

**THE EFFECTS OF THE WEB TRANSITION PROGRAM ON MIDDLE  
SCHOOL STUDENT GPA, ATTENDANCE, AND SUSPENSIONS**

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to compare achievement, attendance, and suspensions of Olathe, Kansas seventh grade students who participated in the *Where Everybody Belongs* (WEB) program with seventh grade students who did not participate in the WEB program as they made the transition from an elementary school setting to a junior high setting.

During the 2008 – 2009 school year, four Olathe, Kansas junior high schools implemented the WEB transition program and four schools did not implement the WEB program as students transitioned from an elementary school setting to a junior high school setting.

For this study, the researcher collected archived quantitative data covering cumulative student grade point averages, student daily attendance, and student suspensions from the Olathe School Database system known as the AS400. Descriptive statistics, two-tailed independent samples *t*-tests (at the 0.05 level of significance), and ANOVAs were conducted. The results of the study indicate WEB participants earned a significantly higher GPA compared to students who were not exposed to the WEB program. There was no significant difference in attendance or suspensions between the two groups of students. ANOVA results also revealed no effect of gender, minority, SES, SPED, or ELL status on the difference in GPA, attendance, or suspensions between the two groups.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Transitions in schools are typically marked by a student moving up in grade level, moving to new school facilities, or moving to a school where the organizational structure is different than previous schools. Most elementary school students are taught in small, self-contained classrooms where students develop close relationships with classroom peers and the individual teacher. On the other hand, most junior highs and middle schools employ a departmental setting, require students to interact with more peers, increase the number of teachers for students to work with, and use competition to motivate student performance in the classroom. In addition to the substantial changes observed in the transition to middle schools, students are also undergoing many personal changes, including emotional, social, psychological, and physiological, which can make the transition more difficult. “The lack of coping skills can have significant effects on adjustment, achievement, aspirations, and feelings of self-worth” and can overwhelm students (Shoffner & Williamson, 2000, p. 3). Since all students encounter transitions during their educational lives, it is important that school leaders understand the effects of transitions on student learning, student attendance, and student behavior.

#### Problem Statement

Every year, students undergo educational transitions moving from self-contained elementary classrooms to junior high or middle school settings. This transition, once defined as a rite of passage, has been pushed to the center of educational debate as federal legislation mandates success for all students. Illustrating difficulties with transitions, an almost 30 year old study by Blyth, Simmons, and Carlton-Ford (1983) illustrated

significant drops in grade point average (GPA), especially for students who made a transition from an elementary school in grade six to junior high in grade seven. A 2010 study completed by Rockoff and Lockwood found significant drops in academic achievement for both math and English. Freeman (2005) discovered students in grade K-8 schools had higher attendance than students who attended middle schools. It is critical, therefore, for educators to understand the difficulties students experience in making transitions from one educational design to another. Finally, a study completed by Balfanz (2008) found that sixth grade students who attended school less than 80% of school days, had more behavior problems, failed more frequently in math and reading, and had 25% lower graduation rates than did their peers who attended more regularly.

Drawing on findings and concepts from previous works which looked at several school outcome measures, this study investigates whether seventh grade students who were exposed to the *Where Everybody Belongs* (WEB) transition program had differences in grade point averages, attendance, and suspensions compared with those seventh grade students who were not exposed to the WEB program. Students in seventh grade were chosen for this study as this is the grade at which students transitioned from elementary school to junior high school in the Olathe School District during the 2008 – 2009 school-year. This study involved students in a junior high setting. Although much of the research was conducted in middle school settings, both the junior high and middle school settings are transitioning elementary students into new organizational structures with similar age students.

### Background and Conceptual Framework

Traditionally, the Olathe School District has served students in grades seven

through nine using the junior high school delivery model. Starting with the 2008 school year the Olathe School District implemented the WEB transition program for students entering seventh grade in four of its eight junior high schools. The WEB program was implemented to assist students transitioning from self contained elementary schools to more departmentalized junior high schools (Olathe School District, 2007).

Table 1 contains the demographics of the four implementing schools.

Table 1

*Demographics for schools that implemented WEB in 2008 - 2009*

School	A	C	E	G
Male	125	159	150	61
Female	96	143	140	69
Low SES	*<10	*11	*<10	*11
White	157	247	252	78
Hispanic	22	*<10	*<10	28
American Indian / Alaskan	0	*<10	0	*<10
Black	25	*<10	*<10	*<10
Asian	0	*<10	*<10	*<10
Other (Multi)	*<10	*<10	*<10	*<10
Special Education	53	41	*<10	29
Total Enrollment in grade 7	290	221	302	130

*Note:* \* indicates that the number reported by State of Kansas includes a group size of fewer than 10 individuals. The state of Kansas does not report information for groups smaller than 10 individuals to prevent the individual from being identified. From Kansas Department of Education, 2010.

Table 2

*Demographics for schools that did not implement WEB in 2008 - 2009*

School	B	D	F	H
Male	113	121	143	107
Female	115	115	165	100
Low SES	*<10	*<10	*<10	31
White	159	208	247	125
Hispanic	43	*<10	*<10	42
American Indian /Alaskan	0	0	0	*<10
Black	*<10	*<10	*<10	*10
Asian	0	0	*<10	0
Other (Multi)	*<10	*<10	*<10	*<10
Special Education	30	*10	*<10	*14
Total	228	236	308	207

*Note:* \* indicates that the number reported by State of Kansas includes a group size of fewer than 10 individuals. The state of Kansas does not report information for groups smaller than 10 individuals to prevent the individual from being identified. From Kansas Department of Education, 2010.

The four schools that implemented the WEB program represent a total enrollment of 2848 students spanning grades seven through nine. 943 seventh grade students started the 2008 – 2009 year in schools that implemented the WEB program. This study used only those Olathe seventh grade students who began the 2008 – 2009 school-year and completed the year in the same school building. Only 902 WEB students were used in this study because they both started and completed the school year in the same building.

The four schools that did not implement the WEB program had a total enrollment of 2845 students, of which 979 were in the seventh grade. Of the students enrolled in non-WEB schools, only 921 were used in the study because they both started and completed the school year in the same building. Table 2 (page 4) contains the demographic data for seventh grade students in schools that did not implement the WEB program in 2008 – 2009 school-year.

Hill, C., Campbell, M. B., & Jacobson, M. (2007), developers of the WEB program, suggested that the program should increase attendance, decrease student discipline, and increase student achievement. Hill, et al (2007) also offered that participation in WEB program activities might accomplish these three changes by addressing the three fundamental student transition needs: safety, information, and connection. According to the training provided by the Boomerang Project, in order for schools to see the benefits of the WEB program, schools must implement the WEB program specifically as presented at WEB Leader Basic Training (Boomerang Project, 2009).

The National Middle School Association (NMSA) (2002) has made several suggestions that need to be considered when implementing successful transition programs. The NMSA suggests that transition programs should address (a) student anxiety associated with the move to a new school, (b) the importance of the parents and school staff in the transition process, and (c) the understanding that successfully overcoming the transition is an on-going process, not a one-time event or activity (NMSA, 2002).

Akos (2002) discovered what students want most is to know the rules and procedures in the school. WEB orientation-day activities are designed to give new students tools for success at their new school. These activities provide students with information, such as class bell schedules, school layout, and the location of the counselor and administrator offices, to help them understand where to access assistance when it is needed. In a study conducted by Arowsafe and Irvin (1992), students reported having safety concerns about how new students might get along with the older students. Safety is addressed through several WEB program activities by utilizing older students as peer mentors and activity leaders for the incoming students. New students develop positive relationships with older students, providing the new students an initial and consistent safe person at the new school (Hill et al, 2007).

According to a 2007 posting by Hill et al, the WEB program fosters and develops connectedness for students as they transition into the middle school by using older peers working with incoming students for the whole school year. The WEB program begins by partnering students entering grade seven with older student mentors (ninth grade students) where relationships develop in small group settings on the very first day of school. The school year continues with social and academic “follow-ups” designed to build upon those initial relationships and increase student connectedness to school. The more connected to school students are, the “better they will do in all measures that count” (Hill et al, 2007, paragraph 10). Akos’ 2002 report is consistent with Hill et al’s rationale as Akos suggested students new to a school tend to have questions regarding rules and procedures but they also worry about topics such as bullying, safety, and homework. Akos also suggested that peers be used as tour guides or mentors to build relationships

(connectedness) as “students often look to significant others for help” during the transition to the middle school (p.7).

### Significance of the Study

This study will be useful in assisting the Olathe School District make decisions related to transitions and the continued use of the WEB program. With the new grade configuration, the Olathe School District (2007) realized new challenges relating to student transition. Data, such as that provided by this study, on differences existing between WEB and non-WEB schools relating to student achievement, absences, and suspensions needs to be evaluated. The results of this study will demonstrate the effectiveness of the WEB program when transitioning seventh grade students to a different organizational structure within the Olathe School District justifying the decision to use or abandon the WEB program. Malaspina & Rimm-Kauffman (2008) stated, there is “surprisingly little research that exists about the extent to which school transitions pose a challenge and cause academic and social performance declines” (p.1). Parents, teachers, and students alike are all concerned about the academic successes of students as they move from the elementary school to a new middle or junior high school setting.

### Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to compare the achievement, attendance, and suspensions of seventh grade students who participated in the WEB program with seventh grade students who did not participate in the program as they made the transition from an elementary-school setting to junior high setting.

### Delimitations

The delimitations for this study begin with the schools selected for participation. This study used data from all of the eight Olathe District junior high schools. All students in seventh grade during the 2008 – 2009 school year who started and ended the school year in the same school building were used in this study.

A second delimitation in the study was the year the data were collected. Data were used from the 2008 - 2009 school year, the year the Olathe School District implemented the WEB Transition Program in four of its eight junior high schools.

A third delimitation was the variables used in this study. This study explored student grade-point averages, student daily attendance and student suspensions. Results from state assessments were not used as part of the grade-point-average calculation. Examples of variables not chosen for the study were student scores on the Kansas Math and Reading Assessments, Kansas Writing Assessment, and the Kansas Social Studies Assessment.

### Assumptions

It was assumed that the results obtained from this study participants mirror results from other members of the population. Secondly, it was assumed that all schools that implemented the WEB program did so in accordance with WEB guidelines and timelines. Finally, it was assumed the data used in this study were accurately pulled from the school database system.

### Research Questions

Following are three research questions that guided this investigation into the effects of the implementation of an elementary to middle or junior high school

transition program.

1. Do students who participate in the WEB transition program have differences in grade point averages than those who do not participate in the WEB program?
2. Do students who participate in the WEB transition program have differences in attendance than those who do not participate in the WEB program?
3. Do students who participate in the WEB transition program have differences in occurrences of in-school and/or out-of-school suspensions than those who do not participate in the WEB program?

#### Definitions of Terms

The following terms were used in the study:

- *Attendance*: The total number of school days in membership (enrolled) for each student. In the Olathe School District, when students missed 1-2 class periods a day, a full day of attendance was counted. When students missed 3 class periods then .50 day of attendance was counted and when a student missed more than 4 periods in a day, no attendance was recorded (Olathe School District, 2011).
- *Suspension*: The number of suspension days (in-school suspension or out-of-school suspension) assigned to a student. In the Olathe School District, if a student is in ISS or OSS for any part of the day, the whole day is coded as a suspension day (Olathe School District, 2011).
- *Grade Point Average*: The total number of grade points earned, divided by the total number of class hours (credits) attempted. Grades are based upon a

4-point system and weighted grades are not used in the junior high schools (Olathe School District, 2011).

- *Transition*: The process of moving from one organizational structure to another.
- *Where Everybody Belongs Transition Program (WEB)*: A transition program developed by Hill et al. designed for students leaving elementary school moving into a middle or junior high school building. The WEB program consists of an orientation day, mentor program, and on-going social and academic activities throughout the school year (Hill et al, 2007).

#### Overview of Methodology

Quantitative data were collected for the 2008 - 2009 school year from the Olathe School District record-keeping software known as the AS400. Participant data were tracked as students moved from sixth grade (elementary school) to seventh grade (junior high school) in the Olathe School District. This study actually included 1823 seventh grade students who both began and completed the 2008 – 2009 school year in the same school building. Data on student grade point average, student attendance, and student suspensions were gathered. A *t* test for independent means was conducted to test whether students exposed to the WEB program and those not exposed to the WEB program had differences in any of the following: grade point averages, daily attendance, and number of days suspended. Descriptive statistics were calculated to describe the demographics of the sample. Finally, ANOVAs were conducted to determine whether minority, SES, SPED, ELL, or gender status affected the difference in GPA, attendance, and suspensions between WEB participants and non-WEB participants.

## Summary and Organization of the Study

Chapter one presented the rationale and background for this study. Chapter two presented a review of the literature on transitioning to a new delivery system, a brief history of the junior high and middle schools, and research summarizing the effects of transition on achievement, attendance, and behavior in junior high and middle schools. Chapter three presented methodology and explains the methods and statistics that were utilized in this study. Chapter four presented the results found in the study, framing them around the questions and hypothesis developed in chapter one. Finally, chapter five contained an interpretation of the results, linking study data to research and making recommendations for further study on the topic of transitions.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The National Middle School Association (NMSA) estimates that, more than 88% of public school students move from an elementary school to junior highs and middle schools to the middle-level grades (NMSA, 2002). As students move from one organizational structure to another, problems often arise in the areas of achievement, attendance, and suspensions. Therefore, it is imperative to research strategies and techniques that enable students to undergo transitions from one organizational structure to another.

Recent middle school reform has centered upon comprehensive transition programs that address needs of incoming students. Successful transition programs not only focus on the academic needs of students but also spotlight the social needs, center on teaching new students survival skills, and provide opportunities for student involvement (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2007; Eccles, Wigfield, Midgley, Reumn, Mac Iver, & Feldlaufer (1993); and Juvonen, 2007). Additionally, some argue that, in order to be successful, transition programs need to be year-long and not just a one day activity (Elias, 2002; NMSA, 2002; Shoffner & Williamson, 2000). Since the passage of the No Child Left Behind legislation, the importance has increased for schools to understand the effects transitions have on student achievement, attendance, and suspensions.

The purpose of this study is to determine if the implementation of the WEB transition program has an impact on student achievement, attendance, and student suspensions. This chapter is designed to summarize the research and effectiveness of transition programs on middle level programs. The first area of review is the history of

junior high and middle school programs, followed by a review of suggested components of transitions to junior high and middle level programs. Next is a summary of an example of a transition program for students entering junior high and / or middle schools. Additional research is needed on the transition from elementary school settings to junior high or middle school and the variables of attendance, grade point average, and student suspensions.

The earliest creation of middle level schools sought to better serve student needs by offering schools that were responsive not only to academics but also to social needs (Alexander & McEwin, 1989; Coleman 2001; and Manning, 2000). The National Middle School Association (2002) suggests that middle schools focus on connecting students to school as a way to impact student engagement and academic achievement.

The chapter concludes by reviewing how transitions impact student achievement, attendance, and suspensions. Researchers discussed below have illustrated that motivation, achievement and attendance often drop and suspensions rise as students move from elementary to junior high and / or middle schools. Explanation for these drops varies, but they might be related to student connectedness to school and the structure of the school itself.

#### History of Junior High and Middle Schools

The first junior high schools were implemented in Ohio in 1909 and were created to ease the transition from elementary school to high school (Juvonen, 2007; Manning, 2000). Curriculum for students was centered upon either vocational training or college preparatory programs. This model worked for a long time because it was very good at

producing workers for the workforce while separating higher-ability students for college (Manning, 2000).

Traditional schools of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the United States were built on a two-level system (grades K-8 and 9-12) but the shift to junior high schools changed the structure to a three-level system. A major reason for the shift to the junior high concept came from groups such as the National Education Association (NEA) which sought to create a school to better meet the needs of its students (Manning, 2000). Additionally, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, junior high schools (as well as early middle schools) were created to comply with mandates on desegregation and to address overcrowding issues found in many elementary schools (George & Alexander, 2002). By the 1960s, approximately 80 percent of the schools in the United States were on the three-level delivery system (elementary, junior high or middle school, and high school) compared to the 1920s, when nearly 80 percent used a two-level delivery system (Alexander & McEwin, 1989). During the 1950s and 1960s, the junior high model began to undergo a review because of federal de-segregation regulations and to determine if there were better ways to meet the needs of the students. Researchers such as Eccles, Midgley, and Lord (1991) began to look at the structure of the school and the needs of students and noticed a mismatch between the junior high school and the learner.

Groups such as the National Middle School Association began to lobby for the creation of a new school called a “middle school” that would be better at meeting the needs of the students. Early middle schools did not focus solely on academic needs, but also focused on social and emotional needs (Coleman, 2001; Alexander & McEwin 1989). Michigan is credited with implementing the first middle school in 1950.

Following its development, the middle school became a buzz word in the education world and many more middle schools were implemented in school districts across the country (Manning, 2000).

What separates a junior high from a middle school is in the characteristics of the school itself. Alexander and Williams (1968, as cited in Manning, 2000) made recommendations to provide additions to the original junior high school curriculum by adding opportunities such as “guidance programs, exploratory programs, and vocational and home arts” (p. 192). Erb (2006) suggested that “highly qualified teachers and schools with strong leadership are a strong indicator of school success” and with “faithful implementation of middle school reform efforts such as Turning Points, the research is overwhelmingly positive in terms of student achievement and behavior” (p. 5). Middle schools also depend upon teacher collaboration, looping, and flexible scheduling, as well as changing the role of administration from a facilitator to a curriculum leader (George & Alexander, 2002). In 1989, Alexander and McEwin generated the following list of effective middle school characteristics:

1. Interdisciplinary teaching model with flexible time schedules.
2. Adequate guidance programming (including advisory programs).
3. Exploratory programming.
4. Comprehensive curriculum to prepare students in basic and continued learning skills.
5. The use of effective instructional methods in the classrooms.
6. Continued preparation for the next level of schooling (high school).

(Alexander & McEwin, 1989, pp. 4-7)

Felner and Jackson (1997) noted that positive changes have occurred in the way schools are aligned with student needs, but he suggested additional change is needed to become more effective. Much of what was originally considered effective in middle school design continues to be in use, but the middle school has evolved as it has aged. In addition to utilizing what has stood the test of time, Felner and Jackson suggested implementing ideas promoted by the Turning Points Comprehensive School Transformation project. Turning Points schools (where implementation has been comprehensive) have demonstrated that student achievement raises, student behavior problems decrease, and students feel safer at school. Suggested changes in the middle school recommended by Turning Points include:

1. Keeping older students away from younger students.
2. Use of teacher teams and advisory-based time with adults. Teams should be no more than 120 students per four adults.
3. Monitor the social losses associated with the transition from elementary to middle school, especially for students who come from “at risk” populations.
4. Provide teachers a minimum of four common planning periods a week to collaborate.

Coleman (2001) recommended that, for schools to have meaningful changes there must be buy-in by all members of the school. Coleman also added that middle schools are now dealing with emphasizing a rigorous curriculum, a re-design of advisory time, and purposeful planning for students as they enter the middle school.

Yecke (2005) used the 1989 Carnegie Report to begin a hard look at the shortcomings of middle schools. Yecke looked at data on how the United States is

falling in comparison to other nations on the National Assessment on Educational Progress (NAEP) test and concluded schools need to change their focus back to education and achievement and move away from other social issues. Yecke argued that parents are dissatisfied with the middle school curriculum and behavior expectations and urged those involved with education reform movements to return to a focus on high academic standards rather than a low-level curriculum that waits for students to pass through the early adolescence phase of life.

#### Transitioning from one Delivery System to Another

Huntinger (1981, as cited in Perkins & Gelfer, 1995) defined transitional activities by saying, transitions are “those practices and procedures that schools can use to ensure the smooth adjustment of students as they move from one grade to another” (p. 171). Transitions in schools are often viewed as “rites of passage” that tend to upset the balance within students, forcing them to redefine themselves in an environment that is more demanding (Elias, 2002). Many studies have concluded students often have lower academic success, increased absences, and increased behavior issues as students move from one delivery system to another (Alspaugh, 1998; Bedard & Do, 2005; Balfanz Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007).

Several pieces of research suggested that students experience more stressors as they move from one organizational structure to another. For example, Eccles and Midgley (1989) hypothesized student declines in middle level schools were due not only to changes in the individual, but also to the differences in the structure of the school and how middle schools do not adequately meet the needs of its students. Eccles, et al (1993) suggested that adolescents in middle schools need autonomy, social acceptance, and

engagement in abstract activities. Further, Crockett, Peterson, Graber, Schulenberg, and Ebata (1989) noted boys seem to struggle more with academic achievement and girls tend to struggle with peer relationships. Perkins and Gelfer (1995) completed a study that showed the transition to middle schools is difficult because students must learn new school rules and procedures, make new friends, learn the layout of a new school, complete more academic work on their own, and live up to greater teacher expectations. Arowsafe and Irvin (1992) interviewed middle level students and found students feared learning new procedures, bullies, academic workload, getting lost at school, and friendship as they moved to the middle school. Anderman and Midgley (1996) noticed that motivational losses occurred due to the increased stress on social and interpersonal skills.

Building upon the work of Anderman and Midgley (1996), Chung, Elias, and Schneider, (1998), Perkins and Gelfer (1995), and Eccles, et al (1993) suggested students must also deal with larger class sizes, the addition of activities, additional teacher styles, and changing relationships with adults and peers. Akos (2002) added that transitions are difficult because they involve changes in the individual as well as in the physical setting of the school itself.

Elias (2002) reported that, during the transition from elementary to middle-level schools, students might lose sight of their identity, which causes them to develop a new identity in a more challenging environment (p. 41). Elias suggested that, for students to have the most successful transition, adults need to provide “skill training and social-emotional learning” (p. 42). Elias generated a list of ideas that schools should build experiences around so the school meets the student’s needs. The list includes:

1. Opportunities to give contributions to causes.
2. Opportunities to find and develop positive relationships with peers.
3. Opportunities for the student to explore and develop their talents.
4. Opportunities to learn and practice life skills such as goal setting, understanding feelings and emotions, and how to work in groups (pp. 42-43).

Perkins and Gelfer (1995) also generated a list of ideas that make the transition from elementary school to middle level schools smoother. This list is as follows:

1. Planning team consisting of administration, counselors, etc. to assist with special needs of students.
2. Identification and goal setting for problems that come up.
3. Development of strategic plans written and shared with all stakeholders.
4. Building wide support for the efforts of the transition team.
5. An evaluation of the process (p. 172).

### Transition Programs

A number of studies have been conducted to measure the effects of a transition program on GPA, attendance, and suspensions. Following is a summary of research studies covering the effects of elementary school to middle level transition programs on several school outcomes.

Ferguson and Bulach (1994) conducted a study of the Shadow Program, an elementary-to-middle school transition program used by Whitewater School in Fayette County, Georgia. Ferguson and Bulach's study compared the social adjustment levels of students exposed to the Shadow Program to those who were not exposed to it. In the Shadow Program, elementary students visited the middle school where they shadowed an

older student for a day. Ferguson and Bulach found that students who were exposed to the Shadow Program were more socially adjusted compared to those who were not exposed to the program. Further, according to Ferguson and Bulach, “Students need to believe the environment is challenging, secure, and safe” (p. 22) and suggested that a transition program be built to address these needs.

The Kickoff Transition Program combined orientation and mentoring programs that helped students transition from elementary schools to middle school (Lonzo, 2001). The Kickoff Program used upper classmen to organize an interactive orientation day before school started and continued with year-long activities designed to ease the transition for both students and parents. Implementation of the activities of the Kickoff Program helped develop a positive school atmosphere where students want to stay in school and mentors are used as a “safety net” for new students. While no formal research studies have been done about the Kickoff Program, the program developers cited schools where administrators are very positive about the implementation of the Kickoff Program.

The WEB program has been used by many schools across the nation. The WEB program developers have collected data from several school districts who have implemented the WEB program. According to Hill et al, WEB schools generally showed a decrease in suspensions and an increase in student grades (Hill et al, 2007).

### Motivation

As students transition to new organizational structures, it is imperative to understand what factors might impact student achievement, attendance, and suspensions so intervention programs can better address student transitions. Motivation towards

school tends to drop from late elementary through middle school into early high school (Hudley,Doud, Hershberg, Wright-Castro, & Polanco, 2002).

Anderman and Midgley (1998) looked at academic motivation in middle school from three points of view in an attempt to explain the drop in motivation in middle school. First, they reviewed Attribution Theory, which simply states student perceptions of their own ability impact motivation. If students feel they are in control and can succeed, they are more likely to try harder and maintain motivation. If the opposite is true and students feel successes are out of their control, motivation decreases. Hudley, et al (2002) states, “those who are intrinsically motivated will learn because they feel they can and they find joy in the action” of learning (pp. 3-4).

Anderman and Midgley’s (1998) second point of view related to Goal Theory, which was explained as students being either goal or task orientated. Task orientated students believe the purpose of learning is to increase one’s own skills or understanding. Goal orientated students focus on one’s own progress and learning. Goal orientated students tend to focus their energy on demonstrating what they have learned while task orientated learners tend to focus on tasks to complete to increase their learning. Anderman and Midgley suggested that the best match for success in schools is for students to be task oriented. They took a more detailed approach to the goal theory and studied it while looking at academic success. Looking at the structure of the middle level classroom, they found many middle level classrooms tend to focus on ability goals and elementary school classrooms focus on task completion. If the learner perceives the classroom as one that aligns with his or her style (task or goal orientated) the student may

put forth more or less effort. Anderman and Midgley suggested student perception of the classroom can impact motivation depending upon the learning style of the learner.

Anderman and Midgley's (1998) third point of view was related to Self Determination Theory, which they explained as students' need to believe in oneself, desire to fit in, and need to be independent. Hudley, et al. (2002) discovered a "major predictor of engagement was a student's own perceptions of their school abilities" (p.10). Juvonen (2007) summarized studies done by others finding that students who felt others cared for them, tried harder in school and did better with the transition to middle school.

Siefert (2004) suggested there are four theories at the forefront of explaining student motivation: Self Efficacy Theory, Attribution Theory, Self-Worth Theory, and Achievement Goal Theory. Self Efficacy Theory relates to how a person interprets his/her own ability to complete a given task. Students who feel they will perform satisfactorily on a task often do perform well, and those who feel they will not perform well on a task often do not do well. Self efficacy is based on how a student feels about how they will perform. Attribution Theory is explained as how students perceive their skills on the outcome (success) of a task. If students feel they have the skills, then they will succeed because the outcome was based upon the fact they had the skills to succeed. Those who feel they do not possess the skill will feel they failed because they do not have the skills. This leads to a drop in motivation. The Self-Worth Theory is understood as the ability to complete a task being related to how one views oneself. If a person feels he/she has worth, motivation will increase and the person will work harder to succeed. If a person does not feel he/she is worth anything, motivation is low and the person will not work very hard to succeed. Siefert also suggested that when a student's learning style is

closer to the expectations of the classroom, motivation to succeed will be higher than when the learning style disagrees with the classroom structure-

Eccles and Midgley (1989) discussed Stage Environment Theory, which suggested that negative results occur when students' needs are not met, and positive results, such as growth and positive motivational changes, occur when the environment meets the learners' needs. The Stage Environment Theory might explain why motivation drops in middle school students as their needs are not met by the school.

The National Association of Secondary School Principals (2006) added, "Well designed transition programs can restore the strong sense of belonging the entering student once felt in elementary school -- a key element associated with the positive motivation to enjoy and succeed in academic tasks" (p. 2). Wentzel (1998) suggested that, when students lack positive relationships (connections) with peers and adults in the school, motivation will drop and academic problems will result. The middle school movement has demonstrated the need for students to feel connected to school. Shulkind (2007) suggested most dropouts did so because they felt the teachers did not care about them. Further, Juvonen (2007) found students in American schools do not like to be in school. Though one cannot assume school connectedness produces increased academics, Juvonen said there is some information to suggest that motivation is affected by connectedness.

### Achievement

Researchers such as Alspaugh (1998) found that students experience a loss in achievement or a drop on achievement tests in the transition from elementary to middle school. Parades (1990) agreed and found that achievement test scores drop regardless of

when a student transitions. For example, students who were in a K-6 setting scored higher than students who were in a 6-8 setting (Parades, 1990). Alspaugh (1998) reported that the scores tended to rebound to pre-transition levels in the year following the transitions. A possible explanation for this might be the mismatch between the needs of the students in middle school and the structure of the middle school. Alspaugh also found that when students arrive from different elementary schools, achievement drops more than when students all come from the same elementary school.

Looking at other influences on achievement, Erb (2006) studied the relationship between grade configuration and student achievement and suggested that configuration is a weak indicator of student achievement. Erb felt that other factors that need to be present to increase student achievement are (a) strong building leadership, (b) highly qualified teachers, (c) “Turning Points” characteristics, and (d) a healthy school culture.

Rockoff and Lockwood (2010) found that as students transition from elementary school to a new middle school, academic achievement in both math and English drops. Rockoff and Lockwood found that students making the transition to sixth grade in the middle school have lower achievement than students who make the transition entering grade seven. Rockoff and Lockwood suggest these losses continue to impact academic success in grade eight.

#### Attendance

Freeman (2002) illustrated that students who attend a K-8 setting school have higher attendance than students who attend middle schools. Freeman suggested the K-8 structure may help to develop supportive relationships in the elementary school but are void in the middle school. Parades (1990) discovered students in an elementary school

setting have higher attendance when compared to students in the first year of junior high school. Parades attributed the difference in attendance to rules and procedures of the new school as opposed to actual student behavior. Lee and Burkam's (2003) study discovered that, when students feel cared about at school, they come to school.

The National Forum on Education Statistics (2009, p. 1) states, "A missed school day is a missed opportunity to learn." There is a large body of empirical evidence that suggested a relationship exists between inputs into the education process and student performance level (Lamdin, 1996). Caldas (1993) and the National Forum on Educational Statistics (NCES) (2009) found that student attendance was positively and significantly associated with student performance, but suggested more study is necessary on this topic. Baker and Jansen (2000) emphasized three points related to excessive absenteeism, including (a) missing school is against the law, (b) frequent absences lead to future problems once the student returns to school, and (c) habits that are developed can lead to larger issues such as truancy. Lamdin (1996) suggested that school attendance can be over-weighted relative to other factors such as parent pressure, internal motivation, and teacher quality, so the impact of attendance might be overstated.

Much of the research on attendance has focused on what to do once an attendance problem is noticed rather than trying to limit absences in the first place (Railsback & Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NREL), 2004). A possible predictor of excessive absenteeism was a lack of connectedness to the school. Wagstaff, Combs, and Jarvis (2000) conducted a study that interviewed students which found several risk factors related to missing excessive amounts of school, including few positive

relationships with peers, high levels of suspensions, feeling unsafe at school, and being bored at school.

Lee and Burkam (2003) stated that absenteeism is related not only to issues with the student but also with the school culture. Examples of building a healthy school culture included implementation of an adult mentoring program, development of positive peer relations at school, and peer mentoring.

A recent study (Balfanz et al, 2007) suggested failing classes and missing school was predictive of dropping out of school. Balfanz et al (2007) suggested that when a student drops out, it is because they have disengaged from school a long time before. The data in Balfanz et al.'s, 2007 study predicted that, when students in grade 6 miss more than 10% of school, the odds are increased that they will not graduate from high school. When a sixth-grade student misses 20% or more of school, the odds are overwhelmingly strong that the student will not graduate from high school.

As cited in Dube and Orpinas (2009), previous research noted that students who miss school have a greater possibility of acquiring negative health and social problems, dropping out of school, having lower academic achievement, and having a poor life after school. Further, students who miss school were usually more behaviorally challenged and had difficulty making positive relations at school. Finally, Dube and Orpinas (2009) summarized that students who had high absences may also have had fewer quality peer relationships as they were disconnected to school but the direction of that finding may be reversed meaning the lack of relationships caused high absenteeism.

#### Student Suspensions and Behavior

Hirst (2005) suggested that rates of discipline referrals and suspensions

increase in middle school. Although there are many possible explanations why the rates increase, research on adolescent delinquency illustrates a pattern of negative peer influence (Jang, 1999). Juvonen presumed that students who do not feel connected are not motivated to behave the way others want them to behave. Failure to connect with school can lead to many negative behaviors (2007).

Railsback identified three sources of inappropriate student behavior. Starting with the school environment, the study explained that student perception of rules, the staff, and the degree of freedom afforded to the students all impact a student's decisions related to behaviors. Second, Railsback concluded that transitions tend to impact behaviors. Behaviors during the first year of the transition tended to be lower at first, then spike finally returning to pre-transition levels. Finally, peer relationships can impact behavior choices. Contacts with peers who are older or choosing more inappropriate behaviors may lead students to make poor behavior choices (2004).

Theriot and Dupper (2010) conducted a study using data from 2003-2005 about students moving from grade 5 (elementary school) to grade 6 (middle school). They found that discipline referrals increased 18% for students in grade 6 relative to students in grade 5. Another study completed by Malaspina and Rimm-Kauffman (2008) suggested student discipline issues did increase at the student's first educational transition point.

It is important to understand that, although the increase in discipline rates as students transitioned to middle level schools is a concern in the short term, long term impacts are also evident as suspension rates in grade 6 appear to be a "moderate to strong predictor of dropping out of school" (Skiba & Peterson, 1999, p. 376).

### Summary of Research

This chapter reviewed the history and purpose of junior high and middle school programs. Junior high and middle schools have undergone a transformation over time and, surely, these changes will continue as more research is completed assesses middle level schools that best meet the needs of students.

The research on transitions from one organizational structure to another often impacts educational outcomes such as achievement, attendance, and school suspensions. There appears to be a link between students transitioning from an elementary school to junior high and middle schools and a decline in student achievement. A possible mismatch between the needs of the students and the structure of middle level schools may be the reason for the decline in achievement. Student attendance may also be affected by the transition from elementary to middle level schools. It appears that the structure of middle level schools may impact the attendance of the students themselves while another possibility is the administrative rules and procedures that students must learn may effect student attendance. Discipline referrals and suspensions also increase in middle level schools. A possible cause for increased discipline referrals and suspensions is that students may not feel a strong connection to their school. Increased discipline problems and student suspensions may place students at risk and result in additional problems in the future.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

The purpose of this study was to compare achievement, attendance, and student suspensions of seventh grade students who participated in the *Where Everybody Belongs* (WEB) program with seventh grade students who did not participate in the program as they made the transition from an elementary-school setting to a junior high setting.

This chapter contains information on the population and sample of the study, sampling procedures, instrumentation, measurement, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, and limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the chapter.

#### Research Design

This study is a quantitative research study utilizing an experimental group which was made up of Olathe seventh grade students who were exposed to the WEB program and a control group which was comprised of Olathe seventh grade students who did not experience the WEB program.

#### *Population and Sample*

The Olathe School District had eight junior high schools spread across the District. This study used only Olathe seventh-grade students who started the 2008 – 2009 school year and completed the year in their respective buildings. Four of the eight junior high schools in Olathe implemented the WEB program in the 2008 – 2009 school year. Table 3 identifies which Olathe junior high schools implemented the WEB transition program at the beginning of the 2008 – 2009 school year.

Table 3

*Olathe School District Junior High School WEB Implementation in 2008 - 2009*

School	Implemented in 2008 - 2009
A	X
B	
C	X
D	
E	X
F	
G	X
H	
Total	

*Note:* X indicates schools that implemented the WEB program during the 2008 – 2009 school year. From Olathe School District, 2008 – 2009; KSDE, 2010

### Sampling Procedures

Purposeful sampling was used in this study. To eliminate students who might have experienced only partial exposure to the WEB program, only students who started the first day of school and ended the school year in the same building used in the study. The experimental group used in this study consisted of 902 seventh grade students, and the control group used in the study consisted of 921 seventh grade students. Tables 1 and

2 (pages 3-4) show the seventh grade enrollment of each of the junior high schools at the beginning of the 2008 – 2009 school year.

*Instrumentation and data collection*

Permission for conducting this study and using data contained in the AS 400 covering students in the Olathe School District was obtained from the following two sources: First, permission was granted by the Baker University Institutional Review Board on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2011. A copy of the IRB Form is included in Appendix A. Second, the Olathe School District designee, Kim Gillespe, gave permission to access the data from the AS 400 for the study. A copy of the Olathe approval letter is included in Appendix C. Rita Hoffman assisted with accessing school demographic data including grade-point average, attendance, and discipline data from the AS400 System.

Quantitative data for this study came from the Olathe School District's student database known as the AS 400. The AS 400 is a computer program that tracks each student and includes demographic information such as entry date into the Olathe Public Schools, grade point average, attendance data, and suspension data. Student grade-point averages stored in the AS 400 system were retrieved for each student who qualified for the study. The Olathe School District uses a 4.0-based grade-point average scale. The Olathe School District calculates cumulative student grade point averages using the total number of grade points earned divided by the class credits taken. GPA's were calculated at the conclusion of the students' seventh-grade year in May 2009. Grades earned prior to the start of the seventh grade year were not included in the calculation of the grade-point average.

Student daily attendance was calculated for each student who qualified for the study. Daily attendance was calculated using only full days of student attendance. Attendance was a cumulative number that represented the total number of school days attended during the seventh grade school year. Suspensions were calculated for each student who qualified for the study. Suspensions recorded in the AS400 system for all disciplinary reasons were used in the calculation of the suspensions. Suspensions were reported as a cumulative number of all in school and out of school suspension days added together for each category (in-school or out-of-school suspension).

### Data Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

Descriptive statistics were calculated through the use of the program, SPSS Faculty Pack Software V. 18 and were used to describe the student enrollment at WEB schools and non-WEB schools.

Three research hypotheses were written so the researcher could review each of the three variables individually. The three research hypotheses used in this study were:

H1: The GPA of students who were exposed to the WEB program will be higher than students who were not exposed to the WEB program.

A two-tailed independent samples *t* test at the 0.05 level of significance for the difference between mean scores of the WEB and non-WEB groups was calculated using the students' grade point averages on SPSS Faculty Pack V. 18. Additionally, an effect size was calculated using the mean and standard deviation of the GPA data.

H2: The attendance of students who were exposed to the WEB program will be higher than students who were not exposed to the WEB program.

A two-tailed independent samples  $t$  test at the 0.05 level of significance for the difference between mean scores of the WEB and non-WEB groups was calculated using the students' attendance on SPSS Faculty Pack V. 18. Additionally, an effect size was calculated using the mean and standard deviation of the attendance data.

H3: The number of suspensions for students who were exposed to the WEB program will be lower than students who were not exposed to the WEB program.

A two-tailed independent samples  $t$  test at the 0.05 level of significance for the difference between mean scores of the WEB and non-WEB groups was calculated using students' suspensions on SPSS Faculty Pack V. 18. Additionally, using the mean and standard deviation of the suspension data, effect size was calculated.

### Limitations

The study has the following limitations:

1. The information recorded in the AS 400 system may not have been recorded in an accurate manner. Data collection and input occurs in individual schools and errors might have been made with data entry.
2. The data used in this study covered students in seventh grade during the 2008 – 2009 school year. Data from different school years may produce different results.
3. The groups of students used in this study varied in their composition. Differences in student make up could produce results that artificially influence the results of the study.

## Summary

Chapter 3 contained an overview of the techniques used to gather and measure data collected from students who were exposed to the WEB transition program and those who were not exposed to the WEB program. The chapter further describes who was chosen for the study, the method data was analyzed, and hypotheses that guided the study. Finally, the limitations for the study were listed. Chapter four presents the results of the study framed around the research questions and hypotheses developed in chapter one.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine whether there were differences in grade point averages, attendance, and suspensions between Olathe, Kansas seventh grade students who were exposed to the *Where Everybody Belongs* (WEB) transition program during the 2008 – 2009 school year and those Olathe seventh grade students who were not exposed to the WEB program during the same year. Archived data was collected on 1823 seventh grade students who began and finished their seventh grade year in the same school to ensure full exposure to the WEB program treatments. The data presented in chapter four differs slightly from data presented in chapters one and three as chapters one and three were based on the September 20<sup>th</sup> building principal student count. Data used in this study were based on students who met the conditions of being enrolled on the first and last day of school in the same Olathe junior high school.

## Descriptive Statistics

Table 4 contains gender data for the sample used in the study. Of the total 1823 students in the seventh grade in 2008 – 2009, 902 were females and 921 were males.

Table 4

*Gender Data for Sample*

	Frequency	Percent
Female	902	49.5
Male	921	50.5
Total	1823	100.0

Table 5 displays data based on student English Language Learner (ELL) status. 1727 students were Non-ELL and 96 students were coded as ELL. Thirteen students coded as consult, 3 students declined services, 39 were coded as monitor, 13 were considered proficient, and 28 were active ELL students. A student's ELL status was based on scores on the Kansas English Language Proficiency Assessment (KELPA). Students who made up all of the ELL categories (monitor, proficient, active, etc.) were combined to produce the ELL portion of the each group.

Table 5

*English Language Learner Status*

	Frequency	Percent
NON-ELL	1727	94.7
Consult	13	.7
Denied	3	.2
Monitor	39	2.1
Proficient	13	.7
Active	28	1.5
Total	1823	100.0

Table 6 contains student Socio-Economic Status (SES) data. The sample for this study contained 1474 students who were not considered low SES and 349 students who were coded as low SES. Of the 349 low SES students, 248 were coded as free and 101

were coded as reduced. Free and reduced students were combined to produce the Low SES group in the study.

Table 6

*Socio-Economic Status*

	Frequency	Percent
Non Free or Reduced	1474	80.9
Free	248	13.6
Reduced	101	5.5
Total	1823	100.0

Table 7 displays data relating to student special education status. In the study, 1572 students were not served in special education, including 100 students who were coded as gifted for a total of 1672 students who were not considered part of the special education group. The sample used in the study contained 151 students who were considered special education students. The students who made up the special education portion of the sample were coded as Autism Spectrum Disorders, Emotionally Disturbed, Hearing Impaired, Learning Disabled, Mentally Retarded, Other Health Impaired, Orthopedically Impaired, Speech Language, Traumatic Brain Injury, and Visually Impaired.

Table 7

*Special Education Status*

	Frequency	Percent
Non-SPED	1572	86.2
Autism Spectrum Disorders	11	.6
Emotionally Disturbed	8	.4
Gifted (Non-SPED)	100	5.5
Hearing Impaired	1	.1
Learning Disabled	90	4.9
Mentally Retarded	8	.4
Other Health Impaired	21	1.2
Orthopedically Impaired	1	.1
Speech and Language	8	.4
Traumatic Brain Injury	1	.1
Visually Impaired	2	.1
Total	1823	100.0

Table 8 displays data on ethnicity as reported by each student or family. The student ethnic population included 1415 white students, three students American Indian /

Alaskan students, 84 Asian students, 159 Hispanic students, 105 African American students, and 57 multi-racial students.

Table 8

*Student Ethnicity Status*

	Frequency	Percent
White	1415	77.6
American Indian/Alaskan	3	.2
Asian	84	4.6
Hispanic	159	8.7
African American	105	5.8
Multi-racial	57	3.1
Total	1823	100.0

In order to determine the exact composition of the WEB participants and non-WEB participants, several cross tabulations were calculated. Table 9 displays cross tabulation data covering group and ethnicity.

Table 9

*WEB Participation - Gender Cross Tabulation*

		Gender		Total
		Female	Male	
Group	WEB	429	473	902
	Non-WEB	473	448	921
Total		902	921	1823

First, when gender was crossed with group, the break down was 429 females and 473 males who participated in the WEB program and 473 females and 448 males who did not participate in the WEB program.

Secondly, when ELL students were cross tabulated with WEB participation status, WEB participants included 867 non-ELL students, and 34 students who were labeled ELL. Non-WEB participants were comprised of 860 non-ELL students and 59 students who were labeled ELL. The non-WEB participant group had 25 more ELL students than the WEB participant group. Table 10 contains the cross tabulation data covering group and ELL status.

Table 10

*WEB Participation - ELL Status Cross Tabulation*

		Group		Total
		WEB	Non-WEB	
ELL Status	Non-ELL	867	860	1727
	Consult	4	9	13
	Declined	1	2	3
	Monitor	12	27	39
	Proficient	6	7	13
	Active	12	16	28
Total		902	921	1823

The third cross tabulation that was calculated was on students' special education status. Refer to Table 11 (page 41) for the breakdown of SPED students for WEB and non-WEB participants. There were 823 non-SPED students in the WEB participants

Table 11

*WEB Participation – Special Education Status Cross Tabulation*

		Group		Total
		WEB	Non- WEB	
SPED Status	Non-SPED	781	791	1572
	Autism	7	4	11
	Emotionally Disturbed	3	5	8
	Gifted (non-sped)	42	58	100
	Hearing Impaired	1	0	1
	Learning Disabled	44	46	90
	Mentally Retarded	5	3	8
	Other Health Impaired	12	9	21
	Orthopedically Impaired	0	1	1
	Speech and Learning	6	2	8
	Traumatic Brain Injury	0	1	1
	Vision Impaired	1	1	2
	Total	902	921	1823

group and there were 849 non-sped students in the non-WEB group. There were 72 special education students in the WEB participant group and 68 special education students in the non-WEB group.

The fourth cross tabulation calculated crossed group and student socio-economic status. The group of WEB participants had 97 free students and 34 reduced students for a

total of 131 low SES students and 771 students who were not considered low SES. Non-WEB participants was comprised of 151 free students and 67 reduced students for a total of 218 low SES students and 703 students who were not considered low SES. Table 12 displays the SES cross tabulation results.

Table 12

*WEB Participation - SES Status Cross Tabulation*

		SES Status			Total
		Non Low-SES	Free	Reduced	
Group	WEB	771	97	34	902
	Non-WEB	703	151	67	921
Total		1474	248	101	1823

The final cross tabulation was calculated using student ethnicity as shown in Table 13 (page 43). The group of WEB participants had 711 white students, 2 American Indian/Alaskan, 48 Asian, 55 Hispanic, 59 African American, and 27 multi-racial students. The group of non-WEB participants had 704 white students, 1 American Indian/Alaskan, 36 Asian, 104 Hispanic, 46 African American, and 30 multi-racial students.

Table 13

*WEB Participation - Student Ethnicity Status*

		Group		Total
		WEB	Non- WEB	
Ethnicity Status	White	711	704	1415
	American Indian / Alaskan	2	1	3
	Asian	48	36	84
	Hispanic	55	104	159
	African American	59	46	105
	Multi	27	30	57
Total		902	921	1823

## Hypothesis Testing Results

The results of the hypothesis testing for this study are presented in the following sections. For each of the three tested research hypotheses (grade point average, student attendance, and student suspensions) the research question is displayed followed by the research hypothesis. Following the hypothesis are the results for each research question. Two-tailed independent sample  $t$  tests were conducted to address the research questions. In all analyses reported in this chapter, the size of WEB participant group was 902 students and the Non-WEB group was 921 students.

Research Question #1: Do students who participated in the WEB program have higher grade point averages than those who do not participate in the WEB program?

H1: The GPA of students who were exposed to the WEB program is higher than students who were not exposed to the WEB program at the 0.05 level of significance.

The results of the independent samples  $t$  test ( $t = 4.53$ ,  $df = 1821$ ,  $p = .000$ ) indicated a statistically significant difference between the average GPA of participants and non-participants. Since the  $p$ -value was less than 0.05, there was enough evidence to conclude the research hypothesis is true. Participants (3.49) have a higher GPA than non-participants (3.35).

Research Question #2: Do students who participated in the WEB program have better attendance than those who do not participate in the WEB program?

H2: The attendance of students who were exposed to the WEB program is higher than students who were not exposed to the WEB program at the 0.05 level of significance.

The results of the independent samples  $t$  test ( $t = -1.44$ ,  $df = 1821$ ,  $p = .151$ ) indicated there was not a statistically significant difference between the average attendance of participants and non-participants. Since the  $p$ -value was greater than 0.05, there was not enough evidence to conclude research hypothesis is true. WEB participant attendance (163.68 days) and non-WEB participants (164.11 days) were not statistically different.

Research Question #3: Do students who participated in the WEB program have lower occurrences of in-school and / or out-of-school suspensions than those who do not participate in the WEB program?

H3: The number of suspensions for students who were exposed to the WEB program is lower than students who were not exposed to the WEB program at the 0.05 level of significance.

The results of the independent samples  $t$  test ( $t = -.66$ ,  $df = 1821$ ,  $p = .509$ ) indicated there was not a statistically significant difference between the average suspensions of WEB participants and non-WEB participants. Since the  $p$ -value was greater than 0.05, the research hypothesis was not accepted. Suspensions for WEB participants (.66) and non-WEB participants (.66) were not statistically different.

#### Additional Analyses

Hypothesis testing yielded no differences in attendance and suspensions so further analysis was completed. In order to determine whether gender status, minority, SPED, SES, or ELL, affected the difference in GPA, attendance, or suspensions between WEB participants and non-WEB participants, fifteen two-factor univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted.

Table 14

#### *ANOVA Results for Grade Point Average*

Interaction Effect	$df$	$F$ statistic	$p$
Gender by Group (WEB / non-WEB)	1,1819	1.780	.182
Minority by Group (WEB / non-WEB)	1,1819	.041	.839
SPED by Group (WEB / non-WEB)	1,1819	.623	.430
SES by Group (WEB / non-WEB)	1,1819	2.056	.152
ELL by Group (WEB / non-WEB)	1,1819	.011	.917

Table 14 (above) presents ANOVA results for GPA. The results of the analyses indicated no effect on the differences between WEB participants and non-participants based on gender, minority, SPED, SES, or ELL.

Table 15 displays ANOVA results for attendance. The results of the analyses indicated no effect on the differences between WEB participants and non-participants based on gender, minority, SPED, SES, or ELL.

Table 15

*ANOVA Results for Attendance*

Interaction Effect	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i> statistic	<i>p</i>
Gender by Group (WEB / non-WEB)	1,1819	.252	.616
Minority by Group (WEB / non-WEB)	1,1819	1.722	.190
SPED by Group (WEB / non-WEB)	1,1819	.671	.413
SES by Group (WEB / non-WEB)	1,1819	.167	.683
ELL by Group (WEB / non-WEB)	1,1819	2.007	.157

Table 16 shows ANOVA results for suspensions. The results of the analyses indicated no effect on the differences between WEB participants and non-participants based on gender, minority, SPED, SES, or ELL.

Table 16

*ANOVA Results for Suspensions*

Interaction Effect	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i> statistic	<i>p</i>
Gender by Group (WEB / non-WEB)	1,1819	.016	.899
Minority by Group (WEB / non-WEB)	1,1819	.055	.815
SPED by Group (WEB / non-WEB)	1,1819	.120	.729
SES by Group (WEB / non-WEB)	1,1819	.257	.612
ELL by Group (WEB / non-WEB)	1,1819	.896	.344

## Summary

Chapter four presented the descriptive statistics and hypotheses testing used in this study. All calculations were obtained using SPSS Faculty Pack V. 18.0. Mean, median, mode, standard deviation, were calculated and a *t*-test score was used to determine the outcome of testing each of the three hypotheses. There was a statistically significant difference for students who participated in the WEB program in GPA's. There were no statistically significant differences between suspensions or the attendance of WEB students and non-WEB students. Further, two-factor ANOVAs were conducted to look more closely at the effect of gender, minority status, SES, SPED, and ELL classification on the differences between participants and non-participants in GPA, attendance, and suspensions. No significant statistical difference in GPA, attendance, and suspensions was observed based on gender, minority, SES, SPED, or ELL status for WEB and non-WEB participants. The final chapter of this study provides a summary of findings, offers recommendations for further study, compares study findings to literature review, and provides information for the Olathe School District and Hill et al, the designers of the WEB program.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### INTREPREATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents an overview of the problem, the purpose statement used to drive the study, a review of the methodology, major study results, findings related to the literature, and recommendations for future studies. Chapter five ends with implications for action and concluding remarks.

#### Study Summary

##### *Overview of the Problem*

Studies have illustrated drops in GPA and attendance as students move from elementary school settings to junior high or middle schools (Blyth, Simmons, and Carlton-Ford, 1983; Rockoff & Lockwood, 2010; Freeman, 2005). Every year students undergo educational transitions where students move from self-contained elementary schools to junior high or middle school settings. It is critical for educators to fully understand the difficulties associated with educational transitions so programs can be implemented to limit losses associated with transitions.

##### *Purpose Statement*

The purpose of this study was to determine if there were differences in achievement, attendance, and suspensions of Olathe, Kansas seventh grade students who participated in the WEB program and students who did not experience the WEB program as they made the transition from an elementary-school setting to a junior-high setting.

##### *Review of the Methodology*

All students who entered seventh grade in one of the eight Olathe, Kansas junior high schools in August 2008 and completed the 2008 – 2009 school year in the same

junior high school were eligible participants for this study. Using the Olathe School District AS400 system, archived student grade point average, attendance, and suspension data were collected and analyzed for this study. All study related data calculations were performed using SPSS Faculty Pack Software V. 18.

### *Major Findings*

Results from testing the first variable, GPA, revealed there was a statistically significant difference in GPA between the students exposed to the WEB program and students who were not exposed to the WEB program. The hypothesis covering GPA predicted students who were exposed to the WEB program would have higher GPA's than students who were not exposed to the WEB program at the 0.05 level of significance. Since WEB students had a higher GPA than non-WEB students, with a *p* value less than 0.05, the research hypothesis may be accepted as true. The hypothesis covering attendance predicted students who were exposed to the WEB program would have higher attendance than students who were not exposed to the WEB program at the 0.05 level of significance. WEB student attendance and non-WEB student attendance were not statistically different; therefore the research hypothesis must be rejected. Testing the final variable, suspensions, did not yield any significant differences in suspensions between WEB students and non-WEB students. The hypothesis covering suspensions predicted students who were exposed to the WEB program would have had lower suspensions than students who were not exposed to the WEB program at the 0.05 level of significance. WEB student suspensions and non-WEB student suspensions were not statistically different; therefore the research hypothesis must be rejected.

ANOVA results between each variable (GPA, attendance, and suspensions) and student SES, SPED, ELL, ethnicity, and gender did not affect the differences between seventh grade students exposed to WEB and non-WEB participants.

### Findings Related to the Literature

Some research evaluates the impact of transition programs on GPA, attendance, and suspensions as students move from an elementary school delivery model to a junior high or middle school delivery model. A few research studies suggested that transition programs, if implemented correctly, can aid in social adjustments during the transition to middle schools for the new students (Ferguson & Bulach, 1994; Lonzo, 2001). The results from this study suggest students who experienced the WEB program have higher seventh grade GPA's than students who were not exposed to the WEB program. A possible explanation to why this significant difference exists for WEB participants may be the result of students who experienced the WEB program participated in academic follow up sessions on a weekly basis. These academic follow up sessions were taught by peer mentors who covered such topics as successful study habits, organization, and time management. All students who experienced the WEB program in their school participated in the academic follow up sessions. Students in non-WEB schools may or may not have participated in formal programs meant to address the skills academic follow up sessions teach.

Research covering student attendance as students move from an elementary-school delivery model to a middle school (or junior high) model is limited as much of the research covers what to do once an attendance problem is realized rather than attempting

to prevent absences from occurring in the first place (Railsback, 2004). A common finding in the research is the idea that students attended elementary school at higher rates compared to middle school because in the elementary school they are better “connected” or have better peer relationships (Freeman, 2002; Lee & Burkham, 2003). This study did not compare attendance between elementary and middle school, rather, it looked at attendance between WEB participants and non-WEB participants. The results of this study did not illustrate any statistically significant differences in attendance between WEB participants and non-WEB participants. A possible explanation for why there was not a statistically significant difference between WEB participants and non-WEB participants is that many students in Olathe junior high schools feel connected to school and may have higher quality peer relationships or the difference could not be detected because student attendance is so high.

Research related to student suspensions as students move from an elementary-school delivery model to a middle school model illustrated that suspensions increase in middle school (Hirst, 2005). Three possible explanations of this increase are peer influences, student connectedness to school, and the school environment (Jang 1999; Juvonen, 2007; Railsback, 2004). This study compared suspensions of WEB participants to non-WEB participants. The results of this study did not demonstrate any statistically significant difference in suspensions for WEB participants and non-WEB participants. A possible explanation for the lack of statistical difference is that many students in Olathe junior high schools may not feel negative peer pressure and maybe more connected to their school or the difference could not be detected because suspensions are so low.

## Conclusions

### *Implications for Action*

The findings of this study may be useful to several groups of people. First, the Administration and School Board of Education of the Olathe School District can use the results of this study to assist in making decisions relating to the continued use of the WEB program. The Olathe school district incurs WEB costs for training, materials, and supplies for implementation which may be difficult during times when monetary resources are limited. Second, the operators of the WEB program, Hill et al, may want to review the WEB program to determine if changes are needed to better address attendance or suspension problems. In this study both variables (attendance and suspensions) showed no significant differences between WEB participants and non-WEB participants. Hill et al could place more emphasis on attendance or suspensions as part of the activities implemented through the WEB program. In light of the pressures brought about by the No Child Left Behind legislation, it is critically important to make sure school district decision makers reduce the negative impacts of transitions as much as possible for all students.

### *Recommendations for Future Research*

As the results of this study have been presented and explained, consideration for future research needs to be considered. This researcher suggests that a similar study be conducted with a more diverse student population. The relative Olathe, Kansas junior high school percentages for ethnic minority students (23%), low SES students (19%), SPED students (15.8%), and ELL students (5.3%) were low when compared to the population of many junior-high aged students across the nation. Follow-up studies with a

more ethnically-diverse student population sample or studies completed in more rural or urban settings than exists in the Olathe School District would allow for comparison to determine whether this study's results could result in different outcomes.

A second recommendation for a future study would be to conduct a student survey to evaluate student connectedness to school and the quality of peer relationships. The review of the literature focused on each of those two areas as possible causes for changes in school outcome measures (GPA, attendance, and suspensions) in the middle schools. The results of the recommended study could provide administrators information relating to the importance of student connectedness when students make transitions from one organizational structure to another.

A third recommendation for a future study would be to add the Kansas Reading or Math Assessment results as a variable for study. In general, GPA's can be subjective as each teacher assigns grades based upon individual criteria using the district approved curriculum as a basis. The addition of the state assessment data might be viewed more objectively as all students take the same assessment under similar conditions. Comparisons could be made with all Kansas school districts since all schools take the same math and reading assessments.

A fourth recommendation for further study would be to perform a longitudinal study of a three year implementation of a transition program like the WEB program. A longitudinal study of three years or more might produce different results than obtained in a one year snap-shot of a transition program.

A fifth recommendation for a future study would be to conduct the same study but use students in sixth grade instead of using seventh grade students. Sixth grade students

are younger and may be less mature than older students which might produce different results than the current study.

A final recommendation for a future study would be to survey individual building WEB coordinators to determine if they have implemented the WEB program according to the WEB guidelines. While at the WEB training, the trainers often said there are times it is OK for each school to make individual changes to the WEB program but for the most part, the WEB program needs to be implemented according to the WEB guidelines. The implementation of the WEB program appears to be critical in determining the perceived impact of the WEB program. If schools say they are implementing WEB but not following the prescribed methods as designed, the results of the WEB program may be altered.

#### *Concluding Remarks*

The purpose of this study was to compare achievement, attendance, and suspensions of seventh grade students who participated in the WEB program with seventh grade students who did not participate in the program as they made the transition from an elementary school setting to junior high setting. This study has demonstrated there was a statistically significant difference in GPA for seventh grade students who experienced the WEB program compared to seventh grade students who did not experience the WEB program. This study also showed there was not a statistically significant difference for WEB participants and non-participants in attendance and suspensions. The results of this study align with the findings of the research conducted on GPA but the results of the study do not align with research findings for attendance and suspensions. The findings of the study suggest that the WEB program may have value in

transitioning students from elementary to middle school settings; however, more research is necessary to confirm the value of the WEB transition program.

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## APPENDIX

## Appendix A – IRB Form



SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
GRADUATE DEPARTMENT

**Date: January 1, 2011**

IRB PROTOCOL NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_  
(IRB USE ONLY)

## IRB REQUEST

Proposal for Research

Submitted to the Baker University Institutional Review Board

**I. Research Investigator(s) (Students must list faculty sponsor first)**

Department(s) School of Education Graduate Department

Name	Signature
1. Dr. Bill Neuenswander	_____, Major Advisor
2. Margaret Waterman	_____, Research Analyst
3.	_____, University Committee Member
4.	_____, External Committee Member

Principal Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Steven J. Skoczek \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone: 913-768-8370  
 Email: chgobears27@sbcglobal.net  
 Mailing address: 16695 W 155<sup>th</sup> Terr  
 Olathe, Kansas 66062

Faculty sponsor: Dr. Bill Neuenswander  
 Phone: 785-594-4518  
 Email: Bill.Neuenswander@bakeru.edu

Expected Category of Review: \_\_\_ Exempt \_\_\_ Expedited  X  Full

II: Protocol: **PERCEPTIONS OF ALLIED HEALTH EMPLOYERS AND CAREER COLLEGE ALLIED HEALTH INSTRUCTORS ON NEEDED KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS FOR THE WORKPLACE.**

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## Summary

In a sentence or two, please describe the background and purpose of the research.

The purpose of this study was to compare student achievement (GPA), attendance, and behaviors of seventh grade students who have participated in the Where Everybody Belongs (WEB) transition program with seventh grade students who did not participate in the WEB program as they made the transition from elementary to junior high school. The study was conducted using data from the 2008 – 2009 school year in the Olathe, Kansas School District.

The results of the study will be used to determine the impact of the WEB program on students transitioning from the elementary school setting to the middle school setting.

Briefly describe each condition or manipulation to be included within the study.

**Student GPA was the 2008 – 2009 grade seven cumulative grade point averages for each 7<sup>th</sup> grade student in the study.**

**Student attendance was the cumulative number of days each 7<sup>th</sup> grade student in the study attended school in the 2008 – 2009 school year.**

**Student suspension was the total number of suspension days (in school and out of school) each 7<sup>th</sup> grade student in the study accumulated during the 2008 – 2009 school year.**

What measures or observations will be taken in the study? If any questionnaire or other instruments are used, provide a brief description and attach a copy.

Will the subjects encounter the risk of psychological, social, physical or legal risk? If so, please describe the nature of the risk and any measures designed to mitigate that risk.

**On each of the three variables described above, descriptive statistics and two-tailed independent *t*-tests will be calculated for both 7<sup>th</sup> grade populations (WEB and non-WEB participants) using SPSS faculty pack v. 18.**

**No questionnaires were used in this study.**

**There were no risks on students associated with this study.**

Will any stress to subjects be involved? If so, please describe.

**No**

Will the subjects be deceived or misled in any way? If so, include an outline or script of the debriefing.

**No**

Will there be a request for information which subjects might consider to be personal or sensitive? If so, please include a description.

**No**

Will the subjects be presented with materials which might be considered to be offensive, threatening, or degrading? If so, please describe.

**No**

Approximately how much time will be demanded of each subject?

**None**

Who will be the subjects in this study? How will they be solicited or contacted? Provide an outline or script of the information which will be provided to subjects prior to their volunteering to participate. Include a copy of any written solicitation as well as an outline of any oral solicitation.

**Data for all 2008 – 2009 Olathe School District 7<sup>th</sup> grade students (both WEB and non-WEB participants) will be used in this study. Data will be provided for all 2008 – 2009 Olathe School District 7<sup>th</sup> grade students; however, there will be no identification of individual student information.**

**The study will solicit no information from students.**

What steps will be taken to insure that each subject's participation is voluntary? What if any inducements will be offered to the subjects for their participation?

**Permission to use data from the Olathe School District AS400 records system was provided by the Olathe superintendent of schools. This study did not involve voluntary student participation.)**

How will you insure that the subjects give their consent prior to participating? Will a written consent form be used? If so, include the form. If not, explain why not.

**A student consent form was not used. Permission to use the data was provided by the Olathe superintendent of schools.**

Will any aspect of the data be made a part of any permanent record that can be identified with the subject? If so, please explain the necessity.

**No**

Will the fact that a subject did or did not participate in a specific experiment or study be made part of any permanent record available to a supervisor, teacher or employer? If so, explain.

**No**

What steps will be taken to insure the confidentiality of the data?

**Data will be provided by the Olathe School District in a manner that is free of any individual identifier that could be used to identify any specific student.**

If there are any risks involved in the study, are there any offsetting benefits that might accrue to either the subjects or society?

**No**

Will any data from files or archival data be used? If so, please describe.

Data from the Olathe School District AS400 records system covering students in 7<sup>th</sup> grade during the 2008 – 2009 school year will be used. The 7<sup>th</sup> grade data used will include student achievement (GPA), attendance, and suspension information.

Appendix B – Institutional Review Board Consent Letter

2-24-2011

Mr. Steve Skoczek  
School of Education Graduate Department  
Baker University

RE: IRB: BU-2011-01: Untitled

Dear Mr. Skoczek:

The Baker University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your research project application (BU-2011-01) and approved this project under the Expedited category. As described, the project complies with all the requirements and policies established by Baker University for protection of human subjects in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

1. A Project Status Report must be filed with the IRB annually for continuation.
2. Any significant change in the research protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to altering the project.
3. Any change in the investigator(s) named in the original application must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to altering the project.
4. Any injury to a subject because of the research procedure must be reported to the IRB immediately.
5. When signed consent forms are required:
  - a. the primary investigator must retain the forms until filed,
  - b. consent forms must be filed with the OIR with the annual report,
  - c. the subject must be given a copy of the form at the time of consent.
6. If this is a funded project, a copy of this letter must be with the grant file.

The Office of Institutional Research (OIR) must be notified when this project is completed or terminated. As noted above, you must provide an annual status report to receive approval for maintaining your project. If your project receives funding which requests an annual update, you must file your annual report at least one month prior to the annual update.

Thanks for your cooperation. If you have questions, please contact me.

**Sincerely,**

**William R. Miller, Ph.D.**  
**Chair, Baker University Institutional Review Board**

**CC: Bill Neuenswander, Ph.D., Faculty Supervisor.**

## Appendix C: Olathe Unified School District #233 Approval



January 19, 2011

Steve Skoczek  
Santa Fe Trail Middle School  
1100 N. Ridgeview  
Olathe, KS 66061

The research project *Effects of the WEB Transition Program on Student Attendance, Achievement, and Discipline*, has been approved for the Olathe Public Schools with the following criteria:

- The project goals are aligned with the district and building school improvement goals.
- Larry Katzif, Director of Student Services, will be the district contact for your project.
- A summary report should be submitted following the completion of your project. Please submit the report to me at the address below or at the email address [kgillespieirc@olatheschools.com](mailto:kgillespieirc@olatheschools.com).

Olathe staff members look forward to working with you throughout the project. If you should have any questions or require any assistance, please contact me at 913-780-7918.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kim Gillespie".

Kim Gillespie  
Research Coordinator  
Olathe District Schools

**R.R. Osborne Instructional Resource Center**

14090 Black Dog Road Olathe, Kansas 66062  
Phone: (913) 780-7007 Fax: (913) 780-8158