ABSTRACT

JEANNIS, LATEISHA YVETTE. Parental Involvement in High School Freshman Orientation: Examining Parental Perceptions Concerning a Critical Transitional Intervention. (Under the direction of Dr. Lisa Bass).

The transition from eighth grade to ninth grade is one of the most critical transitions in a student’s education career. Due to this transition playing a crucial role in the future outcomes and academic achievement of students, many schools have begun to put interventions in place to combat this. The major intervention of focus throughout this document is the use of High School Freshman Orientation. Research has also proven that parental involvement is another intervention that greatly impacts student achievement levels. Although the research has determined that both are beneficial to freshman success levels, very little research has been done regarding parental involvement during High School Freshman Orientation. This qualitative case study worked to determine the perceptions that parents place on the importance of attending High School Freshman Orientation. Parents attending a single school location’s High School Freshman Orientation were interviewed and surveyed with both specific and open-ended questions. Additional observations were also conducted on the day of the orientation, and artifacts were collected.

The interviews and surveys were transcribed and several major themes emerged: (1) Parents want to support their child(ren), (2) Work is a barrier in attending High School Freshman Orientation, (3) Communication is a major barrier for attending High School Freshman Orientation (4) Transportation is not a barrier for attending High School Freshman Orientation (at the study school), (5) Parent attendance rates at these events are low, (6) Parents want to know about the school environment and academics, (7) Parents believe that there are benefits to attending High School Freshman Orientation, and (8) Parents want to be informed about safety on campus.
The increased understanding of parental perceptions of this ninth-grade event to address transition may be used for school personnel that work to create and prepare High School Freshman Orientations. Specific items that may be addressed include communication methods used to inform parents about High School Freshman Orientation, the time of day that the event is held, recruiting parents to attend the orientation, further solicitation of parent feedback, conducting tours during the High School Freshman Orientation, and mandating that all high school programs host a High School Freshman Orientation to assist with freshman achievement levels. Suggestions for further research and recommendations conclude the study.
Parental Involvement in High School Freshman Orientation: Examining Parental Perceptions Concerning a Critical Transitional Intervention

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of North Carolina State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

Educational Administration and Supervision

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______________________________  ______________________________
Dr. Timothy Drake                 Dr. LaTricia Townsend
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the members of my family, whom I love and whose support I truly appreciate. Without them, I would not have been able to reach this point. To my husband McKinlay, who has truly been “Superman” throughout this entire process, your support and the countless hours you have sacrificed do not go unnoticed. Your drive, competitiveness, and immense amount of ambition are what push me to be the best me I can be. You have always made sure that I understood my value, and you continue to push me to succeed in every avenue possible. You continuously force me to step outside of my comfort zone, allowing everyone else to realize what I am capable of achieving. You are truly appreciated, and I love you very much.

To my beautiful daughter Paris Renee, you are the one that I do this for. Each day, I think about your future and know you are watching intensely. You have a smile that lights up the entire room, and looking at you constantly reminds me to “keep going.” Always know that you are in control of your situation and can be anything you want to be. Never allow the words of another individual to stop your progress. You are awesome and were placed here for a reason. Find time to take care of yourself first, and make great impact on everything that you do.

To my parents John and Taisha, you never put a limit on anything I did, and for that I am forever grateful. You have always encouraged me toward earning an education, and made me feel as though I was unstoppable. Dad, you told me every day that I was brilliant, when it was you who was the real genius. Mom, you provided the comfort I needed when things began to get gloomy; our daily laughs and chats kept me sane and I looked forward to these times with you. To my mother in law Javenise, whose drive and ambition is admirable. I have watched your journey and aspire to be like you in so many ways. You have always been kind and giving and
never allow negativity to interfere in your plans. You are strong and simply amazing, and I thank you for all the encouragement and support.
BIOGRAPHY

LaTeisha Jeannis was born on May 3, 1985 in Long Island, New York. After graduating from Bay Shore High School, she attended North Carolina State University, where she graduated with a Bachelor’s degree in Business and Marketing Education, with a minor in Business Management. During her high school and college career, LaTeisha was very active in extracurricular activities, including sports and several academic clubs and organizations.

In August of 2007, LaTeisha began teaching high school business and marketing at Garner High School in Garner, North Carolina. During her time in the classroom, LaTeisha earned her Master’s degree from North Carolina State University in the area of Curriculum and Instruction: Business and Marketing Education. Shortly thereafter, LaTeisha began a position as a Career Development Coordinator and completed the Masters of School Administration (MSA) program at North Carolina State University.

In June of 2013, LaTeisha took a position as a full-time administrative intern at Dillard Drive Elementary School in Raleigh, North Carolina. After earning her Master’s degree, she returned to Garner Magnet High School where she was promoted to Assistant Principal, during which time she started working on her doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Supervision from North Carolina State University.

LaTeisha was awarded the distinction of being nominated for, and inducted into the Jackson Scholars Program\(^1\), worked on several research projects with her professors and colleagues, and presented research at several educational conferences, including the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) and the American Educational Research

\(^1\)The Jackson Scholars Network is a 2-year program through the University Council for Educational Administration that provides formal networking, mentoring and professional development for graduate students of color who intend to become professors of educational leadership.
Association (AERA) during her time in the doctoral program. She was selected in March 2018 to serve as an Assistant Principal at the brand-new South Garner High. In November of 2018, LaTeisha was promoted to Senior Administrator of Employee Relations with Wake County Public School System, where she conducts investigations for disciplinary matters concerning alleged employee misconduct and/or violations of Board Policy.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the team of people who assisted me along my doctoral journey. I would first like to thank God for all the valuable lessons, the number of blessings that I have been provided, and the tremendous amount of opportunity afforded to me; my parents have done a wonderful job teaching me how to get closer to you and I know the value of what you give to me each day. For all that you sacrificed, so that I may live a long and fulfilled life, I thank you.

I would also like to thank all my committee members. First, my deep appreciation goes out to Dr. Lisa Bass, who saw potential in me and always went above and beyond what was asked to help me however she could. Dr. Bass, thank you for providing me with a wealth of knowledge, guidance, great conversation, and friendship, along with so many opportunities I would not have had without you.

Dr. Hicks, I have valued you as an awesome mentor from the beginning of my program. Thanks for always being genuine, kind, helpful, and one of my biggest cheerleaders, not only throughout my academic career but also through my personal journey.

Dr. Drake and Dr. Townsend, you have both been amazing professors who provided me with a great deal of knowledge that has been useful in my career. Your courses were simply outstanding, and I looked forward to going to them weekly. Even more, I appreciate your forward-thinking, positive energy, and innovative point of views. As members of my dissertation committee, I value your advice and recommendations greatly.

I would like to also thank my county (employers), supervisors, and colleagues for all their support and understanding throughout this process. Not only did you allow me to take the time I
needed, but also provided me with experience that was truly hand-on and proved to be very beneficial. Above all, the endless laughter and encouragement has been truly appreciated.

I also want to thank my “sister circle” and send out a big thank you to all of my sisters who continuously pushed me, cheered me on, and understood when I have needed to take time off from the good times with them. A special thank you to Brandi, who always made sure I did not forget about having “fun” throughout this entire process and that I knew what wonderful rewards lay ahead once the work was done.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge my siblings, Tre, Joy, and Jordan. I know that you all watch from a distance, and want you to know that anything is possible when you apply yourself. If there is something that you desire, then go and get it. Always give your all to whatever you do, and never let your dreams die—no matter what the circumstances.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Chapter Introduction

In the last few years, the experience of freshman students has become a central focus in the realm of high school administration. As the foundational year in a high school student’s career, administrators have come to make it a priority to strengthen and solidify the experiences of freshmen, as well as to implement policies that ensure their academic success. Administrators invest early to increase these students’ chance of success as they move through the next several years of their high school career. Research has shown that the academic success levels of students are impacted after they enter high school as ninth graders (Alspaugh, 1998a). Impacting factors including academic shifts in rigor, transitional adjustments, and social changes may be taken into consideration when determining the outcomes of ninth-grade students’ academic success levels. Research has also shown that the level of parental involvement is impacted as students enter and continue through the high school years (Catsambis, 2001), and parental involvement has been proven to have an impact on student success levels (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017).

The performance of ninth graders has declined (Ascher, 1987; Smith, 1997). Because of this overall decreased levels of academic success for ninth graders, many school systems and individual institutions have begun to put several interventions in place to combat the decline and work to increase achievement levels (Brown, 2015). These include ninth-grade academies, early identification of at-risk students, small learning communities, reward and incentive programs, and explicit study skills instruction programs. One sizable intervention has been the use of orientation sessions for incoming students, events which are held to acclimate incoming students to both the institution and expectations of the upcoming school year. However, educational institutions must make a point to request the attendance of parents at these orientations as
displayed on several school websites. With the findings of prior research in regard to lower achievement levels of ninth-grade students compared to other high school grade levels (Ascher, 1987; Smith, 1997), it is interesting that the rate of parental attendance at incoming ninth-grade high school freshmen orientations is not higher.

**Background on the Problem**

Prior research has proven that the ninth-grade year is critical in determining the success of a student throughout the remainder of their high school career (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999). The freshman year is the first level in a high school setting and very different from the middle school setting. During freshman year, students often experience changes that include not only environment and location but also the amount of rigor, changed relationships, increased independence during the school day, and a difference in the school activities offered to them. This transition from eighth to ninth grade may enhance the amount of anxiety and anticipation that an incoming ninth-grade student may experience (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000; Morgan & Hertzog, 2001; Zeedyk, Gallacher, Henderson, Hope, Husband, & Lindsay, 2003).

The ninth-grade dropout rate is also an area of concern due to amount of difficulty and struggle that many of these transitioning ninth-grade students face. Research has determined that the “transition altar’s student’s educational trajectories in ways that could not fully be predicted prior to high school” (Neild, Stoner-Eby, & Furstenberg, 2008, p.544). The freshman year is a period during which student behaviors may change and “it may also be a key point for intervention to minimize the risk of dropping out” (Neild et al., 2008, p. 544). In a study completed by Neild et al. (2008), researchers concluded that “ninth-grade course failure and attendance have a substantial impact on the probability of dropping out...suggesting that a key area for focusing dropout prevention programs is on the transition to high school” (p. 545). In
1992, the United States Department of Education conducted a study to determine the primary reasons that students drop out of school, and their findings are provided in Table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1: Reasons Reported by Eighth Graders for Dropping Out of School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did not like school</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was failing school</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>39.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could not get along with teachers</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could not keep up with schoolwork</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt I didn’t belong</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could not get along with students</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was suspended too often</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
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Many of the reasons cited above are discussed within the literature section of this document. To level the transition from eighth to ninth grade, many educational institutions have implemented varying interventions. Figure 1.1 gives examples of freshman interventions (Neild et al., 2008).
Smother transitions are enabled by schools using means such as freshman academies, regular contact with the same group of teachers or advisors, and transition courses (Riley, 1999). Many of these interventions focus solely on freshman students, working to acclimate ninth-grade students and help them make sense of the overall culture of high school while also increasing their academic performance. Many are familiar with the idea of freshman academies or freshman learning communities. Freshman interventions have been proven to have a positive impact on student learning. “Allowing for students to make a transition to a high school that is much smaller than the typical high school setting” (Neild et al., 2008, p.560) has proven to be beneficial. Freshman interventions allow for institutions to separate the ninth-grade students and focus specifically on the transitional needs of these learners. Freshman interventions personalize the freshman experience for each student, and have furthermore been widely encouraged.
personalized by the institution, and customized to the population being served (Neild et al., 2008).

One major intervention often used for ninth-grade students is High School Freshman Orientation. High school freshman orientation is an event held during a selected period to allow for incoming ninth-grade students and their parents to become familiar with the campus and its offerings, interact socially with other incoming ninth-grade students and parents in hopes of establishing positive relationships, and become familiar with the expectations of the institution and specific course educators. Events such as freshman orientation have “helped to prepare students for the increased expectations and rigor of high school, and boosts confidence about learning” (Erickson, Peterson, & Lembeck, 2013, p. 3). Parental involvement has also been found to positively impact student success in previous research (Shajith, 2012). Therefore, parents are encouraged to participate and become actively involved in most freshman orientation sessions because of the added value of their involvement.

**Purpose of the Study**

Although several studies have been conducted on parental involvement and its impact on student achievement, very little research has been conducted on parental involvement during transitional interventions. As a researcher and current practitioner in a high school, I believe it was important to conduct research in this area because of the supporting data regarding freshman achievement levels. Research has determined that freshman students have the highest dropout rates. Previous research also solidified that parental involvement and early interventions ultimately increase student achievement levels. Yet parental involvement levels during periods of intervention is not at 100%, and the high school where I practiced had very little conversation related to efforts to increase the amount of parental involvement at freshman orientation events. While the study school maintains a strong graduation rate above 90%, freshman achievement
levels remain a concern. Many freshman students at this location do not graduate with their initial cohort, are retained at some point, and may take up to six years to graduate, if they are ever successful.

This study was designed to allow me to garner a better understanding of parental involvement during the freshman orientation of high school students as well as the experiences of parents during this intervention. This qualitative, case study was conducted through the lens of social constructivism and analyzed and described the experiences and perceptions of the parents of incoming ninth-grade students who have attended the freshman orientation at one large suburban high school. The current study was specifically aimed to identify the level of importance that parents place on attending High School Freshman Orientation. The implications of the study will assist the orientation coordinators and school administrators when constructing High School Freshman Orientation for incoming ninth-grade students as well as determining a variety of avenues for parental involvement. Further, this study will inform administrators how to garner more parental involvement, not just in freshman orientation but other interventions as well. More specifically, the resulting data will assist school officials with the design, planning, and implementation of events that serve as interventions, thereby allowing them to focus on outreach and secure parental involvement using a variety of approaches. Furthermore, due to the dearth of research on the topic of parental perceptions of High School Freshman Orientation as a means of intervention, the current study also sought to uncover and fill the gaps in the research literature regarding parental involvement in freshman orientation.

**Significance of the Study**

This study allowed me to determine parents’ experiences as they participate in High School Freshman Orientation, including the level of importance they place on attending the event. The data collected in the study came directly from the parent participants’ perceptions,
which was the primary focus throughout this study. Previous studies have allowed researchers to determine how difficult the transition to high school may be, the factors that contribute to the transition to high school, the level of importance parental involvement plays when determining student success levels, and the use of High School Freshman Orientation as an intervention to combat ninth-grade drop rates. However, there is very little research on actual parental involvement during High School Freshman Orientation. Completing and collecting data regarding parental perceptions about High School Freshman Orientation enabled me to understand how parents view freshman orientation and, in turn, use the data to improve orientation by helping event coordinators increase parental participation. The current research furthermore serves to fill a gap in the literature and assist in creating a new area of inquiry regarding parental involvement during High School Freshman Orientation. Additionally, as it is based solely on parental perceptions, the current research stands apart from previous studies related to freshman interventions, which have tended to seek the perceptions of only students and teachers.

**Research Questions**

To determine the experiences, perceptions, and level of importance that parents place on attending freshman orientation, the following research questions guided the current study:

1. How do parents experience freshman orientation?
   a. Why do parents attend freshman orientation?
   b. What are the perceived benefits of participating in freshman orientation activities?
2. What are the supports put in place for those that attend High School Freshman Orientation?
   a. What are the barriers that hinder parental attendance during freshman
orientation?

3. What are the perceptions of parents who attend High School Freshman Orientation versus those who do not attend?

   a. Why do some parents not attend High School Freshman Orientation?

**Overview of Research Design**

This study examined the level of importance that parents place on attending High School Freshman Orientation, as well as captured how parents experienced High School Freshman Orientation. The current research employed qualitative research methodology, which was chosen because it allowed for the examination of behaviors and perception and enabled the research to be descriptive and rich (Creswell, 2013). Within the realm of qualitative methods, this study was conducted as a case study. Creswell (2013) describes case study as “The researcher’s summary of interpretations and claims. It involves an investigation of a case in a real-life setting” (pg.97).

Using a qualitative case study design, the researcher was able to gather data that was specific, but to the host location. It also allowed the researcher to make changes to the study design as needed during the research, which ultimately allowed me to determine the uniqueness of the perspectives provided. The findings from the study became increasingly apparent while moving through the study and can be used to contribute to the development and change of practices of an organization or system.

The qualitative research design also enabled me to collect data using an initial questionnaire placed on the registration form for a High School Freshman Orientation event being held at a specific location. Once the registration form was complete, the researcher was able to solicit the assistance of several parents. The parents understood that their participation in the research project was voluntary and they could drop out at any time. Consent forms that explained the project, background of the researcher, rights of the parent volunteers, and structure
of the project were provided to each individual, and these forms were required for the parent volunteers to continue with the project. As the researcher, I attended the freshman orientation event, took a series of notes, and collected artifacts. Immediately following the event, I contacted the volunteers of the project to begin setting up individual interviews. Due to the number of volunteers, I also decided to send the required consent form and actual study questionnaire to parents with whom I was unable to meet. Additionally, this researcher solicited the assistance of the study high school’s dean to help identify parents who did not attend the orientation event, and then contacted several of those individuals to request an interview. A number of these parents volunteered, and I was able to interview them after the mandatory consent form had been filled out and signed, allowing for more individual perspectives to be shared and collected.

The current study was based on the perceptions and experiences of parents who attend High School Freshman Orientation sessions. These individuals provided rich, thick description regarding their attendance at the event, the barriers that may have kept them from attending, and the items they deemed valuable to them while attending the freshman orientation. Parental involvement was discussed, as well as their child’s experiences with the transition from middle school to high school. Using a case study allowed this researcher to “explore one or more cases within a bounded system...through multiple sources of information and reports a case description and case-based themes” (Harrison, Birks, Franklin, & Mills, 2017, n.p.). Moreover, conducting the current investigation as a case study at a single research school location allowed me to determine “key issues regarding parental experiences, as well as lessons learned” (Harrison et al., 2017, n.p.) from the case. Through this data collection, a detailed description of parents’ experiences during the current case study determined and allowed for specific emergent themes to be identified and analyzed.
According to Creswell (2013), a case study should include an analysis of several individuals in a real-life setting. In this research, data were gathered regarding the shared experience of parents who attended high freshman orientation at the study school, as well as from parents that did not attend the freshman orientation at the study school. Creswell (2013) also states that the actual data collection should include items such as interviews with individuals along with the examination of documents and observations. The research conducted in the current study included consideration of an initial questionnaire delivered with the event registration documents as well as interviews with parents who attended the High School Freshman Orientation and those who did not attend the event. Observations were conducted throughout the orientation sessions and documents related to the orientation, such as communication methods and agendas were analyzed (Creswell, 2013).

This research study was conducted through the lens of social constructivism. According to Creswell (2013), “social constructivism allows one to understand the world in which they live and develop meaning directed toward certain objects or things” (p. 20). Social constructivism pertains to this study in that it allowed the parents who participated to evaluate their encounters, interactions, and perspectives as they helped shape the research. The goal of the research is to “rely as much on possible on the participants’ views of the situation” (Creswell, 2013, p. 20), thus parents were the only participants and their personal perceptions were a large portion of the data collected.

**Statement of Subjectivity**

The school district where the current study was conducted is the same district wherein I had worked throughout my entire career. This familiarity allowed me to have access to additional data and individuals within the district. While this was somewhat of an advantage to the current work, it also forced me as a researcher to be conscious that I tabled my personal perceptions and
feelings. Even more, the specific school where the research was conducted is a school in which I had previously worked. Again, although this provided me with an advantage via access to data and individuals at the school, I did not have many opportunities to work with freshman students while at this location since the majority of my assignments were with students who were either in the 10th grade or above, and freshman students were housed at another location several miles away and did not frequent our main campus. I did not establish relationships with the students or parents who took part in the research at any time while conducting the current study. Focusing on incoming freshman students allowed me to place some distance between any preconceived perceptions and feelings towards any of the individuals participating in the study. Member checking enabled me to make sure no personal feelings or perceptions were included in the research. Additionally, member checking allowed me to ask clarifying questions while providing an opportunity for the study’s parent volunteers to review transcripts of the interviews conducted and verify that only their perceptions and statements were included in the research.

**Definitions of Terms**

The following definitions are offered to make clear the vocabulary used throughout the research:

**Intervention**

An *intervention* is a step put in place to assist a student who is struggling in a certain area. These steps are “intentional and aimed at a particular weakness” (Lee, 2015, n.p.), and student progress should be monitored over time to determine if the intervention has been favorable in its effects (Lee, 2015). An intervention is an “integrated, strategic, meaningful, and if necessary, intensive curriculum and instruction to powerfully enrich and expand adolescents’ reading lives” (Greenleaf & Roller, 2002, p. 495).
Parental Involvement

*Parental involvement* may be defined as “parents’ interactions with schools and with their children to promote academic success” (Hill et al., 2004, p. 1491). Parental involvement may include parent-student discussion, parent-student monitoring, parent-school contact, and parent-school support. Ultimately, involvement requires parents to invest their “time, attention, and resources in their children with the expectation of a return—namely, that their child will perform better in school” (McNeal, 2014, p. 565). For the purposes of this study, parental involvement will be defined as the parents “actual attendance” during freshman orientation.

Transition

*Transition* is a journey accomplished with short, sharp changes through a period to something unknown (Brammer, 1991). Such a journey requires that one have the courage to take risks and cope with fear. A transition is also a time of change from one phase of life to another. In adolescence, the immaturity of childhood is being left behind, while the challenges and potentials of adulthood have not yet been adopted (Kimmer & Weiner, 1995). During transition, there is an interactive process between a person’s characteristics, his/her coping resources, the environment, and the nature of the transition itself (Schlossberg, 1984).

Freshman Academy

*Freshman academies* are an intervention used for the purpose of assisting high school freshman students during their transition to high school. “Freshman academies are small learning communities within large comprehensive high schools that isolate ninth graders and establish a more intimate program” (Fulco, 2009, p. 4). These programs are often separated from the larger population of students and have a primary focus or concentration.
Chapter Summary and Study Overview

Chapter 1 of the study introduced the research problem, purpose, research questions, definitions of key terms, and overall research design. Chapter 2 follows with a review of the literature regarding the transition from middle school to high school and the aspects of this transition that may have an impact on incoming students; an overview of parental involvement, including the benefits, barriers, communication techniques used to solicit parental involvement; and an overview of freshman orientation and its benefits. Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the study, including the study design, research questions, site selection and sampling criteria, data collection and analysis procedures, research validity and reliability, the researcher’s subjectivity statement, and possible ethical issues within the study. Chapter 4 uses a quantitative approach to present the findings from the study’s data analysis. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the results, its conclusions, and implications for further research.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Introduction

Several researchers, including DeLamar and Brown (2016), Hertzog (2006), and Smith (2006) argue that freshman orientation is an intervention created to assist students with the transition from middle school to high school. Such intervention is needed based on prior research which has shown that many ninth-grade students have difficulty adjusting to and maintaining a level of success during their first year of high school (Mizelle, 2005). The adaptations that must take place during the first year of high school include both academic and social adjustments. For example, the academic shifts that take place may include the level of competitiveness between students, the change in now being in a grade-oriented environment, time management, the amount of responsibility taken on, and having more choices to make in their curricular and extracurricular activities. Social adjustments for high school freshman may include interaction with and potential fear of peers, greater diversity of teachers and peers, relationships with teachers and peers, and a change in the amount of freedom they are privy to (Mizelle, 2005).

High school freshman orientation often provides several activities and presentations with the intention of supporting incoming ninth-grade students and parents during this time of both change and adjustment (DeLamar & Brown, 2016). The following literature review addresses the transition from middle school to high school as well as factors that may have an impact on this transition, examines and defines the issue of parental involvement, and analyzes High School Freshman Orientation as an intervention.

High school freshman orientations, also referred to as ninth-grade transition programs, are usually held within a few weeks of the start of the new school year. These orientations are designed to assist incoming freshman in their transition from middle school to high school. Many freshman orientation sessions are used to explain and identify school policies, offer students and
parents with the opportunity to ask questions, give students their schedules and a chance to acclimate themselves to the new location, and provide students with a general overview of school activities (Black, Terry, & Buhler, 2016). Previous research conducted has established that High School Freshman Orientation has a positive impact on transitional issues such as absenteeism, student academic success levels, and the perceptions of student success held by teachers, students, and parents (Johnson, 2016).

High school freshman orientations often include an invitation and activities for parents of incoming ninth-grade students. Chen and Gregory (2009) conducted a study that supports previous findings indicating parental involvement is beneficial to student success levels and results in positive educational outcomes that include higher achievement levels, improved attendance, and fewer behavioral issues for students (Deslandes, Royer, Turcotte, & Bertrand, 1997; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Stevenson & Baker, 1987).

This previous research conveys that parental practices such as positive relationships, academic engagement, supporting students in their homework, continuous learning at home, ongoing encouragement, clear expectations, and volunteering at school all have a positive impact on student success levels (Chen & Gregory, 2009). Although parental involvement has been found to decrease as students get older (Fisher, 2016), the topic is still significant when discussing the achievement levels of freshman students. High school freshman orientation is an event in which parental involvement is often encouraged, as the event can provide parents with additional knowledge and a better understanding of student policies, procedures, and expectations—all of which is believed to contribute to students’ success. Hence, the information gained at High School Freshman Orientation will be useful to parents as they aid their student throughout the first year and, ultimately, the rest of their high school career.
Although a great deal of research has been done with regards to parental involvement in general, very little research has been done to examine parental perceptions of freshman orientation and whether parents find value in attending this event. I will review research regarding the actual transition from middle to high school, parental involvement, its barriers and benefits, and High School Freshman Orientation as an intervention.

**Transition from Middle to High School**

The freshman year of high school is known to be one of the most essential and vital years within a student’s educational career. This ninth-grade year has been referred to by researchers as precarious and awkward, but also termed pivotal to connote its’ significance (Asher, 1987; Black, 2004; Donegan, 2008). The events and progress throughout the ninth grade may have a lasting impact on the remainder of a student’s high school journey (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999). Specific areas that may be impacted because of how a student progresses through freshman year include student attendance rates, academic performance, and behavior. The way incoming ninth-grade students transition to high school may affect each of these factors. While any transitional process a student goes through has its challenges, the move from eighth to ninth grade is by far one of the most difficult transitions within a student’s educational career. The transition between middle and high school is difficult for a variety of reasons and often leads to students dropping out; in fact, more students fail the ninth grade than any other grade level, and many students remain at that grade for multiple years (Erickson et al., 2013). Additionally, freshman students often experience higher rates of course failure, declining test scores, increased behavior problems, and higher suspension and expulsion rates (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009; Hertzog & Morgan, 1998; Roderick & Camburn, 1999; U.S. Dept. of Education, 2005). Due to the growing concern regarding dropout rates, high failure rates among freshman, and other daunting freshman statistics, there has been a great deal of research devoted to the transition from middle school to
high school (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). It is on this significant topic of interest that the current research focuses its investigation.

**Social and Developmental Adjustments**

Social and developmental adjustments are a major factor during the transition from middle to high school. Although socializing is a large part of high school and important to many high school students, many students have difficulty in this area and aspire to fit into the high school culture (Kinney, 1993). Social issues such as peer relationships, getting along with teachers, bullying among students, and getting lost often overshadow concerns about academics (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Maute & Brough, 2002). Students are also affected by both real and perceived social issues that include harassment or teasing by older students, reestablishing popularity, and difficulty making new friends (Langenkamp, 2009; Mizelle, 2005). Mizelle (1999) proposed that students entering high school are both excited and concerned by the social aspects of ninth grade. Students claim they are looking forward to making new friends and having more choices (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). These opportunities for increased social interaction may occur during the school day, such as during lunch periods/breaks or classroom time, and/or before or after the school day with general free time or school activities.

According to Table 1.1, getting along with teachers is listed as the leading factor leading students to drop out during the ninth grade. There are several reasons why teachers and students may not get along, including lack of relatability, misunderstanding, communication struggles, and lack of engagement and engaging activities, just to name a few (Hamre & Pianta, 2006; Libbey, 2004). Fundamentally, these explanations all come back to teacher student relationships:

Students relationships with their teachers are fundamental to their success in school…Forming strong and supportive relationships with teachers allow students to feel safer and more secure in the school setting, feel more competent, make more positive
connections with peers, and make greater academic gains. In contrast, conflict with teachers may place students on a trajectory of school failure in which they are unable to connect to academic and social resources offered within classrooms and schools. (Hamre & Pianta, 2006, p. 625-638)

Research has also shown that teacher-student relationships ultimately have an impact on school connectedness, school attachment, school bonding, and school culture (Libbey, 2004). Good teacher relationships with students may lead to other desirable outcomes such as positive social development and academic growth, and, ultimately, can help enable schools and classrooms to be more responsive to students’ diverse needs (Hamre & Pianta, 2006), all of which affect social and developmental adjustments during the ninth-grade traditional year.

Students’ social life and peer relationships often surpass academic concerns during their first year of high school (Oakes & Waite, 2009). Even when peers are supportive, students experience a drop in grade point average (GPA) that researchers have speculated may be associated with the distracting nature of peer relationships as students enter high school, with activities such as forming cliques and dating (Smith, 2006). During this transition to high school, many incoming freshmen also face several developmental challenges, which may include physical, emotional, and cognitive changes, as well as an increased desire for independence from parents (Letrello & Miles, 2003). Due to these social and developmental changes during this time of transition, students may develop lower self-esteem and fears about new social circumstances, often resulting in anxiety and negative behaviors (Erickson et al., 2013). The number of changes in social and developmental aspects may also prove to be alienating and overwhelming for many students. Often, previous bonds made in middle school with both peers and staff members now become broken or experience a major alteration (Erickson et al., 2013). As a result, many ninth-
grade students demonstrate diminished engagement and attendance by the end of their freshman year (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009).

Due to behavior problems, suspensions and expulsions are regularly higher in ninth grade than any other high school grade level, causing significant setbacks for students (Smith, Akos, Lim, & Wiley, 2008). Students need more support from the teachers, counselors, parents, and other adults in their lives during the ninth-grade to help them cope with the many changes they are facing. Having a supportive adult in their new environment can also increase confidence, provide guidance for problems or questions, and personalize the new environment (Erickson et al., 2013).

**Structural and Organizational Change**

In previous research, students reported the highest levels of concern around organizational issues such as being prepared for classes, finding their way around, and knowing the expectations of each class (Cauley & Jovanovish, 2006; Smith et al., 2008). Erickson et al. (2013) note:

The structure and organization of high school and middle school are similar in that students have multiple teachers and a variety of academic tracks. However, middle school students typically share similar coursework paths and are not moved as hurriedly through the halls from one class to another. In addition, high schools are much larger, more competitive, and less personal. In a traditional high school, teachers tend to be more concerned with their subject matter, leaving students feeling anonymous. (p. 2)

School structure may also include items such as start time, transition time between class periods, instructional structure within the actual classroom, entire school practices, hallway procedures, the number of peers attending the same high school (Schiller, 1999), the quality of teachers (Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002), and the presence of specific transition programs (Smith,
1997). Often these changes and the added anonymity can result in increased disconnectedness in students that makes dropout more likely (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009).

**Increased Academic Rigor and Failure**

Academic rigor is defined in this study as “academic challenge that supports student learning and growth” (Keller, 2018, p. 89). According to Brown, Feger, and Mowry (2015), there are several academically rigorous practices that can be displayed within one’s educational realm. These practices include the following displayed in Figure 2.1:

![Figure 2.1: Understanding Academic Rigor in Teachers’ Developmentally Appropriate Practices](image-url)
When these applications are exhibited on a consistent basis within the academic arena, academic rigor has been successfully incorporated. Keller (2018) maintains:

The demands to more explicit demonstrations of institutional performance and student educational attainment are the result of the interrelated set of factors that include shifts in higher education funding models, student demographics, labor market expectations, and public perceptions concerning the necessity and value of higher education. (p. 90)

Research has demonstrated a normative decrease in achievement from middle school to high school (Alspaugh, 1998a, 1998b; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999). Due to increased academic rigor in high school, paired with increased expectations for independent work like homework, some students experience a loss of achievement in areas including standardized testing scores (Erickson et al., 2013). As a result, failure and dropout rates in ninth grade exceed those of any other grade (Smith, 2006). Contributing factors to the decline in achievement and high dropout rate among ninth grades include inadequate preparation for high school, increased academic rigor, and lack of interest and relativity. Even students who earned respectable grades in middle school may fail in high school due to not being properly challenged; this, compounded with inadequate preparation, will often lead to decreased effort and eventually dropout (Neild, 2009).

Student engagement levels and interests are factors that should also be considered when discussing a possible decrease in student achievement levels. Numerous researchers have noted how vital student engagement is to academic achievement (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Marks, 2000; Skinner & Belmont, 1993), because “engaged students are attentive and participate in class discussions, exert effort in class activities, and exhibit interest and motivation to learn” (Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012, p. 700). These claims are supported by a survey of high school dropouts conducted by Cohen and Smerdon (2009). Nearly 50% of
high school dropouts said they dropped out primarily because their classes were not interesting, 70% stated they were not motivated to work hard, and two-thirds claimed they would have worked harder if more were demanded of them. More than 80% of the high school dropouts surveyed felt their chances of staying in school would have increased if classes were more interesting and if they had more real-world opportunities to apply to what they had learned (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009).

Students do get bored easily and often, as national studies have found. An alarmingly high numbers of students have reported being bored in school, which does have a large impact on learning (Vogel-Walcutt, Fiorella, Carper, & Schatz, 2012). Moreover, engagement drops dramatically as students get older. For example, in a 2012 Gallup poll, 76% of elementary students reported being engaged in school, a figure that falls in middle school (61%) and even further in high school (44%)” (Harris & Bradshaw, 2018). Eccles et al. (1993) maintain that engagement tends to decline in early adolescence because the learning climate available to students decreases in meeting students’ developmental needs. This is a prime example that not only are academic preparation and rigor essential for high school completion, but engaging class activities, high expectations and standards, and relevant lesson plans are also vital. The next section includes some research on parental involvement and its impact on student achievement.

**Parental Involvement**

Parents have a significant role in a student’s everyday life and circumstance, and part of this role may include being involved in the student’s educational experiences and attainments. Parental involvement may be defined as “parents’ interactions with schools and with their children to promote academic success” (Hill et al., 2004, p.1491). Previous research has proven that parental involvement can in fact increases both academic success and social adjustment when students arrive to high school. Perriel (2015) used a sample of 400 ninth-grade students
and 172 parent participants, and found that 83% of the parents in the study felt that the major areas of parental involvement for assisting their children in school achievement were providing support and encouragement and assisting with their homework. Of the students who participated, 82% believed that parents should also provide encouragement and support. Within that category, 97% of the students said that parents talking to them about the importance of school was the greatest single factor in providing encouragement and support, which they felt would help them excel in their academic performance (Perriel, 2015). Additional studies presented several examples demonstrating that parental involvement, encouragement, and support can come in many different forms. Parental involvement opportunities within a high school may include attending school events, performing community service and volunteering, advocating for the child, going to meetings, and assisting with funding, food drives, social events (Baker, 1997). Although many forms of parental involvement were listed, there are several other varieties of parent involvement that should be considered. Parental involvement leads to many benefits but may also present several barriers for parents. Both the benefits and barriers of parental participation are discussed in the following section, along with additional aspects of parental involvement.

**Benefits of Parental Involvement**

Parental involvement in children’s school and education has been found to be beneficial for children’s academic and social competence (Kessler-Sklar & Baker, 2000; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Musty, 2015; Roberts, 2015; Shajith, 2012, Shumow & Miller, 2001; Singh, 2016). Some educators believe that additional support for children’s learning comes from a strong community of families, students, teachers, and school administrators (Booth & Dunn, 1996). Parental involvement can be perceived ultimately as a partnership in which the student is provided support in each of their learning experiences. This partnership between school and parent not
only enhances academic performance (Shajith, 2012) and increase social skills (el Nokali, Bachman, & Votruba-Drzal, 2010), but research has also shown that parental involvement decreases student behavior problems (Domina, 2005; el Nokali et al., 2010). Parental involvement is a collaborative effort as well as an integration of home and school (Lareau, 1987). When parents are involved and aware of what is going on with their child’s education, they can monitor the student’s assignments and progress. They are also able to intervene when needed and communicate with the necessary individuals, and they can participate in school activities and keep track of opportunities for them and their child. Essentially, parental involvement allows the parent to follow-up and take further action at home.

Parents that are involved ultimately assist with supporting student learning, which makes these parents feel as though they have a central role and are included in their student’s education. Parental involvement can also provide several opportunities for the parent, such as being able to address problems between the school and their child, make some sort of contribution to the school, indirectly improve the quality of education their child would receive, and show their children the value of education and the importance of school (Baker, 1997). This research shows that involvement can give parents a voice in important school decisions, which can impact the school as a whole.

Parental involvement allows students to become better prepared and enables parents to enhance their own opportunities as they become immersed in the student’s campus experience (Reis, 2013, n.p.). Students who have parents that participate directly are more likely to have a smooth transition from middle school to high school (Smith et al., 2008), as well as a more positive experience through their senior year of high school (Castambis, 2001). Some studies have found a correlation between parental involvement and the quality of teaching, which points
out that parents’ involvement in their children’s education helps improve the student’s attitude towards school and academic results, as well as strengthens the relationships between the students and teachers (Fisher & Friedman, 2009). Other benefits of parental involvement include improved parent-teacher relationships, stronger teacher morale and school climate, higher school attendance, and increased parental confidence. Other benefits to students are improved attitude, behavior and mental health plus greater satisfaction and interest in their own education (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

**Communication Between Parents, Teachers, and Students**

Parent involvement and engagement includes communication and interchange. Having some type of dialogue or exchange of information is something that most parents expect and require. “Communication is at the heart of the family-school relationship” (Bouffard, 2008, p. 1), and has one of the largest impacts on parental involvement levels. Parental participation in students’ educational activities has been found to be promoted by positive home-school communications (Kurtulmus, 2016; Shajith, 2012). The goal of home-school communication is the good of the student (Halsey, 2005; Johnson, 2016). Children are more supported to achieve the best outcomes when parents and teachers work together, and such cooperation is fostered by strong, effective, positive communication (Ho, Hung, & Chen, 2013). Communication often supports and helps to strengthen the relationship between parent and school. Successful communication lends to the overall development of the child.

There are a variety of ways in which communication between home and school may occur. These include traditional methods like face-to-face meetings (conferences, social events), phone calls, paper-based newsletters, and report cards. Some of the newest and more non-traditional modes of communication include the use of email, websites, social media platforms, and telephone text messages (Kemp, 2015). Both traditional and non-traditional forms of
communication offer positives and negatives associated with parental involvement. For instance, items such as paper-based newsletters and report cards are often sent via United States mail or by student, and there could be issues with these arriving to their intended destination. Other communication forms such as text messages and email may also find difficulty arriving to the parents due to inaccurate or outdated contact information that has not been updated. The Internet as a source of communication may also have its barriers, as parents must first intentionally visit the website before seeing the school’s communication.

Communication should be a priority for both the school and the home, and it must occur in a timely manner to be effective, true, and successful communication. Feuerstein (2000) contends that increased school-parent is likely to result in reciprocal parent contact, thereby working to improve overall communication with families. Communication must also take place on a regular basis. Baker (1997) conducted a study that found many parents felt as though they only received correspondence from their student’s teacher when it was based around a negative. Positive useful communication with parents by teachers and other staff makes it easier to build “instructional partnerships” supporting the student’s learning and helps strengthen parents’ belief in their own ability to support learning (Olmstead, 2013). Strong connections between home and school are important for many aspects of children’s development (González-Patiño, Poveda, & Morgade, 2012). Effective and frequent communication between schools and parents has been shown to increase children’s academic achievement (Moore, 2015). Teacher communication with parents has been correlated with improvements in student math and literacy outcomes (Henderson & Mapp, 2002) as well as overall achievement (Goodall, 2016; Shute, Hansen, Underwood, & Razzouk, 2011).
Decrease in Parental Involvement in High School

It has been found that parental involvement tends to decrease as children grow older. (Hayes, 2011; Shajith, 2012), and this has been attributed to a variety of reasons. Many parents feel as though their children did not want them involved in school life, especially once the student had moved from elementary to middle and high school (Baker, 1997; Hayes, 2011). Shajith (2012) notes that parental involvement is higher when children are younger but tends to decrease as children grow older, arguably to give the child more independence and autonomy. As students enter high school, many of them look forward to an increased amount of independence. This may mean also not having parents as involved both at home and in school.

Parent aspirations, parent perceptions of the school, and parenting self-efficacy (Đurišić and Bunijevac, 2017) may have a significant impact on parental involvement. Murphey (1992) maintains that parents who hold high aspirations for their children’s future are more likely to be willing to take action to help make sure those aspirations are realized. Additionally, researchers have found that parents’ degree of involvement is likely to be affected by their perceptions of the school itself. That is, if teachers appear to care about the welfare of the child and show respect for parents, there is an increased willingness among parents to become involved in their children’s schooling (Ardelt & Eccles, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Another factor affecting parent involvement is the level of the parents’ self-efficacy. Parents with high self-efficacy are generally more optimistic, authoritative, and consistent in their interactions with their children than are those with lower parenting self-efficacy (Ardelt & Eccles, 2001; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; Olioff & Aboud, 1991). Moreover, theoretical formulations have identified parenting self-efficacy as a key determinant of parental involvement in schooling (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; Eccles & Harold, 1996; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Empirical work suggests that parents with high self-efficacy
are more likely to monitor their children’s schoolwork and to participate actively at the school” (Ardelt & Eccles, 2001; Bandura, 2002).

**Barriers to Parental Participation**

When discussing parental involvement, one may describe the term *barriers* as the obstacles preventing parents from participating in educational activities and events. These obstacles may or may not be by the choice of the parent. There have been several identified barriers to parental participation, with some being more predominant than others (See Figure 2.2). A few of the most prevalent barriers to parental involvement include (a) parents’ sense of responsibility for supporting their child’s learning; (b) parenting self-efficacy in helping their children; (c) invitations and communications from the teachers; and (d) family resources such as time, knowledge, and skills (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Walker, Wilkins, Daillaire, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). A few of the major barriers to parental involvement will be examined throughout the next section of this literature review.

Parental attitudes and beliefs regarding school may have an impact on their involvement. Previous research has shown some factors related to the school, teacher, and student are influential in parents’ decision to participate in their child’s schooling. For example, parental participation is expected to be higher when schools are welcoming and have policies that encourage parents to get involved (Shajith, 2012). Parents are also more likely to be involved in school activities when teachers are optimistic about parental participation and the school implements effective strategies designed to promote parental involvement (Shajith, 2012).

One significant barrier of parental involvement is communication. When parents and schools communicate effectively, it is beneficial to student achievement and helps establish a partnership that is vital to the educational process (Hillian, 2015). Although communication was discussed previously, it can also be an adverse factor when examined from multiple perspectives.
The first evaluation of communication relates to the measure of positive communication that primarily takes place between home and school, as well as the impact of this communication on future home-school interactions. More communication and effective collaboration between parents and teachers work to increase parental involvement in their student’s schoolwork (Hillian, 2015; James, 2012). It is important to note, however, that future correspondence between the home and the school can be impacted by prior communications with the parent, especially if there has been a single or multiple occurrences of non-positive communication, comments, or interaction. Such lack of positivity in prior interactions may lead parents to begin to expect that all future correspondence will simply continue with a negative assertion which may ultimately impact the parent’s perspective and attitude regarding the school” (Tack & Benson, 1983; UK Essays, 2013).

Another communication obstacle may lie within a language barrier between the parent and the school. Too often, schools may not consider the possible language barriers that may occur. Approximately 20% of United States students are learning English as a second or other language, and more than 40% of these students are immigrants (UKEssays, 2013). Thus, parents who do not speak English may not understand newsletters, fliers, or speakers at meetings (UKEssays, 2013). Moreover, the resources and/or tools used to communicate with parents may not be appropriate or beneficial to parents who speak alternate languages. Language barriers may also emerge from the use of rhetoric or jargon by the educational institution, terms and phrases which may not be familiar to parents since it is used primarily for educational professionals.

Time constraints are another factor affecting parental involvement. Time poverty is the term used to describe poor working families’ lack of free time to dedicate to their child’s educational matters (Newman & Chin, 2003). Often, such families have other children to care for
besides incoming freshman, thus prohibiting them from attending school activities (Machen, Wilson, & Notar, 2005). Time constraints may also relate to the hours and time of day required for parental involvement. The hours for events offered by educational institutions may not be conducive to the actual work hours of the parent or guardian (Rubin, 2015). Most school events are held during the day when many parents cannot take the time off from work to attend as it may influence the parent’s employment status or income. For instance, parents that take time off could lose their position, which has the potential to impact their income. Wages for the day of the student activity may also be lost and have an impact on the family if the parent does not go to work.

Scheduling is another major barrier to parental involvement, and many factors of scheduling can affect the attendance of parents at school-related functions. If there are additional children in the home that require supervision, for example, it may not enable the parent to attend outside functions. Parents may also feel uncomfortable with having to bring the other children to events or may not be able to establish additional supervision for the others. The first factor to be discussed includes the presence of other children or siblings (Rubin, 2015). This may ultimately be impacted by the level of income within the household and or the amount of support and additional resources for that household, such as access to daycare facilities. As stated previously scheduling may also impact parent employment based on the hours that many school events are held.

Transportation and either the lack of transportation or little access to is another major barrier of parental involvement. Some households may not have access to transportation at all, affecting their efforts to attend a school-sponsored event (McDermott and Rothenberg, 2000). Residential locations may also be a factor when discussing transportation and access. The
residential locations of parents may not be near needed modes of public transportation or additional supporting individuals that may assist these families with transportation (Rubin, 2015). Not only does this affect the parental attendance but this may also affect student participation. Because school sponsored events are often held during the day (Fisher, 2016), having a mode of transportation may be impacted on a greater scale.

An additional factor discussed when referencing the influence on parental involvement is the possible lack of parental knowledge. Because parents of low socioeconomic status (SES) most likely also grew up in a similar household of low SES, one where their own parents may not have been involved in their education, it is common that they do not know their options due to this limited experience. Moreover, low SES parents are often uninformed about resources available to them in the community, such as those related to immunizations and nutrition (North Central Regional Laboratory, 2004). Sadly enough, often when parents of low socioeconomic status want to help their child in school, they cannot because they simply lack the knowledge of how to do so (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; Zady, Portes, Del Castillo, & Dunham, 1998).

Parental occupation may also have an impact on student success and parental involvement. Parents that may be considered professionals with higher occupational status, such as in the fields of education, health care, or law, have been found to be more involved in assisting their children with homework. They have also been found to be more supportive of their kids in overcoming difficulty in the classroom. Parents with higher occupation statuses also motivate their children in the appropriate manners and determine time limits for studying (Al-Matalka, 2014). Parental occupation levels also have an impact on household finances, which in turn affects parents’ ability to provide transportation that allows their children to take part in student activities. Parental income also has an impact on the ability of the parents and students to
volunteer and participate in conferences (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; Kim, 2009). Finances may also determine what activities the children participate in such as educational field trips and having accurate supplies (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; Hillian, 2015).

The level of parental education may also have a significant impact on parental involvement, which may then affect the amount of support that a student receives (Chavkin, 1993; Fisher, 2016; Shumow & Miller, 2001). Parents with higher educational levels are often more involved in their children’s studies; they participate more actively in discussions about school activities in which their children participate and attempt to understand everything that their children do in school (NCES, 2003). They also attempt to identify academic problems that their children may be facing and discuss these issues with the children, teachers, and Principals to find the best solutions for each of these problems. They are more likely to be involved in assisting their children with homework and allocating time in the day for their children to study and complete any given assignments. Ultimately, they are more likely to be involved in identifying the learning patterns of their children (Al-Mataolk, 2014).

Research has determined that class, ethnicity, and gender play a role in parental involvement. White middle-class families have been known to lead in parental involvement. While minority families who may have additional impacting factors such as cultural capital, language barriers, transportation, and less access to resources are deemed to have very little parental participation. Ethnicity and cultural impacts on parental involvement may include lack of skills and knowledge of social class and titles along with a greater focus on lineage and family heritage (Hornby & Lafaiele, 2011). Lack of trust within cultures, cultural roles, gender roles, expectations and values also impact interaction between parent and school or parent and teacher.
Parents’ perceptions of invitations are another extremely important factor in affecting parental involvement. When parents feel as though the teacher is actively trying to involve them, the school is welcoming, there is a better chance of the parent getting involved in their child’s education. When attitudes are overall positive, parental involvement is encouraged and thus more effectively cultivated (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

Learning difficulties and disabilities, gifts and talents, and behavioral problems can all be looked at as barriers to parental involvement. Children’s performance at school can be a barrier for parental involvement. When children are struggling with their schoolwork due to learning difficulties or disabilities, parents are generally more inclined to be active in parental involvement activities (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Kurani et al., 2009; Yotyodying, 2016). Parents of students who possess academic gifts and talents may also be more involved as these parents may feel more comfortable with attending events and other activities because their children are doing well. Parents who have children with behavioral concerns are more likely to shy away from parental involvement due to fear they will receive more bad news. Disagreement may also occur regarding the needs and services of the student, which may also cause a barrier as well as a level of discomfort experienced by the parent (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

There are several additional factors that may influence parental involvement. As mentioned earlier, income and SES may also be a factor when discussing a lack of parental involvement. Other barriers to parental involvement include income, negative prior experiences, and cultural barriers (Bartel, 2010; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013). Figure 2.2 below displays many of the barriers examined above, as well as several additional barriers that impact parental involvement levels. Additional research confirms that the same
barriers exist for high school (Garcia-Dominic et al., 2010; Goss, 2017; Hillian, 2015; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

**Figure 2.2:** Percent of Public Elementary Schools (K-8) that Perceived Various Concerns as Barriers to Parent Involvement

Epstein’s (2001) framework was designed with overlapping spheres of influence that centered on family, school, and community (as cited in Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). The spheres included in this framework include individual parent and family factors, child factors, parent-teacher factors, and societal factors, with the barriers to effective parental involvement listed within each of these spheres. The factors listed correspond directly with several barriers named previously. Additional barriers include parents’ beliefs about parental involvement; parents’
perceptions of invitations for involvement; class, ethnicity and gender; learning difficulties and disabilities; gifts and talents; behavioral problems; goals and agendas; language; historical and demographic factors; and economic factors (see Figure 2.3 below).

Figure 2.3: Model of Factors Acting as Barriers

As shown in Figure 2.3, there may be parent and family factors that impact the level of parental involvement. Parents may have differing views regarding their role in their student’s education, which may also act as a barrier. This is common among specific immigrant and ethnic groups, and research has shown that there are several expectations where unspoken or verbally communicated, in the United States education system regarding the role of parents (England & Srivastava, 2013; Jhang, 2018; Sikkink & Emerson, 2008). For example, parents who “view their role is to only get their children to school…will not be willing to be actively involved in either school-based or home-based parental involvement” (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011, p. 3). Past
studies have found that the beliefs about the role in relation to parental involvement has also been impacted by income and achievement levels (Clark, 1983; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). As Hornby and Lafaele (2011) write:

The belief that parents have their own ability to help succeed at school is the second belief which is crucial to parental involvement. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) point out that parents with a low level of belief in their ability to help their children are likely to avoid contact with schools because of their view that such involvement will not bring about positive outcomes for their children. (p. 3)

Lack of confidence, language barriers, and prior negative experiences may also impact the parent’s beliefs about their role in education (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Parental involvement levels may also be affected by parents’ views about children’s intelligence as well as how children learn and develop their abilities (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Parents who believe children’s intelligence is fixed and that school achievement is mainly due to children being lucky enough to have high abilities will not see the point in getting too involved in their children’s education (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). On the other hand, parents who believe that achievement at school depends as much on effort as ability and that children’s abilities can always be developed are more likely to be positive about parental involvement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011)

One major parent teacher factor that may be considered when discussing parental involvement is the use of goals and agendas. Differences in goals and agendas between parent and student may heavily impact parental involvement. Parent and teacher interactions and roles are frequently shaped by differing expectations and vested interests (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Wolfendale, 1983). Parent-teacher meetings are often used to discuss progress, goals, and student
behavior. During these meeting majority of the time, the teacher’s agenda is primarily discussed. The differences in the agendas for these meetings between parent and teacher can be pivotal and create additional barriers.

There are several societal factors that may impact parental involvement. These factors include historical and demographic characteristics as well as economic factors that impact the entire educational institution. Historically, educational institutions had barriers to involving parents due to schools’ structure and culture of extreme formality and very small effort to collaborate with parents. However, educational institutions have gone through a form of modernization, and over time, have grown to encourage positive parental perceptions, involve families in their created agendas, and include partnerships with parents and families. “Parents are now being seen as having an important role to play in education” (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011, p. 4). Unfortunately, there are still many institutions that carry the attitude and perceptions of the past that continue to affect the amount of parental involvement incurred. Often, economic factors include items such as resources and funding, and due to the lack of both in some locations, many programs, resources, training, and future research is limited (Adelman, 1992; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Sanders, 2006). Due to the small amount of support, many educational institutions are not able to provide opportunities for parental involvement. These items may include functions at the school, providing training and classes for both parents and students, establishing partnerships, and possibly providing home visits.

**Freshman Orientation**

For every incoming high school freshman, there is a period in which they will experience transition. For students to become more acclimated with their new location, many high schools have what is called a freshman orientation, which has been called a community-building experience for the entire high school campus (Robinson, Burns, & Gaw, 1996). Attending the
High School Freshman Orientation will allow for new students to feel a sense of connection and commitment to the campus after participating in an orientation program” (Robinson, Burns, & Gaw, 1996). High school orientation sessions are often held at the beginning of a school year, though this and the desired outcomes and resources may vary according to the institution (Yanni, 2016). Generally, the orientations are used to familiarize and welcome students to an educational institution, and to help students gain more comfort with their new educational environment (Titley, 1985; Yanni, 2016). Keeping students engaged is another desired outcome of freshman orientation, as research has shown that engaging students via personalized learning initiatives can boost attendance, decrease dropout rates, and reduce the amount of disciplinary issues. More engaged students stay tuned in to their education (Hertzog & Morgan, 1998). Previous research confirms that the transition from middle to high school is difficult for many students (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000; Morgan & Hertzog, 2001; Zeedyk et al., 2003), and for this reason, many educational institutions have put in place several interventions including events such as a freshman orientation or other transitional programs. This may include the isolation of ninth-grade students at events such as freshman orientation to provide the student with support for the transitional period.

Students who attend schools with an explicit transition program like freshman orientation are more likely to experience a smooth transition to high school than students who attend schools without this type of program (Smith, 1997). Freshman orientations allow students and parents to learn about and gather resources about the school the student plans to attend. Mayhew, Vanderlinden, and Kim (2009) assessed the outcomes related to freshman orientation programs. Data for the study were collected during the Fall semester following the orientation, giving students a chance to reflect upon the experience and the information they received during
orientation. Various academic and social outcomes were explored to determine whether the information shared during orientation had proven valuable to the freshman students. The results determined that the orientation provided critical campus resources to students and was successful in helping them understand what was expected of them academically and socially as freshmen in high school (Mayhew et al., 2009).

Although freshman orientation sessions vary in content and structure, they are similar in that they provide students with resources and tools as an intervention to help ease their adaptation into high school. Freshman orientation may also assist with keeping students on track amid the major social and developmental adjustments associated with entry into high school and helping them deal with the increased academic rigor to avoid failure (Erickson et al., 2013). Successful orientation programs help students navigate the academic and social expectations of their new environment (Mullendore, 2014; Yanni, 2016).

**Benefits of Freshman Orientation**

An intervention is a strategy or group of strategies that are intentionally used to change or create a specific behavior. Many educational institutions have tried a variety of program initiatives and interventions to increase the success rate of their students (Chu, 2016). Due to the amount of research on the challenges and outcomes of the transition from middle to high school, freshman orientation sessions are often used as an evidence-based intervention to address retention issues (Barefoot, 2000). These orientations also serve to integrate incoming students to the new academic and social environment with a goal of reducing the attrition rates of first-year students (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 2005). Figure 2.4 was developed by the researcher with information adapted from Srofe (2009), displays several ninth-grade concerns and various interventions that have been used in high schools.
Key Focal Areas of Freshmen Orientation

There are several topics covered at a freshman orientation seminar, including academic integration, personal development, and social/campus integration (Burgette & Magun-Jackson, 2009). Although most previous studies have focused on college student persistence and first-year seminars (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 2005), evidence from these studies as well as other research on high school freshman suggest that, in addition to providing information regarding academic integration and social integration, orientations are also aimed at providing a foundational model for understanding attributes of the student. In general, these studies have focused on what incoming freshman students need to persist (Burgette & Magun-Jackson, 2009).

Figure 2.4: Freshman Intervention Model
Research has looked at what incoming freshman students may need to be successful throughout their educational career. Several freshman orientations have begun to put several best practices in place to address building and maintaining social relationships, developing positive academic strategies and habits, and familiarizing the incoming student with general campus procedures. Several incoming student orientations have also implemented sessions to address parent and student concerns as well as others to provide strategies for improving student attendance and retention rates (DeLamar & Brown, 2016). Many high school orientations also give incoming freshman students schedules for other interventional programs that may be available throughout the school year, such as freshman academies.

Hosting freshman orientation events provides schools with an opportunity to familiarize students with facilities and procedures at the new school and make personal connections, which may lead to improved relationships with specific staff members and students (Erickson et al., 2013). Freshman orientation sessions increase awareness of high school academic programs, increase their comfort and reduce anxiety, provide resources designed to make the transition to high school easier, and make students and parents more aware of available interventions to support ninth graders who may be struggling academic or socially (SEDL, 2016). Programs like this not only help prepare students for the increased rigor of high school, but they also help boost their confidence in learning (Erickson et al., 2013). Conducting freshman orientation for incoming ninth-grade students also provides a sense of belonging for these students, which can be defined as a “students’ sense of being accepted, valued, included, and encouraged by others (teachers and peers) in the academic classroom setting and of feeling oneself to be an important part of life and activity of the class” (Goodenow, 1993, p. 25). Orientation sessions may be structured in a variety of ways. Often, tours of the environment and facility are provided, course
requirements are covered in general information sessions, and sessions are held to address deliver student expectations and standards (SREB, 2005). All students can benefit from a High School Freshman Orientation that includes possibly a tour, gives them information about sports and activities, and provides assistance in planning a schedule (Erickson et al., 2013). Moreover, much of the orientation is hosted by the school’s own staff and students, providing an opportunity for students to form relationships before they arrive on campus.

**Freshman Academy**

Freshman academies are small learning programs within large high schools that isolate ninth graders in an intimate setting (Fulco, 2009). Freshman academies were in part created to decrease ninth-grade dropout rates (Cook, Fowler, & Harris, 2008), and have been found to do so successfully. These “schools within schools” must consist of a welcoming and flexible culture (Cook et al., 2008). Flexibility is important in that the needs of the students and the school will change over time; thus, to be effective, the program will need to adjust as needed (Habeeb, 2011). Freshman academies can be created by the hosting institution itself and/or make use of models that have been created by outside agencies. For instance, High Schools that Work provides a model for high school academies to use that is ultimately focused on producing students who are career-bound, and which suggests several strategies for effective high school transition:

- Implement an interdisciplinary approach to accelerate low-achieving middle school students.
- Conduct summer school for middle school students to get a jump start on their ninth-grade year and prevent learning loss.
• Conduct a summer program for incoming ninth graders who are below grade-level performance.
• Form teacher support teams.
• Develop academies and small learning communities.
• Offer double-dosing of mathematics and English.

High Schools That Work sets high standards with a recommended curriculum that assesses student performance based on National Assessment of Educational Progress benchmarks (Srofe, 2009).

**Key Focal Areas of Freshman Academies**

Although freshman academies may differ in structure, many focus on similar aspects. These items include a focus on a college preparatory curriculum, authentic learning experiences, personalization, rigorous and relevant instruction, and collaboration (Cook et al., 2008). “Many of the common design features among freshman academies are:

• Personalization, such as small learning environment, advisory systems, teaming, small class sizes, and block scheduling.
• Rigorous and relevant instruction, such as college-preparatory curriculum; connections to careers, community, and college; culturally-relevant curriculum; project-based learning; and extra academic supports.
• Professional collaboration and learning, such as summer retreats, regular professional development, and weekly teacher collaboration.

Additional common key areas include creating a sense of belonging, providing support to ninth-grade students with academic deficiencies, improving instruction, preparing students for success beyond high school, and stimulating lasting change. A sense of belonging may be created through efforts at more personalization and building a sense of community, such as with smaller
learning environments or offering mentorships or advisories, even advisory programs customized to meet the diverse needs of individual subgroups for special populations. Academic supports include extra help and curriculum adjustments, options for credit recovery, and more time for academics wrap-around services like supports for social-emotional and psychological issues. Overall support for the transition to ninth grade is delivered with freshman academies, provision of more services for freshman, and offering a summer program for incoming freshman (Srofe, 2009). As Hertzog (2006) states:

By implementing the academy concept, schools provide the transitioning students an opportunity to adjust to the new facility, acquire the skills to succeed in a competitive educational environment, and enjoy a feeling of security similar to what they experienced in middle school. (p. 61)

**Barriers to the Use of Freshman Academies**

Although much of the research notes that freshman academies yield many positive results, there are several reasons why many institutions may nonetheless choose not to implement a freshman academy. As discussed previously, freshman academies must be well planned and include a quantity of differentiated logistical plans and structures that can arguably have a negative impact on students and the results gained (Habeeb, 2013).

Freshman academies have also not been implemented at some institutions because of the issues related to the dispositions and behaviors of ninth-grade students. Conducting a freshman academy ultimately forces all freshman students to participate, even those who do not display the behaviors the academy was designed to serve, and because these students are forced to participate in the academy, they may begin to imitate or mirror undesired behaviors. Additionally, having all freshmen in one location under one program may limit the options of the students who do not display these behaviors; that is, participation in certain class or elective
options, extracurricular activities, and clubs and teams may be limited due to the intentional isolation of the freshmen in the academy. Others have furthermore argued that students may be sheltered and sometimes coddled within these academies, thereby not giving them the true experience of the independence required in high school (Habeeb, 2013).

True collaboration must take place between the staff of a freshman academy if the academy is to be successful. For example, teachers are expected to collaborate and participate in professional teams in which strategies are shared and decision-making for the academy may be collective. If the collaborative model is not used correctly, student behavior and achievement levels as well as the success of the freshman academy could see negative impact. Another point is that the same freshmen behaviors that warranted the creation of a freshman academy are the behaviors that must be carefully considered and managed while in the freshman academy, which also requires strong collaboration between teachers and staff to successfully address (Fulco, 2009; Srofe, 2009).

Lack of resources may also be a concern about hosting a freshman academy. Items such as a master schedule, class periods, and the availability of teachers, rooms, and finances may all affect the decision whether to hold a freshman academy. The master schedule may be particularly difficult to create due to the number of courses or the number of students that participate in the freshman academy. Teachers are another resource that is heavily considered. Some teachers may not be interested in teaching freshman courses, or the institution may simply not have enough teachers to focus on the freshman academy. The qualifications of teachers also have a large impact on the outcomes of the students, so schools often prefer teachers who have high evaluative ratings and high-quality teaching strategies when focusing on a specific group of students like freshmen. The locations of classrooms is another factor of consideration, one that is
affected by the makeup and architecture of the school and the availability of the facility, as many prefer that freshmen be completely isolated from others when attending freshman academies. Class periods are another concern when considering holding a freshman academy; certain courses may only be offered at certain times, in turn affecting the available classroom locations, master schedule, or teachers of the academy. Finally, finances may be one of the largest items to have a negative impact on the holding of a freshman academy. Since institutions often pay for the program itself, finances may determine what resources the school has to offer for the freshman academy (Habeeb, 2013).

Chapter Summary

Parents play a significant role in helping their children become successful members of society, and they are also integral in guiding their children through the difficult time of transition associated with entrance into ninth grade. Studies have found that students whose parents monitored and positively intervened in their child’s activities, such as by helping with schoolwork and participating in the child’s education, were more likely to transition easily into high school. In addition, school contact with parents has been found to result in improved overall communication between families and schools (Smith, 2006). When schools and teachers encourage parental participation, higher levels of parental involvement result.

Moreover, students whose parents are involved are usually more adjusted, have lower dropout rates, and higher achievement. Transition programs that involve students, parents, and teachers have the strongest effect, hence parents should be informed about all aspects of the transition, course decisions, and planning of activities. (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009). In turn, students who attend transition program have been found to adjust more successfully to high school (Smith, 2006), as freshman interventions can assist with many of the top concerns for ninth graders (see Figure 2.4). As research has shown that ninth-grade activities have a
significant impact on a student’s following years of high school and general academic success levels, having more parental involvement during events such as freshman orientation can contribute to the overall enhanced success of the students.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Chapter Introduction

The research conducted in the current study examined a factor related to the success and achievement of freshman students. When analyzing the influences on the success of freshman students, it was clear that parental involvement had a significant impact. I also began to consider personal experiences with freshman students while serving as an assistant Principal, and continued to review data related to the high dropout rates for ninth graders. My research revealed a lack of parental participation in ninth-grade interventions such as freshman orientation. As a result, the overarching goal of this study was to determine exactly why the number of parents attending freshman orientation sessions was low, as well as to identify the value that they placed on attending freshman orientation. I elected to do a qualitative study so that I might discover the stories behind parental decision-making regarding whether or not to attend freshman orientation.

Study Design

Qualitative research was most appropriate for this study because qualitative methods allowed me to examine the experiences of my study participants most deeply. “Qualitative research is a source of well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of human process. With qualitative data, one can preserve chronological flow, see which events led to which consequences, and derive fruitful explanations” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Underlying reasons for participants’ behavior can also be determined using qualitative research and data. In the current study, parents of freshman students were interviewed to garner insight regarding their experiences with and perceptions of freshman orientation, following the lead of Campbell (2014) by collecting open-ended emerging data that was organized into emergent themes.
Within the available qualitative approaches, I elected to conduct a case study to find and qualify commonalities between the experiences of this study’s participants. Case study research allows for the researcher to “understand a whole from one case. Case studies can bring out new ideas or assist with rethinking established theories (Dumez, 2015, p.55) In this case study, I explored the experiences of parents who attended High School Freshman Orientation at a specific, large suburban high school in North Carolina. The purpose of this intensive case study was to gain a better understanding of parents’ perceptions and experiences during the freshman orientation of high school students, as well as the role that parents play in this intervention for ninth-grade transition. This study further aimed to identify the level of importance that parents place on attending freshman orientation.

This qualitative, case study was conducted through the lens of social constructivism and described and analyzed the experiences and perceptions of parents of incoming ninth-grade students who attended the High School Freshman Orientation at a large suburban high school. Social constructivism allows for the analysis of “lived experiences” (Au, 1998). It also allows for perception to be a primary source of research, as perception is men’s primary form of cognitive contact with the world around and the main form of awareness” (Efron, 1969). Through perception, one may obtain an awareness of how experiences and events are considered. Social constructivism also comes from social exchange, relationships, and experience (Au, 1998). The case study approach combined with the constructivist framework facilitated an understanding of parent’s perceptions and experiences, as indicated above. The implications of this study will assist freshman orientation coordinators and school administrators when constructing High School Freshman Orientation for incoming ninth-grade students.
Qualitative design was selected for this research study to gain an understanding of the experiences and the level of importance parents place on attending High School Freshman Orientation. “With qualitative data, one can preserve chronological flow, see which events led to which consequences, and derive fruitful explanations” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 4), and having these types of data allowed me to eventually obtain “serendipitous findings and new integrations” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 4). Although it would have been interesting to collect data such as student success quantities, dropout rates, and student interests, capturing the actual experiences and perceptions of the parents was more valuable through qualitative study as the research design enabled me to draw valid and reliable meaning from the experiences of participants (Miles et al., 2014) and allowed for me to be explanatory, exploratory, and descriptive (Yin, 2003). The behavior, thoughts, and perceptions of the participants was also collected without any manipulation (Yin, 2003). Using this methodology, I was able to learn gain insights into the awareness of parents that attend these High School Freshman Orientation sessions. This ultimately provided a better understanding of parental involvement during the freshman orientation of high school students and the role that parents play during this intervention designed to address the ninth-grade transition.

**Research Questions**

To determine the level of importance that parents place on attending High School Freshman Orientation, the following research questions were used to guide the current study:

1. How do parents experience freshman orientation?
   a. Why do parents attend freshman orientation?
   b. What are the perceived benefits of participating in freshman orientation activities?
2. What are the supports put in place for those that attend High School Freshman Orientation and what are the barriers that hinder parental attendance during freshman orientation?

3. What are the perceptions of the parents who attend High School Freshman Orientation versus those who do not attend?
   a. Why do some parents elect not to attend High School Freshman Orientation?

These questions served as the starting point and focus for discussion with the parents that I examined. Through these research questions, I aimed to learn about and understand the experiences and perceptions of parents that attend freshman orientation. These research questions helped me identify the central areas of concern for my study but also allowed for follow-up based on the answers provided during interviews.

**Study Limitations and Delimitations**

**Limitations of the Study**

An additional limitation to this inquiry was the scheduling of the freshman orientation event itself. Often High School Freshman Orientation sessions are only arranged once a school year for a specific cohort of incoming ninth-grade students. Ultimately, this had an impact on the gathering and assembly of data from the participants. Because of this scheduling, additional data collection had to take place after the freshman orientation event itself, which in turn may have an impact on the recollection of the experience of each participant.

**Delimitations of the Study**

One major delimitation to this study was the fact that the research was be conducted at only one suburban high school in the state of North Carolina. Due to the restricted amount of contribution and involvement, the beliefs of those who were interviewed may not have been parallel to those of parents at other schools or those outside of the state or area.
Site Selection and Sampling Criteria

My sampling strategy was purposeful (Creswell, 2007). The site of the research was a large suburban high school in Suburban North Carolina with about 900 ninth-grade students in a total population of 2,600 students. These parents were of different cultures, backgrounds, and occupations, and came from families of multiple sizes. Having a diverse sample allowed for a variety of perceptions to be gathered from the parents, and enabled a range of coding to take place as well.

Data Collection

To obtain data, several different forms of information and collection methods were utilized in this study. Table 3.1 below provides an overview of the data collection methods used.
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<tr>
<th>Data Collection Method</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Research Question Addressed</th>
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| Interviews             | Conducted 13 interviews total:  
  • 7 parents that attended the High School Freshman Orientation event (each interview was 40 minutes to 1 hour in length)  
  • 6 parents that did not attend the High School Freshman Orientation event (each interview was 30 minutes maximum in length)  
  Used 18 open-ended questions in the interviews | RQ1 - How do parents experience freshman orientation?  
  RQ2 - What are the supports put in place for those that attend High School Freshman Orientation?  
  b. What are the barriers that hinder parental attendance during freshman orientation?  
  RQ3 - What are the perceptions of the parents who attend High School Freshman Orientation versus those who do not attend, and why do some parents not attend the event? |
| Questionnaires         | 17 questionnaires sent to parents that did attend the High School Freshman Orientation  
  18 open-ended questions (same as interview questions) emailed to parents  
  Answers were anonymous | RQ1 - How do parents experience freshman orientation?  
  RQ2 - What are the supports put in place for those that attend High School Freshman Orientation?  
  b. What are the barriers that hinder parental attendance during freshman orientation?  
  RQ3 - What are the perceptions of the parents who attend High School Freshman Orientation versus those who do not attend, and why do some parents not attend the event? |
| Observations           | Conducted observations throughout the entire High School Freshman Orientation event (3 hours total)  
  Notes taken during parent sessions – Only parents were invited to a separate session that included greetings and information from several staff members | RQ1 - How do parents experience freshman orientation?  
  b. What are the perceived benefits of participating in freshman orientation activities? |
Table 3.1 Continued

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<th>Data Collection Method</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Research Question Addressed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Analyzation of Artifacts</strong></td>
<td>Analyzation of documents such as:</td>
<td>RQ1 - How do parents experience freshman orientation?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Parent Folder</td>
<td>b. What are the perceived benefits of participating in freshman orientation activities?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Parent Registration</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Parent folder included several documents related to school staff and curriculum offerings</td>
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<td>Parent registration was held on the school’s website, and data from the information collected on the website along with data from the initial registration form were used</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interviews**

Interviews were one major form of data collection that took place in the current study. The qualitative research interview helps contribute to gaining conceptual and theoretical knowledge based on the meanings of life experiences to the persons being interviewed (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Holding interviews allowed for the gathering of information based on the structured questions I created while also enabling me to ask additional questions and dig deeper into some of the answers provided by the participants by requesting more information when clarity was needed. Throughout the study, I understood that some of my interview attempts were going to be rejected; thus, having a larger sample size to choose from may have been beneficial. I originally planned to interview at least 15 parents and ended up interviewing 13 parents to gather data, including not only those who attended the High School Freshman Orientation but also a few who did not attend the High School Freshman Orientation.
Questionnaires

During the current research study, I also made use of a questionnaire including the same questions as were used in conducting the interviews. This written series of questions required the subjects to respond in their own words and with as much depth as they would like. Depending on the amount of space provided on the questionnaire, the response is typically a sentence, paragraph, or more, and these open-ended questions allow the subject to interpret the questions with a minimal amount of direction from the researcher (Walker, 1987). The questionnaire was completed by 17 additional parents who attended the school’s High School Freshman Orientation. It should be noted that parents were not asked for any identifying information on the questionnaire.

Observations

I also completed several observations while attending the freshman orientation. Observations are:

…used to check whether what people say they do is the same as what they actually do…Unstructured observation provides insight into interactions between dyads and groups, illustrates the whole picture; captures context/process; and informs about the influence of the physical environment. (Mulhall, 2003, p. 307)

The observations in the current study were unstructured and allowed me to view the entire setting while obtaining data and taking in-depth notes on the parent sessions. My observations included looking for facial expressions when certain topics were discussed, viewing any emotional reactions that may occur; watching for any contact between school staff and parent or parent and student; observing basic interaction, movements of individuals, the use of space, and location selection; and listening to and noting the content of conversations and questions. During the event, I was able to see all the items listed above and took elaborate notes. Attending the
orientation with the intent to observe also allowed me to gather documents, ascertain what is offered at the school, and gain an understanding of the resources provided during the orientation itself. While gathering my observation data, I took in-depth field notes and drew pictures of expressions and locations.

**Analysis of Artifacts**

During my observations, I collected for analysis several artifacts provided to parents during the orientation session. Observing how the artifacts were used during the event also proved to be very important. The parents were able to refer to the documents, formulate questions, and solicit additional information. When analyzing the artifacts collected, I focused on who the artifact was given to and created for, how it was actually used, how it was meant to be used, and what information was provided on the artifact. Research also states that analysis should take place alongside the additional collection of data (Silverman, 2001). This proved to be true in that, although information was provided to the parents, having data from my own observation allowed me to determine the effectiveness of the artifact itself.

**Additional Methods**

To establish and secure participants for the study, I solicited volunteers on the initial communications given out for freshman orientation. The registration link was placed on the school website, and participants were required to fill out an information sheet with recruitment questions (Appendix A). This registration form was also used as a recruitment tool by including a question inviting parents to volunteer for the study. Once this information was collected, I contacted the parents that expressed willingness to participate in an interview. I followed-up this initial contact with a phone call to provide an explanation of the future process of participating in the interview. I also send out written informed consent forms (Appendix B) ahead of time for
participants to read and review, and required these informed consents to be signed before the interview.

Initial contact for parents who did not attend the High School Freshman Orientation was made via a telephone call during which I explained the research project and the process of participating in an interview. I also sent out a written consent form via email and required these forms to be signed before the interview. Interviews took place at a location and time of the participant’s choice.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Interviews were held at a location and time chosen by the participants to make participants feel more comfortable within their chosen surroundings, so that I might gain more candid responses. To gain several different perspectives, I planned to interview at least 15 parents of incoming freshman who were of different backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses. During the parent interviews, I also reviewed the information that the parents received at the freshman orientation and obtained more information regarding their overall experience at the event. Using the information gained from the parents, I was able to gather additional information regarding the communication methods used to inform parents about the High School Freshman Orientation session, the reasons they attended the orientation, as well as the barriers to attending the event. As the researcher, it was important to present the information in the form of the perspective of the participants, so the interviews were voice-recorded and additional notes were taken during the interviews.

Before conducting the study, a consent form was sent out and acquired from each participant. The consent form included information stating that the identities of the participants would remain anonymous and confidentiality ensured (Appendix B). The consent form also
requested permission to record the interview with each participant, which were to be held for no longer than 60 minutes each. Participants were also afforded the opportunity to discontinue participation at any point.

The questions asked throughout the interviews were questions developed using guidance from the extant literature and additional research (Appendix C). A written interview protocol for each participant including semi-structured interview questions was developed, and the data collected were recorded. During the interviews, I asked parents about their experience at the freshman orientation and had them describe what they felt was beneficial or unhelpful to them throughout the event. Most of the questions included were open-ended to facilitate additional discussion, and were based on topics such as the personal background of each participant, barriers to and reasons for attending freshman orientation, views on parental involvement, and their perceived roles. Immediately following each interview, I took personal notes and reflected upon my experience and personal reactions. All notes were taken on paper and documented via computer for future reference.

Observations were made by the researcher at the High School Freshman Orientation. I documented the parents’ reactions as well as the questions and concerns they had during the orientation. Conducting observations in this way allowed me to get a better understanding of the experiences of those who attended the High School Freshman Orientation while seeing firsthand what takes place during the event. My observations included the use of both descriptive and reflective notes to make conclusions regarding the process and activities that took place (Creswell, 2007).

**Data Analysis**

The purpose of the current study was to gain a better understanding of parental involvement during the freshman orientation of high school students, the role that parents play,
and the level of importance parents place on attending this intervention for transition. The data collected throughout this study were stored using an electronic filing system. This filing system was created by using an electronic folder to collect each coded item. Coding was done using electronic highlighters via a computer system ATLAS.ti. All information collected was filed into this specific folder and saved on a password-protected electronic hard drive that was secured in a locked file cabinet to which only the researcher had access. All notes, recordings, surveys, transcriptions, consent forms, and interviews were filed electronically to provide a reliable backup to my research in addition to the copies made of each item (at least two). Electronic copies were also stored via password-protected hard drives to maintain a secure duplicate of each item.

Data were sorted and transcribed as they were collected. After reading through and listening to the item several times, I made additional notes and then took the time to go through each type of data to begin making comparisons. According to Robert Yin (2003), examining, categorizing, and pattern building is a critical step in the explanation building process. Going through each type of data allowed for me to begin making predictions regarding emerging themes. Each item was first coded individually and then coded in comparison to the other items using an open coding system, with a manual coding process that allowed me to begin identifying the similarities and differences. The process was conducted using software ATLAS.ti to hand-code the research while also enabling me electronically store and compare the data. Having systems such as ATLAS.ti allowed me to begin grouping and creating focuses by using an electronic folder system. Comparable quotes and information were pulled from each reference and stored, and themes were ultimately identified at this stage. Having multiple sources of descriptive, evidence (Yin, 2003) also allowed for me to begin to construct validity.
Research Validity and Reliability

Validity in the current study was determined through a variety of strategies. Due to the multiple data sources that were collected (literary reviews, observations, field notes, and interviews), triangulation was one of the largest validation tools used. Each item that was collected was reviewed and analyzed to ensure the information gathered was in fact aligned. Member checking was also used to determine validity. Interviews and transcriptions were sent to the participants to make sure that the items provided were accurate according to the participant. I also made use of peer review, a method that is heavily supported in academics and helps reveal alternate perspectives. As the researcher, I also made use of rich, thick descriptions to create a full understanding of the data using a high amount of detail and clarity.

Although I took field notes during the interview process, all interviews were audio-recorded to establish reliability. This was done to make sure that the field notes were accurate. Moreover, researcher biases were addressed at the beginning of the study, and peer examinations took place throughout. Table 3.2 below displays the data collection in this study.

Table 3.2: Data Collection Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Data Collected</th>
<th>Research Question Addressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent interviews (13)</td>
<td>RQ1 – How do parents experience freshman orientation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. Why do parents attend freshman orientation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. What are the perceived benefits of participating in freshman orientation activities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>RQ2 – What are the supports put in place for those that attend High School Freshman Orientation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. What are the barriers that hinder parental attendance during freshman orientation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>RQ3 – What are the perceptions of the parents who attend High School Freshman Orientation versus those who do not attend?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.2 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Data Collected</th>
<th>Research Question Addressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaires (17)</td>
<td>RQ1 – How do parents experience freshman orientation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. Why do parents attend freshman orientation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. What are the perceived benefits of participating in freshman orientation activities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations and Field Notes</td>
<td>RQ1 – How do parents experience freshman orientation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. What are the perceived benefits of participating in freshman orientation activities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Documents</td>
<td>RQ1 – How do parents experience freshman orientation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. What are the perceived benefits of participating in freshman orientation activities?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Subjectivity Statement**

As a researcher, I continued to study parental involvement during freshman orientation of incoming ninth-grade students. To do so, I took time to identify my own position as a researcher and remained aware that I had several views and possible assumptions which could have had an impact on my inquiry and analysis.

I grew up in a household that valued education. My stepdad had a Bachelor’s degree in music education, and my mother attended vocational school. While my stepdad was not a practicing educator, he still participated in and contributed to a career that involved working with
adolescents daily. The expectation for achievement was high, and I understood why education was important. As a child, though, I always enjoyed educational tasks. I was excited to attend school and chose to “play school” when I was not in an actual learning environment. I never struggled academically and challenged myself frequently, remaining very active in school and participating in several clubs and athletics. I had my heart set on becoming an educator throughout my schooling. Eventually, I succeeded in becoming an educator and began teaching at a very diverse and competitive high school. As a classroom teacher, I feared facing disgruntled parents, and carried this fear with me until I became a high school administrator.

Once I became a high school administrator, I was forced to step outside of my comfort zone. Speaking to parents was a huge part of my daily assignments. These parents were often not pleased to hear from me and made it clear how they felt about the conversation taking place or the decisions that were being made. After about a year of exchanges with parents, I was finally comfortable and was no longer afraid to interact with them. I began thinking about how beneficial the conversations were that I had with parents and how quickly situations could change if teachers truly invested time in reaching out to parents. For this reason, I began studying the impact of parental involvement on student’s behavior and academic success.

I also have a personal interest in students, particularly the freshman class. Many are not aware that the highest dropout rates occur during a student’s ninth-grade year, and even I was unaware of this until I took a course during my Master of School Administration program. Once I learned about it, however, this striking information about the challenges of ninth-grade students stayed with me. I was also aware that parental involvement assists with the overall success of high school students. After participating in a few High School Freshman Orientation sessions at my school, I noticed that parental involvement during the events were quite low. The number of
students that attended the event compared to the actual number that enrolled was also very low. Hence, I questioned how we could get these parents involved to decrease our dropout rate and increase student success levels.

Prior to working on this project, I studied the transition of students from eighth to ninth grade and looked at parental involvement. I have examined some possible causes of the increased freshman dropout rates as well as reasons associated with the absence of parental involvement. Based on the information gathered, I decided to explore the perceptions of parents and their attendance rates during High School Freshman Orientation.

This study took place in a school at which I am no longer employed. For the past few years, this school has put in place a freshman academy that forces the campus to be split into two locations. The freshman class is held in a location that is about eight miles away from the main campus, which houses the 10th-grade through 12th-grade students. Although we were one school, I primarily served at the main campus and thus did not have much interaction with many freshman students. While the students may have been familiar with who I was, they have had very little, if any, direct contact or interaction with me.

During this study, I also had to make use of bracketing since I had current knowledge from working during the locations High School Freshman Orientation. Bracketing is a method used to mitigate the potential detrimental effects of preconceptions related to the research (Tufford & Newman, 2012). By using bracketing, I was able to distance myself from the research topic despite the fact that I had a large amount of prior knowledge from my previous participation in the event. To effectively distance myself, I had to suppress any thoughts that may have lent to my own personal bias as well as review a large amount of literature and supporting research around the topic.
Connecting the Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of social constructivism was used throughout the study to assist help the current research “rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation” (Creswell, 2013, p. 20). Having this framework throughout the study while focusing on the participants’ perceptions enabled me to maturate meaning and interpret experiences based on the parents’ responses. Social constructivism was also used to help me seek understanding from the participants’ responses (Creswell, 2013).

The questions developed for the study focused specifically on parental experiences and their interpretation of the barriers and benefits of freshman orientation. It was important to develop an understanding of what parents experience during these orientation sessions since it can ultimately have a major impact on the future implementation and amount of parental involvement during these interventions by the educational institution.

Ethical Issues

To avoid ethical issues, each participant received and signed an informed consent form prior to participation in this research study. Fictitious names were used to describe each participant throughout the research to sustain their confidentiality and protect their anonymity. The information gathered throughout the study was not shared with any other participants or staff members related to the school, and all data were collected and placed in a secure location to sustain confidentiality. The interview recordings were deleted at the end of the study. Since participation in the study was voluntary, all participants were able to terminate their participation at any time.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 has provided a discussion of the methods used in conducting the current study. This qualitative, case study used data collected via interviews, questionnaires, researcher
observations, and artifact analysis. Data were analyzed using coding to identify emerging themes related to parental perceptions of High School Freshman Orientation. The theoretical framework of social constructivism was applied to enable focus on the participants’ experiences as much as possible. Chapter 4 follows with a discussion of the findings in the current study.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Chapter Introduction

This qualitative, case study was designed to gain a better understanding of parental involvement during the freshman orientation of high school students and the experiences of parents during this intervention for transition. The purpose of a case study is to complete an intensive study about a person, a group of people or a unit, which is aimed to generalize over several units. Case studies allow for the researcher to investigate a single individual, group, community or some other unit.” (Heale & Twycross, 2018, p.7). In an attempt to understand the experiences of parents, the current study was specifically aimed to identify the level of importance that parents place on attending High School Freshman Orientation by collecting and reviewing data from a freshman orientation session at a large suburban high school in North Carolina. This school has about 2,600 students total, with about 900 of them being listed as “incoming” ninth-grade students. Using this specific study site enabled the researcher to collect data from parents of diverse backgrounds.

To collect data by recruiting parents for future interviews, I added one question to the school’s original registration form for the High School Freshman Orientation. I attended the high school orientation session, where I observed, took field notes, and collected artifacts. Following the event, I contacted and interviewed seven parents who attended the High School Freshman Orientation event as well as six parents that did not attend the orientation, and I sent a questionnaire with the same questions from the interviews to an additional 17 parents that did attend the event. The intention was to collect data from those who attended and those who did not attend as well as to review the perceptions of parents and determine the level of importance placed by parents on attending the orientation.
This chapter will begin with information regarding the background of the study, followed by a description of the data collection used throughout the study. Afterward, I will provide an overview of the research site that includes school background information, demographic information, school performance data, and a description of those that attended the High School Freshman Orientation. Next, I will provide some particulars on the demographics of the school, which will include data on school performance and an overview of the High School Freshman Orientation event. I will also present findings by reviewing the artifacts collected on the day of the event, examining parent interviews, and analyzing parent survey data. I will discuss the study’s research questions, conceptual framework, any validity or reliability issues, and the themes that emerged from the analysis. The last section of the chapter includes a summary of the findings from the study.

**Background of the Study**

Ninth grade is one of the most critical periods in a student’s educational career. Prior research has shown that student achievement in the ninth grade can be a large predictor in the future success of a high school student. Ninth grade is considered the foundational year in high school, and this first year of high school has become more of a priority when studying student achievement due to the high dropout rates and wide variety of elements that impact ninth-grade student outcomes.

Appendix D displays the student dropout rates from 2009-2010 (NCES, 2012). This table presents student dropout numbers by state or jurisdiction, grade level, and race. Specifically, the dropout numbers for each state is shown by student race and the number of dropouts within each grade level. This table shows very high dropout rates for high school freshman in many states; notably, high school freshman have the highest dropout rates in the state of North Carolina,
where the current study took place. Student achievement during this foundational and transitional year may be impacted by several factors.

Because of ninth-grade achievement levels becoming more of a focus, many institutions have tried to put interventions in place to assist high school freshman. One considerable intervention for incoming ninth-grade students would be the creation and use of High School Freshman Orientation sessions, during which students can become acclimated with their new school and surroundings and are offered several opportunities to gain knowledge about the academic and social attributes of high school. Research has also shown that having parental involvement affects overall student achievement levels. As a result, several institutions have also chosen to invite parents to the High School Freshman Orientation, where they, like the students, are provided information regarding the academic and social attributes of high school.

Although many schools have chosen to make use of High School Freshman Orientation sessions, there is still work that must be done to get stakeholders to attend. Despite the information that prior research has provided regarding both ninth-grade student achievement levels and the impact of parental involvement, it remains difficult to get parents to attend. There is also very little research on parental involvement during High School Freshman Orientation, specifically the perceptions of parents regarding their decision to attend or not attend the event.

**Background of the Research Site**

The research site is a large high school in suburban North Carolina. This school has about 2,600 students with a total of more than 900 freshman students. The Title I school where the study was conducted had a 40% free and reduced-price lunch rate, reflecting students’ socioeconomic status and earning the school additional educational funding. The student body consists of 50% African American students, 37% White students, 13% Hispanics students, and 1% Asian students. The student teacher ratio is 17:1 and the student attendance showed that
93.6% of students attended school daily. According to the 2016-2017 NC School Performance Report Card, the school performance grade is a C with achievement at a score of 61, growth at 50.0, and school performance at a 59. Table 4.1 below shows the scores received by the school for different areas of academic proficiency.
### Table 4.1: Study School Achievement Indicators from the NC School Performance Report Card

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achievement Indicators</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English II Proficiency</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math I Proficiency</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology Proficiency</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ACT Proficiency</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT WorkKeys</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-Year Graduation Rate</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passing Math III</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

80 percent of the School Performance Grade is based on the school achievement score. The school achievement score is calculated using a composite method based on the points earned by a school on all the tests measured for that school. 20 percent of the School Performance Grade is based on academic growth. If a school has met expected growth and inclusion of the school’s growth score reduces the school’s performance score and grade, a school may choose to use the school achievement score solely to calculate the performance score and grade.
Additional data were examined regarding the research site, revealing additional elements that may ultimately have an impact on freshman performance levels. The 2018 Teacher Working Conditions Survey presented several items that stood out and could potentially impact both freshman performance as well as parental participation. Table 4.2 below displays some of the highlighted questions and results from the referenced Teacher Working Conditions survey.

Table 4.2: Relevant Questions from the 2018 Teacher Working Conditions Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Element</th>
<th>Question Number</th>
<th>Question Text</th>
<th>% Agreed from Study School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Q2.1</td>
<td>Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about the use of time in your school.</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Q2.1</td>
<td>a. Class sizes are reasonable such that teachers have the time available to meet the needs of all students.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Q2.1</td>
<td>b. Teachers are allowed to focus on educating students with minimal interruptions.</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities and Resources</td>
<td>Q3.1</td>
<td>Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about your school facilities and resources.</td>
<td>59.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities and Resources</td>
<td>Q3.1</td>
<td>c. Teachers have sufficient access to instructional technology, including computers, devices, printers, software and internet access.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities and Resources</td>
<td>Q3.1</td>
<td>g. The school environment is clean and well maintained.</td>
<td>58.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey Element</td>
<td>Question Number</td>
<td>Question Text</td>
<td>% Agreed from Study School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Support and Involvement</td>
<td>Q4.1</td>
<td>Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about community support and involvement in your school.</td>
<td>56.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Support and Involvement</td>
<td>Q4.1</td>
<td>a. Parents/guardians are influential decision makers in this school.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Support and Involvement</td>
<td>Q4.1</td>
<td>e. Parents/guardians know what is going on in this school.</td>
<td>67.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Support and Involvement</td>
<td>Q4.1</td>
<td>f. Parents/guardians support teachers, contributing to their success with students.</td>
<td>60.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Student Conduct</td>
<td>Q5.1</td>
<td>Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about managing student conduct in your school.</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Student Conduct</td>
<td>Q5.1</td>
<td>a. Students at this school understand expectations for their conduct.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Student Conduct</td>
<td>Q5.1</td>
<td>b. Students at this school follow rules of conduct.</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Student Conduct</td>
<td>Q5.1</td>
<td>c. Policies and procedures about student conduct are clearly understood by the faculty.</td>
<td>55.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Student Conduct</td>
<td>Q5.1</td>
<td>d. School administrators consistently enforce rules for student conduct.</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.2 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Element</th>
<th>Question Number</th>
<th>Question Text</th>
<th>% Agreed from Study School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managing Student Conduct</td>
<td>Q5.1</td>
<td>Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about managing student conduct in your school.</td>
<td>f. Teachers consistently enforce rules for student conduct. 33.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>g. The faculty work in a school environment that is safe.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to these standout results of the 2018 NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey, there are several items that may ultimately have a significant impact on freshman success levels and parental involvement. Concerns with time include questions regarding large class sizes and a great deal of interruption during class periods. Concerns with facilities and resources include challenges such as having enough access to resources and an environment that is appropriately maintained. Staff members are also concerned about community support and involvement, specifically parental involvement. The results posted also yielded conclusions that parents are not very influential decision-makers in the school, do not know what is going on in the school, and do not support teachers. The largest area of concern included the management of conduct within the school, which can have a major impact on school culture and environment. Staff members felt as though students at the school did not follow and understand the expectations for conduct, the faculty did not understand the expectations for conduct, both administrators and teacher did not consistently enforce the rules for conduct, and overall the school was not safe and orderly.
Additional data display that the research school operates on a traditional high school calendar and has a four-year graduation rate of 90%. Although this site has a large graduation rate, the freshman class retention rates are still a major concern. Figure 4.1 below displays specific concerns regarding the number of students who are registered as ninth-grade students for each year, the number of students who began the specific school year as a ninth-grade repeater, as well as the percentage of freshman students that were retained at the end of that specific school year.

Figure 4.1: Freshman Class Retention Rates
As one can see, the number of freshman students for this specific location continues to increase each year, as does the percentage of freshman retained. Ninth-grade repeaters are students who have been in the ninth grade at least one time before the current school year and are still in the ninth grade. This includes students who have been in the ninth grade more than two times as calculated by earned course credits. Because freshman retention rates have steadily been climbing at the research site, administrators and staff at have worked on creative interventions to serve these specific students. Some of the interventions put in place for these students include summer promotions, freshman boot camp, a fast track credit recovery program, virtual course credit recovery, collaboration with the four feeder middle schools, and freshman orientation.

Staff at this location have focused many of their efforts on finding effective and innovative structures and activities for their freshman orientation session. Each year, the session offerings, speakers, and general plans for the orientation have been modified and adjusted. During the school year in which the current study was conducted, High School Freshman Orientation was held at the school’s new location. As stated earlier, there are 900 freshman students registered for the 2018-2019 school year at the research school, but less than a third of parents attended the orientation event. According to the registration form provided before the actual freshman orientation event and sign in sheets from the day of the event, of the large number of incoming freshmen that are registered to attend this research school, 328 students and parents signed up to attend the freshman orientation, and only 227 parents actually signed in and attended.

**Data Collection Overview**

Parent perceptions and experiences were paramount to this research study. To determine the perceptions of parents during High School Freshman Orientation, several types of data were collected. I began collecting data by adding a question to the initial event registration form sent
out by the study school to recruit parents to participate in the current investigation; this question asked parents if they were interested in participating in a study regarding parental perceptions of High School Freshman Orientation. Interested parents were required to submit their contact information on the registration form. The data collected from this initial questionnaire ultimately determined the parents that I contacted following the High School Freshman Orientation session for requests to conduct interviews.

The next opportunity for data collection occurred during the High School Freshman Orientation session itself. During the session, I spent time collecting artifacts and making observations, including gathering the resources provided to the attending parents. The items provided included a folder with several documents for parents. The folder itself consisted of printed information regarding local sponsors; the mission and vision statements of the school and district; the school logo, contact information, and social media handles; tips for what to do in a job interview; information regarding illegal drug use, alcohol, nicotine, and painkillers; and information on texting and driving, dating, social media safety, and sexting. The inside of the folder included a grade tips sheet, a student clubs and organization list, a list of counselors and their caseload, and a scavenger hunt activity. The observations made during this study consisted of a great deal note-taking related to information verbally provided to the parents, questions and concerns of the parents, and parents’ reactions. Conducting observations also allowed me to get a better feel for the experiences of the parents that attended the High School Freshman Orientation session. My own personal reflections were also documented in note form. All notes taken were descriptive and reflective.

Immediately following the orientation, I compiled a list of those who were interested in participating in the study, using the initial questionnaire sent. There was a total of 32 parents that
volunteered to participate in the study. I contacted the Dean of Students and requested the demographic information of those who volunteered to participate. Each parent was sent an informed consent form to review and sign, and only 24 of those individuals returned a complete informed consent form. Of the 24 parents who did, 7 parents were contacted and scheduled for an interview. The interview took place at a location and time of the volunteer’s choice. Each interview lasted between 40 minutes and one hour and was recorded by digital device. To gather additional information, I sent an electronic questionnaire with the same questions asked in the interviews to the additional 17 parents who volunteered. All 17 parents completed and turned in the questionnaire within two days.

I also contacted the Dean of Students at the research school site and requested the contact and demographic information for the parents who did not attend the High School Freshman Orientation event. I communicated with the first 10 parents listed by phone and requested to set up an interview, all were hesitant, but 7 parents who did not attend the event agreed to the interview. The volunteer parents provided a time and location and the interviews were set up, though only 6 of the 7 volunteers showed up and completed the interviews. The informed consent form was reviewed and signed at the site of the interviews, and the interviews, which were 30 minutes maximum in length, were audio-recorded like the others. When the interviews were complete, they were all transcribed, printed, and stored. Following the transcription of the interviews, I also spent time organizing the information provided in the electronic questionnaires into the same transcription format as the interviews. A spreadsheet of data from the electronic questionnaire was also saved. Each of these data collection methods assisted with participants describing their lived experiences throughout this case study (Moustakas, 1994).
Once the transcription process was complete, all participants received an electronic copy of the transcribed interview via email. As part of member checking within the participants were asked to read over the transcript to make sure that the interpretation of the conversation and dialogue that took place was valid and accurate. None of the participants felt as though corrections needed to be made to the electronic transcripts.

After validation had been completed, I uploaded each transcript into ATLAS.ti, a qualitative analyses software. While making use of the software, I spent time sorting, filtering, and looking for common themes and coding the data. The data from the questionnaire results were also used to determine common themes both by hand and via ATLAS.ti.

Following the initial analysis of data using ATLAS.ti, I began analyzing the personal notes I took during the High School Freshman Orientation event. These notes were also uploaded into ATLAS.ti and analyzed in conjunction with the parent interviews. The analysis was added, and additional coding took place.

I also analyzed the documents provided during the High School Freshman Orientation. These documents included a folder that displayed sponsors for the event as well as printed information regarding local sponsors; the mission and vision statements of the school and district; the school logo, contact information, and social media handles; tips for what to do in a job interview; information regarding illegal drug use, alcohol, and nicotine, and painkillers; and information regarding texting and driving, dating, social media safety, and sexting. The inside of the folder included documents such as a grade tips sheet, a student clubs and organization list, a list of counselors and their caseload, and a scavenger hunt activity. I took personal notes related to these documents and attempted to make connections to the parent interviews and the
observations I made. A picture of these documents and the folder were uploaded into ATLAS.ti and analyzed in comparison to the previous parent interviews and observation notes.

The last data analyzed were information related to the background of the school. Attendance of the parents at the High School Freshman Orientation was analyzed and compared to the number of parents that could have attended, and the demographics of those who attended the school was analyzed. School performance was examined using the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey (TWC) and NC School Report Card. The actual location and logistics of the High School Freshman Orientation event were examined and analyzed, followed by the data that included the ninth-grade dropout rate at the specific research site.

**Review of Artifacts**

**Artifact #1 – Parent Folder**

Once parents arrived at the research school for the High School Freshman Orientation event, they were required to sign in. Once signed in, parents were provided with a folder that they could use during the event. The appearance of the folder provided was blue and gold (the school’s colors) with a large school logo on the front cover. The front cover of the folder also provided information about the school location, which included the physical school address, contact information, social media handles, and Principal’s name. The bottom of the folder’s front cover also included images of small business cards provided by local sponsors of the school. The folder itself consisted of printed information regarding local sponsors; the mission and vision statements of the school and district; the school logo, contact information, and social media handles; tips for what to do in a job interview; information regarding illegal drug use, alcohol, nicotine, and painkillers; and information on texting and driving, dating, social media safety, and sexting. The inside of the folder included a grade tips sheet, a student clubs and organization list,
a list of counselors and their caseload, and a scavenger hunt activity. The contents of the folder are discussed in detail in Appendix E.

Artifact #2 – Parent Registration

School website. Parents were given the opportunity to sign up for the research site’s High School Freshman Orientation event on the school website. On the homepage of the website, the school provided a banner stating the name and theme of the event as well as pertinent information such as the event’s date, time, and location.

The school names the High School Freshman Orientation event the “Trojan Transition.” The school mascot is a Trojan and the name of the event suggests the fact that, as stated previously, there is a major transition that takes place when students enter the ninth grade. Alongside this information, the school also provided a link for parents to use that would immediately direct them to a registration form on the Survey Monkey website. The top portion of the registration form displayed additional pertinent information regarding the event. The second half of the registration form gave parents a location to fill out their personal information. Once a parent signed up for the event and submitted the registration form, they were provided with a confirmation of registration (Figure 4.2).
According to the final registration form, 328 students and parents signed up to attend the freshman orientation at the school where the current study was conducted. However, only 227 parents signed in and attended on the day of the event.

Phone blasts. In addition to notifications about the High School Freshman Orientation event to parents displayed on the school’s website, parents were also given event reminders using “phone blasts.” Phone blasts were sent once a week on Monday, by the Principal of the research site, using a recording software that delivered text messages to parents’ phone numbers taken from the school database. Several other announcements were given during the phone blasts, but the segment related to the High School Freshman Orientation were as follows:

Good Evening Garner Nation,

This is your Principal White. Here are your announcements for this week. Our annual Trojan Transition event, also known as the freshman orientation, will be held for both
incoming freshman and parents on Tuesday, August 7. At this time, we will be hosting the event at our Goal Street location from 1-4 pm. Please register on our school website for us to determine a more accurate headcount for the event. We look forward to having all families attend.

**Email notifications.** Email notifications were also sent out to the parents via the email address located within the school database. These email reminders were sent immediately following the phone blasts every Monday, and were an actual transcription of the phone blasts sent to parents.

**Parent Interviews, Questionnaires, and Researcher Observations**

In anticipation of the annual High School Freshman Orientation held by the research school, I made initial contact with the Principal and the Dean of Students, who was the event coordinator, to request adding a short questionnaire (Appendix A) to the initial registration form that would be used to recruit parents for the event. The questionnaire required specific information from parents who were willing to participate in a future study regarding parental involvement during High School Freshman Orientation. Parents that were willing to participate in the study were asked to state “yes” and list their contact information. If the parent was not interested in participating, they had the option to select “no” and submit the registration form. The request for the additional questionnaire was granted by the study school, and the questions were added to the form beneath the information required by the school itself.

Several weeks in advance of the High School Freshman Orientation, the research school released the parent registration form for those interested in attending the event, via the school’s website. There were 328 parents who signed up to attend the orientation, and of these, 32 parents volunteered to participate in the current study. Via email, each parent participant was then sent an informed consent form to review, sign, and return. I was able to collect 24 completed
informed consent forms. Of the 24 approved volunteers, seven were contacted to arrange an interview date at the location and time of the participant’s choice. The interviews lasted between 40 minutes and one hour and were recorded by digital device. To gather additional information, the additional 17 parents who volunteered were sent an electronic questionnaire with the same questions asked during the interviews. All 17 parents completed and turned in the questionnaire within a two-day time period. I also contacted the Dean of Students at the research school site and requested the contact information for parents who did not attend the High School Freshman Orientation event. I communicated with the first 10 parents listed by phone and requested to arrange an interview; all were hesitant, but seven parents agreed. The volunteer parents chose a time and location, and the interviews were arranged. Of the seven interviews organized, only six parent volunteers attended and completed these interviews. The informed consent form was reviewed and signed at the interview site. These interviews were also digitally recorded, and each interview lasted no more than 30 minutes. Table 4.3 below displays parent participation as well as the methods used in this study. Pseudonyms are given to the participants in order to allow for participants to be candid in their responses while also maintaining confidentially (Simon & Gomes, 2011; Moustakas, 1994).
Table 4.3: Parent Participation in the Current Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym, Race and Gender</th>
<th>Method of Participation</th>
<th>High School Freshman Orientation Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Betsy, White - Female</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Attended orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan, White - Male</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Attended orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhia, Black - Female</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Attended orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason, White - Male</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Attended orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jared, Black - Male</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Attended orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue, Hispanic - Female</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Attended orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regan, White - Female</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Attended orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emanuel, White - Male</td>
<td>Electronic Questionnaire</td>
<td>Attended orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McKinley, Black - Male</td>
<td>Electronic Questionnaire</td>
<td>Attended orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trish, White - Female</td>
<td>Electronic Questionnaire</td>
<td>Attended orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonya, Black - Female</td>
<td>Electronic Questionnaire</td>
<td>Attended orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briana, Hispanic - Female</td>
<td>Electronic Questionnaire</td>
<td>Attended orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian, Black - Male</td>
<td>Electronic Questionnaire</td>
<td>Attended orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregory, White - Male</td>
<td>Electronic Questionnaire</td>
<td>Attended orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha, White - Female</td>
<td>Electronic Questionnaire</td>
<td>Attended orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabrina, White - Female</td>
<td>Electronic Questionnaire</td>
<td>Attended orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael, Hispanic - Male</td>
<td>Electronic Questionnaire</td>
<td>Attended orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandi, White - Female</td>
<td>Electronic Questionnaire</td>
<td>Attended orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie, White - Female</td>
<td>Electronic Questionnaire</td>
<td>Attended orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corine, White - Female</td>
<td>Electronic Questionnaire</td>
<td>Attended orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy, White - Female</td>
<td>Electronic Questionnaire</td>
<td>Attended orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan, Black - Female</td>
<td>Electronic Questionnaire</td>
<td>Attended orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leighan, White - Female</td>
<td>Electronic Questionnaire</td>
<td>Attended orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariah, Black - Female</td>
<td>Electronic Questionnaire</td>
<td>Attended orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony, White - Male</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Did not attend orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jess, White - Female</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Did not attend orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly, Black - Female</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Did not attend orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendra, Black - Female</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Did not attend orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christy, Hispanic - Female</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Did not attend orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat, White - Female</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Did not attend orientation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participant information from the interviews and electronic questionnaires was gathered and tallied. I was able to collect a diverse sample which included participation from 12 White females, 5 White males, 6 Black females, 3 Black males, 3 Hispanic females, and 1 Hispanic male. I was also fortunate to have this same diverse sample within the questionnaires and interviews and was able to collect at least one interview and questionnaire from each demographic classification listed above.
When interviews were complete, they were all transcribed, printed out, and stored. Following the transcription of the interviews, I also spent time organizing the information gathered from the electronic questionnaires into the same transcription format as the interviews. A spreadsheet of data from the electronic questionnaire was saved. Member checking was also completed by sending interview participants a transcription of their responses to allow for them to correct any inaccuracies ensure that there was no misrepresentation of their views or comments (Simon & Gomes, 2011, Moustakas, 1994). I also conducted observations throughout the High School Freshman Orientation event. These observations were taken through written notes and addressed the reactions, expressions, and questions of parents during their sessions.

**Participant Responses**

Each question in the parent interview and questionnaire was examined and analyzed. An overview and analysis of each question is discussed in Appendix F. The following Table 4.4 gives a summary of the responses and highlights provided by parent participants through the interview and questionnaire responses during the study.
Table 4.4: Summary of Participant Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary of Participant Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>92% of parents interviewed and of those who took the questionnaire believed that attending the High School Freshman Orientation event was worth it and important. Parents specifically appreciated the parent tour as well as hearing from staff members at the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50% of the parents were informed of the orientation through the school website, 33% via email and 9% via word of mouth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent support was listed as simply talking or daily communication between parent and student, making sure the parent is available, asking questions and maintaining communication with the school personnel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple reasons that parents attended the High School Freshman Orientation were provided. The answers with the largest responses included wanting to take a tour of the location, assisting students with their transition, an attempt to stay informed, and to meet staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents were pleased with the staff members and the sessions provided at the High School Freshman Orientation but provided lots of comments regarding the parent tour. Overall, parents felt as though the parent tour was very beneficial, but poorly planned and executed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A major barrier that almost kept parents from attending the orientation were their work schedules. Parents who did attend also believed that work schedules may have kept other parents from attending the High School Freshman Orientation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation was not an issue for parents, as they were able to provide their own transportation or use ride sharing services.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Through interviewing, the participants in depth feelings and attitudes regarding their experiences at the High School Freshman Orientation were revealed (Simon & Gomes, 2011, Moustakas, 1994). Overall, parents had a positive experience when attending High School Freshman Orientation at the host location where the current study was conducted. Parents felt that the sessions and staff members were effective and helpful. Many parents referenced areas of concern such as the parent tour, but even still the tour was believed to be valuable to supporting the parent. Parents expressed that attending High School Freshman Orientation is important to them and they believe that the information gained from the event will assist them in supporting their students’ transition.

**Analysis of Research Questions**

After gathering data through the analysis of artifacts, observation, interviews, and questionnaires, the initial research questions in the current study were answered:

1. How do parents experience freshman orientation?
   a. Why do parents attend freshman orientation?
   b. What are the perceived benefits of participating in freshman orientation activities?

2. What are the supports put in place for those that attend High School Freshman Orientation?

3. a. What are the barriers that hinder parental attendance during freshman orientation?

4. What are the perceptions of the parents who attend High School Freshman Orientation versus those who do not attend?
   a. Why do some parents elect not to attend High School Freshman Orientation?
Research Question 1

1) How do parents experience freshman orientation? a) Why do parents attend freshman orientation? b) What are the perceived benefits of participating in freshman orientation activities?

Through the analysis of data, it was determined that the benefits of High School Freshman Orientation, parents wanting to know about the school environment and academics, parents wanting to support their children, attending High School Freshman Orientation is important to parents, and parents wanting to learn about supports and gathering resources in order to assist their student were all emergent themes throughout the research. Each of these themes are described in detail in Table 4.6. This study found that the main reason parents attend High School Freshman Orientation is to ultimately support their student. Supporting students may be done through a variety of means, which may include both the parent and student becoming more familiar with the new environment of the school they will be attending, the physical location and the layout and the happenings of the school, and the staff and key individuals on campus who will ultimately lead the school itself. Other ways parents support their child(ren) in school include having time with the staff members (specifically school administration and school counselor) and being provided with the opportunity to ask questions and converse one-on-one with key individuals. The participant interviews and questionnaires presented data indicating that parents believed supporting their students also meant daily communication with them, and the information provided to parents at the High School Freshman Orientation helped encourage such communication. Within the parent interviews and questionnaires several parents expressed that they would be sure to “talk” to their student by “asking questions and discussing how classes are going, through one on one conversations, and by encouraging student involvement during the conversations while checking in daily to see what’s going on at school”. With the information
they were given, parents were able to become more familiar with the layout of the school building, the academic and extracurricular offerings available to their ninth-grade student, and the general daily processes of the school.

There are also several perceived benefits for parents who participate in the High School Freshman Orientation. These benefits include providing parents the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the academic expectations and academic requirements for the students. Parents who participated in this study were appreciative of and found it extremely helpful to be given time to go through academic expectations with an educational professional, and felt the event helped them obtain a more in-depth understanding to better assist and provide resources for their student(s). One parent specifically stated, “In my opinion the Freshman Orientation gives parents insight about what academic standards are expected from their child and how parents and staff can help their child succeed”. An additional parent stated, “The sessions provide lots of information, especially the part that spoke about graduation requirements, what they need to actually graduate, and the academic requirements for different paths a student can take to achieve their goals”. An additional benefit of attending High School Freshman Orientation for parents is the opportunity to learn about the type of activities that will take place on campus, which may include academically-focused happenings or extracurriculars. Resources for each of these were provided via the parent folder or group discussions during the orientation event. One Black female parent interviewed stated, “Who knew there were so many activities on this campus. They didn’t have all of this when I came here. What in the world is the Pokémon club? I would’ve had no idea if it weren’t for this sheet with an explanation.” Data collected through the questionnaires and interviews also suggested that parental dialogue and discussion with staff members was very beneficial in helping them learn about both academics and extracurricular
happenings. For example, a White male parent attendant stated, “I enjoyed hearing the principal’s perspective and learning about various programs offered at GMHS from various presenters, and just putting names to faces and knowing who to go to if questions come up”, while another White female parent stated, “I learned a lot about what was required to have for this year and for years to come. Having general information to guide students through the 9th grade and beyond was helpful.” Having this awareness will allow parents to become more involved, participate, and attend these activities; encourage their students to attend and participate; and allow parents to provide additional follow-up regarding these activities. The ultimate benefit of attending the High School Freshman Orientation for parents is being able to assist with preparing incoming ninth graders to not only be successful in their first year of high school but also for the years beyond.

Within the questionnaires and interviews several parents voiced their opinions about the High School Freshman Orientation itself. Many parents expressed that they enjoyed the orientation and felt as though it was a “great effort put on by the school”. The data collected can determine that parents felt as though the High School Freshman Orientation was organized and beneficial. One Black male parent stated, “You can tell somebody really took their time with the planning and wanted the parents to be here”. Another Black female parent stated, “I wasn’t sure what to expect when I signed up to come, but this has been fantastic. I feel like I am a lot more aware of what goes on here at the school. My son will have everything that he needs”. Through observations I could see that parents were engaged and attentive during the parent sessions. There were very few adults on their mobile devices and there were several questions that were asked during the session. One Hispanic female parent asked, “Will the school continue to have
orientation in future years” and described that she felt the information provided to her throughout the few hours was “exactly what she needed”.

Although several felt as though the High School Freshman Orientation was beneficial, there were several parent participants that pointed out that the only negative part was the parent tour. One White male parent stated, “They need to do a better job with that tour, it felt rushed, and I could not hear a thing. That was one thing I had high hopes for.”

Many parent volunteers were thoroughly impressed by the resources that they were provided during the High School Freshman Orientation. Parents were especially thankful for the folder that was provided during the parent session. One Black female parent stated, “I am glad that the school is concerned about the whole child. I came to this event expecting to hear about academics and did not put any thought into the pressures that my child may face on a daily basis. Having these tips gave me something to think about”. A second Hispanic female parent asked school staff if she could take a few additional packets to provide to her friends that are parents. She stated, “I am surprised by the number of illegal drugs our kids have access to. Having a little bit of information about h types will be helpful.”

Overall, many parents felt as though attending High School Freshman Orientation was important. All of the parent participants stated that attending the event was important to them. As stated previously, several parents felt as though attending the High School Freshman Orientation ultimately allowed for the parents to support their student. The information and resources gained at the orientation were items that could be used throughout their students transition to high school and well as throughout the years following the ninth grade. One White male parent stated,
“Having all of the information provided in the folder was top notch. I’ll be able to answer questions and encourage my daughter to do more. She has never really done anything at school, but there is a whole list of things that she can do. There is no excuse, she knows everything that is going on and there has to be one thing that she is interested in”.

Several additional parents expressed that just experiencing the event with their child was helpful. Another Hispanic male parent stated, “She sees me. She knows that I am here. She will hear me ask questions, so she will know that I am just as interested as she is. I am here to help”.

**Research Question 2**

2) What are the supports put in place for those that attend High School Freshman Orientation? 2b. What are the barriers that hinder parental attendance during freshman orientation?

According to the data collected, there are very few supports that have been put in place for parents that attend High School Freshman Orientation. Through conducting research, one can determine that schools often assume that parents receive the correspondence sent to them through the mediums selected. The research site chose to use the school website, phone blasts, and follow-up emails to advertise the upcoming High School Freshman Orientation, and investigation in the current study revealed data indicating that the communication primarily viewed by the parent participants was the school’s website. While this was the primary source of communication viewed by the parents to inform them about the high school orientation event, the responses gathered via the interviews and questionnaires in this study suggested that there are very few supports put in place outside of phone blasts and emails (general technology usage) for those who may not have access to view the website or have the awareness to seek out event
information on the site. One Hispanic male parent stated, “Mail flyers should have been used.” Another White male parent stated, “Everyone is not technology inclined, they have to consider that.” As a result, other forms of communication that do not require technology may need to be evaluated as a means of communication with parents.

An additional form of support put in place at the High School Freshman Orientation in this study was having the school faculty serve as resources to deliver information to the parents who attended. Parents were given opportunities to ask questions and engage in one-on-one conversation with faculty members. Several parents asked questions during the parent session and several made contact with staff members immediately following the parent session. Contact information was provided for all the school’s staff members in the event a parent wanted to reach out at a later time and date. One White female parent stated, “They’ve got everyone on this contact form, should come in handy”. I also observed a White female parent ask a question during the parent survey related to contact information, the parent beside her tapped her and said, “that’s why they put this in the folder” and pulled out the document with staff information on it.

One last support that was put in place for the parents who attended the High School Freshman Orientation was the packet of information provided to them at the start of the event, giving parents information regarding student activities, preventative measures, academic requirements, and key staff members’ contact information. Several parents commented on the folder. One Black male parent in particular stated, “this was thoughtful and probably what we needed as parents. I have everything at my fingertips. Everything they talked about has a document to go with it. Genius.”

Several barriers to parental involvement in the High School Freshman Orientation event became evident from the collection of data in this research study, specially through participant
interviews and questionnaires, the most prevalent barriers being the work schedules of parents and the time of day that the event took place. Parents having to work was an emergent theme throughout this research study. This specific theme is discussed in detail in Table 4.6. From the data collected, I could determine that those who did not attend the High School Freshman Orientation could not attend due to their work schedule and/or the time of day that the event was held. Many parents surveyed and interviewed also stated that they had to take off work for the event or in some way rearrange their schedules to be able to attend. During the parent interviews and questionnaires one White male parent stated “Evenings would have been easier. I missed a half day of work”. A second Black female parent stated, “Why do schools always have events during the day? They act as if parents do not have to work. How am I supposed to support my student and do what they ask if they can’t help me out, just a little?” These same individuals suggested that the parents who did not attend the freshman orientation could not do so because of the time of day and work schedule concerns.

Communication was also found to be a barrier and an emergent theme within this research study due to many parents not attending the freshman orientation. The theme, communication, is described in detail in Table 4.6. Through the data collection, it was determined that several parents who did attend would not have been aware of the High School Freshman Orientation if they had not been told about it by another individual or if they had not visited the school website despite the research school communicating through several other mediums. One of the White female parents who did not attend high school freshman orientation stated, “How did the school notify parents about this event? I didn’t even know they had an orientation.” Another White male stated, “I overheard my neighbors talking about the
orientation.” Of those who completed the questionnaire and interviewed, 25% felt as though parents did not attend because they were unaware of the event.

Research Question 3

3) What are the perceptions of the parents who attend High School Freshman Orientation versus those who do not attend? a) Why do some parents not attend High School Freshman Orientation?

The responses of the parents who attended the High School Freshman Orientation were analyzed against the responses of the parents who did not attend the event. When discussing and analyzing the perceptions of the parents who wanted to attend the orientation, whether they did or not, most parents felt as though attending the orientation was important. Of those who attended and were interviewed or completed a questionnaire, 100% of parents felt as though attending the high school was important. One Black female parent stated “Why wouldn’t a parent want to come and support their child. I understand that things get in the way but sometimes you have to prioritize and this should be a priority”. The interviews and questionnaire data strongly supported the high level of importance placed on attending the High School Freshman Orientation. The parents in this study ultimately felt attending the High School Freshman Orientation was important in order to learn about supports so that they could better support their student, let the child know “that they are a concerned and involved parent”, and better assist them. Many of these parents felt that attending would allow them to identify academic requirements while also making sure that the environment their students were in was acceptable and conducive to the student’s success. One White female parent stated, “Attending the orientation gives my child confidence and comfort for their first days at a new school”. Attending the orientation for the parents would also include meeting several adults and professionals that would be assisting the students in their education. One Black female parent
stated, “I need to know who is going to be around my child all day, all month, all year. They will probably influence them more than I.” Another Hispanic male stated “I want to be able to say, Oh yea, I know who that is. That is the male who had the red shirt on.” When asked the reason for attending the High School Freshman Orientation using the questionnaire and during interviews, parents provided several different reasons based around learning about supports so that they could better assist their student such as, “wanting to assist their child with their transition, wanting to learn about the curriculum, staying informed meeting the staff”, as well as several additional reasons presented. Most of the parents could agree that attending the orientation was in fact important to them regardless if they were able to attend or not.

Through the data collection with parents who did not attend, I was able to determine that the most substantial reasons for the parents not attending High School Freshman Orientation. Parental attendance rates were also an emergent theme through the collection of data during this research study. The theme of parent attendance rates is described in detail in Table 4.6. One major factor uncovered was the lack of communication between school and parent with notice about the upcoming event. Several parents stated that they did not attend because they simply did not know about the event. The hosting school did provide communication in several ways that included posting on the school website and voicemail messages. Although several mediums were used, parents claimed to still be unaware the event was taking place. One White male parent asked, “Did they send a phone message? Did they put in on the website? I must have missed all of that. I probably would have received it, if it were in text”. An additional cause that kept parents from attending the High School Freshman Orientation was the work schedule of the parents and the time of the day the event that was held, which was during the day from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Several parents said that their work schedules would not allow them to attend, as for
many, they were unable to make arrangements to attend the event right in the middle of their work day.

Of the responses received from those who attended High School Freshman Orientation versus those who did not attend, there was very little differentiating information. Parents seemed to have the same perspective on attending High School Freshman Orientation. Parents found value in attending the orientation and ultimately wanted to attend the orientation even if they did not attend. Parents also felt as though the resources that were gathered or that could have been gathered were beneficial and would assist them with supporting their student(s) afterward. Several parents expressed that just being present with their student would not only show their children that they care but would also show school staff that the student has a support system or someone who is involved. One difference between the parents who attended and those that did not attend was the thoughts regarding communication. Those who did not attend expressed more dissatisfaction regarding the methods used, with some parents stating that they did not know about the orientation or did not become aware until the last minute.

Correlating the Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of social constructivism was used throughout the current study to assist with allowing the research “to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation” (Creswell, 2013, p. 20). The perceptions of parents were the main source of data collection throughout this study. To collect data for this research study, I made use of interviews and questionnaires with open-ended questions (Creswell, 2013, p. 25). Interviews, observations, and questionnaires were all geared toward the perceptions and input of the parents who attended. This approach allowed the participants in this study to fully and freely describe their own experiences. As the researcher, my role was to listen carefully to their views and interpret the findings based on their background and experiences (Creswell, 2013). The interpretation of their
experiences revealed a significant amount of information regarding the phenomenon while providing keen insight to the study (Ortiz, 2013). The phenomenon described would be parental perceptions.

The artifacts collected and analyzed in this study were gathered from the parent orientation session to determine what type of information parents were provided during the high school orientation event. The interviews allowed the parents to interpret their own experiences, and seek understanding when needed. With the personal perceptions presented by the participants in this study, I was able to gain new knowledge and understanding from the findings.

**Data Validity and Reliability Concerns**

Throughout this study, the process of triangulation was used to find common themes. Triangulation was chosen because of the variation in data sources collected. Using the different sources of data and triangulation allowed me to identify common information presented in the investigation. Having multiple courses of information and using the strategy of triangulation also provided a complete understanding of the perceptions of parents related to High School Freshman Orientation.

One question of validity in this research study relates to the identity of the individuals completed the questionnaires. Since these questionnaires were completed and returned via email, I had no way to confirm that the individual who completed the questionnaire was in fact the parent of a student slated to attend the research school. Although consent forms were submitted and returned to me, there was still no way to guarantee and assure the respondent’s identity.

**Summary of Data Collection**

Table 4.5 below provides a summary of the data collection in the current study as discussed above.
**Table 4.5: Summary of Data Collection**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Contents of Items Collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Artifacts</strong></td>
<td>Path Folder: Collected at High School Freshman Orientation Event and included:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Ninth-Grade Tips Sheet:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Make good decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Have good attendance and be prepared for class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Stay organized and turn work in on time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Check PowerSchool to keep up with your grades.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Be an active learner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Study for the sake of understanding and learning, not just memorizing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Have positive interactions with staff members and your peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Learn and follow the expectations of the school and each of your teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. Know and use your resources; your teachers, counselors, and administrators are here to support you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. Take responsibility for your education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. Focus on your destination, but remember to enjoy the journey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Ninth-Grade Freshman Notes Sheet</strong>, including:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Contact information for the lead ninth-grade administrator, the names of all ninth-grade counselors at the site, the Dean of Students, school social worker, student assistance program counselor, and career development coordinator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. A detailed chart with graduation requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Grading scale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Tenth grade promotion requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. URL for the state college and career website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Information regarding student attendance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Information about driving privileges and eligibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Counselors and Caseload Sheet</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The sheet included contact information for the ninth-grade counselor as well as all additional 10th through 12th grade counselors by alphabet.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.5 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Contents of Items Collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scavenger Hunt</strong> (10 questions)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Who is the Principal of GMHS and what is their room #?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Where is the nurse’s office?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. On what floor are most freshman classes on?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Who is my counselor this year? Who will be my counselor next year?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What is GMHS mascot?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. On what floor is the pool?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Who is the freshman administrator and what is their office #?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. What time does school start? Finish?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. How many credits do I need to graduate from HS?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. What do I need to do to see my counselor?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Website</strong></td>
<td>Screen shots of the school website and event notification and signup methods taken during the registration period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviews</strong></td>
<td>7 interviews of parents who attended the High School Freshman Orientation event (between 40 minutes and 1 hour)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 interviews of parents who did not attend event (no more than 30 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Questionnaires</strong></td>
<td>17 emailed questionnaires, all returned within 48 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Observations</strong></td>
<td>Observations were conducted at the High School Freshman Orientation during parent sessions. The observations consisted of a great deal of notetaking related to information verbally provided to the parents, questions and concerns of the parents, and the reactions of the parents. Conducting observations also allowed me to get a better feel and understanding of the experiences of the parents who attended the High School Freshman Orientation session. I also documented my own personal reflections in note form. All notes taken were descriptive and reflective.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Emergent Themes:**

From analysis of the data from interviews, observations, questionnaires, and artifacts, several themes emerged in the current study. In order to complete an intensive study, make generalizations, and ultimately complete an in depth examination, I worked to determine the
emergent themes within the study (Heale & Twycross, pg.7). The emergent themes for the host school, in this study are listed in Table 4.6 below.

Table 4.6: Emergent Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Data Instrument Obtained From</th>
<th>Statement/Question/Observation/Artifact Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attending High School Freshman Orientation is important to parents</td>
<td>Interviews, Questionnaires, Observations</td>
<td>Questionnaire and Interview Questions: Question 1, 5, 6, 12, 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>54% of parents have attended freshman orientation before.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>92% of parents that attended felt as though the High School Freshman Orientation was worth attending.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8% felt as though it was not beneficial.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Of all of the parents who attended the freshman orientation session, 100% of them felt as though attending the High School Freshman Orientation with their student was important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I want my child to feel at ease about attending such a large school”, and “it gives my child confidence and comfort for their first days at a new school”, parents displayed the general concern for their students and wanting to be able to assist with these specific feelings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents want to learn about supports and gathering resources so that they can better assist their child(ren)</td>
<td>Interviews, Questionnaires, Observations, Artifacts</td>
<td>Questionnaire and Interview Questions: Question 5, 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“The sessions provided lots of information, especially the part that spoke about graduation requirements, what they need to actually graduate, and the academic requirements for the different paths a student can take to achieve their goals.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Data Instrument Obtained From</td>
<td>Statement/Question/Observation/Artifact Item</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents having to attend work is a major barrier for attending High School Freshman Orientation</td>
<td>Interviews Questionnaires Observations Artifacts</td>
<td>Questionnaire and Interview Questions: Question 10, 11 &lt;br&gt; 67% of the parents responded that they believed parents had to work. &lt;br&gt; Parents interviewed, and survey also suggested that the time of the event be changed to better suite parents who would like to attend. Of the parents questioned who could not attend the High School Freshman Orientation event several stated that they would prefer that the event is held outside of work hours as well. &lt;br&gt; When interviewing the parents who were unable to attend “having to attend work” was one of the reasons as to why parents did not attend the orientation. One parent interviewed specifically stated, “Why do the schools always have events during the day? They act as if parents do not have to work. How am I supposed to support my student and do what they ask if they can’t help me out, just a little?” &lt;br&gt; Researcher reviewed a list of the parents that attended the orientation as well as the registration results from website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Data Instrument Obtained From</td>
<td>Statement/Question/Observation/Artifact Item</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication is a major barrier for attending High School Freshman Orientation</td>
<td>Interviews, Questionnaires, Observations, Artifacts</td>
<td>Questionnaire and Interview Questions: Question 2, 3, 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>25% of respondents felt as though the parents did not know about the orientation.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>50% of the parent’s survey stated that they found out about the High School Freshman Orientation through the school website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>33% of the parents questioned stated that they were notified about the High School Freshman Orientation through email, 9% of the parents found out about the event through word of mouth, 5% through the phone blast and 3% in alternative way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>21% felt as though the school communicated appropriately and effectively. 38% of the parents interviewed and questioned felt as though the school should have communicated differently, while 41% were unsure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Mail flyers should have been used.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Researcher reviewed a list of the parents that attended the orientation as well as the registration results from website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation was not a barrier to attending High School Freshman Orientation</td>
<td>Interviews, Questionnaires, Observations, Artifacts</td>
<td>Questionnaire and Interview Questions: Question 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Of the parents questioned and interviewed 25% of the parents did not attend the event, and 96% of the parents that did attend the high School freshman orientation were able to attend the event by using their own transportation. An additional 4% were able to attend by using a ride sharing service such as Uber of Lyft. No parents stated that they made use of another method of transportation to attend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Researcher reviewed a list of the parents that attended the orientation as well as the registration results from website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Attendance Rates</td>
<td>Observations, Artifacts</td>
<td>List of parents that attended the orientation Registration results from website</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.6 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Data Instrument Obtained From</th>
<th>Statement/Question/Observation/Artifact Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Parents want to know about the school environment and academics | Interviews Questionnaires Observations Artifacts | Questionnaire and Interview Questions: Question 1, 6, 9  
Many of these parents felt as though they were able to “get a feel for the building and the environment.”  
Although many felt as though the tour was the worst part of the event, 29% of parents responded that they felt the tour was in fact beneficial.  
Parents also felt as though attending the orientation session allowed for them to gain a better understanding of the graduation requirements and how to get students acclimated to high school.  
“It was nice to see administration and get a feel for who is setting the tone.” Another stated, “The academic session was informative and gave me a face to put with some of the names, especially guidance.” An additional parent also stated, “The Principal's address was most helpful. His understanding of challenges (technology/smart phones) was reassuring as parents struggle to find balance for kids.”  
“In my opinion the Freshman Orientation gives parents insight about what academic standards are expected from their child and how parents and staff can help their child success during.” |
Table 4.6 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Data Instrument Obtained From</th>
<th>Statement/Question/Observation/Artifact Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benefits of the High School Freshman</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Questionnaire and Interview Questions: Question 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>Questionnaires</td>
<td>“Enjoyed hearing Principal Hillman's perspective and learning about various programs offered at GMHS from various presenters, and just putting names to faces and knowing who to go to if questions come up.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>Although many felt as though the tour was the worst part of the event, 29% of parents responded that they felt the tour was in fact beneficial.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“It was nice to see administration and get a feel for who is setting the tone.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Another stated, “The academic session was informative and gave me a face to put with some of the names, especially guidance.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>An additional parent also stated, “The Principal's address was most helpful. His understanding of challenges (technology/smart phones) was reassuring as parents struggle to find balance for kids.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>When asked whether parents felt as though the research location hosting a High School Freshman Orientation event was a genuine attempt to assist their student 100% of parents interviewed and questioned responded that they did feel as though this was a genuine attempt by the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A parent reported that, “Having the administration at the event allowed for me to have an initial connection with the school.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The staff was “engaged and seemed very approachable.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.6 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Data Instrument Obtained From</th>
<th>Statement/Question/Observation/Artifact Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Interviews, Questionnaires, Observations, Artifacts</td>
<td>Question 5, 16 Security and safety concerns was mentioned several times throughout various items within the questionnaire answers and interviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 provided an analysis of the data collected via interviews, questionnaires, observations, and artifacts. The analyzed results for the artifacts were presented individually and by what the artifact provided for parents. The analyzed results for the interviews, questionnaires and observations were presented by question and by parent perception. Observational data was included as needed throughout the analysis of the interviews and questionnaires. Several artifacts and their contributions to parent perceptions were also included in the analysis of the interviews and questionnaires. Implicit answers to the research questions were then provided by analyzing each question of inquiry. I then discussed how the data collected correlated with the theoretical framework chosen for the research study. Validity and reliability concerns were then examined and reviewed. A summary of the data was presented in chart form and the limitations of the study were considered. Lastly, the emerging themes of the findings were presented and discussed. After discussing the study’s findings as they relate to parent perceptions, Chapter 5 will include the implications of the findings as well as recommendations for any further research.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Chapter Introduction

The current study was designed to determine the level of importance that parents place on attending High School Freshman Orientation and to gain a better understanding of the experiences and perceptions of the parents who attended High School Freshman Orientation at the host location. Chapter 5 discusses the study findings, including several implications for practice and for policy. The chapter also presents the limitations of the study and offers recommendations for future research.

Study Findings

Attending High School Freshman Orientation is important to parents. Although there are many parents who are unable to attend school events such as High School Freshman Orientation, it is still important to them and an event that they often make the effort to attend. Unfortunately, however, there are barriers such as work schedules and childcare that may keep parents from attending and participating in a ninth-grade orientation event. When parents attend events such as High School Freshman Orientation, they feel as though they are showing and providing support for their student and attempting to be involved in the transition their child is experiencing. Attending events such as High School Freshman Orientation gives parents an opportunity to gain additional knowledge related to the expectations and requirements of their new high school student. They are able to get answers to their questions, which helps them better support the student.

Parents ultimately want to learn about supports for their children, and when they attend the High School Freshman Orientation, they are displaying their efforts to help comfort their child gain a better understanding of the transition and what is to come, and assist their child by providing them with information. Attending events such as a ninth-grade freshman orientation is
a way to calm any uneasy feelings students or parents may have about the student’s transition to a larger, more rigorous environment like high school. By attending the orientation, parents are also able to determine what resources are available to both them and the students, identify and speak with keep staff members, and receive information about academic expectations and graduation requirements. Having knowledge of the items mentioned above will ultimately help parents support the student outside of school.

Although parents in this study expressed wanting to attend the High School Freshman Orientation, several barriers that may hinder their attendance were revealed by the parents who participated in this study. For this location, work schedules are the largest barriers for parents who want to attend, because High School Freshman Orientations are held during normal business working hours. These findings are in line with the claims of Rubin (2015), who discussed how hours for events offered by educational institutions may not be conducive to the actual work hours of the parent or guardian. These hours may require parents to take off from work to attend, as confirmed by many in this study who attended the orientation at the host research site but were forced to forego work to attend the daytime event.

Although we are aware that communication between home and school is a critical part of increasing student achievement (Hillian, 2015), the current study did find that communication is also a major barrier for parents attending High School Freshman Orientation. The host research school in this study provided information to parents via the school website, automated voicemail messages, phone text blasts, and email messages. Although these mediums were used, however, several parents reported that they still did not receive the correspondence from the school and either heard about the event by word of mouth stumbled upon the information when browsing
the Internet. The research school also recognized that they did not always have updated contact information for parents and students. Hence, since no method of communication will reach all parents, this study’s findings suggest that schools hosting orientations must provide information about the event by using several different mediums in an attempt to inform the greatest number of parents and families.

McDermott and Rothenberg (2000), Rubin (2015), and Fisher (2016) all discussed transportation as a barrier to parental involvement. As a researcher, I was able to determine that transportation is no longer a barrier for many parents who would like to attend events such as High School Freshman Orientation. Most parents who attended the host research site’s orientation arrived by using their own transportation or a ride-sharing service like Uber or Lyft, as did those who were unable to attend the event but agreed to take part in an interview. It seems as though, over time, transportation has become less of an issue for many due to the availability of new ride-sharing services and the increase in public transportation options.

Parental attendance rates at ninth-grade orientations are still low overall, as they were at the research school site’s High School Freshman Orientation. The estimated number of incoming freshmen for the research school’s upcoming school year was about 900 students. Of the 900 students, 328 parents signed up online for the High School Freshman Orientation, and an even lower number of only 227 parents actually signed in and attended the event. Even considering that some households may only have one parent or guardian and others may have none at all, 227 parents showing up at the orientation to represent a class of 900 ninth-grade students reflects a severely low attendance rate of parents at such events, one that is alarming in light of the evidence that parental involvement can assist the success of students in high school.
Parents are extremely interested in learning about the school environment as well as receiving information about academics. The parents who attend High School Freshman Orientation value meeting key adults in the building, learning about the campus grounds through tours, being provided information regarding extracurricular offerings, and understanding the safety measures put in place on the campus. Meeting the administration was viewed as a favorable benefit of the orientation, and parents in this study valued the insight about academic standards and expectations that they gained from attending the event.

Research shows that a safe and secure learning environment is a critical foundation to supporting student achievement (Ewton, 2014). Students must be provided with a safe learning environment to increase student achievement levels and productivity. School safety is a growing concern (Ewton, 2014) for parents, and many would like to become more aware of what precautions have been and will take place on the high school campus. It is therefore beneficial for the schools hosting freshman orientations to provide information and, if possible, handouts for the parents regarding school and student safety. For instance, the host research site gave out information sheets on drugs and poor behavior that proved to be helpful for the parents in this study. Moreover, information like this about school safety can help parents support their children at school and at home.

There are several benefits for parents who attend High School Freshman Orientation. One major benefit appreciated by the parents in the current study was the use of the guided school tour. The school tour allows parents to view the environment, find their students’ classrooms, and learn the location of key areas within the building. Having a school tour also provides an opportunity for parents to ask questions, gain reassurance, and see locations that they may not normally have the chance to see during a general visit to the school. This study, however,
revealed some issues suggesting that, when schools provide a tour for parents, logistics should be closely addressed. For example, group sizes need to be determined ahead of time, if possible, to allow for effective communication between the tour guide and the parents who are participating. It may also be a good practice to provide reinforcing documentation such as maps of the route to strengthen the quality of the activity and make certain that parents are getting the information they need.

Parents also appreciate the opportunity to meet or to get a feel for the key staff members on campus who will be leading or interacting with students. Key members of the school community may include the school Principal, Assistant Principal(s), Dean of Students, school counselor(s), and student support services team members. Being able to hear from these individuals directly and having the opportunity to put a name with a face is also helpful for parents who attend High School Freshman Orientation. Contact information for each individual and staff member should also be provided to encourage more personalized questions from the parent if needed.

Parents felt as though attending High School Freshman Orientation enhanced the connection between them and the school. Their attendance allowed for them to begin building relationships with staff members of the school, to gauge the climate and culture of the school, and gather an impression of the individuals that will be working with their children. Having the face time with these individuals and being provided the opportunity to ask questions and have discussions improved the comfort levels of several parents that attended. Having the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the course offerings, requirements, and expectations of the school was also beneficial and enhanced the connection between the parent and the school. Several parents felt more prepared to assist their student with their transition and expressed that
they were relieved once the school provided assistance and information in regard to these items. Parents also felt as though the school tour provided them the opportunity to become more connected with the school. Not only will they be able to talk about the locations within the school but they were able to become more familiar with the layout, structure and organization of the school itself.

From the literature presented in chapter two I was able to determine the following:

1. Parental involvement ultimately increases student achievement levels.
2. High school freshman have the highest dropout rates out of any other grade level.
3. Several high school locations have used events such as Freshman Orientation as an intervention to combat ninth grade drop out rates.

This particular qualitative, case study focused on the parental involvement during an actual High School Freshman Orientation. From the data collected and analyzed, I was able to determine that it is important to have parents attend High School Freshman Orientation. Having parents attend the High School Freshman Orientation untimely provides parents with the opportunity to support their student by becoming educated and gathering resources so that they may assist their student with succeeding in school. These resources are items or information that can be used outside of the orientation and throughout the next few years of a student’s high school career. As a result of the parents attending and gathering these resources, if used effectively, student achievement levels will increase. Figure 4.3 below will provide a graphic to show the relationship between parental involvement and their attendance at High School Freshman Orientation.
Figure 4.3: The Impact of Parental Involvement

Implications of the Study

Implications for Practice

The findings and outcomes of this study on parental involvement in High School Freshman Orientation suggest some clear implications for practice within an actual school and its programming. The implications and practices discussed in this section are realistic and attainable, but each recommendation may require additional resources, labor, and planning time to execute, items that some schools may not have readily available. Nonetheless, establishing such new practices may be worth the effort in respect to its impact on increasing parental involvement and, in turn, overall high school freshman success rates.

The data collected and analyzed in the current study (interviews and questionnaires) along with the extant literature, uncovered evidence suggesting that communication between school and parents was a major factor affecting parental involvement rates. Several parents who participated in this study claimed that they did not receive any communication regarding the
upcoming High School Freshman Orientation and instead learned about it through another individuals or by chance when looking at the school’s website. Many others felt the various communication methods used by the school, which included an announcement on the school’s website, phone blasts, and email messages, were ineffective and attributed to low parental attendance. Although the school relied on the website as one of its primary methods of communication, several parents who participated in the study claimed not to have seen the website, suggesting that schools should not assume parents have access to the Internet or that they take the time to visit the site on a regular basis if they do. Hence it seems that schools should continue to use their websites as a means of publicizing the event but recognize that other mediums can help increase the efficacy of communications and boost event attendance.

School personnel also often assume that the contact information on file for parents is current when using this information to send out emails and phone blasts. However, this is not always true, so several other methods of communication should also be used to attempt to reach parents in as many ways as possible. Parent contact information should furthermore be updated on a regular basis to help avoid issues with updated data. To make sure the correct contact information for parents is on file with the school, several approaches can be used:

1. Close to the end of the previous school year and during the early summer months, school clerical staff members can work to update and check parent contact information. These clerical members can make phone calls to parents and send out emails to verify these items. If the information is incorrect, the clerical staff member can contact the incoming student’s previous school, search additional district databases, and/or make use of the school social worker (home visits) in an effort to gather the correct contact information for parents.
2. During new student registration periods, parents should be required to attend for the student to be enrolled at their new location. Throughout this endeavor, all parent contact information should be collected and verified. Parents should also be required to provide no less than two emergency contacts in the event a parent cannot be located.

3. At the beginning of every school year, parent information should be collected via paperwork and emergency contact cards taken home by the students. During the first few days of school, each student should be provided with this documentation and asked to return these items within that first week. Once returned, clerical staff can be used to review and update the collected information in the school database. Teachers can also gather parent information during the school year through items such as signed syllabi and progress reports, and they can be asked to share this information and update the school database with the information collected.

4. Parent contact information can also be collected and updated during general school events attended by parents. For example, if a school hosts events such as sporting contests, fine arts presentations, or awards ceremonies, parents are likely to attend. A clerical staff member can be used to assists parents with updating their contact information at the event, which would allow contact information to be collected at various times throughout the school year and checked frequently.

There are several additional methods of communication that should be used in conjunction with the others discussed previously. As many methods of communication as possible should be used at one time to convey the message about the upcoming event in a greater effort to reach parents. Examples of additional modes of communication include:
• School blogs.
• Social media.
• United States postal mailings.
• Home/community visits.
• Mobile communication apps (Google Hangouts, Voxer).
• Newsletter and fryers (brought home by student or posted).
• Notifications and alerts.
• Videos.

**Implications for Policy**

Chapter 4 showcased several items that could be enhanced to increase parental involvement rates at ninth-grade orientation events. The previous section discusses several implications for practice that may contribute to expected growth in the involvement of parents at these events. This section presents additional changes to policy that can be completed district-wide.

**Mandatory High School Freshman Orientation.** As discussed in Chapter 4, the current study determined that the rate of parental involvement was extremely low compared to the number of parents that could have attended the research site’s High School Freshman Orientation event. Student achievement levels, specifically for freshman students, were also very low at the research high school. In Chapter 2, literature was presented showing that both parental involvement and interventions such as high school freshman orientation have had a huge impact on student achievement (Castambis, 2001; Kessler-Sklar & Baker, 2000; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Musty, 2015; Roberts, 2015; Shajith, 2012, Shumow & Miller, 2001; Singh, 2016; Smith et al., 2008). It is recommended that school districts provide the necessary resources and mandate each high school to hold a ninth-grade orientation or similar event that gives parents the opportunity
to visit the school with their incoming student. The content and structure of the events may vary, but the purpose and general outcome of an orientation event should hold true. However, not all high schools implement such an event, often due to issues such as a lack of labor, time, or other resources. If attendance at such orientation events were mandatory, though, it would give parents the opportunity to ask questions and gather additional knowledge about the school their child will attend. It is also recommended that school districts assist with capturing the critical elements of these events digitally and provide copies to parents of students who enroll late into school. Another suggestion is that each school be required to develop an orientation video, and that this video is posted on the school’s website. This would help parents become acclimated with the school prior to the orientation event and possibly answer any questions they may have.

**Communication.** Based on the literature reviewed and the data gathered in the current study, it is recommended that the district also assist individual schools with communications promoting upcoming High School Freshman Orientation events. For example, the school district website should present a list of district high schools and their orientation dates, locations, and times, along with a link to the registration for each event. School districts should also assist by providing digital and paper resources that publicize each school and encourage both parents and students to attend the orientation events. Because ninth-grade orientations are held in an attempt to get parents involved and participating in students’ education as part of an overall effort to ultimately enhance student achievement rates, High School Freshman Orientation should be a primary focus for high schools in the area.

Mandatory implementation and district-wide support for these suggested changes to policy, along with more consistent guidelines, can greatly enhance student success levels across a school system.
Best Practices for High School Freshman Orientation

Conducting this research study has allowed for me to gather a large amount of data related to the best practices of hosting a High School Freshman Orientation. The following information will provide several suggestions for coordinators of High School Freshman Orientation when preparing for future events.

• **Use several methods of communication** – As discussed in the research above, host sites should work to ensure that parents are contacted using several different mediums. Several of the parents at the host location stated that they did not know about the upcoming orientation. Parents have also stated and given examples of the different types of communication methods that were used to receive the information. These mediums ranged from the use of the school website to using the U.S. postal service.

• **Create ways to update parent contact information** – Hosts sites for High School Freshman Orientation should work to make sure that parent information is updated frequently. The host site should begin with making sure the registration for includes questions related to parents contact information such as phone number, email, and address. Once the parents attend the event, the host site should provide opportunities for the parents to update their information, such as when they are signing in or being marked present, or by intentionally providing locations in the school during the event such as kiosk or staff members to update personal contact information. Throughout the school year parent contact information should be frequently checked.

• **Hold the orientation two to three times a day or over several days at multiple times** – In order to equally serve families and parents of those who would like to attend the High School Freshman Orientation host sites should offer several sessions for parents to
choose from and in an effort to accommodate all. For example, the host site would benefit from holding a session in the morning hours, in the afternoon, and during evening hours, in order to accommodate parent work schedules. Hosting the event over several days would also be beneficial and ultimately be another option and opportunity for parents to choose from.

- **Release registration form with information early** – Host schools should create and release the High School Freshman Orientation registration form several months in advance through multiple mediums. This would allow for parents to plan ahead and this would allow for the school to gauge how many parents plan to attend. Having an idea of how many parents plan to attend several months in advance would allow for the host site to personally reach out to those parents that did not sign up. It would also allow for the host site to plan the activities and determine what information to give out at the event itself.

- **Add a comments field on the registration form to allow for parents to add comments regarding what they would like to see happen at the High School Freshman Orientation** – Having an additional comments field on the registration form would allow for participants to write exactly what they would like to see happen at the event. They could give specific details, as well as suggestions on what resources would be beneficial to them, the individuals that they would like to hear from or meet, as well as the activities that they would like to see take place.

- **Hold a separate parent session** – Parents should be invited to the orientation session. Holding a separate parent session would be beneficial in that parents would be able to
candidly ask questions and get a feel for the host location. Having a separate parent session will also parents to gather resources, build a network, connections and contacts.

- **Provide parent resources** - It is suggested that High School Freshman orientation host sites provide resources in the form of a parent folder at the beginning of the parent session. This folder should include information regarding curriculum and graduation requirements, student schedules, a map of the building, contact information for staff, organizational and extracurricular activity information, tips related to drugs, alcohol, and student mental health, as well as any additional items that parents may suggest in the registration form. These documents should be items that parents can refer to both during and outside of the orientation event.

- **Have school staff participate and disseminate information** – Having school staff participate in the High School Freshman orientation will allow for parents to put a face with a name, gauge the individuals that will be working with their students and ask any questions that they may have. Having staff participate in the orientation will also allow for parents to get a feel for the culture and the climate of the school from a direct source. This will also provide parents an opportunity to get an idea of the mission and vision of school leaders.

- **Allow for a separate question and answer period** – During the parent session time should be reserved for parents to ask any questions that they may have. It is suggested that this time period be held at the end of the session to allow for parents to continue conversations after the event with specific individuals if needed. Holding the question session at the end will also allow for loose ends to be tied in regard to any information that was presented throughout the parent session.
• **Solicit feedback from the parents** – A parent exit survey should be conducted at the end of the High School Freshman Orientation. This will allow for parents to provide suggestions and provide feedback regarding what they felt was beneficial and was not.

**Limitations and Delimitations of the Study**

**Study Limitations**

Several items influenced the outcome of events in the current study. Each one of these limitations and constraints determined the future of the study as well as the overall interpretation and conclusions presented throughout.

One major limitation within the current study was time, in that the process of collecting data through interviews was extremely time-consuming. Parents had to be individually contacted and, after the initial communication, a date, time, and location had to be determined for each interview. Scheduling these interviews took some time. Following the scheduling, the interviews with parents were held, and these ranged between 40 minutes and one hour in length. Several parents who did not attend freshman orientation were also contacted and interviewed in this study. Making initial contact with these parents was extremely difficult, and I had to strategically call when there was a better chance of reaching the parents, during the evening hours and outside of traditional work hours. A few parents seemed skeptical about the study, and many had questions. Although seven interviews were set up with parents who did not attend the orientation, I was unsure that parents would actually attend; however, only one participant did not show up to their planned interview. All interviews were recorded and transcribed using a transcription process done by hand, which took no less than three hours per interview to complete. Thus, as I was employed full-time as a high school administrator, time continued to be a limitation during
this study since selecting a time that worked for the participant as well as transcribing was extremely difficult.

A second limitation in this study was the fact that freshman orientation was only held on one day out of the entire school year at the research school. This put a lot of pressure on me to collect as much data as possible during the single event. Although many volunteers gave this researcher permission make follow-up contact with them, there were still limitations. For example, many did not want any additional contact after completing the questionnaire or the initial interviews. Any questions that I had after the orientation had to be directed to the research site’s Dean of Students (also the orientation coordinator) through telephone or email. Additionally, there was a tremendous amount of pressure to make sure that I was able to solicit help from as many parents as possible on the day of the event, since it was possible I would not be able to get in contact with these parents at a later time.

**Study Delimitations**

There were also several delimitations put in place for this research study. I continued to evaluate the scope of my study while conducting it, and proceeded to put specific boundaries in place in an attempt to be more efficient and orderly. During the planning stages of this study, I chose to collect data from one school site. This school site was chosen for the research because of its diverse student and parent population, varied achievement levels of students, and variety of course offerings, as well as its status as an International Baccalaureate location. Choosing this location was very strategic and enabled a diverse set of data to be gathered in this study.

During the data collection process in the current study, I was able to recruit 32 parent participants who were willing to interview. Of the 32 parents who volunteered, 24 individuals submitted completed consent forms. Due to the arduous nature of the interview process, of these
24 parents from whom I received consent forms, only seven parents were interviewed. Data from the additional 17 participants were gathered through questionnaires via email that included the same questions as the interview.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

While planning and organizing for this research study, I was unable to find much research and literature on parental involvement during transitional interventions like freshman orientations. There were several studies conducted on parental involvement and its impact on student achievement, but none about parental involvement and transitional interventions. Previous research has determined that freshman students have the highest dropout rates, as well as solidified that parental involvement and early interventions ultimately increase student achievement levels. With this previous knowledge, parental involvement in High School Freshman Orientations is unquestionably a subject that could use some additional exploration and assessment.

Another area that could use some further research is the practice of educational locations hosting events for which they seek parent attendance outside of school hours. Understanding the thoughts and experiences of parents who attend school events outside of work hours, as well as an examination of the needs of parents during these events, would be beneficial to school personnel and school districts to consider when implementing and planning programs. The data gathered from these events could also be used to assist with determining additional items implemented when soliciting parent participation.

An additional area in need of additional research is the use of effective communication strategies by educational locations. For example, a study on parent Internet usage would be beneficial. Though we live in an era in which Internet usage is huge, a study to pinpoint
specifically how and why parents use the Internet may help identify the best times or types of communication methods for contacting parents of different age groups, demographics, and income levels.

Additional research can also be conducted based on the information provided by the demographics of the participants. The researcher can conduct future studies based the involvement of parents by race and gender. Further data can be collected such as social class, age, and family structure. This would allow for the researcher to examine the characteristics of parents that attend versus those that do not attend and work to determine the needs of the school when soliciting the attendance of parents to High School Freshman Orientation.

Further research can also be conducted on students who do not have parents. It is often assumed that school-aged students have some form of parent, but school data shows that many students do not. Some students may simply have a guardian or another family member of age who oversees them, while others may be legally emancipated and on their own. Because previous research has proven that parental attendance and support works to increase student achievement levels, researchers should begin to look into achievement levels and supports for students who do not have parents.

I would also recommend expanding the scope of the study. Because this study was a case study, there was only one location from which information was pulled and research was conducted. Although this location allowed for the study to focus and execute an in-depth examination of parental involvement during the High School Freshman orientation, it was still focused on one location which is not a true representation of the area of research. Expanding the scope of the study to several research site locations would help to provide a more accurate picture of the actual needs and wants of parents regarding High School Freshman Orientation. One last area for suggested further research would be to conduct a study based upon what parents feel they would like to learn about when attending events such as
High School Freshman Orientation. Allowing parents to provide feedback about the information, activities, and handouts parents would like to receive during these events would benefit school personnel as well as parents and students.

Conclusion

Prior research (Booth & Dunn, 1996; Kessler-Sklar & Baker, 2000; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Musty, 2015; Roberts, 2015; Shajith, 2012, Shumow & Miller, 2001; Singh, 2016) has proven ninth-grade students have high dropout rates and that parental involvement works to increase student achievement levels. Research has also demonstrated that interventions such as freshman orientation bolsters student achievement. However, although all topics have been heavily researched, there is very little research done on actual parental involvement during High School Freshman Orientations. I chose this topic in a quest to understand the perception of parents during the High School Freshman Orientation as well as the level of importance that parents place on attending. This study was designed to allow the research to garner a better understanding of parental involvement during the freshman orientation of high school students and the experiences of parents during this intervention for transition.

This study worked to determine the level of importance parents place on attending High School Freshman Orientation, and the implications of this study can be used to assist the orientation coordinators and school administrators when planning High School Freshman Orientation for incoming ninth-grade students and working to encourage parental involvement. The parents selected for this study were parent volunteers that either attended or did not attend the High School Freshman Orientation event. The location selected for this study was a high school located in suburban North Carolina, one with a variety of learning needs and academic
levels, a diverse population, and curriculum that varied in accordance with the international baccalaureate program.

I began the study by sending out a recruitment question on the High School Freshman Orientation signup form via the school’s website. Additional data was collected on the day of the event through observation and notes. Immediately following the event, parents that attended the event and those who did not attend were contacted and a follow-up interview was scheduled. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. During the analyzation, the initial research questions were answered regarding parent experiences and perceptions.

The research study conducted concluded that parents believe attending High School Freshman Orientation is important. Many parents felt attending the orientation with their student would ultimately show their support for their student and allow the parent to be more in tune with the child’s needs. The research also determined that many parents used the High School Freshman Orientation to educate themselves so that they can assist their children to success in school. A few barriers were presented throughout the study, such as the work schedules of parents, the time of day that the High School Freshman Orientation was held, and concerns about the communication methods used by the school. Several recommendations were provided regarding using multiple communication methods, holding the High School Freshman Orientation at more feasible times of day for the parents to attend, and possibly providing additional resources for the parents to attend. Since High School Freshman Orientation is an intervention frequently used in high schools to combat student transition concerns, based on the findings of this study, it would serve as beneficial to continue additional research on the parental component of involvement in these ninth-grade transitional events.
REFERENCES


**Works Consulted**


http://www.amle.org/Portals/0/pdf/research_summaries/Transition_from_MStoHS.pdf


Appendix A: Initial Recruitment Communication on Orientation Registration Form

1. Are you interested in participating in a study regarding parental involvement in freshman orientation (Participation will include at least one interview)?
   ____Yes
   ____No

2. If you are interested please provide the following contact information:
   First Name: ________________________________________________________________
   Last Name: ______________________________________________________________
   Phone Number: ___________________________________________________________
   Email Address: ____________________________________________________________

Talking Points:

Dear Potential Participant:

   We are requesting your assistance with a study conducted by a researcher at North Carolina State University on Parental Involvement during High School Freshman Orientation. LaTeisha Jeannis will be conducting the study as a doctoral student at North Carolina State University. Participating in this research is voluntary and your choice to be participant will not affect your student’s access or eligibility for anything in school.

   The purpose of this study is to understand parental involvement during the freshman orientation of high school students and the role that parents play during orientation. This study is important because it will assist the orientation coordinators and school administrators when constructing freshman orientation for incoming ninth grade students as well as determining a variety of ways to encourage parental involvement. This study will allow for Mrs. Jeannis to pinpoint the areas of need and create suggestions for coordinators and administrators preparing for this annual event.

   In order to be a study participant, you must be a parent of an incoming ninth grader at this high school location. You do not have to attend freshman orientation to participate in the study.
Appendix B: Parent Interview Questionnaire

1. Did you attend parent orientation? If so, move to question #5. If not, answer questions #1-8 and #15-16 only.
2. If not, why? Did you want to attend freshman orientation?
3. Have you ever attended freshman orientation before? Was it worth attending? What aspect of freshman orientation was most helpful?
4. What were the barriers that kept you from attending this year? What would have drawn you to attend freshman orientation?
5. On what medium did you receive an invitation/information regarding freshman orientation?
6. Was there any follow up to this invitation?
7. Do you think there was a better way to communicate?
8. Outside of orientation what are some ways in which you support your student?
9. What is your reason for attending freshman orientation?
10. What did you think about the sessions that you attended?
11. What were your thoughts about the staff members that participated in this event?
12. Do you feel as though this orientation was a genuine attempt to assist your student?
13. What were the benefits of attending the orientation?
14. Were there any barriers that almost kept you away from freshman orientation?
15. Why do you think there are some parents that did not attend?
16. Do you think that attending freshman orientation with your student is important? Why or why not?
17. Did you take off from work to attend this event? ____Yes   ____No
18. What mode of transportation did you take to get to this event?
   ____Personal Car
   ____Public Transportation
   ____Ride from another individual
   ____Walked
   ____Other? (Specify) _____________________
19. Did you feel as though this event was helpful to you as a parent? ____Yes   ____No
20. What made this event helpful to you?
21. What was the most informative/helpful session?
22. Was there anything that you wanted to learn more about that wasn’t presented?
Appendix C: Informed Consent for Research

North Carolina State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study: Parental Involvement During High School Freshman Orientation (12648)
Principal Investigator: LaTeisha Jeannis
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Lisa Bass

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of parental involvement during high school freshman orientation sessions. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being part of this study. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate, however the risks of this study are minimal since you as a participant can choose to opt out of participating in any portion that makes you uncomfortable.

What is the purpose of this study?
To acquire a better understanding of parental involvement during the freshman orientation of high school students and the role that parents play during this intervention for transition.

Am I eligible to be a participant in this study?
In order to be a participant in this study you must be the parent of an incoming high school freshman at the chosen school site. You cannot participate in this study if you are not a parent of an incoming high school freshman at the chosen school site.

What will happen if you take part in the study?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to discuss your personal experiences during your attendance at the high school freshman orientation or provide information regarding the reasons that you did not attend the high school freshman orientation. You will be required to spend no more than 60-90 minutes per interview, with no more than two interviews during the study at a location and time of your choosing. Most interviews will only last about 60 minutes. Additional follow up may take place electronically rather than face to face. These interviews will be voice recorded and additional notes will be taken during the interviews. Your identity will remain confidential. Fictitious names will also be used to describe each participant throughout the research in order to sustain confidentiality and protect the anonymity of each participant. Information that is gathered throughout the study will not be shared with any other participants or staff members related to the school. A fictitious name will also be used to describe the school system. All data will be collected and placed in a secure location in order to sustain confidentiality. All recordings will be destroyed within one year of data collection.

Risks
There are minimal risks associated with participation in this research. In order to avoid ethical issues, you will receive this informed consent form. Fictitious names will also be used to describe each participant throughout the research in order to maintain confidentiality of each participant. All information that is gathered throughout the study will not be shared with any other participants or staff members related to the school. A fictitious name will also be used to describe the school system. All data will be collected and placed in a secure location in order to sustain confidentiality. All recordings will be removed at the conclusion of the study. Due to the fact that participation in the study is voluntary, you are able to terminate your participation at any time.
Benefits
There are no direct benefits to your participation in the research. The indirect benefits include the assistance that orientation coordinators and school administrators will receive from the study when constructing future high school freshman orientations for incoming ninth grade students as well as determining a variety of avenues for parental involvement. There will be no direct benefit expected to the subject, but knowledge may be gained that could assist school leadership in the development or continuation of freshman orientation sessions.

Confidentiality
The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Data will be stored securely in external hard drive form and password protected. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study.

Compensation
You will not receive compensation for participating in this study.

What if you have questions about this study?
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher LaTeisha Jeannis, at 919-946-8275.

What if you are a NCSU student?
Participation in this study is not a course requirement and your participation or lack thereof, will not affect your class standing or grades at NC State.

What if you are an NCSU employee?
Participation in this study is not a requirement of your employment at NCSU, and your participation or lack thereof, will not affect your job.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?
If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact the NCSU IRB Office via email at irb-director@ncsu.edu or via phone at 1.919.515.4514.

Consent to Participate
“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.”

Subject's signature____________________________________________ Date ________________

Investigator's signature________________________________________ Date ________________
### Appendix D: 2009-2010 Public High School Dropouts, Grades 9-12

#### Number and Percentage of Public High School Dropouts, Grades 9-12, 2009-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State or jurisdiction</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian/ Pacific Islander</th>
<th>American Indian/ Alaska Native</th>
<th>Two or more races</th>
<th>Grade 9</th>
<th>Event dropout rate</th>
<th>Grade 10</th>
<th>Event dropout rate</th>
<th>Grade 11</th>
<th>Event dropout rate</th>
<th>Grade 12</th>
<th>Event dropout rate</th>
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</thead>
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<td>United States</td>
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<td>2.3</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td></td>
<td>104,756</td>
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<td>113,370</td>
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<td>5.1</td>
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<td>1.3</td>
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Number and percent of 9th- to 12th-graders who dropped out (event dropout rate), by grade

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Not available.

#Rounds to zero.

‡Reporting standards not met (too few cases for a reliable estimate).

1 Data were imputed based on prior year rates.

NOTE: Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Event dropout rates measure the percentage of public school students in grades 9 through 12 who dropped out of school between one October and the next. Enrollment and dropout data for ungraded students were prorated into grades 9 through 12 based on the counts for graded students. DoD stands for Department of Defense.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "State Dropout and Completion Data File," 2009–10. (This table was prepared November 2012.)
Appendix E: Parent Folder

The folder given to parents in the current study could be unfolded and used as a poster. The inside of the folder included additional text to be used by the receiver, and this printed text on the front displayed information regarding, “What not to do in a job interview” as well additional sponsor promotional ads. The inside of the folder provided detailed information about substance abuse and usage, including data and statistics about the following:

- Binge Drinking
  - The “booze it and lose it” campaign
  - What happens if you have any detectable concentration of alcohol when stopped?
  - What if you are under the age of 21 and convicted of drinking alcohol?
  - What happens if you are under the age of 21 and convicted of purchasing or attempting to purchase alcoholic beverages?
  - What happens if you are under the age of 21 and convicted of driving after consuming?

- Cigarettes
  - General information about the harmfulness of cigarettes
  - Cancer and additional disease from smoking
  - E-Cigs: E-cigarette usage and avoidable health risks

- Dating
  - Dating quiz
  - What a girlfriend/boyfriend can do (actions)
  - Contact information for a dating hotline

- Texting and Driving
• North Carolina driving and texting laws
  • Distracted drivers

• Marijuana
  • Effects that marijuana could have on an individual
  • How marijuana can impact learning
  • How marijuana can impact sports
  • How marijuana can impact judgement
  • How marijuana can impact driving

• Painkillers
  • Oxycodone
  • Hydrocodone
  • Meperidine
  • Why painkillers are addictive
  • Mental effects of painkillers
  • Physiological effects of painkillers

• Meth
  • What are methamphetamines?
  • Short-term effects of meth
  • Long-term effects of meth

• Social Media
  • Being smart and safe with social media
  • Cyberbullying
  • Bullying
• Types of bullying
  • Warning signs of bullying
  • What to do if you are bullied

• Cocaine
  • Usage
  • Short-term effects of cocaine usage
  • Long-term effects of cocaine usage

• Heroin
  • Usage
  • Short-term effects of heroin usage
  • Long-term effects of heroin usage

• Sexting
  • Laws about sexting in the State of North Carolina
  • Legislative summary

• Hotlines (individual contact information for all items listed previously)

The back of the folder included several additional printed business cards of local sponsors and patrons for the research site. As discussed in the next section of this document, several individual documents were also provided to parents within the folder.

**9th-grade tips sheet.** Within the folder provided to parents, the research site included a tips sheet for a successful ninth-grade year. This document presented illustrations and 12 tips for ninth-grade success. The tips presented were the following:

1. Make good decisions – establish a good peer group and positive outlets.
2. Have good attendance and be prepared for class.
3. Stay organized and turn work in on time.
4. Check PowerSchool to keep up with your grades.
5. Read.
6. Be an active learner – as questions, take notes, do homework, and study.
7. Study for the sake of understanding and learning, not just memorizing.
8. Have positive interactions with staff members and your peers.
9. Learn and follow the expectations of the school and each of your teachers.
10. Know and use your resources – your teachers, counselors, and administrators are here to support you.
11. Take responsibility for your education – like anything in life, what you get out of the school will depend on what you put into school.
12. Focus on your destination, but remember to enjoy the journey

**GMHS freshman notes sheet.** The folder provided to parents included a document titled “GMHS Freshman Notes.” This document displayed contact information for the lead ninth-grade administrator, all ninth-grade counselors at the site, the Dean of Students, school social worker, student assistance program counselor, and career development coordinator. A detailed chart with graduation requirements was also in the document. This chart specifically contained the names of the curriculum administered, verification regarding credit hours to be obtained, and course names. The document also listed the school system grading scale and 10th-grade promotion requirements. Several other pieces of information such as a URL for the state college and career website, information about student attendance, information about driving privileges and eligibility, and athletic eligibility were all printed beneath the graduation requirements chart. Additionally, two questions with answers were presented on the document. The first question
stated, “What can Student Services do for me?” and the second read, “What can I do if I need help with my classes?” Both questions were followed by short answers and, at the very bottom of the document, there was information regarding how students can see their counselor and get involved on campus.

**Counselors and caseload sheet.** Another document in the folder provided to parents who attended the High School Freshman Orientation event was titled, “Counselors and Caseloads.” This document provided contact information for the ninth-grade counselor as well as all additional 10th- through 12th-grade counselors. A short list of additional Student Support Services staff was also included on the document, with contact information for the Student Services Assistant Principal, school social worker, school registrar, school guidance technician, and student services receptionist.

**Clubs and organizations list.** The folder provided to the parents in attendance also included a list of clubs and organizations. This list included names, brief written descriptions, sponsor names, and contact information for 48 student clubs and organizations.

**How well do you know GMHS?** The last document inside of the folder distributed to parents at the research site’s High School Freshman Orientation session was a scavenger hunt titled, “How Well Do I Know GMHS?” This document included the 10 questions listed below:

1. Who is the Principal of GMHS and what is their room #?
2. Where is the nurse’s office?
3. On what floor are most freshman classes on?
4. Who is my counselor this year? Who will be my counselor next year?
5. What is GMHS mascot?
6. On what floor is the pool?
7. Who is the freshman administrator and what is their office #?

8. What time does school start? Finish?

9. How many credits do I need to graduate from HS?

10. What do I need to do to see my counselor?

Parents were asked to use this document while they went through each session at the High School Freshman Orientation. No incentives were provided for completing the document.
Appendix F: Participant Responses

**Question 1.** Have you ever attended a Freshman Orientation before and was it worth attending? What aspect of that freshman orientation was most helpful?

Of the 20 parents interviewed, questioned, and observed, 37% reported that this was the first time that they were attending a High School Freshman Orientation, while 54% stated that this was not their first time attending such an event. Of these parents, only 8% felt as though attending the High School Freshman Orientation was not worth it, with another 92% stating that it was worth it.

There were several items that the parents in this study found helpful while attending the High School Freshman Orientation. The first item the parents felt was helpful was being provided general information regarding student course requirements and having a list of courses that were offered at the research school. One parent specifically stated, “In my opinion, the Freshman orientation gives parents insights about what academic standards are expected from their child and how parents and staff can help their child success during ninth grade.”

A second item in which parents felt was helpful was the tour of the building. Having a tour of the building allowed for parents to understand the not only the layout but the components of the environment in which their future students would be part of. A third item that parents felt was helpful was meeting key staff members. One last item that parents communicated as being helpful was hearing from the Principal of the school. A separate parent stated, “Enjoyed hearing Principal White’s perspective and learning about various programs offered at GMHS from various presenters, and just putting names to faces and knowing who to go to if questions come up.” Another parent also reported that she “enjoyed everything about today. I feel more comfortable about what is to come.”
A small percentage of parents communicated that attending the High School Freshman Orientation was not helpful to them. One parent commented, “The orientation was helpful for my child but not for me. I did not get anything out of the sessions.” Another parent also remarked that they had attended the event before and did not find it helpful. Neither parent had suggestions regarding what would make the event better.

**Question 2. How did you hear about our freshman orientation and was there any follow-up by the school afterward?**

Previous research mentioned in Chapter 2 discusses communication as a concern when examining parental involvement in High School Freshman Orientation events. During this study, parents were asked about the communication methods used for conveying information about the High School Freshman Orientation event and whether any follow-up methods took place. The data from the study disclosed and confirmed that communication was in fact a major concern when related to the event. The interview, questionnaire, and observation results exhibited that the school website was the most used form of communication between school and parent. From the completed questionnaires in this study, 50% stated that parents were initially informed of the High School Freshman Orientation through the school’s website. An additional 33% of the parent’s interview, questioned, and observed reported that they were notified about the High School Freshman Orientation via email, 9% of the parents were notified about the event by word of mouth, 5% through the phone blast, and another 3% in alternative, unspecified way. Only 29% of the parents also said that, after the initial communication made by the school, they did receive some sort of secondary or follow-up communication by the school about the event.

**Question 3. Do you think the school could have communicated differently? Any suggestions?**
The research school made use of several different methods of communication to make parents aware of the upcoming High School Freshman Orientation event. These methods included postings on the school website, emails to parents, and phone text blasts made by the principal to parents. According to those interviewed, questioned, and observed, 21% of the parents felt as though the research school’s communication methods were appropriate and effective. An additional 38% felt as though the school should have communicated with them differently. Of the parents who claimed that the method used to contact them was not effective, some felt as though United States mail may have been a more beneficial way of notifying them. These parents used statements such as, “Mail flyers should have been used.”

A second method of communication that parents stated may have been beneficial was the use of more phone blasts and “phone messenger.” Although the research school makes use of phone communications consistently, once a week, there are still several families that do not receive the correspondence. Unfortunately, some families do not have updated telephone numbers and information on file at the school, and other families simply do not take the time to listen to the updates given by the school via telephone. Moreover, due to reasons including general changes in phone providers, financial concerns, or switches in phone numbers, parental contact information is often not updated.

**Question 4. Outside of orientation, what are some ways in which you support your student?**

Parents were asked an open-ended question about ways in which they support their student. Having an open-ended question like this allowed parents to respond with any input they felt was assistive and supportive to their student. An overwhelming number of parents who answered this question, including those who did not attend the freshman orientation event,
claimed that they make sure to have some type of daily communication with their child. Some parents stated that they make certain to “talk” to their child about school by “asking questions and discussing how classes are going.” Another stated that they make sure they have “one-on-one conversations” with their student to let them know that their parent “is always available.” Several other parents also reported that they like to “encourage student involvement during the conversations” and try to check in daily to see what is going on at school.

Another type of support frequently used by the parents in the current study to assist their children was communication with the teachers in several different forms. These forms of communication include attending parent-teacher conferences, using email, or engaging in telephone calls. When discussing parent and teacher communication, majority of the parents stated that they accomplished this by attending parent teacher conferences. At this specific school where the current study was conducted, parent-teacher conferences were only held when requested; parents with a concern can contact the student’s counselor, who will then set up a time and place for the parent and teacher to meet. Additional contact such as phone calls or email interaction does occur, but can be done by either the teacher or the parent without any additional assistance needed.

Another type of parental support that was mentioned frequently throughout this study was assisting their students with homework. Many of the parents stated that they continue to ask their children if they need assistance with their homework or if they have homework that needs to be completed.

One last item frequently mentioned by parents in the interviews and questionnaires was the use of PowerSchool. PowerSchool is a web-based software that parents can log into from home to keep track of student information. Teachers can update this information daily or as
needed. Parents stated that they frequently checked PowerSchool to keep track of student grades and attendance. Other forms of support mentioned was assisting with the PTA and attending extracurricular activities such as sporting events.

During the high school freshman ordination event, several parents inquired about additional items. These items included patriotism in the PTA in which parents could be directly involved and extracurricular activities such as sports, clubs, and organizations. Parents were asked to leave their contact information with the Dean of Students, who would contact them directly with information on getting involved.

**Question 5. What is your reason for attending freshman orientation?**

Parents that attend the High School Freshman Orientation were asked the reason they attended. This was also an open-ended question for which parents could provide their own response. Several different reasons were presented, including the following:

1. Student coming from another county (2 of 20 parents answered).
2. First child to attend high school (6 of 20 parents answered).
3. Wanted to take a school tour (18 of 20 parents answered).
4. Safety concerns (3 of 20 parents answered).
5. Wanted to assist child with transition into high school (13 of 20 parents answered).
6. Wanted to learn about the student’s curriculum (9 of 20 parents answered).
7. For parent to have an expectation of trust (3 of 20 parents answered).
8. For parent to build trust (3 of 20 parents answered).
9. To stay informed (17 of 20 parents answered).
10. To meet the staff (14 of 20 parents answered).
Due to the wide range of responses received, one can determine that although several parents have similar answers, each parent ultimately had their own reason for supporting their child. As a result, a few themes emerged from the data, including parents wanting to stay informed, know more about the school environment and academics, and get a tour of the location. This also shows that schools must work to address the needs of all parents and students. There is no way that one school event such as a High School Freshman Orientation will address all these needs. As discussed in the literature, parent involvement can come in all forms, so parents may be able to obtain some support when it comes to the reasons that they attended the event through the additional forms of involvement. For example, High School Freshman Orientation may not include staff members parents are looking forward to meeting. Having and attending some type of “meet the teacher” or open house event may enable parents to meet the staff.

**Question 6. What did you think about the sessions that you attended today? What was the most informative/helpful session?**

Parents that attended the freshman orientation event were asked what they thought about the sessions and what they found to be the most informative and helpful session. This was also an open-ended question that allowed parents to write exactly how they felt about attending the sessions. In answering the question, 88% of parents responded that the sessions were helpful to them, with comments such as calling the sessions “informative.” Another parent, who was corroborated by other parents, stated, “The sessions provided lots of information, especially the part that spoke about graduation requirements, what they need to actually graduate, and the academic requirements for the different paths a student can take to achieve their goals.”
Some of the most helpful sessions, according to parents, were the administrative sessions and the academic sessions regarding student graduation requirements. The administrative session introduced to the parents all the administrative team members and their roles as well as a few key individuals on the school staff, such as the Dean of Students and the counselors. During the administrative session, the research school’s Principal gave an address, and one of the parents commented on this in saying, “It was nice to see administration and get a feel for who is setting the tone.” Another stated, “The academic session was informative and gave me a face to put with some of the names, especially guidance.” Yet another parent remarked on the Principal’s address, stating, “The Principal's address was most helpful. His understanding of challenges (technology/smart phones) was reassuring as parents struggle to find balance for kids.” In my observations of this session as the researcher, I noted that the parents were extremely attentive during it. Unlike other sessions during which parents seemed to be more engaged in their cell phones, hands were raised to ask questions and heads were nodding when parents felt as though they agreed or could relate to what was being said. Immediately following the session, several parents approached the Principal to converse with him and continue with follow-up questions.

The freshman orientation session parents found to be most unfavorable was the school tour. During this session, all the parents were led throughout the school building while a guide highlighted key locations. Several of the parents felt as though this was the most unproductive part of the event for various reasons, with some describing it as unorganized and too long. One parent stated:

The parent tour was awful. One person led tour for all adults. I couldn’t hear a word she said because the group was so large so basically, I walked halls and saw some classrooms
but didn’t know what they were. Didn’t hear any explanations of what areas were. Group needs to be much smaller, so people can hear what is being said.

Through observation, I could see that parents were visibly frustrated during this guided tour of the building. Several parents chose to stand in the back of the group, and some even began to linger behind. At times, though infrequently, a person in the group would shout something related to not being able to hear what the tour guide was saying. After a few attempts to get the guide to speak more loudly, these specific individuals appeared to give up and became part of the individuals in the back of the group.

**Question 7.** *What were your thoughts about the staff members that participated in this event?*

The parents who attended the High School Freshman Orientation were also asked their thoughts regarding the staff members at the event. This was another open-ended question that allowed for parents to give their individual point of view and thoughts. Many of the attending parents reported feeling as though staff members who were present at the event were very “professional and relatable,” and one parent stated that the staff was “engaged and seemed very approachable.” Parents were specifically impressed with the speech by the Principal, articulating that they perceived his words to be “heartfelt.”

The research school has more than 200 staff and faculty members. During the High School Freshman Orientation, the staff members present included the school’s administrative team, including the Principal, four assistant Principals (two assistant Principals did not attend due to personal conflicts), the Dean of Students, all school counselors, several clerical staff members, the JRTOC instructor, and several teachers who led separate sessions for the students. Throughout the parent sessions, some of these individuals addressed the parents regarding
subject areas and topics related to their roles. For example, the administrative team spoke with parents about general school rules, procedures, and expectations; the assistant Principal of instruction spoke specifically about academic goal-setting; and school counselors addressed topics related to social emotional learning.

**Question 8.** *Do you feel as though this orientation was a genuine attempt to assist your student? Why or why not?*

When asked whether they felt as though the school’s decision to host a High School Freshman Orientation event was a genuine attempt to assist their student, 100% of parents responded “yes.” Many stated there were a lot of good questions and answers to hear at the event and felt the student sessions were very strong; one parent remarked that “breaking the students in small groups and helping them get to know one another” was extremely helpful for her student, and that the session allowed parents to “get a first glimpse of what to expect.”

**Question 9.** *What were the benefits of attending the orientation?*

When asked what they found to be the benefits of attending High School Freshman Orientation, parents provided several different answers. Although many felt as though the tour was the worst part of the event due to the group’s size and the session’s lack of organization, 29% of parents said the tour was, in fact, beneficial. Many of these parents felt they were able to “get a feel for the building and the environment” when taking the tour. A second beneficial factor for parents in this study who attended the research site’s High School Freshman Orientation was the presence of and interaction with the administrative team and counselors. One parent commented, “Having the administration at the event allowed me to have an initial connection with the school,” while another parent stated, “Face time with the counselors and administrators was helpful.”
Parents also felt as though attending the orientation session allowed for them to gain a better understanding of the graduation requirements and provided tips and strategies to assist students with getting acclimated to high school. One parent stated, “I learned a lot about what was required to have a year and for years to come. Having general info to guide students through the ninth grade and beyond was helpful.”

**Question 10. Were there any barriers that almost kept you away from Freshman Orientation? If so, please elaborate.**

Throughout the current research study, parents were also asked about the barriers that could have potentially kept them away from attending the High School Freshman Orientation event. When answered, 63% of parents who attended reported not having any specific barriers, but 29% stated that work was a potential barrier and an additional 8% said there was an underlying barrier that may have potentially kept them away from attending the event. Both time and work were also listed as a potential barrier in Chapter 2.

When discussing the topic of work as a barrier to their involvement, parents in the current study made comments such as, “I had to come without my spouse because he had to work” and “Evenings would have been easier; I missed a half day of work. One parent remarked, “I am a stay at home mom, so I didn’t have any barriers; however, what about the parents who had to take a half day of work?”

Parents also suggested that that the time of the event be changed to better suit the schedule of parents who would like to attend. Of the parents questioned who could not attend the High School Freshman Orientation event at the research site, several stated that they would prefer that the event is held outside of work hours.

**Question 11. Why do you think there are some parents who did not attend?**
Parents that attended the High School Freshman Orientation were asked why they thought some parents did not attend the event. Of the participants in this study who attended the event, 67% thought other parents did not attend because of work, 25% suggested parents did not attend because they were unaware of the event, and 8% attributed the lack of attendance to additional reasons such as summer vacation, childcare concerns, previous experiences with the school, the parents’ lack of interest, and transportation issues. According to the data collected in the current study, work hours and communication were indeed significant factors of concern when discussing parental involvement and potential barriers. Several other items such as lack of interest, transportation, and previous experience with the school were also suggested in the previous research.

**Question 12. Do you think that attending freshman orientation with your student is important? Why or why not?**

When asked to share their view of the High School Freshman Orientation’s importance, 100% of the parents who participated in this study and attended the event felt that it was important. A few major themes appeared when the parents were asked to elaborate on why it was important. Many thought it was important to attend the event with their child(ren) because it showed their parental support; as one parent stated, attending the orientation allowed them to show their child “that they are concerned and involved.” Another major theme that emerged was the fact that parents want their children to become acclimated with the school, as evidenced by statements such as “I want my child to feel at ease about attending such a large school” and “It gives my child confidence and comfort for their first days at a new school.” Thus, the parents in the current study displayed general concern for their students and wanted to be able to help their child(ren) deal with difficult feelings associated with the transition to ninth grade.
Question 13. Did you take time off work to attend this event?

According to data analysis results in this study, 54% of parents that attended the High School Freshman Orientation did not have to take off work to attend the event. However, 46% of parents were required to take a day off or time away from work to attend, and this portion represents the situation faced by many parents. As stated in previous research, parents often have difficulty taking off work to attend these and other types of events for their child’s schooling. Even when a parent can take off, doing so may leave them in fear of possibly losing their job or missing wages that are vital to their family. This also directly correlates with Question 10, when parents were asked to name some of the barriers that may have kept them away from High School Freshman Orientation. When interviewing and questioning the parents who were unable to attend the orientation, “having to attend work” was one of the reasons provided. One parent interviewed specifically stated:

Why do the schools always have events during the day? They act as if parents do not have to work. How am I supposed to support my student and do what they ask if they can’t help me out, just a little?

The results in the current study, then, point to the time of day when the orientation is held as a main barrier to parental involvement in the event.

Question 14. What mode of transportation did you take to get to this event?

Of the parents questioned and interviewed, 25% did not attend the High School Freshman Orientation, but 96% of those who did attend the event were able to do so by using their own transportation, and the additional 4% arrived at the event using a ride-sharing service such as Uber or Lyft. No parents reported the use of another method of transportation to attend. Of those who did not attend the event, 23% stated that it was due to work and the other 2% claimed they
were unaware the event would be taking place. This collection of data displays that transportation was not a major concern related to involvement of the parents in this study.

**Question 15. Did you feel as though this event was helpful to you as a parent? Why or why not?**

Of the parents who attended the High School Freshman Orientation session in this study, 92% said that attending it was helpful to them as a parent, while 8% thought it was not beneficial. Many parents who found the event to be helpful expressed that it made them more aware of the expectations of students, others cited meeting the staff as one of the most beneficial aspects of the orientation session, and several said having information regarding the academic programs was beneficial to them. Of this study’s participants who felt as though the orientation session was not helpful to them as a parent, 100% had previously attended a freshman orientation and remarked that much of the information they received at this research site’s event was the same as what they were given at a previous orientation session. A few other parents who felt the High School Freshman Orientation was not beneficial also stated that they “wanted to hear more about the safety concerns on campus.”

**Question 16. Was there anything that you wanted to learn more about that wasn’t presented? If so, what was it?**

When asked if there was anything they wanted to learn about the school that was not presented during the orientation session, parents in this study provided a variation of answers. This open-ended question allowed parents to respond how they saw fit. The items reported by parents include the following:

- More information about sports (registration periods).
- Student clubs and organizations.
• Security and safety concerns (mentioned several times).
• Pick and drop off procedures.
• Carpool procedures.
• Additional academic information.
• Response to behavior displayed by students at school.
• Extracurricular activities.
• Study skills for students.
• Student schedules.
• Supply list.