
- 7th Grade Orientation
- Hallway helpers (RHS students)
- Principals office

9. What was least helpful to your start in 7th grade? *

Check all that apply.

- Planners
- Teachers
- Senior High Students
- Clear classroom / hallway rules
- 7th grade orientation
- Hallway helpers (RHS Students)
- Principals office

10. Were the homework expectations clear in your classes? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very much

11. Was the difficulty of the homework just right? *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Very much

12. Were the expectations of the classroom teachers just right? *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Very much

13. Was the amount of homework too much? *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Very much

14. Were the tests, projects, or papers too hard? *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Very much

15. Did you feel safe at school in 7th grade?

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Very much

16. Did you have an adult in school you felt you could trust? *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Very much

17. Did you enjoy 7th grade? *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Very much

18. Do you feel you did or are doing your best in school in 7th grade? *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Very much

APPENDIX C. PARENT SURVEY

2015 Grade 7 Transition Survey

Parent Survey

* Required

1. **What year did your child complete 7th grade? ***

Mark only one oval.

2015-16

2016-17

2. **Did you feel your child was ready for grade 7? ***

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Very much

3. **Did your child's experience in 6th grade help prepare them for 7th grade?**

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Very much

4. **What was the most helpful in 6th grade to prepare your child for 7th grade? check all that apply ***

Check all that apply.

switching classes

practicing locks

High School tour

7th grade Orientation

Other

5. **Did you feel your child was prepared for grade 7 on the first day of school? ***

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Very much

6. Did you find the RHS Hallway Helper students helpful on the first day of school in grade 7? *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Very much

7. Were the teachers helpful on the first day of grade 7? *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Very much

8. What was the most helpful to your child's start in 7th grade? Check all that apply *

Check all that apply.

- Planners
- Teachers
- Senior High Students
- Clear classroom / hallway rules
- 7th Grade Orientation
- Hallway helpers (RHS students)
- Principals office

9. What was least helpful to your child's start in 7th grade? *

Check all that apply.

- Planners
- Teachers
- Senior High Students
- Clear classroom / hallway rules
- 7th grade orientation
- Hallway helpers (RHS Students)
- Principals office

10. Were the homework expectations clear in your child's classes? *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Very much

11. Was the difficulty of the homework just right? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very much

12. Were the expectations of the classroom teachers just right? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very much

13. Was the amount of homework too much? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very much

14. Were the tests, projects, or papers too hard? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very much

15. Did your child enjoy 7th grade? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very much

16. Do you feel your child did or is doing their best in school in 7th grade? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very much

APPENDIX D. TEACHER SURVEY

Grade 7 Transition Survey

Teacher Survey

* Required

1. Did you feel your students were ready for grade 7? *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Very much

2. Are students prepared for 7th grade by activities in 6th grade?

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Very much

3. What areas of need are most evident for 7th grade students? *

Check all that apply.

- organization
- homework completion
- meeting deadlines
- social/emotional skills
- communication skills
- Other: _____

4. Were 7th grade students adequately prepared for the first day of 7th grade? *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Very much

5. Did you find the RHS Hallway Helper students helpful on the first day of school in grade 7? *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Very much

6. Were the orientation activities helpful in preparing students for 7th grade? *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Very much

7. What was most helpful in supporting students in 7th grade? *

Check all that apply.

- Planners
- Homework Room
- PASS Team support
- Clear classroom / hallway rules
- 7th Grade Orientation
- Hallway helpers (RHS students)
- Other: _____

8. What was least helpful to your child's start in 7th grade? *

Check all that apply.

- Planners
- Teachers
- Senior High Students
- Clear classroom / hallway rules
- 7th grade orientation
- Hallway helpers (RHS Students)
- Principals office

9. What homework expectations do you feel are reasonable for 7th grade students? *

Mark only one oval.

- none
- 10 min
- 30 min
- 1 hour
- more than 1 hour

10. How do you arrange homework with other teachers to avoid overburdening students? *

11. **What communication techniques do you use to keep parents informed of classroom activities and assignments? ***

Check all that apply.

- Website
- Google Classroom
- Moodle
- Remind
- Gradebook
- Other: _____

12. **How do you inform individual parents when their child is struggling with your class? ***

13. **What common routines do you practice in 7th grade that help simplify processes for students? ***

Check all that apply.

- grading scale
- rules
- notetaking
- writing
- reading strategies
- Other: _____

14. **What is your familiarity with the unique learning needs of 7th grade as compared with senior high students? ***

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not familiar	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very familiar

15. **How can the Roseau High School improve the support for 7th grade students? ***

