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A Mixed-Method Program Implementation: Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills Program in a Medium-Sized Suburban School District

Jennifer Gross
Lindenwood University

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by

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Dr. Lynda Leavitt, Dissertation Chair	3-4-2016 Date
Dr. Joseph Alsobrook, Committee Member	3-4-2016 Date
Dr. Sherrie Wisdom, Committee Member	3-4-2016 Date

Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

Full Legal Name: Jennifer Gross

Signature: Jennifer Gross Date: 3/4/16

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Abstract

While many educators viewed transition as a one-time event, it often proved to be more of a process than simply an occasion (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009). The researcher observed through the role as a school counselor that students with high anxiety tended to exhibit low resilience during times of transition. In order to assist students as they moved from eighth to ninth grade, the school of study implemented the Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills Program (OOLSP) using student mentors. This study explored student perception of anxiety and resilience in relation to participating in this program. The researcher utilized the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) and Spence Children's Anxiety Scale (SCAS) as pre- and post-tests, and conducted a *z*-test for difference in means analysis. Attendance rates were studied, due to the high correlation found in research between attendance and achievement, using a Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis. Perception questionnaires were completed in December and May by 287 freshmen, 45 mentor students, 16 teachers, and 315 parents. Interviews were conducted with 10 freshmen, nine student mentors, and six teachers.

Results from the surveys and perception questionnaires proved inconsistent. The SCAS scores indicated a significant change in student anxiety levels, especially on the generalized anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and panic disorder subscales. Interestingly, students' perceived anxiety decreased based on questionnaire responses. Results from the CD-RISC suggested students' resilience did not change, while responses from the questionnaire showed a significant increase in students' perceived resilience. Attendance rates had a moderately strong relationship, indicating a correlation between eighth and ninth grade attendance. Perceptions from freshmen,

student mentors, teachers, and parents suggested that the relationships formed during the program implementation had more influence than the program itself.

Based on the inconsistent results, the researcher recommended discontinuing the use of the OOLSP, as it was implemented in this study. The researcher recommended maintaining the mentoring program and improving upon pre-existing structures. Future researchers were encouraged to conduct further exploration on the OOLSP using more traditional implementations, as well as investigating student-perceived anxiety and resilience in comparison to documented experiences of anxiety and resilience.

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Chapter One: Introduction

A myriad of emotional experiences often characterized the transition from middle school to high school, and for many students anxiety proved to be one of the most frequently experienced emotions. Roughly 40 million people in the United States had an anxiety disorder, and most experienced symptoms before they turned 22 (Anxiety and Depression Association of America [ADAA], 2015c). In essence "the present age may be said to be an age of anxiety" (Singh & Thukral, 2009, p. 122). Unfortunately, the researcher frequently observed an increase in anxiety around the time students transitioned from one level of school to another.

The transition from middle school to high school was especially critical, since it took place as students were just beginning to enter adolescence (Queen, 2013). This period of life was often characterized in the literature by stress and turmoil (Grills-Taquechel, Norton, & Ollendick, 2010), and school programming to address the anxiety and stress that surrounded the transition from middle school to high school was needed (Queen, 2013). Students' perceptions of the transition process affected how well they transitioned (John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities, [JGC], 2013) and although the school system in the United States developed a frequent, predictable system of transition, many students still found these transitions to be disruptive (Benner, 2011). Moving from middle to high school typically involved more changes than previous school transitions and challenged even academically successful students (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009).

"Resilience [was] often viewed as an adaptive, stress-resistant personal quality that [permitted] one to thrive in spite of adversity" (Ahren, Ark, & Byers, 2008, p. 32).

The experiences of students during their first year of high school often determined their success in the later grades (Williams & Richman, 2007); fortunately, researchers found that school programs designed to help ease the transition from middle to high school influenced student achievement (Habeeb, 2013). Many existing programs were designed to help students navigate the stress and anxiety often caused by the transition from middle to high school. The Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills Program (OOLSP) was developed to teach life skills, such as critical thinking, decision-making, goal setting, and communication to middle and high school students (Overcoming Obstacles, 2014a). In essence, this program was designed to help students learn to cope with life transitions and build the skill of resilience.

Purpose of the Dissertation

The purpose of this study was to investigate a possible relationship between resilience, anxiety, and attendance in transitioning students who participated in the OOLSP. The study also explored possible differences in resilience, anxiety, and attendance before and after student participation in the program. All freshman students in a traditional advisory participated in this yearlong program designed to teach life skills, including resilience, goal setting, and stress management. This study included ninth grade students from all sub-populations who attended the research school, instead of a specific subgroup, and utilized student, teacher, and parent surveys, personal reflections, and secondary data to explore this potential relationship and difference.

Rationale

Transitions naturally occur throughout life, and in the experience of the researcher (as a school counselor), school-aged children move through several transitions in a short

amount of time. Being able to successfully transition often affected students for many years to come, and researchers showed that successful early-school transitions predicted success in post-secondary settings (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009). While many factors influenced how successfully a student transitioned, the researcher observed that anxiety and resilience appeared to play a role in the level of success students experienced during the transition between different school levels – specifically, middle school to high school. The then-current literature revealed anxiety was linked to poor academic performance and difficulty transitioning (Grills-Taquechel et al., 2010; Ingul & Nordahl, 2013), while resilience was linked to higher academic performance and successful transitions (Ahern, Ark, & Byers, 2008; Bowes, Maughan, Caspi, Moffitt, & Arseneault, 2010; Langenkamp, 2010).

The then-current literature focused predominantly on specific subgroups: students who were bullied (Bowes et al., 2010), students who lived in an urban setting and low-income neighborhoods (Lantieri, 2008), students who experienced the death of a parent (Eppler, 2008), and students diagnosed with mental health issues (Hjemdal, Vogel, Solem, Hagen, & Stiles, 2011), but failed to investigate these traits in the general population of students. At the time of this study, the researcher found no existing studies that linked anxiety and resilience in a general population of school-aged students; however, the researcher observed that in students experiencing high levels of anxiety, resiliency appeared to be low.

This study developed from observations during the researcher's role as a school counselor. Students appeared to experience higher levels of anxiety when they possessed less resilience. The researcher believed that when students possessed the resilience skills

necessary to overcome anxiety, they would achieve greater academic success when facing transitions, including increased attendance. Other researchers found common traits among individuals that demonstrated high resilience, as well as evidence that learning these skills helped increase resilience (Brown, Jean-Marie, & Beck, 2010; Langenkamp, 2010; Lantieri, 2008). This research focused on the potential relationship between anxiety and resilience in the general population of students, instead of focusing on one specific subgroup of students. This researcher also explored differences from before and after student program participation, specifically in the areas of anxiety and resilience. The research population included students who were transitioning from middle to high school, as the researcher observed this transition to be significant in predicting future academic success.

Methodology

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach to analyze the implementation of the OOLSP. Several types of participants were part of this study, including freshman students, students participating in a leadership course who served as mentors, teachers supervising lesson implementation, and parents of freshmen participating in the OOLSP, which was developed by the Community for Education Foundation in 1992 (Overcoming Obstacles, 2014a). The researcher collected data from a variety of means: surveys, questionnaires, interviews, observational data, and attendance data.

Given the variety of data points containing quantitative data (survey results and attendance information) and qualitative data (questionnaires, interviews, and observations), a mixed-methods approach was determined to be appropriate for this study (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). Furthermore, Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012)

found that mixed-methods studies could help researchers examine if relationships existed between existing variables and at what depth, by looking at both the qualitative and quantitative data. Given the nature of this program and the many variables included, the researcher believed that the in-depth examination offered through a mixed-methods study was warranted.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This research project examined the following null and alternate hypotheses:

Null H_1. There is no relationship between participating in the Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills program and student's level of anxiety, resilience, or attendance.

Alternate H_1. There is a relationship between participating in the Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills program and student's level of anxiety, resilience, or attendance.

Null H_2. There is no difference between student's anxiety, resilience, or attendance levels before and after participating in the Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills program.

Alternate H_2. There is a difference between student's anxiety, resilience, or attendance levels before and after participating in the Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills program.

This research project also sought to answer the following three research questions:

RQ_1. How do students perceive participating in Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills program as influencing their anxiety and resilience?

RQ_2. How do teachers perceive Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills program as influencing their students' anxiety and resilience?

RQ3. How do parents perceive Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills program as influencing their student's anxiety and resilience?

Limitations

With any research study, there were inherently variables that potentially affected the outcome. Limitations specific to this research project were explored below:

Sample, population, and geographic location. This research project was based in only one high school, potentially limiting the generalizability to other schools that do not fit a similar demographic. The researcher chose the sample, population, and geographic location due predominantly to availability. The flexibility of the OOLSP worked within the confines of a pre-existing mentor program, providing for ease of implementation.

Surveys selected for data collection. There were many surveys that existed to measure resilience and anxiety in adolescents. The researcher chose the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) and the Spence Children's Anxiety Scale (SCAS) for this study for specific reasons. Several studies found the CD-RISC to be a valid, reliable measure of resilience in several studies (Campbell-Sills & Stein, 2007; Connor & Davidson, 2003; Notario-Pacheco et al., 2011). Similarly, studies showed that the SCAS possessed high validity and reliability across different populations (Bakla et al., 2013). Both the CD-RISC and SCAS were available to the researcher to use free of charge, making them financially desirable for use in this study. The design of both scales made them easy to administer in the school setting.

Curriculum. A team consisting of three teachers and a counselor at the participating school chose the OOLSP. The team considered other programs, such as

Link Crew and Career Choices, but ultimately decided on the OOLSP due to the low cost and flexibility (Leadership Team, personal communication, August 4, 2014). Many established curricular systems were quite costly, while the OOLSP was available free of charge for educators to use, with permission. Furthermore, the curriculum was aligned to the American School Counselor Association National Standards (Overcoming Obstacles, 2014b), adding credibility to the information presented through the lessons. Educators at the school of study did not design the curriculum, and therefore, the curriculum may not have met their specific needs. The researcher found that this particular curriculum was flexible and easily adaptable for individual school needs. While the developers designed the lessons for easy implementation, there was always the potential for misinterpretation of a lesson design, or inconsistency in the implementation of a lesson. Training and continued monitoring through observations attempted to lessen the occurrence of inconsistent implementation.

Lack of prior research. Although research existed in the areas of anxiety, resilience, and transition, as well as for the OOLSP, the researcher was unable to find any research examining a potential relationship between these variables. Also, much of the research completed in the area of resilience was older (Davis & Paster, 2000), although the topic did appear to be gaining new interest and some new research was beginning to emerge (Bowes et al., 2010; Langenkamp, 2010). Anxiety was an oft-studied topic, but previous research tended to focus on a specific sub-population (Bowes et al., 2010; Hjemdal et al., 2011), instead of looking at a general high school population at large. For these reasons, the researcher chose to look at the potential relationship between these variables across a general education setting to add to the then-current body of literature.

Self-reported data. This research relied on self-reported data from surveys, questionnaires, and interviews with parents, staff, students serving as mentors, and freshman students participating in the OOLSP. Some of the inherent disadvantages of self-reported data were the credibility of the information gathered, skewed self-perception, inaccurate memories, varying motivations, and skewed responses (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Furthermore, respondents could have misinterpreted a question and answered in a way in which the researcher was not expecting. Knowing these limitations, the researcher thoroughly considered surveys, questionnaires, and interview questions before using them, and the data was closely examined to avoid misinterpretation.

Specific variables studied. For the purpose of this research project, the researcher chose to focus solely on student reported resilience and anxiety as it related to transition, and how the experience of participating in the OOLSP influenced students throughout their freshmen year. While there were many different factors that contributed to student transition, the researcher identified these two variables based on observations made while working as a school counselor in a high school setting. The researcher observed that successful students seemed to possess more resilience and experienced less anxiety than students who were not as academically successful. With the implementation of the new curriculum, meant to teach freshman students life skills (such as resilience and how to handle anxiety), the researcher chose to explore these two variables exclusively.

Time constraints. With any research project, and perhaps most especially with educational research, time was a factor of which the researcher was cognizant. In this particular study, the program was implemented through a study hall period, and lessons were delivered once per week in a 20-minute time frame. The leadership team, in

collaboration with the building administrators, made the decisions regarding curriculum implementation. Given the nature of the school setting and the recent increase in academic rigor within the state standards, there was limited time available for the implementation of this program. The OOLSP, however, was flexible by nature, and customizable to meet the individual school's needs.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following applicable terms were defined.

Anxiety. According to the American Psychiatric Association (APA), anxiety disorders were characterized by "overwhelming feelings of panic and fear, uncontrollable obsessive thoughts, painful/intrusive memories, recurring nightmares, and physical symptoms" (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2015a, para. 2). For the purpose of this paper, anxiety was operationalized in a broader term, to encompass the experience of anxiety with or without meeting the requirements to be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder as defined above.

Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC). According to the developers (Connor & Davidson, 2003) the CD-RISC was a "brief, self-rated measure of resilience" (p. 81).

Life skills. Life skills were conceptualized as a broad set of skills that people possessed, which allowed them to handle the stress of everyday life (Pindborgh, 1997; World Health Organization, 1999). These skills included "decision making, problem solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, effective communication, interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness, empathy, coping with emotions, [and] coping with

stress" (Pindborgh, 1997, p. 1). This definition, although older, was still used in the then-current literature.

Medium-sized school district. For the purposes of this study, the researcher defined this term to refer to a district with a total student enrollment over 10,500 students.

Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills Program. The Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills Program sought to bring life skills instruction to every student. The program was available for free nationwide, and "gave all educators the tools they need to teach over 20 critical skills to their middle school and high school students. Through it, students learned skills like communicating effectively, making sound decisions, setting and achieving goals, and resolving conflicts" (Community for Education Foundation, 2013, para. 1).

Resilience. The researcher chose to use the definition created by Cicchetti (2010), which stated "resilience has been conceptualized as a dynamic developmental process encompassing the attainment of positive adaptation within the context of significant threat, severe adversity, or trauma" (p. 145). The researcher also followed the thinking of Bartley (2006) who conceptualized resilience as an on-going process utilizing many skills. This definition was still widely used in then-current literature.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL). According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2005):

> Social and emotional learning (SEL) was the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show

> empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. (para. 1)

Spence Children's Anxiety Scale (SCAS). As the developers reported, the SCAS was a self-reported scale that measured the "young person's perception of the frequency with which they experience symptoms relating to obsessive-compulsive disorder, separation anxiety, social phobia, panic/agoraphobia, generalized anxiety/overanxious disorder, and fears of physical injury" (Spence, Barrett, & Turner, 2003, p. 606).

Transitioning Students. For the purpose of this study, the researcher defined transitioning students as students in their first semester of ninth grade, as those students who were in the first year at the high school level and had just completed their final year of middle school.

Summary

Anxiety disorders were the most commonly diagnosed disorder in adolescents (Beesdo, Knappe, & Pine, 2009), and this research was designed to fill the gap left from previous researchers by examining anxiety and resilience in the general population of transitioning students, thereby aiding educators in helping students from all levels. While many other researchers focused on the specific subgroups (Bowes et al., 2010; Eppler, 2008; Hjemdal et al., 2011) previous research paid little attention to students in the general population. The purpose of this study was to investigate a possible relationship between resilience, anxiety, and attendance in the general population, transitioning students who participated in the OOLSP. A review of then-current literature was explored in Chapter Two, while Chapter Three discusses the specific methodology used

by this researcher. Chapter Four presents results from this study, and a thorough discussion of both the study and implications for future research is contained in Chapter Five.

Chapter Two: The Literature Review

Transitioning from middle school to high school was a process, not merely an event (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009) and involved numerous variables, including the transition itself, student attendance, the level of anxiety experienced by the student, life skills development, student resilience, and opportunities for mentoring. The researcher provides a brief overview of these topics below, and then expanded upon them more thoroughly throughout this chapter.

While transitions were described throughout the literature as a natural occurrence in adolescence, they often were met with both positive and negative results. Goodwin, Mrug, Borch, and Cillessen (2012) found that the move from middle school to high school provided the opportunity to form new friendships; however, the move often led to disruptions in established friend groups (Neild, 2009). Parents played a significant role in helping their children transition successfully, and students with involved parents reported forming stronger connections with their teachers (Chen & Gregory, 2010). Furthermore, teachers played a lead role by beginning the process of transition in middle school and preparing students for the increased rigor they would experience in high school (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010).

Many students struggled with attending school on a regular basis (Wimmer, 2008). The Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE, 2011) found that in New York alone, one in five students missed enough days throughout the year to equal one month of school. Finding common terminology to describe student absences proved difficult, and three of the most common terms were truancy, chronic absenteeism, and school refusal behavior

(JGC, 2012; Wimmer, 2008). Many factors influenced student attendance, with anxiety identified as a common cause of student absenteeism.

Adolescence was a time of passage from childhood to adulthood (Mellor & Delamont, 2011); however, transitioning from middle school to high school caused many students to experience stress, turmoil, and anxiety (Grills-Taquechel et al., 2010). While research showed it was normal for people to experience anxiety during stressful circumstances, anxiety disorders developed when students were fearful during times when they encountered reasonably fearful circumstances (Chandler, 2015). Common types of anxiety included separation anxiety (Chandler, 2015), panic disorder (National Institute of Mental Health [NIMH], 2010a), social phobia or social anxiety disorder (National Institute of Health and Care Excellence [NICE], 2013), generalized anxiety disorder (Allgulander, 2012), obsessive-compulsive disorder (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry [AACAP], 2011), and post-traumatic stress disorder (Rapee, 2012). Mellor and Delamont (2011) found that before transitioning, students experienced anxiety specifically related to learning a new building, increased rigor in curriculum, and building relationships with new teachers, as well as anxieties focused around urban myths, such as a high prevalence of bullying and other perceived issues.

Research showed many ways educators could help ease the transition between middle and high school, and incorporating the instruction of life skills into the curriculum was one such method. Many terms existed in the literature that described how people handled the inevitable stresses experienced in life, and finding common definitions or explanations of life skills proved difficult. While some researchers referred to these skills as coping skills (Iizuka, Barrett, Gillies, Cook, & Marinovic, 2014), others instead

referenced basic skills or general skill sets (Lundetrae, 2011). Researchers did agree, though, that children often learned life skills from observing how others handled emotional situations, as well as from experiencing emotional situations and watching how others reacted to their response (Kids Matter, 2015). Possessing positive life skills often led to the development of resilience.

According to National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 2010) having resilience allowed children to handle any obstacle they encountered. Troy and Mauss (2011) noticed that although everyone experienced stress throughout their lives, not everyone experienced negative outcomes from that stress. Cicchetti (2010) stated "resilience has been conceptualized as a dynamic developmental process encompassing the attainment of positive adaptation within the context of significant threat, severe adversity, or trauma" (p. 145). Protective factors were traits that allowed a student to alter the perception of a negative event in order to avoid negative outcomes (Centre for Parenting & Research, 2007). In contrast, risk factors were traits that increased the potential for students to perceive an event negatively, which could yield a negative outcome (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012).

Mentoring was a popular method used to promote the development of protective factors, and mentors existed in many forms stemming back to ancient Greece (Rudolph & Connell, 2012). When reviewing literature for this study, the researcher identified three common styles of mentoring: adult/child mentoring (Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, & McMaken, 2011), group mentoring (Zasloff & Okurowski, 2012) and peer-mentoring or cross-age mentoring (Bonin, 2013). These different methods all shared a common thread – relationships. Furthermore, for many students, the mentoring relationship provided

them with the experience of a successful relationship, and allowed an opportunity to make changes in relationships with peers and family (Grossman, Chan, Schwartz, & Rhodes, 2012). Unfortunately, Borden (2011) found that many programs lacked sufficient resources to meet the needs of the mentors and mentees.

This literature review examined these topics in greater detail, and explored their relationship with each other. In many instances, the researcher struggled to find updated information regarding the topics discussed. The lack of then-current literature surrounding these variables and their interaction with one another added to the need for more current research to be conducted. Where possible, the researcher linked newer research to older studies, in order to help the reader understand the multi-faceted world of transition.

Transitions

For American students, transitions occurred frequently and predictably; however, they commonly led to disruptions in student function and achievement (Benner, 2011). As noted by Neild (2009):

> Transitions in schooling [were] moments of great promise for children, holding the potential for personal growth, new learning, and greater independence and responsibility. At the same time, as any parent [would] attest who ever has watched a child disappear through the schoolhouse door for the first time, school transitions [were] moments of great peril. (p. 54)

One such transition occurred between the end of middle school (typically eighth grade) and the beginning of high school (typically ninth grade). Often, this transition unfortunately coincided with the onset of adolescence and the pain associated with that

that time (Nield, 2009). For many "the ninth grade [was] a pivotal year where suddenly students [found] themselves struggling to navigate large, impersonal, and competitive environments" (Cook, Fowler, Harris, 2008, p. 1).

The majority of students viewed this transition as not only a positive experience (Neild, 2009), but a chance for growth and personal freedom (Benson, 2009). Ninth grade also presented an opportunity to shed previous social identities (Benner, 2011). Unfortunately, many students lacked this experience and positive outcomes. Several students instead found increased levels of anxiety (Grills-Taquechel et al., 2010), changes in social groups (Goodwin, Mrug, Borch, & Cillessen, 2012), and increased academic pressure (Holcomb-McCoy, 2011). Several factors influenced the experience that students had during this time of transition, including parental involvement (Chen & Gregory, 2010), relationships with peers and staff (Benner, 2011; Goodwin et al., 2009), and school transition programs (Neild, 2009).

Parental involvement was frequently mentioned in relation to student transition between middle and high school. The New York City Department of Education (2015) identified several behaviors for parents to help their students learn to be successful in school, including regular attendance, punctuality, cooperation, communication, respect, reliability, motivation, study skills, work ethic, self-reflection, writing skills, analysis, interpretation, accuracy, and problem-solving skills. Mompremier (2009) found that socio-economic status was perceived to lead to difficulties transitioning. Chen and Gregory (2010) investigated how a student's perception of parental involvement influenced student transition in the areas of academics and behaviors, and found that perceived parental involvement increased student achievement.

Several researchers focused on parental perceptions of transition and Butts (2011) found that students were often more optimistic about the positive aspects of transition than their parents. Parents and students both identified concerns related to social and academic changes resulting from the transition to high school (Rice, Frederickson, & Seymour, 2011). Involving parents in the transition process appeared to help ease the transition for students (Sylvan Learning, 2015). Many researchers encouraged schools to involve parents beginning in eighth grade (Habeeb, 2013) and continuing through freshman year. Goodwin et al. (2012) suggested that this transition provided a good opportunity for both school personnel and parents to positively influence student decisions, especially in regards to peer relationships.

Transitioning from middle school to high school often strained peer relationships, as "pre-transition friendships and social supports [were] often disrupted by the move to a new educational context" (Benner, 2011, p. 201). Moving from one school setting to another led to disruptions in established friend groups (Neild, 2009) while simultaneously providing new friendship opportunities (Goodwin et al., 2012). Changes in peer relationships were not entirely negative. When students had negative experiences in middle school, the change to high school provided opportunities to develop positive relationships and influences (Goodwin et al., 2012). Benner (2011) showed that changes in peer relationships effected academic performance.

Teachers at both the middle school and high school level proved to be important components of the transition process. The Texas Education Agency (2015) identified the following ten strategies students utilized for a successful transition: (1) worked to maintain friendships and accepted that the transition was nerve-wrecking; (2) sought out

tutoring; (3) completed a four-year plan; (4) talked with friends, and shared information about high school; (5) met teachers, principals, and counselors before school starts and learned about building policies; (6) took advantage of summer opportunities; (7) kept an eye on upcoming events, such as grading periods; (8) explored student organizations and found supportive friend groups; (9) learned to take deep breaths when stressed and knew who to talk to for help; and (10) understood how credits work and knew how many were required. Habeeb (2013) stressed the importance of communication and collaboration between middle school and high school teachers to insure both levels aligned academically, socially, and procedurally. Middle school teachers began the process of transition by preparing students for the increased rigor they would experience in high school (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). Once students reached the high school, teachers addressed the concerns students had regarding the increase in homework, navigating the building, and dealing with new social pressures (Habeeb, 2013).

Students who experienced mental health problems benefited from emotional support from teachers at the high school (DeWit, Karioja, Rye, & Shain, 2011). Benner and Graham (2009) found that the transition to high school led students to feel both lonelier and more anxious, especially among female students. DeWit, Karioja, Rye, and Shain (2011) found that students with mental health issues experienced more difficulty during the transition, due to the decrease in teacher and peer support at the high school level. Goodwin et al. (2012) later supported these findings. Individual perception of the change played a large role in student experience, which proved problematic for students with predominantly negative thought patterns, such as those with depression or anxiety (Mackenzie, McMaugh, & O'Sullivan, 2012). The researcher concluded that an

unsuccessful transition had the potential to lead to early chronic absenteeism (which is discussed later in this paper) and dropping out.

According to Nield (2009) students who failed to earn the recommended number of credits during their freshman year of high school were at significantly elevated risk for later dropping out of school. Millenky, Schwartz, and Rhodes (2013) estimated that "five million American youth between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four [were] both out of school and unemployed" (p. 1), many of which did not complete high school. Transitioning was especially difficult for African American and Latino students, especially in cases where they encountered limited interaction with peers of the same ethnicity (Benner & Graham, 2009). Dropping out of school was not a sudden act, but rather a culmination of years of feeling disengaged and disconnected, which often started before the transition to high school and was exacerbated by the move from middle school (Benner, 2011).

Students reported concerns about the changing environment that accompanied the transition from middle to high school. During this transition, students faced "more difficult coursework, a different organizational structure, new peers, more students, and different expectations from teachers and administrators" (Suldo & Shaunessy-Dedrick, 2013, p. 196). Benson (2009) stated that 26% of the students surveyed "had questions about the new building and getting from class to class" (p. 32). Other potential adjustments included new class schedules, such as block scheduling (Neild, 2009). Participation in organized activities proved to have a positive influence on student transition (Bohnert, Aikins, & Arola, 2013). Research also showed that intentional transition programs helped ease these specific concerns (Benson, 2009).

In literature current at the time of this writing, transition programs existed in many different forms with varied levels of effectiveness; however, researchers almost universally agreed upon their usefulness (Nield, 2009). Most transition programs included one or more of the following components: having counselors from the high school meet with eighth graders before the end of the year (Habeeb, 2013), a summer orientation program (Neild, 2009), or high school student panels (Benson, 2009). Other programs included embedded activities throughout the year, such as peer mentors (Bonin, 2013) and big brother/sister programs (Herrera, DuBois, & Grossman, 2013). Fostering these peer relationships appeared especially beneficial to transitioning students, when compared to simply hearing information from teachers (Andrews & Clark, 2011).

Educators that viewed transition as an event failed to recognize that transition was a process, often beginning in middle school (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009). Research current at the time of this writing focused on student actions from immediately before the transition to immediately after (Benner, 2011). While many students reported experiencing a decline in anxiety once they entered high school (Benson, 2009), not all students were able to make the adjustment successfully. Programs that spanned from middle school to high school, and addressed social, academic, and procedural concerns, helped students successfully transition to high school (Habeeb, 2013).

Students with special needs often had a difficult time transitioning. "Despite the efforts of policymakers and practitioners, a gap [remained] between post-high school outcomes of students with disabilities and outcomes for other students" (Cobb, Upscomb, Wolgemuth, & Schulte, 2013, p. vi). The Grant Wood Area Education Agency (2007) outlined these eight strategies used by students accessing special education service who

made a successful transition out of high school – (1) they started early, planned ahead, and dreamed big; (2) they knew what was available, who to contact, and how to get needed services; (3) they worked together with their family and school staff; (4) they used the IEP process to plan and get what was needed to achieve; (5) they expected success and had high expectations; (6) they were aware of the potential for the transition to be emotional; (7) they created a support system; and (8) they were involved in the process as much as possible. For students with disabilities, transitioning out of high school took more planning than was needed for non-disabled students (Bangser, 2008; Condon & Brown, 2008).

Successful transitioning required looking beyond high school and planning for a long-term future (Reichman & Jacoby, 2015). Many students found that transitioning out of high school paralleled the transition into high school in many ways. Unfortunately, students often found that their secondary education did not prepare them for the increased demands of the post-secondary world (Bangser, 2008). In order to be prepared for college and beyond, high school students needed to learn good work habits, study skills, and strong interpersonal and social skills, as well as learning the importance of attending every day and being punctual (New York City Department of Education, 2015).

Attendance

"Students [could not] perform well academically when they [were] frequently absent" (Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA [CMHS-UCLA], 2015b, para. 1). Unfortunately, a high number of students missed school each day. The CFE (2011) found that in New York alone, one in five students missed enough days to equal one month absent from school. Romero and Lee (2007) discovered that nearly one-fourth of

all kindergarten students were at-risk of becoming a chronically absent student or were already chronically absent. Bruner, Discher, and Chang (2011) concluded that even schools with average daily attendance (ADA) rates in the desired range could have problems with chronic absenteeism, since a school with a 95% ADA could still have 30% of students missing the equivalent of one month of school (p. 2).

Researchers found that accurately tracking student attendance was a difficultly obtained, but vital source of data for policy makers and educators (Chang & Jordan, 2012). When researching student absenteeism, numerous terms described why students were absent from school. Truancy, chronic absenteeism, and school refusal behavior were three of the most common terms used (Wimmer, 2008). John W. Gardner Center for Youth (JGC, 2012) defined truant students as those with "repeated, unexcused absences" (p. 1). Bruner et al. (2011) defined chronic absenteeism as missing 10% or more of school days, regardless of the reason for the absence. "Every student absence [jeopardized] the ability of students to succeed at school" (CMHS-UCLA, 2015b, para. 3).

School refusal behavior was defined in general terms and often included students who refused to attend school for various mental health reasons, including separation anxiety, performance anxiety, social anxiety, generalized anxiety, depression, bullying, and other health-related concerns (Wimmer, 2008). Beidas, Crawley, Mychailyszyn, Comer, and Kendall (2010) found that school refusers often had other mental health diagnoses. Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) separated student absences into three groups: students who could not attend (absences based on factors such as illness or familial obligations), students who would not attend (absences due to factors such as bullying or

school anxiety), and students who did not attend (absences not due to any specific reason). Understanding the differences among these three groups proved vital to addressing their unique needs.

When researching students who could not attend, it was apparent that many factors influenced their absences. Cutillo (2013) identified poverty as a major obstacle for student attendance. Lack of reliable transportation, parents not understanding the importance of education, lack of access to healthcare, and unreliable living conditions all added to student absences (Balfanz & Chang, 2013). JGC (2012) confirmed these influences, and added parent disabilities and violence in the home as contributing factors to students' inability to come to school regularly.

In contrast, students who would not attend school often did so for very different reasons. Wimmer (2008) cited incidence of depression, along with anxiety as common among school refusers. Ingul and Nordahl (2013) similarly found a high comorbidity with anxiety, which often made identifying the root cause of the absence difficult. According to the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network Statistics (as cited by Sylvan Learning, 2015) there were several reasons that students gave for skipping school, such as viewing school as boring, lacking positive relationships with teachers or peers, being suspended, feeling unsafe, missing homework, feeling unchallenged, and having a job.

School refusal occurred most commonly at ages of transition or during times of major change in the student's life, and many students avoided school due to negative social interactions, such as bullying (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Williams (2001) discovered that one major issue surrounding school attendance was that refusing to attend

school carried both positive and negative reinforcement. Negative reinforcement came from students perceiving attendance as a punishment, which proved to be a motivator for missing school. Truant students gained positive reinforcement from missing school, because they were able to engage in activities in which they might not normally be allowed to participate (CMHS-UCLA, 2015a).

Truant students had numerous reasons for not attending school. School size, especially larger school sizes, influenced the occurrence of truancy (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; JGC, 2012). Pathammavong et al. (2011) found that drug and alcohol abuse often led to truancy. Similarly, Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) discovered that truant students often missed due to having something better to do, finding a lack of value in their education, having families that did not value education, or simply having nothing that stopped them from skipping. The Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA (CMHS-UCLA, 2015a) found that truancy tended to be a group phenomenon, and truant students often hung out in groups that participated in risky or dangerous behaviors.

Part of the problem schools faced in addressing the issue of chronic absenteeism was a lack of consistency in reporting (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Some communities were able to address and reduce the occurrence of chronic absenteeism, with varying degrees of success. In Atlanta, the Truancy Intervention Program documented success in reducing truancy (Skola & Williamson, 2012). In New Zealand, Mhurchu et al. (2010) found that offering free breakfast was a way to encourage school attendance and met a health need of students living in poverty. Having clear policies, which were frequently communicated home, helped several schools correct their chronic absentee problems (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Similarly, understanding the root causes, such as mental

health (Ingul & Nordahl, 2013) and poverty (Cutillo, 2013) gave schools a starting point to begin to address the issue of chronic absenteeism.

Anxiety

Experiencing anxiety during times of transition was a normal part of development (AnxietyBC, 2015a). Many viewed adolescence as a time of passage from childhood to adulthood (Mellor & Delamont, 2011); however, transitioning from middle school to high school caused many students to experience stress, turmoil, and anxiety (Grills-Taquechel et al., 2010). "Adolescence [was] a time of change in the biological, social, and psychological landscapes of individuals' lives" (Reynolds & Juvonen, 2012, p. 677) and led many students to experience anxiety during their transition. Research showed it was normal for people to experience anxiety during stressful circumstances; however, anxiety disorders developed when students were fearful, even when not presented with reasonably fearful circumstances (Chandler, 2015). Having an anxiety disorder often prevented students from making friends, asking questions in class, or participating in school activities, as well as putting students at a higher risk for poor academic performance or substance abuse (ADAA, 2015g).

Although anxiety disorders were among the most prevalent mental health issues facing students, they were also the most undiagnosed, undetected, and untreated (Thompson, Robertson, Curtis, & Frick, 2013; Tillfors et al., 2011). Students with "emotional disorders were least likely to have contact with specialist services" (Stallard, et al., 2012, p. 1). While prevalence rates varied between studies due to differences in population criteria, rates were frequently estimated between five and 20% of the population (Rapee, 2012). While anxiety typically began before the age of eighteen, a

few sub-categories of anxiety appeared later in life (Kessler, Ruscio, Shear, & Wittchen, 2009).

McLoone, Hudson, and Rapee (2006) defined anxiety as being "characterized by an irrational fear of a situation or stimulus that [was] in excess of what would be considered reasonable and age appropriate" (p. 221). This was still commonly used in then-current literature. Students with anxiety often reported experiencing psychosomatic symptoms, such as headaches, stomachaches, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and muscle tension (Bulbena & Pailhez, 2011; Rapee, 2012; Von der Embse & Hasson, 2012). Some adolescents also reported feeling panicked and scared (Ingul & Nordahl, 2013).

"Anxiety has been found to be one of the most common causes of distress in children and young people" (AnxietyUK, 2015, p. 4). Anxiety disorders existed in many different forms, including social phobia, separation anxiety disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and school phobia (McLoone, Hudson, & Rapee, 2006) as well as social phobias (Ingul & Nordahl, 2013). Many students also experienced test anxiety (Mychailyszyn, Mendez, & Kendall, 2010). Obsessive-compulsive disorder (CMHS-UCLA, 2008) and post-traumatic stress disorder (Rapee, 2012) were two other manifestations of anxiety. Negative thoughts/thinking, physical feelings, and fear characterized all anxiety disorders (AnxietyUK, 2015).

Separation Anxiety Disorder. Healthy children normally experienced fear and worry when transitioning between locations and caregivers (Dabkowska, Araszkiewicz, Dabkowska, & Wilkosc, 2011). When children experienced an intense fear above what would be considered normal, they had the potential to develop separation anxiety

(CMHS-UCLA, 2008; Chandler, 2015). Figueroa, Soutullo, Ono, Yoshiro, and Saito (2012) identified:

> Three key components of separation anxiety disorders: excessive and persistent fears or worries before and at the time of separation, behavioral and somatic symptoms before, during, and after the separation, and persistent avoidance or attempts to escape the separation situation. (p. 2)

Young students with separation anxiety disorder displayed "distress before or during attempts at separation" (Dabkowska et al., 2011, p. 313) especially when separating from an attached caregiver (Breedon, 2012).

Symptoms of a separation anxiety disorder included worrying over separation, fear of being lost or kidnapped, inability to be alone at home, inability to go places without an attached parent(s), inability to sleep alone, and experiencing nightmares (Chandler, 2015). Physical symptoms included headaches, abdominal pain, fainting, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, muscle pain, and chest pains (Figueroa, Soutullo, Ono, Yoshiro, & Saito 2012). A genetic link existed between children diagnosed with separation anxiety disorder and parents who had a history of anxiety, depression, or panic disorder (Dabkowska et al., 2011). "Approximately one-third of childhood cases of [separation anxiety disorder] persisted into adulthood" (Figueroa et al., 2012, p. 5). If left untreated, separation anxiety disorder often led to the development of a panic disorder in later life (Robinson-Nay, Eaves, Hettema, Kendler, & Silberg, 2012).

Panic Disorder. National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI, 2013) estimated that each year one in 20 people were diagnosed or treated for a panic disorder, and women were twice as likely to experience this disorder as men. Panic disorders often

appeared during late adolescence or early adulthood (APA, 2006; NIMH, 2010a), and consisted of episodes of intense fear accompanied by physical symptoms (Chandler, 2015). A main feature of a panic disorder was the existence of panic attacks. Panic attacks were characterized by "a period of intense fear or discomfort that [struck] suddenly, often in familiar places, where there [was] seemingly nothing threatening" (APA, 2006, p. 2).

Physical symptoms of a panic attack included palpitations, trembling, shortness of breath, nausea, dizziness, numbness, and chills (Craske et al., 2010). Some have mistaken panic attacks for a heart attack (APA, 2006) while others reported feeling like they were dying (National Alliance on Mental Illness [NAMI], 2013). According to the APA (2006) a diagnosis of a panic disorder required that students experienced more than one panic attack, along with at least four of the following symptoms – sweating, shortness of breath, rapid or pounding heartbeat, chest pains, feeling unsteady, choking or smothering sensation, numbness or tingling, chills or hot flash, faintness, trembling or shaking, nausea or abdominal pain, feeling unreal or disconnected, and/or fear of losing control or dying. Attacks typically lasted less than 10 minutes (Craske et al., 2010).

Many people with panic disorder developed a fear of experiencing a panic attack (NAMI, 2013). Anticipatory anxiety caused many sufferers to become reclusive in order to avoid potentially embarrassing situations (APA, 2006), and in many cases, severely limited normal functioning (NIMH, 2010a). One treatment of panic disorders was cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) (NAMI, 2013). CBT consisted of learning about the disorder, monitoring panic attacks and situations that produced anxiety, learning relaxation and breathing techniques, restructuring thought patterns to have more realistic

interpretations, and being exposed to frightening or anxiety inducing situations (APA, 2006). Therapists often used anti-anxiety medications in combination with CBT (NIMH, 2010b). When done together, these two methods had success rates that averaged between sixty and ninety percent (APA, 2006, p. 2).

Social phobia or social anxiety disorder. An intense "fear of being judged by others and of being embarrassed" (NIMH, 2007, para. 3) characterized social anxiety disorder, and roughly 15 million adults suffered from social anxiety (ADAA, 2015f). Typical onset occurred around the age of thirteen and affected approximately twelve percent of the population (NICE, 2013, pp. 4-5). Common symptoms of social anxiety disorder included feeling anxious around others, experiencing increased self-consciousness, being afraid of becoming embarrassed, fearing the judgment of others, worrying for several days or weeks about an upcoming event, avoiding public places, and experiencing difficulty making friends (NIMH, 2007). Physical symptoms included blushing, shaking, sweating, or appearing anxious (NICE, 2013). These symptoms or the fear of experiencing them severely limited the person's ability to participate in normal activities (NIMH, 2007).

Several options existed for the treatment of social anxiety disorder. Cognitive therapy allowed patients to explore stressful situations in a safe environment (Grohol, 2013). Therapists used this therapy both individually and in groups (NICE, 2013). Exposure therapy was another method, and involved gradually increasing the intensity of stressful situations while practicing coping skills with the supervision and assistance of a therapist (Markway, 2013). Therapists often prescribed medication such as antidepressants, anti-anxiety medication, and beta-blockers in conjunction with therapy

(NIMH, 2007). Unfortunately, many people with social anxiety disorder chose to self-medicate with alcohol and substance abuse, which often delayed the benefit of traditional treatment (ADAA, 2015e).

Generalized anxiety disorder. Students who experienced excessive and uncontrolled anxieties across many areas of their life could have been diagnosed with generalized anxiety disorder (ADAA, 2015c); characterized by a "pervasive and uncontrollable state of worry" (Allgulander, 2012, p. 88) that was excessive, unrealistic, and persistent (ADAA, 2015c). This disorder typically started in late adolescence (NIMH, 2010b), and had a prevalence rate between one and three percent (Allgulander, 2012). People with generalized anxiety disorder experienced two typical types of fears, including worrying about actual, current problems and worrying about unknown, hypothetical problems and situations (AnxietyBC, 2015b). Generalized anxiety disorder differed from normal anxiety in not only duration and persistence, but also unsubstantiated concerns created the anxiety (ADAA, 2015c).

Both physical and behavioral symptoms were present in generalized anxiety disorder. Physical symptoms included muscle tension, restlessness, interrupted sleep, irritability, and fatigue (Allgulander, 2012). Behavioral symptoms included "avoidance of news, newspapers, [and] restricted activities due to excessive worries about what could happen" (Rector, Bourdeau, Kitchen, & Joseph-Massiah, 2008, p. 13). Generalized anxiety disordered had both environmental and genetic origins, and researchers found enhanced activity in the amygdala (Allgulander, 2012; NIMH, 2010b). The two main treatments used by people with generalized anxiety disorder were psychotherapy and medication (NIMH, 2010b). Cognitive-behavioral therapy was the most common form

of psychotherapy used (Allgulander, 2012). Therapists often prescribed medications, such as anti-depressants and anti-anxiety medications, in conjunction with therapy (NIMH, 2010b).

Obsessive-compulsive disorder. Obsessive-compulsive disorder typically began in adolescence, and researchers estimated that it affected one in two hundred adolescents (AACAP, 2011). This disorder was characterized by a pattern of obsessions and compulsions designed to alleviate anxiety (CMHS-UCLA, 2008). Obsessions included "intrusive, unwanted ideas, images, fears, thoughts or worries that [were] experienced as uncomfortable, unpleasant, distressing, or anxiety provoking" (Gomes de Alvarenga, Savio Mastrorosa, & Conceicao do Rosario, 2012, p. 3). Compulsions, in contrast, were "repetitive behaviors or rituals (like hand washing, hoarding, keeping things in order, checking something over and over) or mental acts (like counting, repeating words silently, avoiding)" (AACAP, 2011, p. 1). Completion of a compulsory act often served to lessen the anxiety brought on from the obsession (Gomes de Alvarenga et al., 2012).

Physical symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder included muscle tension and overall discomfort, while behavioral symptoms were often characteristic of the obsession, such as hand washing or avoidance of public places (Rector et al., 2008). Often, sufferers did not seek treatment until they could no longer ignore the daily disruption (Gomes de Alvarenga et al., 2012). The most frequent treatment involved a combination of psychotherapy and medication (AACAP, 2011). Therapists could use exposure therapy (which involved gradual exposure to anxiety inducing situations while denying the use of compulsion behaviors) in conjunction with other treatments (Gomes de Alvarenga et al., 2012).

Post-traumatic stress disorder. "Each year in the United States more than five million children [experienced] some extreme traumatic event" (Perry, 2007, p. 1). Although many children were resilient after such an event, some children developed "a variety of emotional and behavioral symptoms that [could] be severe and long-lasting" (Cohen, 2008, p. 1). In these children, post-traumatic stress disorder developed after they experienced a traumatic event during childhood (Rapee, 2012). Unfortunately, children exposed to one traumatic event often experienced multiple traumatic events (Cohen, 2008).

Experiencing trauma brought about a variety of symptoms in different children (Cohen, 2008). While some students were able to cope, others experienced depression and anxiety for months or even years following the trauma (ADAA, 2015d). Other common symptoms included sleep disturbance, nightmares, anger outbursts, irritability, and avoidance of places or people that triggered memories of the traumatic event (Rector et al., 2008). Treatment plans often incorporated a combination of cognitive-behavioral therapy, anti-anxiety medication, and exposure therapy (Huemer, Erhart, & Steiner, 2010). The episodic nature of this disorder, along with the frequent misdiagnosis of symptoms, made connecting children with appropriate therapy difficult in many instances (Cohen, 2008).

Although each disorder had unique subtleties, all anxiety disorders interfered with the young person's ability to function in academic and social settings (Huemer et al., 2010), were based on unreasonable fears (Chandler, 2015), and led to avoidance of specific situations, either due to past experiences or fear of experiencing anxiety (Rapee, 2012). Similarly, anxiety had a high comorbidity with other mental health disorders

(Kessler et al., 2009). Depression was especially common in children and adolescents diagnosed with anxiety (Duchesne & Ratelle, 2010; Mychailyszyn, Mendez, and Kendall, 2010; Ng, Ang, and Ho, 2012). In students with anxiety, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and substance abuse were often present, or appeared later in life (Huberty, 2015). If left untreated, anxiety disorders [increased] the risk of depression, addictions, and suicidality for children and adolescents" (Thompson et al., 2013, p. 224).

The development of anxiety was frequently the result of a combination of biological and environmental factors (ADAA, 2015a). Reynolds and Juvonen (2012) found that the experience of anxiety correlated closely with the onset of puberty. Reardon, Leen-Feldner, and Hayward (2009) found this to be true specifically in girls that experienced an earlier onset of puberty relative to their peers. Experiencing puberty earlier than peers, especially for girls, created a "heightened psychological distress" (Reynolds & Juvonen, 2012, p. 677), which linked to the development of internalizing disorders, such as anxiety and depression (Reardon et al., 2009). Anxiety tended to develop in children of anxious parents, or those who had other anxious family members (ADAA, 2015g).

The majority of students transitioned without significant issues (Grills-Taquechel et al., 2010); however, transitioning between school levels did influence the onset of anxiety for some students. Mellor and Delamont (2011) found that before transitioning, students experienced anxiety specifically related to learning a new building, increased rigor in curriculum, and building relationships with new teachers, as well as anxieties focused around urban myths, such as a high prevalence of bullying and other perceived issues. Grills-Taquechel, Norton and Ollendick (2010) found that students with

diminished self-worth developed anxiety more frequently during the transition to high school than students with a healthy level of self-worth.

Strong relationships with friends (Ingul & Nordahl, 2013) and teachers (Grills-Taquechel et al., 2010) helped ease the transition for many students and led to fewer students developing anxiety. Temperament also proved to be another influencing factor in the development of anxiety (Brumariu & Kerns, 2013). Self-sabotaging strategies presented in children who were chronically absent from school (Ingul & Nordahl, 2013). Self-sabotaging actions included running away, faking illness, refusing to attend school, and physical violence (Stroobant & Jones, 2006). Some behavioral signs that signaled anxiety included oppositional behaviors, refusal to work, and other inappropriate behaviors, such as yelling and kicking (Minahan & Rappaport, 2012/2013).

Parents had a significant impact on the development of anxiety. Niditch and Varela (2012) found that parenting styles characterized by control or rejection led to an increased prevalence in anxious children. Furthermore, parents with anxiety tended to foster anxiety within their children (Dadds & Roth, 2008). When children perceived their parents as supportive and warm, they were less likely to develop anxiety and depression in comparison to children who perceived their parents as controlling (Duchesne & Ratelle, 2010). Having a caring home correlated to fewer suicide attempts in a study completed in New Zealand (Fleming, Merry, Robinson, Denny, & Watson, 2007). Breedon (2012) found that children needed to learn, through example, how to manage their worries or fears, both real and perceived.

Transitioning between school levels and parent styles were not the only factors that influenced the development of anxiety. Experiencing bullying, whether as a witness

or victim, led some students to avoid school and develop school phobias (Ingul & Nordahl, 2013). Rivers, Poteat, Noret, and Ashurst (2009) found that witnessing bullying, as opposed to being the victim of a bullying incidence, correlated with an increased incidence of developing anxiety. Incidence of cyber-bullying produced similar results as traditional bullying incidences (Kowalski & Limber, 2013). Cyber-bullying involved "sending or posting harmful or cruel text and/or images using the Internet or other digital communication device, such as a cell phone" (Feinberg & Robey, 2010, p. 1). Especially for girls, bullying (whether electronic or not) had a high correlation with anxiety and depression (Kowalski & Limber, 2013).

Several methods were available to measure the existence of anxiety with children and adolescents. Stroobant and Jones (2006) interviewed college students with a history of school avoidance and anxiety in the hope of identifying predictors of anxiety development. Mychailyszyn, Mendez, and Kendall (2010) utilized the Anxiety Disorders Interview Schedule for Children, which provided more structure than other interview styles and led to the diagnosis of several types of anxiety. Numerous studies used rating scales, varying in length, to assess student's levels of anxiety. Ng, Ang, and Ho (2012) used the State Trait Anxiety Inventory, which consisted of students' self-rating twenty items, worded both positively and negatively. Niditch and Varela (2012) administered the Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale, where children self-reported on 37 items designed to assess four aspects of anxiety. Grills-Taquechel et al., (2010) used the Multidimensional Anxiety Scale for Children, comprised of thirty-nine items that were self-reported and identified levels on four subscales.

Yet another scale designed to identify anxiety was the Screen for Child Anxiety-Related Emotional Disorders or SCARED. Ingul and Nordahl (2013) used this scale, which consisted of 41self-reported items, in their study on student absenteeism. Whiteside and Brown (2008) administered the SCAS, which was the scale used in this study. Essau, Muris, and Ederer (2002) also used the SCAS in their study comparing the validity of the SCAS with the validity of the SCARED and found validity and reliability was comparable between the two scales. The researcher of this study chose the SCAS based largely on the ability to use the scale free of charge.

Researchers identified several different methods to treat anxiety in the school setting. Tillfors et al. (2011) conducted a study utilizing an internet-based program designed to teach cognitive-behavioral therapy skills. Huberty (2015) suggested students meet regularly with school psychologists or counselors to manage anxiety in the school setting. In an ongoing study, Stallard et al. (2012) examined a cognitive-behavioral therapy program and compared it to the FRIENDS prevention program (p. 1). Other researchers suggested accommodations included previewing the school at the beginning of the year, identifying potential anxiety inducing locations, and creating plans to manage the anxiety (CMHS-UCLA, 2008).

Anxiety existed in many forms and at varying degrees of severity (Chandler, 2015). Several factors influenced the development of anxiety in young people, including temperament (Brumariu & Kerns, 2013), family history (Niditch & Varela, 2012), and experiences of childhood trauma (Huemer et al., 2010). Treatment of anxiety often included a combination of cognitive-behavior therapy, medication, and learning strategies for coping (Allgulander, 2012; NIMH, 2010b). In the school setting, several

interventions existed, with many geared at teaching skills for managing stress (Srikala & Kumar, 2010).

Life Skills

Many terms existed in the literature to describe how people handle the inevitable stresses experienced in life. While some researchers referred to these skills as coping skills (Churchill, Villareale, Monaghan, Sharp, & Kieckhefer, 2010) others preferred the term social skills (Pinar & Sucuoglu, 2013). There were even researchers who did not label the type of skill, but instead referenced basic skills or general skill sets (Lundetrae, 2011). A sub-grouping of skills has emerged in recent literature called 21st Century Skills. The researcher included only a brief overview of these skills within this paper, as this topic was too broad and only distantly related to this research project to include a lengthy discussion.

Twenty-first Century Skills, at the time of this study, included critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity (Kaplan & Steffens, 2010; National Education Association, 2015). Researches chose these precise skills to specifically address the global and cultural changes facing young people, including globalization, automation, and demographic changes (Jerald, 2009). Kaplan and Steffens (2010) found, however, that a divide existed among educators in regards to teaching 21st Century Skills. Many educators believed that focusing on these skills specifically would distract from other important lessons (Jerald, 2009; National Education Association, 2015). The use of technology was closely related to 21st Century Skills, and educators were again divided on how to appropriately incorporate technology in to the classroom (Kaplan & Steffens, 2010).

For the purpose of this study, the researcher combined all of these terms under the broad umbrella term of life skills. Some researchers conceptualized life skills as a broad set of skills that people possessed, which allowed them to handle the stress of everyday life (Pindborgh, 1997; World Health Organization, 1999). Pincus and Friedman (2004) found that having "the ability to deal purposefully and effectively with the wide-ranging demands and stressors that [were] part of everyday life [was] a critical skill for healthy functioning" (p. 223). These skills included "decision making, problem solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, effective communication, interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness, empathy, coping with emotions, [and] coping with stress" (Pindborgh, 1997, p. 1). McIntyre, Blacher, and Baker (2006) included self-regulation, both behavioral and emotional, as a life skill.

Students who failed to develop appropriate life skills could experience lifelong consequences. Students who had not developed appropriate life skills faced several potential difficulties, such as dropping out of school (Lundetrae, 2011), or substance abuse (Gorman, 2011). Children often learned life skills, including self-control and emotional expression, from observing how others handle emotional situations, as well as from experiencing emotional situations and watching how others reacted to their response (Kids Matter, 2015). Possessing effective life skills, therefore, served as a barrier to the negative effects of stress on development, such as substance abuse (Gorman, 2011), and helped students develop resilience (Cohn, Frederickson, Brown, Mikels, & Conway, 2009).

Resilience

The idea of resilience came from the field of physics, where a resilient object, when stressed, was found to bend and then bounce back instead of breaking (Brendtro & Longhurst, 2005). Furthermore, resilience has the root form of resile, which meant to "bounce back or rebound after being stressed" (Moore, 2013, p. 3). Often, resilience is looked at as the ability to "bounce back" (Manyena, O'Brie, O'Keefe, & Rose, 2011). Resilience shared many features associated with other characteristics, such as risk competence (Brown et al., 2010), self-efficacy (Mori & Uchida, 2009), and self-esteem (Samel, Sondergeld, Fischer, & Patterson, 2011). Doll, Jones, Osborn, Dooley, and Turner (2011) found that resilience was not a stationary skill, but rather one that changed as students grew and matured.

According to NASP (2010) resilience allowed children to handle any obstacle they encountered. On the opposite side of resilience was vulnerability (Manyena et al., 2011). Children who possessed resilience had "high-quality peer friendships, an internal locus of control, expect[ed] to be successful, and [were] engaged in their schools and communities" (Doll, Jones, Osborn, Dooley, & Turner, 2011, p. 114). Resilience was also "associated with discussions about periods of transition, disaster or adversity" (Ahern et al., 2008, p. 32), which led to limited research into the existence of resilience in everyday life.

Troy and Mauss (2011) noticed that although everyone experiences stress throughout their life, not everyone experiences negative outcomes from that stress. For the purpose of this paper, the researcher chose to follow the definition used by Cicchetti (2010) which stated "resilience has been conceptualized as a dynamic developmental

process encompassing the attainment of positive adaptation within the context of significant threat, severe adversity, or trauma" (p. 145). The researcher also followed the thinking of Bartley (2006) that conceptualized resilience as an on-going process utilizing many skills. The researcher considered a similar definition from Ahern et al., (2008) which stated "resilience [was] often viewed as an adaptive, stress-resistant personal quality that permits one to thrive in spite of adversity" (p. 32). The researcher rejected this definition because it lacked the concept of the process of being resilient.

Scali et al. (2012) looked at resilience as "the capacity of individuals to cope with traumatic events" (p. 1), while Lantieri (2008) referred to this as a person's "inner preparedness" (p. 43). For some, possessing the skills necessary to cope with trauma potentially enhanced their perceived sense of control (Doll et al., 2011) making the trauma manageable. As Jindal-Snape and Miller (2008) found in children, not all trauma events were major life occurrences, but rather a number of frequent minor stresses that when combined created a traumatic experience. As people grew older, resilience was linked to a greater sense of well-being, especially in the face of high stress environments (Paula Couto, Koller, & Novo, 2011).

Researchers suggested several characteristics needed to develop resilience (see Table 1). The Girl Scouts of the USA (2011) suggested there were four primary factors that influenced the development of resilience – young person, family, community, and culture while Wagnild (2010) identified five core characteristics. Similarly, Pearson (2012) found four building blocks of resilience. NASP (2010) established seven different ingredients for resilience. The APA (2015c) suggested 10 ways to build resilience and Mowbray (2011) created a seven-element approach.

Table 1

Characteristics of Resilience as Identified by Different Researchers

Organization:	Characteristics of Resilience:
Wagnild (2010)	Meaningful life Perseverance Self-reliance Equanimity Existential aloneness
Pearson (2012)	Secure bond with a caring adult Relationships with positive role models Opportunities to learn skills Opportunities to participate in meaningful activities
NASP (2010)	Emotion awareness and control Impulse control Realistic optimism Flexible thinking Self-efficacy Empathy Reaching out
Mawbray (2011)	Vision Determination Interaction Relationships Problem-solving Organization Self-confidence
APA (2015)	Make connections Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable Accept change Move toward your goal Take decisive actions Look for opportunities for self-discovery Nurture a positive view of yourself Keep things in perspective Maintain a hopeful outlook Take care of yourself

Resilience traits appeared in settings outside of the overtly traumatic – namely educational resilience (Covell, 2010). Masten, Herbers, Cutuli, and Lafavor (2008) defined resilience "in relation to competence in developmental tasks and risks to positive development" (p. 76) specifically as it related to educational settings. Harvey (2007) looked at resilience in the educational setting as "coping effectively with difficulties that might otherwise lead to anxiety, depression, physical symptoms, or poor achievement"

(p. 10). Williams and Portman (2014) found that parents and extended family members helped promote educational resilience.

A discussion of resilience was often accompanied by a discussion of risk factors. According to Haeffel and Grigorenko (2007):

> The concepts of risk and resilience [were] often described as different sides of the same coin. Risk [referred] to the heightened probability of negative outcome[s] among individuals possessing certain vulnerabilities or sharing exposure to certain conditions. Resilience [was] a dynamic process encompassing the manifestation of positive functioning despite possessing vulnerabilities or the presence of high risk. (p. 435)

Researchers identified protective factors as traits that altered negative events to potentially avoid negative outcomes, while risk factors were those that increased the potential for a negative outcome (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). Risk factors, however, needed to be examined in multiple areas of the student's life to assess potential impact (Amitay & Gumpel, 2015) and needed to be significant and discernible (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012).

Transitions created a time of potential trauma for students, as relationships with peers and adults changed along with the environment (Weiss & Baker-Smith, 2010). Declining grades and increases in behavioral issues often characterized this time of transition (Langenkamp, 2010; Rose, Miller, & Martinez, 2009). Harvey (2007) stated "positive social relationships, particularly with multiple friends, relatives, and neighbors, [created] resiliency" (p. 10) in transitioning students. For many students, a supportive school environment served as a positive factor in regards to risk (Moore, 2013).

Furthermore, Langenkamp (2010) found that peers played a role in helping one another cope with the transition from middle to high school, while family relationships and home environment played a role in student adjustment (Bowes et al., 2010).

While many influencing factors effected how resiliently students handled adversity in school, familial support appeared to have a large impact. According to the APA (2015b) Office on Children Youth and Families "warm and nurturing relationships between children and the adults in their lives [were] the most important factor in developing resilience and overcoming potential negative effects of daily stress" (p. 1). Eppler (2008) studied children that experienced the death of a parent, and found that grief appeared in all areas of life, including with peers, at school, and at home, but for students with a strong support network, the effects on school achievement lessened. Victims of bullying that had strong relationships with their parents experienced more resilience in dealing with the incidence of bullying than peers who did not possess such strong family connections (Bowes et al., 2010).

Mental health also contributed to the development of resilience in children. Positive mental health served as a protective factor against risk (Friedli, 2009). Exposure to trauma in childhood physically changed the way the brain functioned in response to stress, and led to an increased risk for developing mood and anxiety disorders later in life (Gillespie, Phifer, Bradley, & Ressler, 2009). Resilience development helped strengthen positive mental functioning, which proactively protected students from negative reactions to stress (Bardi et al., 2012). Similarly, Brendtro and Longhurst (2005) found that physical changes in the brain caused children to default to responses that lead to risky outcomes, thus making it more difficult to succeed in a school setting.

Temperament played a role in resilience development, with some individuals seeming hard-wired to be resilient (Brendtro, 2015). Hoffman (2015) identified nine temperament qualities that affected resilience – activity level, distractibility, intensity, regularity/predictability, approach/withdrawal of new situations, sensitivity, adaptability, persistence, and mood. Students who possessed high levels of self-confidence and self-esteem also appeared to be more naturally resilient (Bitsika, Sharpley, & Peters, 2010). Brendtro (2015) suggested that intelligence fostered resilience, since knowing one's own strengths and possessing the ability to problem-solve to overcome obstacles required a logically thinking, intelligent brain. Anxiety and depression resulted in less resilience in students, especially at the point of transition (Bitsika et al., 2010; Hjemdal et al., 2011).

Researchers used many different techniques to measure resilience. Interviews allowed researchers to explore student perceptions of resilience, as well as other co-existing traits (Eppler, 2008). Rating scales were also a popular method of inquiry, and various studies used many different scales. Hjemdal, Vogel, Solem, Hagen, and Stiles (2011) chose to utilize the Resilience Scale for Adolescents (READ) in their study. Ahern, Kiehl, Sole, and Byers (2006) explored the appropriateness of six different scales when used with an adolescent population, including the Adolescent Resilience Scale (ARS), CD-RISC, and Resilience Scale (RS), which were all found to have acceptable credibility. Scali et al. (2012) used the 10-item CD-RISC in their study on trauma and anxiety while Bitsika, Sharpley, and Peters (2010) administered the CD-RISC as part of their study examining the relationship between anxiety, depression, and resilience. This study utilized the CD-RISC scale, due largely to validity and accessibility for research.

Brendtro (2015) identified four areas needed to develop resilience – attachment, achievement, autonomy, and altruism. Without resilience, students were at a greater risk for developing negative outcomes cognitively, emotionally, physically, and socially (APA, 2015b). Resilience protected against the development of other mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, and helplessness (Wagnild, 2010), and led to more success outcomes (Mowbray, 2011). Troy and Mauss (2011) found that resilience could be taught, and such instruction was most effective when begun at a young age, with continued support. Supportive non-parents, such as teachers and peer mentors, provided one potential avenue for instruction in resilience and related skills (Rhodes & Lowe, 2008).

Mentoring

This study made use of student mentors to help transitioning students adjust to high school. Mentoring existed in many forms stemming back to ancient Greece (Rudolph & Connell, 2012) and historically defined as an older person helping someone younger move through a transition in their life (Leidenfrost, Strassnig, Schutz, Carbon, & Schabmann, 2014). "Mentoring provided an alternative for youth whose parents were unable to fulfill a mentoring role and served as an additional resource for youth whose parents were engaged in their lives" (Borden, 2011, p. 1). Researchers used the term mentor in reference to the adult or older peer that provided the guidance or instruction, while the term mentee referred to the child or younger peer that received the guidance (Wai-Packard, 2012). Omatsu (2015) summarized what a mentor was and was not (see Table 2). When reviewing literature for this study, the researcher identified three common styles of mentoring: adult/child mentoring (Big Brothers Big Sisters [BBBS],

2015), group mentoring (Meister & Willyerd, 2010) and peer-mentoring or cross-age mentoring (Bonin, 2013; Garringer & MacRae, 2008).

Table 2

Characteristics that Mentors Should Cultivate and Avoid

Mentors were:	Mentors were not:
A knowledgeable and experienced guide	A (surrogate) parent
A caring, thoughtful, and humane facilitator	A professional counselor or therapist
A role model	A flawless or infallible idol
A trusted ally, or advocate	A social worker
	A lending institution
	A playmate or romantic partner

Note: Information gathered from Omatsu, 2015, p. 10-11

Adult/child mentoring. The most well-known example of an adult/child mentoring program was the Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) program (Herrera et al., 2013), which helped shape how many defined mentoring (Borden, 2011). For over 100 years, BBBS paired volunteer adults in a one-on-one relationship with a child (BBBS, 2015, para. 1). In 2001, BBBS began providing school-based mentoring (Herrera, Kauh, Cooney, Grossman, & McMaken, 2008). These meetings typically lasted for one hour per week, and occurred during the school day or immediately after school dismissed (Bayer, Grossman, & DuBois, 2013) and meeting discussions covered a variety of topics, including social concerns and academic subjects (Herrera et al., 2008).

One consistent problem faced by the BBBS program was the ability to recruit an adequate number of volunteers, especially given the expected time commitment, which included the expectation to meet a few times each month (BBBS, 2015). The school-based model proved less time consuming than traditional BBBS programs, and made

recruiting volunteers much easier due to the less intense commitment (Bayer et al., 2013). The impact of mentoring depended largely on the quality of the relationship between the mentor and mentee, with stronger relationships leading to more lasting outcomes (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). Unfortunately, Rodriguez-Planas (2014) found that most of the positive effects of mentoring faded after the conclusion of the mentor relationships, especially for male mentees.

Group mentoring. Much of the research on group mentoring was older, although evidence suggested this method was still being used (Zasloff & Okurowski, 2012). Rhodes (2002) found that group mentoring programs had "considerable variation in size, the number of adults and youth who [comprised] the groups, the amount of time that the group spen[t] together, the fluidity of the memberships, the structure imposed and the activities in which they [engaged]" (p. 1). Foster (2001) estimated that one in five mentoring programs used a group model, with the average ratio of one mentor to four mentees. Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, and Taylor (2006) suggested that the groups typically had six to 10 mentees per mentor, while MENTOR (2005) stated that groups had less than four mentees per mentor. Other programs paired several mentors with a group of mentees (Foster, 2001). Groups met regularly over an extended period, such as a school year (MENTOR, 2005).

The group model helped many programs compensate for a limited number of volunteers, as well as attracted volunteers who were more comfortable with a structured format (Foster, 2001). Group mentoring programs typically included planned group activities, often with time for personal sharing at the end (MENTOR, 2005). This structure allowed group members to learn from each other, as their peers modeled

appropriate social behaviors or discussed topics of interest to the members (Karcher et al., 2006). Unfortunately, the group setting often made individual relationships between the mentor and mentee more difficult to develop, and resulted in weaker relationships than those found in one-on-one settings (Rhodes, 2002).

Peer mentoring/cross-age mentoring. Recently, many schools shifted to a peer-mentoring or cross-age model. The term peer-mentoring was often used when referring to mentoring relationships where older students mentored younger students at the same educational level (such as senior high school students mentoring freshman high school students) (Bonin, 2013). Similarly, peer tutoring referred to relationships of a solely academic nature, as opposed to including social and emotional topics (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). The term cross-age mentoring referred to relationships that paired an older youth with a younger youth at a different educational level (such as high school students mentoring elementary students) (Garringer & MacRae, 2008). For the purpose of this paper, the term peer mentoring was used when discussing any mentoring relationship that paired two youths (regardless of difference in age) and focused on the relationship instead of the acquisition of specific academic skills.

One positive outcome from a peer mentoring relationship was that the mentor fostered a sense of belonging in the mentee by helping them learn the hidden culture of the institution (Andrews & Clark, 2011). Campbell, Smith, Dugan, and Komives (2012) found that mentoring led to the development of positive leadership skills for the mentor. Mentors who developed positive relationships with their mentees experienced an increase in several helpful personality areas, including being open, conscientious, and agreeable

(Faith, Fiala, Cavell, & Hughes, 2011). Meanwhile, mentees also reported higher grades than their non-mentored peers (Leidenfrost et al., 2014).

While there were many positive outcomes of peer mentoring relationships, challenges did exist. Colvin and Ashman (2010) found that some mentors felt vulnerable in their role, which made building a relationship difficult. In other instances, the mentors did not provide a positive example for their mentee to follow (Garringer & MacRae, 2008). High school mentors particularly tended to "become more easily overwhelmed than older mentors, especially when working with children who [had] behavioral problems" (MENTOR, 2007, p. 10). Furthermore, mentors and mentees might not have fully grasped the purpose of the relationship, or what role they played in the development of the mentoring relationship (Garringer & MacRae, 2008).

One common thread among the different types of mentoring programs was a focus on relationships with trust the cornerstone in relationship development. The Mentoring Partnership of Southwestern Pennsylvania (2015) identified the following tips for mentors trying to establish a trusting relationship: (1) be a friend; (2) foster mutual respect; (3) listen; (4) take a step back; (5) be consistent; (6) be supportive; (7) have fun; (8) be yourself; and (9) be realistic. Strong mentoring relationships led to increased levels of social and emotional skill development in both the mentor and mentee (Herrera et al., 2013). The mentoring relationship also empowered students to achieve academically, especially those identified as "at-risk" (Frank, 2011). Furthermore, for many students, the mentoring relationship provided students with the experience of having a successful relationship, and allowed an opportunity to make changes in other relationships with peers and family (Grossman et al., 2012). Often, researchers

determined the effectiveness of the mentoring program by measuring the quality of the mentoring relationship (Borden, 2011).

There were a few common challenges faced by the mentoring programs. One of the biggest challenges for any mentoring program was finding enough volunteers to meet the needs of the mentees (Herrera et al., 2008). Borden (2011) found that many programs lacked sufficient resources to meet the needs of the mentors and mentees, and both mentors and mentees had difficulty making a commitment to the program (Grossman et al., 2012). Finally, difficulty with the relationship building process, whether due to unrealistic expectations, discontinuing the program, or personality differences often led to unsatisfactory or detrimental relationships (Borden, 2011; Rodriguez-Planas, 2014).

Summary

Many different factors affected transitions, creating a multi-dimensional process. Student's attendance played a key role in predicting success, but often proved difficult to truly measure (Chang & Jordan, 2012). The amount of anxiety experienced by the student was influenced by family history and previous experiences, and also played a key role in student success (Huemer et al., 2010). Resilience was one variable that was found to positively influence student transition and promote educational success (Covell, 2010). Life skill development and education was one method educators used to help ease the stress of the transition, and increase student resilience (Cohn et al., 2009). Lastly, mentoring relationship strongly influenced how well students transitioned from middle school to high school (Herrera et al., 2013). In Chapter Three, the researcher outlined the methodology used in this study, and discussed the data collected in Chapter Four.

Finally, Chapter Five discusses the results and gave suggestions for future research into these topics and the link to the current literature.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This research project utilized several different research tools to collect data, including surveys, questionnaires, interviews, observations, and attendance data. A mixed-methods research design was selected due to the ability apply data to answer both hypotheses and research questions for this study (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Explanation, where needed, was included to give the reader a clear understanding of how the researcher implemented and administered specific measurements given the structure of the research site.

The Research Site

The school referenced in this study was located in the suburbs of a large Midwestern city in the United States of America, within a school district that served roughly 11,000 students (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [MODESE], 2014a, para. 4) through one early childhood center, 10 elementary schools, four middle schools, and two high schools (para. 1). For the school year studied, the student population was 1598, with 51% of the students being female and 49% male, and the student-to-teacher ratio was 17:1 (MODESE, 2014a, para. 4). Over the past eight years, the population of the school decreased from 1998 students in 2008 to an enrollment of 1598 (C. Vitale, personal communication, September 14, 2014). At the time of this study, the gender balance had shifted slightly, with 52.4% of students being male and 47.6% female in 2008, to the current figures listed above (MODESE, 2014a, para. 4).

The participating school had limited diversity, with 86.7% of the students self-identified as White, 8.4% self-identified as Black, 2.5 % self-identified as Asian, 2% self-

identified as Hispanic, and 0.4% self-identified as Other (MODESE, 2014a, para. 4). These demographics remained consistent between 2010 and 2015, as seen in Figure 1. Over the past eight years, the percentage of students who received free or reduced lunch rose from 11.8% in 2008 to the 15.1% at the time of this study, 15.1% (MODESE, 2014b, para. 2).

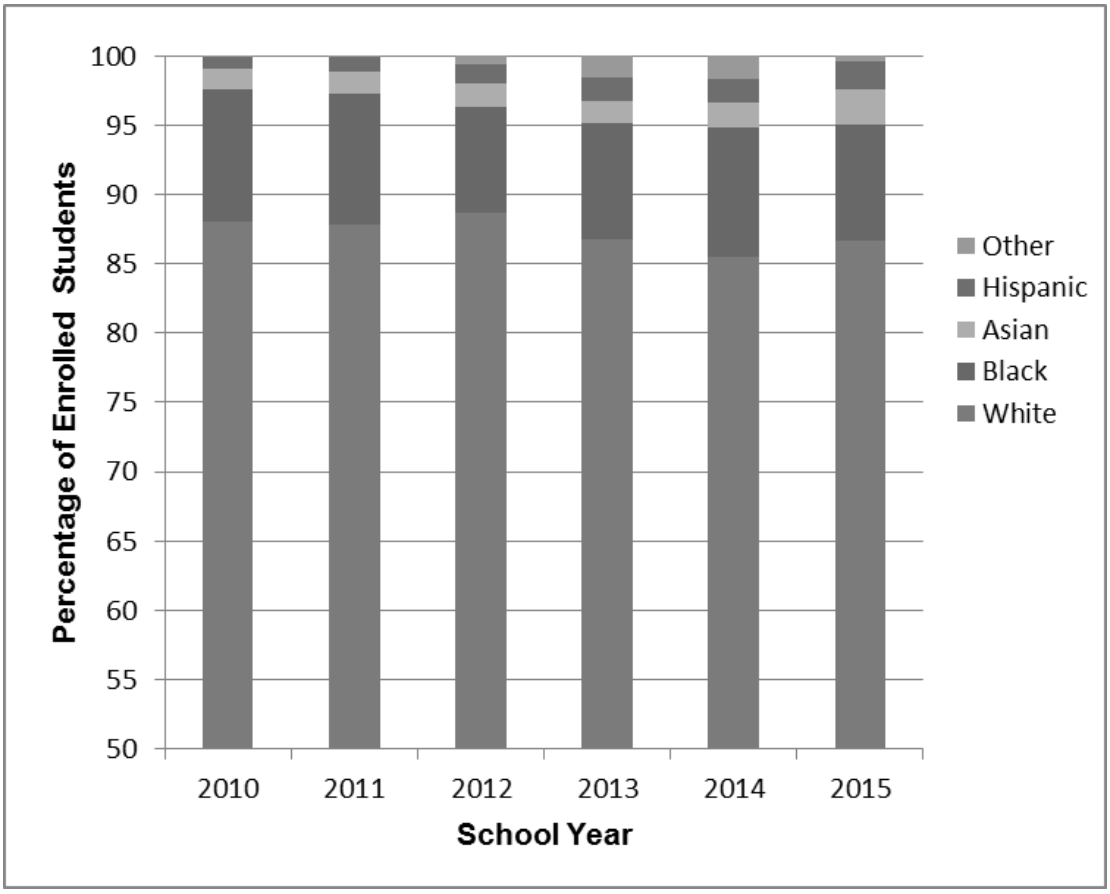

Figure 1: Student demographic information. This chart represents percentage of student's self-identified ethnicity 2010-2015.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2015), the median household income for this area was $77,027, while the per capita income was $37,006 (para. 3). The percentage of residents living below the poverty line was 3.5% (US Census Bureau, 2015, para. 3). The median home value was $209,300, with 85.4% of residents owning

their home, and the racial demographics of this area showed little diversity, with 96% of residents identified as White (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015, para. 2). The school also participated in a transfer program, where students living in the inner city attended this county school instead of their home district (Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation [VICC], 2013).

Per researcher observation, the participating school operated on a block schedule, with four blocks per day, and each block ran eighty-four minutes in length. Students took seven academic courses, and as their eighth course, all students participated in an advisory/study hall block, which occurred during the same period for all students. These regular advisories were separated by grade level, and students remained in that advisory, with the same group of students and teacher, for the duration of their high school career. The student-to-teacher ratio in these advisories was approximately 22:1 (S. King, personal communication, September 14, 2014). In the researcher's experience working within the research context, the specialized advisories existed for students in the marching band, advanced choir, special education, leadership courses, newspaper and broadcast production, and for students in need of academic or behavioral intervention.

Developing the Intervention

For the eight years previous to this study, a team of three teachers and one counselor (the researcher) referred to hereafter as the "Leadership Team," worked to develop a comprehensive freshmen transition program. During this period, the Leadership Team explored several pre-existing programs, toured neighboring school districts, and attended professional development conferences on the topic of freshman transition. Unfortunately, due to scheduling conflicts, budget restrictions, and lack of

support from colleagues, the school district was unable to purchase an existing program and struggled to create an original, impactful program (Leadership Team, personal communication, August 4, 2014). While searching for pre-existing programs to fit the unique needs of their student population, the team learned about the OOLSP (Leadership Team, personal communication, August 4, 2014).

The Community for Education Foundation (CEF) designed the OOLSP in 1992 with the mission to "ensure that all young people learn the communication, decision making, and goal setting skills they need to be successful in life" (Overcoming Obstacles, 2014a, para. 3). The CEF provided this program free of charge to educators, which contained over 180 hours of curriculum (Overcoming Obstacles, 2014a). The curriculum aligned to both Common Core State Standards (CCSS) as well as American School Counselor Association National Standards for Students (Overcoming Obstacles, 2014b). Schools in Los Angeles, New Jersey, and New York reported improved attendance, a decrease in bullying, and an increase in college and career readiness with the implementation of this program (Overcoming Obstacles, 2014c). In 2013, OOLSP was recognized as a Crystal Star recipient for program excellence (National Dropout Prevention Center, 2013), and was recommended by the CASEL as a promising classroom-based program for today's use (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2005).

The Leadership Team chose the OOLSP based partially on cost, as well as the CCSS alignment and flexibility to implement the program in a way that met the unique needs of the school (Leadership Team, personal communication, August 4, 2014). Due to time constraints, the team did not implement the full curriculum immediately upon

receipt (Leadership Team, personal communication, August 4, 2014). Instead, the Leadership Team selected specific lessons from the full curriculum, using the sample high school pacing plan outlined by the OOLSP, which was retrieved from the CEF website under the high school curriculum section (Overcoming Obstacles, 2014d). Out of a potential 63 lessons, 13 lessons were selected and implemented the third week of school, delivered once a week for a twenty-minute time period during the student's mandatory advisory period, with most lessons spread over two-to-three class periods (see Appendix A).

The Leadership Team facilitated a mentoring program at the school before this study began, that paired teams of two-to-three junior/senior students with one of the 16 traditional freshmen advisory classes to serve in a mentoring role. Students became part of this program through a leadership course that consisted of 41 senior and four junior-level students (S. King, personal communication, September 14, 2014). These students applied and participated in an interview before their acceptance into the class, with the clear understanding that serving as a mentor was a key component to the course material. The leadership students presented the selected OOLSP lessons to the freshmen as part of their role as mentor. The student mentors were graded on their role as a mentor; however, participation in this study in no way calculated as a component of the student's grade, and students were assured of their confidentiality in all questionnaires and interviews (see Appendix B).

Observations of the mentors, by the leadership team, were part of their mentoring experience, and data collected from the observations was included in this study. Observation data was void of information that identified the mentor students or their

specific freshman advisory. The leadership team chose to complete observations to help insure consistency in the implementation of the program, as well as allowed feedback to the student mentors on ways they could improve the delivery of the curriculum (Leadership Team, personal communication, August 4, 2014). Each member of the leadership team, at least once per semester, observed each student mentor team, and a debriefing was conducted at the end of the observation to encourage growth in the student leaders. The leadership team developed and used a standard observation form for consistency in observations (see Appendix C).

Given the limited number of mentors available, the researcher decided that students in non-traditional advisories would not be part of this program. Non-traditional advisories included two special education classrooms and four classrooms for students in need of academic intervention (based upon grades and behavior criteria). There was also one advisory specifically for students in the marching band program that the researcher excluded as well, due to rehearsals that were conducted during advisory. With the flexible nature of these advisories (students regularly moved in and out of academic intervention advisories), data used for this study included information from students who participated in the program for varying lengths of time. Permission was granted by the school district's superintendent to use the secondary data collected during the implementation of this program, as well as any primary data collected specifically for this research study (see Appendix D).

Participants

This study consisted of several different types of participants in varying roles: freshman students, student mentors, parents, and teachers. The number of freshmen

participating in the program fluctuated throughout the year due to students enrolling, withdrawing, and moving in and out of the intervention advisories, beginning with 315 and ending with 273 student participants (S. King, personal communication, May 4, 2015). Freshman participation is explained in detail later in this chapter, but primarily consisted of participating in activities taken from the OOLSP and delivered by student mentors. The student mentor group consisted of 42 seniors and three juniors that participated in a Leadership course. As part of the requirements of the course, student mentors delivered pre-designed lessons from the OOLSP to freshmen.

The number of teachers involved in the program remained consistent throughout the year at 16, and were selected from their role as a freshman advisory teacher. Teachers worked with student mentors, and assisted with classroom management during the implementation of lessons and activities. Parents of freshmen in participating advisories were contacted based on whether an e-mail address was available in the student information system. Custodial parents (including both the primary parent and the spouse) were contacted at all available e-mail addresses. Non-custodial parents were only contacted if the system showed that they requested duplicate information. At the beginning of the year, there were 584 e-mails available, and at the end of the year, there were 563 parent e-mails available (J. Betzer, personal communication, May 20, 2015).

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

This study utilized primary and secondary data from freshman students, student mentors, freshmen advisory teachers, and parents of freshmen to answer the following research questions and hypotheses:

Null H_1. There is no relationship between participating in the Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills program and student's level of anxiety, resilience, or attendance.

Alternate H_1. There is a relationship between participating in the Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills program and student's level of anxiety, resilience, or attendance.

Null H_2. There is no difference between student's anxiety, resilience, or attendance levels before and after participating in the Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills program.

Alternate H_2. There is a difference between student's anxiety, resilience, or attendance levels before and after participating in the Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills program.

RQ_1. How do students perceive participating in Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills program as influencing their anxiety and resilience?

RQ_2. How do teachers perceive Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills program as influencing their students' anxiety and resilience?

RQ_3. How do parents perceive Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills program as influencing their student's anxiety and resilience?

The researcher served as the freshman guidance counselor, as well as a member of the Leadership Team. The researcher was not directly connected to the delivery of the program material, nor did any student data collection (surveys, interviews, etc.) originate from the researcher. Instead, another counselor, in a non-evaluative role, conducted the interviews and surveys distributed through the administration. The researcher notified parents of this study and assured them that participation would in no way influence student achievement (see Appendix E). The procedures used for data collection, along

with the method for data analysis, confidentiality maintenance, and method for gathering consent, are summarized below, as seen in Table 3.

Table 1

List of Participants, Their role in the Study, and Data Points for Collection

Participants:	Role and Data Points:
Leadership Team	• Comprised of 3 Teachers and 1 counselor • Trained Leadership Mentor students to implement the OOLSP curriculum • Selected the lessons that would be delivered to the freshmen • DATA POINTS: Conducted observations of Leadership Mentor students as they implemented curriculum
Leadership Mentor Students	• n = 45 • Assigned to specific freshmen advisories • Delivered selected lessons from the OOLSP • Worked with the freshman as they transitioned • DATA POINTS: Interviews (convenience sample = 9), In-class perception activity (Dec/May); Observation of OOLSP lessons
Freshman Students	• n = 315(August)/287(May) • Worked with the Leadership Mentors assigned to their advisories • Participated in the OOLSP • DATA POINTS: CD-RISC (pre/post), SCAS (pre/post), Program survey (pre/post), Perception survey (Dec/May), interviews (random sampling = 10)
Parents	• n = 584 (December)/563 (May) • Encouraged their freshman student to work on the skills taught through the Overcoming Obstacles program • DATA POINTS: Perception questionnaire (Dec/May), interviews (random sampling)
Freshman Advisory Teachers	• n = 16 • Assisted Leadership Mentor students in implementing the OOLSP • Assisted Leadership Mentor students with classroom management • DATA POINTS: Perception questionnaire (Dec/May), interviews (convenience sample = 6)

Freshmen

All freshmen in traditional advisories participated in the OOLSP transition initiative administered during their advisory period. At the beginning of the school year, 287 freshmen completed a pre-test rating scale that measured their level of anxiety and

resilience, along with a pre-survey designed by the Overcoming Obstacles program (see Appendix F) (J. Betzer, personal communication, September 3, 2014). The scales used were the CD-RISC 25 (Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale, 2015a) and the SCAS (Spence Children's Anxiety Scale [SCAS], 2015c). The researcher obtained permission to use these assessments as part of this program and study (see Appendix G).

The researcher originally planned to explore a potential relationship between student resilience and anxiety by comparing pre/post survey data for specific students and planned to remove identifying information and code student data. However, the researcher learned after the pre-test surveys had been distributed that the school administrator had decided to instruct students not to place any identifying information on the survey, for fear that results might be compromised and data would be used for diagnostic purposes. Therefore, in Chapter Four, the researcher was unable to explore a potential relationship between pre/post survey data on anxiety and resilience through use of paired data, but did examine the attendance data for relationship trends.

Students completed these assessments during their advisory period, in the form of a paper assessment, with the instruction to not provide the student's name. Any student who was not in a traditional advisory continued with normal advisory activities. Advisory teachers collected the assessments and returned them to the guidance office, where the guidance secretary input the data into a spreadsheet, excluding any identifying information, if listed. At the end of the year, 265 students from traditional advisories completed the CD-RISC and SCAS as a post-test, and utilized the same procedures. Students also completed the Overcoming Obstacles pre-survey again, which served as a post-program assessment. These surveys were administered as part of the normal school

operations and the Leadership Team decided to administer them anonymously, making comparisons of individual student growth through use of paired data impossible. Data analysis of the whole class was completed, and potential differences and relationships in student anxiety and resilience were looked at from the perspective of the freshman class in general.

Students completed an optional perception survey in December and May (see Appendix H) that contained Likert-scale items and open-ended questions designed by members of the Leadership Team. Surveys were e-mailed to students using a Google Form document, a method utilized frequently by the district. The guidance secretary e-mailed the surveys to the students at their school e-mail address through the school information system. Students completed these surveys anonymously and the guidance secretary previewed the responses and removed identifying information before sharing with the Leadership Team.

In March, parents and students were informed of the opportunity to participate in an interview regarding perceptions of the OOLSP (see Appendix I). The Leadership Team designed the interview questions based on observations and experiences working with freshman students (Leadership Team, personal communication, February 5, 2015). A school counselor other than the researcher (hereafter referred to as the interviewer) conducted the interviews and served as the contact person for all student participants. Parents of the 23 interested students were asked to contact the interviewer for more information and to obtain the consent forms prior to the interviews taking place (see Appendix B). Assent was gained from the students before conducting the interviews. Through a random sample generator, the interviewer selected ten students to interview

about their participation in the program. Students were assured of their confidentiality and efforts were made to insure students were comfortable during the interview. The interviewer recorded and transcribed each interview and removed identifying information from the transcript. Interview participants received no compensation, and their participation in the interview process was confidential, insuring that there would be no effect on their relationship with their mentors, advisory teachers, or counselors.

The researcher performed a Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis on the secondary data from the pre and post-test results, as well as the Likert-scale survey items. The researcher explored emerging themes in the open-ended response questions, as well as from the interview responses. Statistical analysis was performed using a *z*-test for difference in means to compare the December and May surveys. Attendance data was collected on all students who participated in the OOLSP for the whole year. This data was provided from the attendance secretary and was scrubbed of any identifying information before being shared with the researcher. Statistical analysis was performed using a *z*-test for difference in means to measure a possible difference in the attendance data from first semester to second semester, based upon the recommendation of Fraenkel et al. (2012).

Student Mentors

Forty-five students taking a leadership course served as mentors to the freshmen advisories. As part of this program, they implemented the selected lessons and worked with their freshmen to help them transition to high school. Student mentors were informed of this study and told their identities would be kept anonymous and their participation in activities related to this study would in no way alter their grade for the

class, if they chose to participate. Student mentor perceptions were explored during an in-class activity in December and May regarding their perceptions of the program (see Appendix J). Student names and identifying information were removed from the responses before being reviewed by the researcher. The Leadership Team conducted observations of each team using a standard observation form (see Appendix C).

In March, student mentors and their parents were informed of the opportunity to participate in an interview regarding their perceptions of the OOLSP (see Appendix I). The Leadership Team designed the interview questions based on observations and experiences working with freshman students (Leadership Team, personal communication, February 5, 2015). The interviewer contacted parents of the nine interested student mentors for more information and to obtain the consent forms prior to the interviews (see Appendix B). Assent was gained before interviewing all nine student mentors about their participation in the program (see Appendix B). Students were assured of their anonymity, and efforts were made to insure students were comfortable during the interview. The interviewer recorded and transcribed the interviews and removed identifying information from the transcript. There was no compensation for participating in the interview and participation in no way altered the grade earned in the class. Participation in the interview was confidential, insuring that there would be no effect on their relationship with their freshmen mentees, advisory teachers, classroom teachers, or counselors.

The researcher explored emerging themes in the open-ended response questions, as well as from the interview responses. Statistical analysis using a *z*-test for difference in means was used to compare the December and May perception surveys. Observation

data was considered secondary data for the purpose of this study, since the observations were completed as part of a program implemented separate from the purposes of this study. Interviews specific to the study were considered primary data, and parental consent was obtained before interviews were conducted, with student assent obtained at the beginning of each interview.

Teachers

As part of the program, 16 teachers who facilitated this program completed a voluntary teacher perception survey in December and May, using a Google Form document e-mailed to their school e-mail (see Appendix K). All responses were anonymous and the guidance secretary screened all responses to remove any identifying information before providing the information to the researcher. The surveys included both Likert-scale items and open-ended questions, and were used as secondary data, due to the fact they had been administered as part of the normal functioning of the school program. The researcher analyzed descriptive statistics to compare the December and May surveys. The researcher also explored emerging themes in the open-ended response questions.

In March, the interviewer informed teachers of the opportunity to participate in an interview regarding their perceptions of the OOLSP (see Appendix I). The Leadership Team designed the interview questions based on observations and experiences working with freshman students (Leadership Team, personal communication, February 5, 2015). The six interested teachers were asked to contact the interviewer for more information and to obtain the consent forms before the interviews took place. The interviewer gained assent before interviewing each teacher about his or her participation in the program (see

Appendix B). Teacher participants were assured of their confidentiality and efforts were made to insure they were comfortable during the interview. The interviewer recorded and transcribed the interviews, and removed identifying information from the transcript. There was no compensation for participating in the interview, and their participation was confidential to insure there was no influence on the relationship between the teacher and their freshman students, student mentors, or colleagues. The researcher explored emerging themes in the interview responses.

Parents

As part of the program, parents of the 317 freshmen in traditional advisories were contacted via e-mail in December and May regarding completing a survey through an anonymous Google Form, and in total, 535 e-mails were sent to custodial and non-custodial parents (see Appendix L) (J. Betzer, personal communication, December 5, 2014). The survey included both Likert-scale items and open-ended questions, and was used as secondary data, due to the fact they had been administered as part of the normal functioning of the school program. Data analysis was performed using a Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis on the pre- and post-test Likert-scale survey items, based upon the recommendation of Fraenkel et al. (2012). The researcher also explored emerging themes in the open-ended response questions.

In March, the interviewer informed parents of the opportunity to participate in an interview regarding their perception of the OOLSP (see Appendix I). The interviewer served as the contact person for interested parents. Parents were asked to contact the interviewer for more information and to obtain the consent forms before the interviews took place (see Appendix B). There was no compensation offered for participating in the

interview. The researcher planned to explore emerging themes in the interview responses; however, no parents consented to the interview.

Summary

The researcher presented the specific measurements, surveys, and other assessment tools utilized to complete this research study, along with a detailed description of the methods and approaches used for data collection. Special attention was given to the unique nature of this program, as well as the many contributing components of this study. Given the intricate structure of this study, consideration was given to insure that the explanations provided a clear and concise overview of the study and program, so that future researchers would be able to duplicate or adapt this study. Results from this study were presented in Chapter Four, and a thorough discussion of both the study and implications for future research were summarized in Chapter Five.

Chapter Four: Results

This study examined several variables related to the experience of freshman students who participated in the OOLSP. The researcher explored the existence of potential relationships and differences between anxiety levels, resilience levels, and attendance rates before and after participation.

Demographic Information

Of the 379 freshmen in the school of study, 273 participated in the OOLSP. . Participation was based on their placement in a traditional advisory. There was limited diversity in the class, with the majority of students identifying as Caucasian. Gender was fairly evenly divided, as seen in Table 4.

Table 2

Demographic Information

Participant:	# of students	% of population
Total freshmen enrollment:	379	
Male	185	48.8%
Female	194	51.2%
Freshmen participating in the study:	273	
Male	123	45.0%
Female	150	55.0%
Ethnicity of freshmen participating in the study:		
African American	12	4.4%
Asian	9	3.3%
Caucasian	243	89.0%
Hispanic	9	3.3%

Note. Information in this table was taken from May 20, 2015 enrollment data from the school information system.

Null H_1. There was no relationship between participating in the Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills program and student's level of anxiety, resilience, or attendance.

As stated in Chapter Three, the researcher originally planned to explore a potential relationship between student resilience and anxiety by comparing pre/post survey data for specific students, and planned to remove identifying information and code student data. However, the researcher learned after the pre-test surveys had been distributed that the school administrator instructed students not to place identifying information on the survey, for fear that results might be compromised and data would be used for diagnostic purposes. Therefore, the researcher was unable to explore a potential relationship between pre/post survey data in regards to anxiety and resilience using paired data, but did examine the attendance data for relationship trends.

Attendance. Many factors influenced student daily attendance and students had numerous reasons for missing school (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). However, nearly all researchers agreed on the importance and significance of attending daily (Bruner et al., 2011; CMHS-UCLA, 2015b; Chang & Jordan, 2012). An average daily attendance rate (ADA) of 95% or higher was typically used as the basis for state or federal funding, as well as to determine if the school had an attendance problem (Bruner et al., 2011). For that purpose, the researcher looked at student ADA rates from both eighth to ninth grade. The researcher pulled a random sample of students who had attended a district middle school for the analysis, as attendance information was not available for students who had transferred in to the district.

Looking at eighth grade data, the sample students had an ADA of 96.94%, with a standard deviation of 3.05. Twenty percent of the students had an ADA of less than 95%,

with the lowest recorded as 87.50%. The ninth grade ADA, in comparison, was 97.30%, with a standard deviation of 2.57. Fourteen percent of the students had an ADA of less than 95%, with the lowest recorded as 88.51%. A Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis resulted in $r = 0.609$, which indicated a moderately strong positive relationship between eighth and ninth grade attendance. These results indicated that students with high attendance in eighth grade were likely to have high attendance in ninth grade as well. Based on the moderately strong relationship found between eighth and ninth grade attendance, the researcher rejected this portion of the null. However, the researcher did not reject the full hypothesis, since the data could not show a relationship with the OOLSP.

Null H_2. There was no difference between student's anxiety, resilience, or attendance levels before and after participating in the Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills program.

To measure the existence of anxiety in participating students, the researcher used the SCAS. The full questionnaire contained 44 questions, but only 38 specifically targeted at identifying anxiety were included in the final scoring. Freshmen rated each item on a four-point scale to indicate the frequency with which the statement occurred: never (0 points), sometimes (1 point), often (2 points), or always (3 points). The maximum total score possible on the SCAS was 114.

Freshman students in traditional advisory classes participated in the SCAS in August and again in May. A school secretary collected student responses anonymously and entered them randomly into a spreadsheet for tabulation. Due to the anonymous nature of the data collection, the researcher could not perform a Pearson Product Moment

Correlation test on paired data. Instead, the researcher performed a *z*-test for difference in means, with a confidence level of 95%. The researcher used an online random number generator to select results included in the sample and did not sort the survey data before selection. The creators of the SCAS normed the test in several ways, including both genders combined (aged 12 to 15), male students (aged 12 to 15), and female students (aged 12 to 15) (SCAS, 2015b). The researcher compared results of this study to the three normed groups and used separate random samplings of male students, female students, and both genders combined.

In August, a total of 315 freshman students with an average age of 14 years and 2.5 months completed the SCAS. For the May administration, 273 freshman students with an average age of 14.83 years and 10 months completed the SCAS. When compared to the established norms, student scores were in the normal range for both the August and May test (SCAS, 2015b). The researcher rejected the null hypothesis due to the z-score (*z*-test value, -3.552; critical value, -1.65), indicating that levels of anxiety did change in a significant manner, even though scores remained in the normal range (see Table 5).

Male students in the normative group scored lower than the norms of both genders combined (SCAS, 2015b). Although these scores remained in the normal range of the normative scores, they resulted in a *z*-score of -2.980 (critical value, -1.65). At a 95% confidence level, this *z*-score led the researcher to reject the null hypothesis (see Table 5). Female students in the normative group scored higher than male students and both genders combined (SCAS, 2015b). Scores for both administrations placed the female students in the normal range; however, they resulted in a *z*-score of -4.032 (critical

value, -1.65) at a 95% confidence level, and therefore led the researcher to reject the null hypothesis (see Table 5). These results indicated that male and female students both exhibited a significant change in anxiety.

Table 3

SCAS Full Scale

	Both Genders Combined		Male Students		Female Students	
	August	May	August	May	August	May
Average	19.64	29.80	17.06	25.78	21.92	34.48
Std. Dev.	10.41	17.34	11.27	17.35	11.33	18.89
z-Score	-3.552		-2.980		-4.032	
Result	Reject the null		Reject the null		Reject the null	
Normed Mean	24.65		21.06		27.88	
Normed SD	15.46		14.83		15.32	

Note. Confidence level of 95%, with critical value of ±1.65.

The SCAS contained subscale groupings that identified six types of anxiety. The subscales identified separation anxiety, social phobia, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder, physical injury fears, and generalized anxiety disorder. The full survey inter-mixed the subscale questions, and they did not necessarily appear in the order listed in this study. Subscale results are listed in the following sections.

Separation anxiety.

The characterization of separation anxiety included an intense fear of being separated from a caregiver considered to be above a developmentally normal level (CMHS-UCLA, 2008; Chandler, 2015). Figueroa et al. (2012) identified "three key components of separation anxiety disorders: excessive and persistent fears or worries before and at the time of separation, behavioral and somatic symptoms before, during,

and after the separation, and persistent avoidance or attempts to escape the separation situation" (p. 2). The six questions from the SCAS that identified separation anxiety included items measuring fear of being alone, being away from parents, worrying about family members, sleeping alone, attending school, and staying away from home overnight (SCAS, 2015a).

Table 4

SCAS – Separation Anxiety

	Both Genders Combined		Male Students		Female Students	
	August	May	August	May	August	May
Average	1.62	2.32	1.34	1.86	1.86	2.78
Std. Dev.	1.56	2.07	1.41	1.92	1.62	2.16
z-Score	-1.910		-1.544		-2.109	
Result	Fail to reject the null		Fail to reject the null		Reject the null	
Normed Mean	2.84		2.31		3.32	
Normed SD	2.69		2.59		2.70	

Note. Confidence level of 95%, with critical value of ±1.65.

Results from scores of both genders combined and male students were lower than the normed mean for both the August and May administration. On the separation anxiety subscale, the researcher failed to reject the null hypotheses for both the male students and both genders combined groups (*z*-test values, -1.544; -1.910; critical value, -1.65), indicating that neither group achieved a significant change in its experience of separation anxiety (see Table 6). Similarly, female students scored below the normed average in both August and May. With a z-score of -2.109 (critical value, -1.65), the researcher rejected the null hypothesis, indicating that female students achieved a change in

separation anxiety indicators during the period studied (see Table 6). Even with that increase, scores from all groups were within the normal range.

Social phobia.

Characterizations of social anxiety disorder included an intense "fear of being judged by others and of being embarrassed" (NIMH, 2007, para. 3). This disorder was the "third most common mental disorder in adults worldwide" (Veale, 2003, p. 258). The six questions that identified social phobia included items related to feeling scared during testing, using public restroom facilities, performing poorly on school work, and talking in front of peers (SCAS, 2015a).

Table 5

SCAS – Social Phobia

	Both Genders Combined		Male Students		Female Students	
	August	May	August	May	August	May
Average	5.62	7.26	5.00	6.34	6.52	8.08
Std. Dev.	3.26	3.75	3.33	3.87	3.30	3.84
z-Score	-2.334		-1.856		-2.179	
Result	Reject the null		Fail to reject the null		Reject the null	
Normed Mean	6.08		5.23		6.85	
Normed SD	3.52		3.31		3.52	

Note. Confidence level of 95%, with critical value of ±1.65.

Results from scores of all three groups were near the normed mean for both the August and May administration. For female students and both genders combined groups, their respective z-scores led the researcher to reject the null hypothesis (*z*-test values, -2.179; -2.334; critical value, -1.65), indicating a change in behaviors characteristic of

social phobia (see Table 7). For male students, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis (*z*-test value, -1.856; critical value, -1.65) (see Table 7). When compared to the normed standards, all scores were within the normal range.

Obsessive-compulsive disorder.

A pattern of obsessions and compulsions designed to alleviate anxiety characterized obsessive-compulsive disorder (CMHS-UCLA, 2008). Obsessions included "intrusive, unwanted ideas, images, fears, thoughts or worries that [were] experienced as uncomfortable, unpleasant, distressing, or anxiety provoking" (Gomes de Alvarenga et al., 2012, p. 3). Compulsions, in contrast, were "repetitive behaviors or rituals . . . or mental acts" (AACAP, 2011, p. 1).

Table 6

SCAS Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

	Both Genders Combined		Male Students		Female Students	
	August	May	August	May	August	May
Average	2.74	5.10	2.66	4.48	2.64	5.82
Std. Dev.	2.61	3.83	2.39	3.82	2.59	4.44
z-Score	-3.609		-2.856		-4.375	
Result	Reject the null		Reject the null		Reject the null	
Normed Mean	4.10		3.89		4.29	
Normed SD	3.38		3.29		3.45	

Note. Confidence level of 95%, with critical value of ±1.65.

The six questions that identified obsessive-compulsive disorder included items related to checking that a task was performed correctly, experiencing bad or silly thoughts, requiring specific thoughts to stop bad things from happening, performing

repetitive actions, and requiring perfection to prevent negative things from happening (SCAS, 2015a).

Based upon the results from the obsessive-compulsive subtests, students in all three groups achieved an increase in those behaviors. As seen in Table 8, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis for all groups (*z*-test values, -3.609; -2.856, -4.375; critical value, -1.65), indicating that all groups achieved a change in their obsessive-compulsive behaviors; however, scores were still within the normal range.

Panic disorder.

Panic disorders consisted of episodes of intense fear accompanied by physical symptoms (Chandler, 2015). A main characteristic of a panic disorder was the existence of panic attacks, characterized by "a period of intense fear or discomfort that [struck] suddenly, often in familiar places, where there [was] seemingly nothing threatening" (APA, 2006, p. 2). The nine questions that identified panic disorder included items that included feeling out of breathe for no reason, trembling and shaking, feeling scared when riding in a car, experiencing fear in crowded places, experiencing sudden fear without stimuli, feeling dizzy or faint, and fearing the experience of fear (SCAS, 2015a).

On the panic disorder subscales, the researcher rejected the null for all groups, due to the increase from August to May (*z*-test values, -2.311; -2.043, -3.177; critical value, -1.65) (see Table 9). Female students, especially, achieved a large change on this subscale. These results indicated that students from all groups experienced a significant change in behaviors characteristic of a panic disorder. Even though students experienced this increase, their scores remained in the normal range throughout the whole year.

Table 7

SCAS Panic Disorder

	Both Genders Combined		Male Students		Female Students	
	August	May	August	May	August	May
Average	2.04	3.98	1.68	3.26	2.12	5.12
Std. Dev.	2.59	5.34	2.99	4.58	2.99	5.97
z-Score	-2.311		-2.043		-3.177	
Result	Reject the null		Reject the null		Reject the null	
Normed Mean	3.11		2.57		3.60	
Normed SD	3.89		3.77		3.94	

Note. Confidence level of 95%, with critical value of ±1.65.

Generalized anxiety disorder.

Students who experienced excessive and uncontrolled anxieties across many areas of their lives often had generalized anxiety disorder (Turgeon, Kirouac, & Denis, 2005). Generalized anxiety disorder was characterized by a "pervasive and uncontrollable state of worry" (Allgulander, 2012, p. 88) that was excessive, unrealistic, and persistent (ADAA, 2015c). The six questions that identified generalized anxiety disorder included items such as worrying about general things, experiencing a strange feeling in their stomach, feeling afraid for no reason, having a rapid heartbeat, worrying that something might happen, and feeling shaky (SCAS, 2015a).

Similar to the results from the panic disorder subscale, students in all three groups experienced a significant change in behaviors characteristic of generalized anxiety disorder (see Table 10). These scores led the researcher to reject the null in all groups, with students from the both genders combined and female student groups showing

especially strong changes (*z*-test values, -4.350; -4.352; critical value, -1.65). All of the scores, though, were still within the normal range.

Table 8

SCAS Generalized anxiety Disorder

	Both Genders Combined		Male Students		Female Students	
	August	May	August	May	August	May
Average	4.72	7.64	4.20	6.28	5.48	8.62
Std. Dev.	2.91	3.75	2.93	3.41	3.37	3.83
z-Score	-4.350		-3.271		-4.352	
Result	Reject the null		Reject the null		Reject the null	
Normed Mean	5.59		4.80		6.31	
Normed SD	3.28		3.02		3.34	

Note. Confidence level of 95%, with critical value of ±1.65.

Physical injury fears.

Physical symptoms were present in many types of anxiety, including separation anxiety (Figueroa et al., 2012), panic disorder (APA, 2006), obsessive-compulsive disorder (Rector et al., 2008), and generalized anxiety disorder (Allgulander, 2012). The five questions that identified physical injury fears included items related to being afraid of the dark, afraid of animals, fear of going to the doctor, fear of high places or elevators, and a fear of insects (SCAS, 2015a).

On the physical injury fear scale, the female students and both genders combined groups did not experience a significant change in behaviors. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis due to their respective z-score (*z*-test values, -1.520; -1.403; critical value, -1.65) (see Table 11).

Table 9

SCAS Physical Injury Fears

	Both Genders Combined		Male Students		Female Students	
	August	May	August	May	August	May
Average	2.90	3.50	2.18	3.56	3.30	4.06
Std. Dev.	1.73	2.48	2.09	2.79	2.33	2.66
z-Score	-1.403		-2.799		-1.520	
Result	Fail to reject the null		Reject the null		Fail to reject the null	
Normed Mean	2.91		2.26		3.50	
Normed SD	2.56		2.42		2.55	

Note. Confidence level of 95%, with critical value of ±1.65.

Male students, though, did experience a significant increase, which led the researcher to reject the null (*z*-test values, -2.799; critical value, -1.65). Scores for all groups were still within the normal range.

Resilience

Cicchetti (2010) stated that "resilience has been conceptualized as a dynamic developmental process encompassing the attainment of positive adaptation within the context of significant threat, severe adversity, or trauma" (p. 145). In the face of adversity, researchers often wondered how to predict whether someone would succeed or fail (Catterall, 1998). Many assessments, such as the CD-RISC existed to measure a person's resilience. The CD-RISC was available in several forms, including the full twenty-five item version used in this study. Students rated each item on a four-point scale, with a potential total score of 100. Students could choose from the following responses, which earned the noted points: not true, 0 points; rarely true, 1 point; sometimes true, 2 points; often true, 3 points; and true nearly all the time, 4 points. The

CD-RISC was originally normed in the general population with a mean of 80.7 (CD-RISC, 2015a). Although the developers originally normed the scale with adults, several studies successfully used this scale with adolescents (CD-RISC, 2015b). Unfortunately, many studies looked at specific groups of adolescents, such as those who had trauma experience, those with a mental health diagnosis, and those from a specific ethnicity (CD-RISC, 2015c).

While this researcher did not find a prior study with a population matched to this research, three studies had comparable populations. Bruwer, Emsley, Kidd, Lochner, and Seedat (2008) studied South African adolescents with an average age of 16.2, and found a mean score of 65.9, with a standard deviation of 18.6. Fyncham, Altes, Stein, and Seedat (2009) reported similar findings in their study on South African adolescents, who had an average age of 16.7, with a mean score of 63.7 and a standard deviation of 15.9. Lim, Broekman, Wong, Wong, and Ng (2011) studied Singaporean youth, and found a mean score of 71.13. These scores offered a guideline for analyzing the results from this study, but were not used as a direct comparison, due to the significant difference in the study population.

In this study, freshman students in traditional advisory classes took the CD-RISC in August and again in May. A school secretary collected student responses anonymously and entered the data into a spreadsheet for tabulation. Due to the anonymous nature of the data collection, the researcher could not perform a Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis on paired data. Instead, the researcher performed a z-test for difference in means, with a confidence level of 95%. The researcher used an

online random number list generator to select results that were included in the sample and did not sort the survey data before selection.

In August, a total of 315 freshman students with an average age of 14 years, 2.5 months completed the CD-RISC. In May, 273 freshman students with an average age of 14.83 years, 10 months completed the CD-RISC. Results from this study were analyzed in three independent sample groups: scores from both genders combined, scores from male students, and scores from female students (see Table 12).

Table 10

CD-RISC

	Both Genders Combined		Male Students		Female Students	
	August	May	August	May	August	May
Average	70.32	69.62	67.00	71.92	65.58	69.50
Std. Dev.	15.99	13.52	15.95	15.04	14.55	14.98
z-Score	0.236		-1.587		-1.327	
Result	Fail to reject the null		Fail to reject the null		Fail to reject the null	

Note. Confidence level of 95%, with critical value of ±1.65.

Results from all three groups were comparable to the mean scores reported in the previously mentioned study. All three groups achieved changes in results from the August to May administration; however, none of the changes proved statistically significant. Based upon the computed z-scores, the researcher failed to reject the null for all three groups (*z*-test values, 0.236; -1.587, -1.327; critical value, -1.65).

Due to the impact attendance had on student achievement, the researcher examined the average daily attendance rate of students in the study. Of the 273 students who completed the program, 35 freshmen who did not attend a district middle school were excluded from the attendance population, due to an inability to obtain their

attendance rates from eighth grade. Samples were pulled from the remaining 238 students. The researcher examined the average daily attendance rate for three separate sample groups: both genders combined, male students, and female students (see Table 13). Based upon the results, the researcher failed to reject the null for all three groups (*z*-test values, -0.638; -1.214, -0.561; critical value, -1.65), indicating that there was not a significant change in student attendance from eighth to ninth grade.

Table 11

Average Daily Attendance Rate from Eioghth and Ninh Grade

	Both Genders Combined		Male Students		Female Students	
	8th grade	9th grade	8th grade	9th grade	8th grade	9th grade
Average	96.94%	97.30%	96.75%	97.42%	96.27%	96.87%
Std. Dev.	3.05	2.57	3.06	2.42	5.81	4.84
z-Score	-0.638		-1.214		-0.561	
Result	Fail to reject the null		Fail to reject the null		Fail to reject the null	

Note. Confidence level of 95%, with critical value of ±1.65.

In summary, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis, which stated that there was no difference between student's anxiety, resilience, or attendance levels before and after participation in the OOLSP. Although a few subscales and subgroups did produce results that would suggest there was a difference, the majority of the data did not support that claim and instead indicated no statistically significant change. Overall, the data suggested there was no difference in students' anxiety, resilience, or attendance during the period studied.

RQ_1. How do students perceive participating in Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills program as influencing their anxiety and resilience?

Freshman students completed a perception survey in August and May regarding their participation in the OOLSP. The survey also looked at their perception of working with the leadership mentor students. Both the August and May surveys asked the same questions, and a few questions explored their levels of anxiety regarding their experiences during freshman year, and their ability to seek resources (resilience), when needed. Students were asked to respond on a Likert scale that ranged from 1 to 5, with 1 equaling 'not at all' and 5 equaling 'very much' (see Appendix H). Results from these surveys are summarized in Table 14.

Table 12

Freshman Perception Survey

	August		May			
	Average	Standard Deviation	Average	Standard Deviation	z-score	Results
I enjoy working with my mentors.	3.80	1.14	3.44	1.33	1.273	Fail to reject null
I liked the lessons from Overcoming Obstacles.	2.00	0.88	2.72	1.16	-3.497	Reject null
The mentors care about me and want me to be successful.	4.04	0.99	3.62	1.35	1.808	Fail to reject null
I feel anxious about high school.	2.94	1.15	2.42	1.11	2.301	Reject null
I know where to get help if I need it.	3.22	1.15	4.00	0.86	-3.841	Reject null

Note. Confidence level of 95%, with critical value of ±1.65.

The question that specifically explored the perception of anxiety was ‘I feel anxious about high school’ (see Table 14). On the August survey, student answers generated an average score of 2.84, with a standard deviation of 1.15. In May, student responses decreased to an average of 2.42, with a standard deviation of 1.11. When analyzed, these scores resulted in a z-score of 2.301 (critical value, 1.65). With a confidence level of 95%, the results led the researcher to reject the null, indicating that students’ perceptions of their anxiety levels decreased throughout the year.

The question that specifically explored students’ perceptions of their resilience was ‘I know where to get help if I need it’ (see Table 14). On the August survey, student answers generated an average score of 3.22, with a standard deviation of 1.15. In May, student responses decreased to an average of 4.00, with a standard deviation of 0.86. When compared, these scores resulted in a z-score of -3.841 (critical value, 1.65). At a confidence level of 95%, the results led the researcher to reject the null, indicating that students’ perceptions of their resilience increased throughout the year.

In August, freshman students took a pre-survey designed by OOLSP to assess areas of need. The researcher administered this survey at the conclusion of the program as well, to explore growth (see table 15). The survey offered thirteen statements, which students rated on a four point Likert scale with the following values: never (1 point), sometimes (2 points), often (3 points), and always (4 points).

Table 13

OOLSP Program Survey

	August		May			
	Average	Standard Deviation	Average	Standard Deviation	z-score	Result
1. I can identify five of my personal strengths.	2.96	0.81	3.04	0.92	-0.46	Fail to reject
2. My decisions affect others.	2.52	0.81	2.48	0.95	0.23	Fail to reject
3. I break my long-term goals into medium-range and short-term goals.	2.28	0.64	2.42	0.81	-0.96	Fail to reject
4. I consider the consequences of my decisions.	3.08	0.72	3.12	0.75	-0.27	Fail to reject
5. I prefer to resolve conflicts by talking instead of fighting.	3.22	0.95	3.26	0.85	-0.22	Fail to reject
6. It is hard for me to control my anger.	1.88	0.85	1.80	0.76	0.50	Fail to reject
7. Cooperation reduces problems at home and school.	2.96	0.81	3.00	0.83	-0.24	Fail to reject
8. I can list three ways to manage my stress.	2.84	0.84	2.82	1.04	0.11	Fail to reject
9. I prepare for exams at least one week in advance.	2.18	0.83	2.34	0.92	-0.91	Fail to reject
10. I am confident when I communicate with people.	2.60	0.83	2.62	0.90	-0.12	Fail to reject
11. I have strategies to deal with negative peer pressure.	2.82	0.83	2.98	0.96	-0.89	Fail to reject
12. I show respect to people whom I don't agree with.	2.88	0.80	2.92	0.83	-0.25	Fail to reject
13. I am prepared for the changes of high school.	3.40	0.73	3.20	0.81	1.30	Fail to reject
Total	35.62	5.37	36.00	5.67	-0.34	Fail to reject

Note. Confidence level of 95%, with critical value of ±1.65.

Samples taken from the August and May administrations were compared, and on all items the z-scores (z-test values, -0.46, 0.23, -0.96, -0.27, -0.22, 0.50, -0.24, 0.11, -0.91, -0.12, -0.89, -0.25, 1.30, -0.34; critical value, ±1.65), with a confidence level of 95%, led the researcher to fail to reject the null. These results indicated there was not significant growth made by students on the variables explored through the survey.

Ten freshmen volunteered to be interviewed in May (see Appendix I). The researcher used the responses from the interview to further explore student perception of how participation influenced anxiety and resilience levels as students transitioned to high school. Several themes emerged from the interview, including student relationships with their mentors, relationships with their teachers, and positive and negative aspects of the program. These themes are discussed below.

Relationships with mentors.

All 10 students mentioned their relationship with the mentors in their advisory. Seven students noted positive interactions, and one of the students said, “My mentors really made the activities fun and memorable,” while another stated, “We’re friends. They’re nice and they talk with us about stuff we need to know,” while a third commented, “The mentors were the best part! It helps so much to know a senior. We’re really close.” Finally, another student stated, “My mentors made my freshman year great!” Other students did not have such positive relationships, and two freshmen noted some negative interactions. One student felt that the mentors belittled them, saying, “They treat us like we’re little kids,” while another simply said, “They don’t really care – they’re just there to get the lesson done and leave.”

Relationships with teachers.

Students reported several positive interactions with teachers. One student said, "My teacher really tried to get to know us," while another stated, "you can tell they care." Two students mentioned feeling a personal connection to their teacher, "I know I can go to my teacher at any time – she really cares." Another student summarized the year by saying, "it started off rough, but now we're family. My teacher is like the mom – she's tough, but she wants what is best for us."

Only two students discussed negative relationships with their teachers. One stated, "My teacher didn't care what we did, and only wanted us to be quiet. I didn't get along with her at all!" The other said simply, "I didn't like my teacher at all!"

Positive aspects of the program

When asked specifically about their transitions to high school, every student mentioned anxiety, but felt that their mentors helped them make a smooth transition. One student commented, "Being a freshman is hard – it was nice to learn how to make it not so hard." Another said, "The activities were really helpful, especially the goal setting ones, since everything at high school matters." Two students discussed the struggles they had transitioning, saying, "I came from a small school, so I was really scared. But my mentors helped me fix it, and made this year good." Another simply said, "This year made me develop a thick skin – which apparently I needed."

Negative aspects of the program

The students noted a few negative aspects of the program, although all agreed the mentors were helpful. Four students felt their time could be better spent on homework, with one student saying, "I didn't like the lessons taking up all that time. I mean, they were okay, but I had homework that needed to get done." Three students expressed that

they would have preferred their teacher to deliver the lessons, instead of the mentors, with one specifically saying, “I didn’t like the lessons, but I guess the topics were helpful. Maybe if our teacher had done them, they would have been better.” Three students wished the lessons could have been more personal, and one said, “Sometimes it felt like the mentors were just going through the motions. I think it would have been better if they had designed the lessons instead.”

Mentors Perception

Mentor students were also interviewed regarding their perceptions of the program and how well the freshmen transitioned. Their responses were similar to the freshmen noted above, with the majority of the mentors noting positive relationships with their freshman mentees. One student noted, “We’ve gotten really close. It’s cool that they look up to us and know they can come to us if they need help.” Three mentors discussed mixed reactions with the freshmen, with one saying, “My relationship with my freshmen was weird and a little rocky at first – they didn’t want to participate . . . but now we laugh and get along pretty well.”

In regards to the program itself, the mentors had mixed reactions when discussing its effectiveness. One mentor commented, “Some of the lessons seemed really mature,” while another noted, “my freshmen didn’t take the lessons seriously.” Others felt they had merit, and, as one mentor put it, “They didn’t always like them, but they were getting something out of it. They were completely different by the end of the year – more mature and less helpless.” Every mentor felt the program was worth continuing, but several suggested offering more individual time to build relationships. As one said, “I liked the lessons, but it would be nice to just talk sometimes.”

Overall, feedback from both the mentors and the freshmen supported the idea that participating in the OOLSP was a positive experience for the freshmen. While they still experienced stress, the development of positive relationships with their mentors, along with skills learned, provided a buffer and built their resilience. Although not every freshman developed a close relationship with his or her teachers or mentors, they all felt their transition was aided by the things they experienced in this program.

RQ_2. How do teachers perceive Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills program as influencing their student's anxiety and resilience?

Teachers who facilitated the implementation of the OOLSP completed a perception survey in both August and May (see Appendix K). Teachers rated statements on a scale of 'not at all' (1 point) to 'very much' (5 points). Survey results are summarized in Table 16.

Only one statement, "I think my students benefit from working with the mentors," changed significantly from August to May. That result indicated that teachers achieved an increase in the value of freshmen working with the mentors as the year progressed.

In March, teachers from traditional freshman advisories were contacted with the opportunity to participate in an interview. Of the available 16 teachers, six teachers consented to the interview. While reviewing results from the interviews with the teachers, three main themes emerged from their responses: relationships with their students, positive aspects of the programs, and negative aspects of the program. These themes are discussed separately below.

Table 14

Teacher Perception Survey

	Average August	Std. Dev. August	Average May	Std. Dev. May	z-score	Results
I enjoy working with the mentors on OOLSP lessons.	3.54	1.13	4.08	0.95	-1.319	Not significant
My students enjoyed the OOLSP lessons.	2.46	1.45	2.77	1.30	-0.518	Not significant
I think the mentors are a valuable program.	3.62	0.77	4.23	0.83	-1.943	Not significant
I think my students benefit from working with the mentors.	3.38	0.87	4.15	0.90	-2.215	Significant
My students enjoy working with the mentors.	3.69	1.11	4.08	1.04	-0.924	Not significant

Note. Confidence level of 95%, with critical value of ±1.65.

Relationships with students

All six teachers discussed the relationships they built with their freshman students. The majority of the comments were positive, with one teacher noting, “I really feel like we became a family,” and another stating, “I know so much more about my students than I normally do after freshman year.” Two teachers felt that the program allowed them more opportunity for conversation, with one observing, “Because of the lessons, we talked about a lot of topics that don’t typically come up, but really gave everyone a chance to share their thoughts and get to know one another.” Only one teacher had a negative experience, saying, “I wish that I had gotten to know my freshmen

better. While I think the mentors were great, my freshmen really latched on to them, and they'll be gone after this year."

Positive aspects of the program

Every teacher interviewed noted positive aspects of the program. One reported, "My students needed to hear the topics [discussed]," with another saying, "The information in OOLSP was really helpful, even if my kids didn't always like the lessons." Two teachers felt the program was helpful as the students transitioned to high school, with one noting, "Doing the lessons together helped my advisory become a team." Yet another said, "The activities really gave a lot of opportunity to collaborate and problem-solve, which really brought my class together."

Negative aspects of the program

Each teacher commented on some negative aspects of the program. Two teachers felt the time commitment was intrusive, with one observing, "My freshmen really grew to resent the lesson and the amount of time they took away from doing homework." Three teachers felt the effectiveness wore off as the year progressed, with one stating, "The mentors and freshmen both seemed to lose interest and just seemed to go through the motions second semester." A few commented on the delivery of the lessons, and one suggested that the teachers should deliver the lessons, commenting, "Several of the lesson plans seemed over the heads of the mentors. If a teacher had been doing the lesson, I think it would have been a lot better." Three teachers had concerns about classroom management, with one mentioning, "The mentors tried – and usually succeeded – in keeping the kids on task, but they weren't teachers, so it didn't always work."

RQ3. How do parents perceive Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills program as influencing their student's anxiety and resilience?

Parents were surveyed via e-mail in both August and May regarding their perceptions of how well their students transitioned to high school (see Appendix L). Teachers rated statements on a scale of 'not at all' (1 point) to 'very much' (5 points). Survey results are summarized in Table 17. For all statements, parents did not indicate a significant change from August to May. As part of the May survey, parents were invited to participate in an interview. Unfortunately, no parents volunteered to be interviewed.

Table 15

Parent Perception Survey

	Average August	Std. Dev. August	Average May	Std. Dev. May	z-score	Results
My student has adjusted well to high school	3.90	1.05	4.08	1.05	-0.85	Not significant
My student has discussed the activities that the mentors do using the OOLSP.	1.94	1.25	2.22	1.36	-1.07	Not significant
I feel that there are sufficient supports in place to help my student succeed at school.	3.30	0.97	3.46	1.03	-0.8	Not significant
My student feels that there are people who care about him/her at school.	3.32	1.02	3.42	1.13	-0.46	Not significant
I think the mentors are a valuable program.	2.66	1.17	2.76	1.30	-0.40	Not significant

Note. Confidence level of 95%, with critical value of ±1.65.

One parent responded back, indicating the feeling that they were not adequately informed about the program and would, therefore, not be able to make an appropriate contribution to the study. The lack of parental participation is explored further in Chapter Five. Also included in the May survey was two open-ended questions for parent response, regarding positive and negative experiences their students had during freshman year. These comments are discussed below, in place of interview responses. Parents noted three main positive experiences of their freshman students' transition: friendship, teachers, and extracurricular activities. Negative experiences fell in two main categories: peers and teachers.

Positive experience – Friendships

Many parents discussed the friends their students made during freshman year, with one stating, "We came from a small school, so we were worried. But, everything has turned out fine and everyone was so welcoming – my son has tons of friends and loves school." A few parents commented on the flexibility to meet students of other grades, saying, "Having classes with upperclassmen has really helped my son mature," while another said, "My daughter has made some great older friends that have helped her adjust to high school." Several parents talked about the variety of friends their student had been exposed to, with one commenting, "My kid was pretty sheltered up until now, but he's really become more open to others, and branched out in his friend choices," and another said, "Because the school's so big, she's been able to let go of some old, bad friends, and make some new good friends."

Positive experience - Teachers

Parents mentioned teachers as positively influencing their students' transitions in several comments. One parent noted, "The feedback from the teachers was really helpful for when my son was absent." Another said, "The teachers have really helped my kid mature this year, and he's starts self-advocating for himself – it's incredible!" Yet another noted, "My daughter has really bonded with her advisory teacher." Several parents mentioned specific teachers making a difference in how a student learned, such as one parent who said, "My son has struggled in math until this year, but [teacher] has made all the difference. He finally gets it!" A few parents noted that the increased rigor has been positive, with one commenting, "It's nice to see my daughter be challenged and succeed."

Positive experience – Extracurricular activities

Several parents noted participation in extracurricular activities as a positive influence on the transition to high school, especially participation in football and band. One parent said, "Being in band made all the difference, probably because of the summer practices," and another commented, "Because of band camp in the summer, my son knew so many people from different grades, and really felt comfortable starting school." Several parents commented on how welcoming members of different clubs were, with one noting, "My daughter was really nervous about joining student council, but the upperclassmen made her feel right at home." Many parents discussed athletic participation, with one saying, "The wrestling team welcomed my son with open arms," and another commenting "The football team made him feel like part of the family."

Negative experiences – Peers

Unfortunately, not all peer interactions were positive. One parent commented that her daughter "sits in the bathroom by herself during lunch and no one even knows." Bullying was a concern for some parents, with one parent referencing "one incidence of bullying by an upperclassman" and another noting, "He's a young freshman and small in stature so there was some bullying." Another said simply, "Bullying – it never stops." A few parents cited inappropriate conversation topics as a negative, with one parent stating, "He came from a private school, and all anyone seemed to talk about was drugs and drinking." Yet another parent expressed frustration that her son was not in classes with friends, saying, "All of his friends ended up in classes together without him – now they all have other friends and have left him behind."

Negative experience – Teachers

Several parents referred to negative interactions their students had with a teacher. A few parents talked about specific teacher styles, with one saying, "My son's math teacher wouldn't help him until he viewed her video online, but that's not how he learns." Another commented that one teacher seemed to have a "thin the herd mentality, and was really just out to make the students feel inferior." Others commented on teacher attitudes, noting, "Some of his teachers just don't seem to care," and another simply said, "I haven't met one positive teacher." A few parents commented on the pace the teachers set, saying, "Sometimes they move too fast." Another simply said, "I don't think the teachers realize they are still freshmen – they don't have great study skills yet, so teach them!"

Summary

Based upon the results from the collected data, the researcher failed to reject both null hypotheses (NH_1 and NH_2) for this study. While a few scales used in this research did generate results that led to a rejection of the null hypothesis, such as the anxiety scale, overall results were not significantly different enough to warrant a complete rejection of the null. The researcher explored several emerging themes found in the responses to the research questions. Based on survey results, none of the studied groups achieved significant changes from the beginning of the program to the end. Students developed relationships with both their mentors and teachers, and they found both positive and negative aspects to the implemented program. Teachers similarly developed relationships with their freshman students, and they found positive and negative aspects of the program as well. Parents indicated no significant change in their students from the beginning of the program to the end. They identified several positive experiences with friends, teachers, and extracurricular activities. They also identified negative experiences with friends and teachers. Implications from these results are discussed at length in Chapter Five, along with suggestions for future researchers.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Reflection

Although many educators viewed transition as a one-time event, in truth, it proved to be more of a process that occurred over time (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009). In order to assist students as they transition from middle school to high school, many schools established programs to help ease the transition. This study looked at how one school implemented the OOLSP, specifically as it related to student-perceived experience of anxiety and resilience. Attendance rates were explored, due to the high correlation found in research between attendance and achievement. The researcher utilized data from two surveys, the CD-RISC and SCAS, which were administered to freshmen during their advisory period. Perception surveys were also completed by freshman students, mentor students, advisory teachers, and parents. Lastly, interviews were conducted with freshman students, mentor students, and teachers.

Results from these data showed significant change in students' levels of anxiety from the beginning of the year to the end. Students' levels of resilience, however, did not change during that time. Attendance rates remained fairly consistent from middle school to freshman year. Perceptions from freshman students, mentor students, teachers, and parents all suggested that relationships formed during the program had more impact than the program itself. These results are explored further in the next section.

Triangulation of Results

This study looked at three variables: anxiety, resilience, and attendance. Based on the literature review and personal observations, the researcher found these variables were related to one another, especially during times of transition, such as moving from middle school to high school. Research showed that school programs helped students

successfully transition and often eased anxiety, increased attendance, and increased student self-esteem (an important component of resilience) (Habeeb, 2013; Nield, 2009; Skola & Williamson, 2012; Srikala & Kumar, 2010). The specific program implemented in this study and the surveys used were chosen based on availability, since the school of study was faced with financial difficulties.

Results from the study were examined for three separate groups (both genders combined, male students, and female students) and generated results that appeared mixed on the effectiveness of the program. Student scores from the full-scale SCAS indicated that student levels of anxiety significantly changed from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. Three subscales, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Panic Disorder, and Generalized Anxiety Disorder, showed a significant change in all groups, with levels increasing on all three subscales. Other subscales showed no change or changed in only one or two subgroups.

Resilience, however, did not generate the same results. The researcher used the same three groups for analysis, with regard to resilience. Based on the results previously discussed, students achieved no significant increase or decrease in their levels of resilience from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. Likewise, attendance achieved no significant increase or decrease, indicating that students attended school at a similar rate during both their eighth and ninth grade years. Attendance rates had a moderately strong relationship when comparing ninth grade rates to eighth grade rates, indicating that eighth grade attendance was predictive of ninth grade attendance rates. Given the mixed results, the researcher failed to reject the null hypotheses, indicating that

there was no difference between students' anxiety, resilience, nor attendance levels before and after participating in the OOLSP.

Student perceptions of their own anxiety rates were inconsistent with the results from the various surveys. Students indicated through their perception survey that they still felt anxious about school; however, unlike the survey, which indicated an increase in anxiety, student perception of levels of anxiety decreased from the pre-to-post-test. Similarly, student perception of their own resilience conflicted with the results from the survey. On the student perception survey, the ability to ask for help changed significantly from the beginning of the year to the end, indicating an increase in resilience. However, the survey data did not show such an increase. Both teachers and parents indicated no significant change in anxiety or resilience levels of their freshman students from the beginning of the year to the end. An interesting theme that emerged from the interviews was the focus on relationships. Many responses pointed to developed relationships as the key factor in a successful transition, instead of the activities completed through the OOLSP.

Discussion

Based upon the results summarized in Chapter Four, the researcher did not recommend the continued use of the program for the research school, although there would have been justification to do so. While students experienced some change in their experience of anxiety and resilience, the researcher found that these changes were not significant enough overall to warrant the continuation of the program, as it was currently being implemented. Students' perception of their anxiety levels, as reported through the freshman perception survey, indicated a decrease in anxiety during the year. On the

contrary, results from the SCAS indicated an increase in student anxiety. Meanwhile, results from the CD-RISC indicated that student resilience did not significantly change during the year; however, results from the student perception survey showed an increase in student's perceived resilience. The inconsistency of these findings led the researcher to conclude that the program did not significantly impact student transition. Attendance rates remained flat, further suggesting that the program made minimal impact.

While exploring the research questions, the results indicated clearly that the relationships formed through the program had the greatest impact, not the program itself. Specifically looking at results from the student perception survey, freshmen showed a decrease in how much they enjoyed the lessons (see Table 14). There was also no significant change in their results measured by the OOLSP survey, indicating that they did not learn the intended skills. One potential cause could be that the program was originally designed for teachers to implement, and this school chose to use student mentors as the instructors. Student mentors were given only minimal instruction in classrooms management and lesson implementation and therefore, might not have delivered the lessons as effectively as a licensed teacher.

Freshman students and mentor students, along with teachers and parents, cited relationships as the most positive aspect of the program. Based on the research conducted regarding mentoring programs, these results were not surprising. Overwhelmingly, relationships were the focus of the interviews, even when the questions were not directly related to relationships. Freshman students and mentor students, especially, seem to have formed strong relationships, with only a few students noting less positive relationship development. Teachers also discussed the relationships they

formed, many citing very positive experiences. Although all agreed that the lessons were not as effective, the opportunity to collaborate and get to know one another seemed a beneficial use of time.

Unfortunately, parents appeared unaware of the program, and none consented to the interview. While parent survey comments indicated that freshmen did communicate at home regarding events at school, those conversations appeared to exclude mention of the advisory activities. The researcher speculated this was due to lack of communication at home about the specific lessons and activities completed by the freshmen. Although parents were informed of the program at the beginning of the year, they were not updated regarding program progress along the way. Therefore, they were not knowledgeable about the program nor the intended outcomes.

Recommendations for Future Research

As with many educational research studies, this study had many limitations that future researchers should address or explore. One limitation was the curriculum used, as well as the manner in which it was implemented. The curriculum was originally intended to be delivered by the classroom teacher. Given the nature of the school of study and the design of the advisory period, the Leadership Team from this study was unable to require that teachers deliver the lessons. Student mentors, on the other hand, were completing this program as part of a class, and therefore, could be delegated the task of delivering the lessons. Although training in lesson delivery was provided, mentors were not as competent in their delivery as a certified teacher may have been.

The researcher recommends that future researchers should study the effectiveness of this program when implemented by certified staff. With the flexible nature of the

curriculum and the minimal cost associated with its use, the researcher would be imprudent to dismiss the usefulness of this program. However, serious reflection should be given to the implementation methods and the reliability of using students in place of teachers. The researcher also suggests that future research explore a comparison between the program and other mentoring opportunities, to explore whether the program itself was effective or if the relationships drove improvement.

Another limitation was the population studied, which included sample size and geographic location. This study looked specifically at general education freshmen in a suburban, Midwestern high school. The researcher suggested that future researchers investigate transition programs in other settings, such as rural and urban schools. Furthermore, research into general education students was found to be limited and future researchers were encouraged to continue to investigate the effectiveness of transition programs in the general population.

This study made use of self-reported data through surveys. This method was inherently flawed, since students had the potential to be less than honest when completing anonymous surveys. Similarly, since surveys were administered during advisory, students could have rushed through them in order to move on to more desirable activities. The researcher recommends that future researchers consider utilizing other methods of data collection, such as open-ended questionnaires or focus groups, in order to gather more authentic responses.

The two surveys that the researcher selected for this study were the CD-RISC and SCAS. The researcher chose these surveys based largely on ease of administration and minimal cost. Other measurement tools existed that could have been used instead, and

future researchers should consider utilizing other assessments to explore both anxiety and resilience. In future studies, the researcher encourages others to consider comparing different assessments measuring the same variable, especially as they apply to general education students.

Resilience and anxiety were the main variables studied, and the researcher chose those variables based on observations made through working as a school counselor. However, as explored in the literature review, there are several other variables that affect student transition, such as puberty (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009), parental involvement (Chen & Gregory, 2010), peer relations (Benner, 2011), and mental health (DeWit et al., 2011). The researcher recommends that future studies investigate how other variables changed throughout school transitions, as well as what potential influence they might have over a student's transition. Furthermore, the researcher suggests that future research projects investigate how these variables interact and develop among students in the general education population.

Several subscales of the SCAS measured significant changes from the pretest to posttest; however, this study was not designed to investigate potential causes of those increases. In future studies, the researcher advises others to delve more deeply into those results, and explore the reasons behind increases, such as those seen: generalized anxiety disorder scale, panic disorder scale, and obsessive-compulsive disorder scale. The researcher also suggests that future studies examine in more detail the differences between genders, as several subscales showed marked differences in male and female student measures, as well as those for the both genders combined sample.

Time was a limitation in this study. Program implementation was limited to twenty minutes weekly, meaning that many lessons were spread across several meeting times. Although the program allowed for this flexibility, the researcher speculated that this led to the program being less than effective. For future studies, the researcher recommends that others attempt to limit the number of sessions over which a lesson is spread, in order to make the activities more impactful and consistent.

The researcher was interested in the focus on relationships that emerged while exploring themes. Every group discussed the impact of the mentoring relationship, and cited that as the most memorable part of the program. Based on those responses, the researcher suggested that future research look more specifically at the role that mentors play in student transition, especially as it related to mental health concerns. The researcher also suggested that future research explore how those relationships could be expanded to begin before students start their transition and continue as they move through high school.

Conclusion

Transitions often proved to be a tumultuous time in a student's life. Not only were students faced with the onset of adolescence (Queen, 2013), but they were also charged with adapting to a completely new environment, both socially and academically (Cook, Fowler, Harris, 2008). Simultaneously, many students faced a myriad of emotional concerns, such as anxiety (ADAA, 2015c). The experiences of students during their first year of high school often determined their success in the later grades (Williams & Richman, 2007). Resilience was one skill that allowed children to handle any obstacle they encountered (National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 2010).

Furthermore, resilience was linked to higher academic performance and successful transitions (Ahern et al., 2008; Bowes et al., 2010; Langenkamp, 2010). Students developed their resilience through many methods, such as mentoring, which helped foster a sense of belonging in their mentees (Andrews & Clark, 2011).

Being able to successfully transition often affected students for many years, and research indicated that successful early school transitions predicted success in post-secondary settings (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009). Schools had the responsibility to assist students in being successful, and numerous programs existed to help meet this responsibility. One such program was the OOLSP, which was used in this study. Although the program did not have the desired result on the school of study, students who participated in the OOLSP still made gains throughout the year, based largely on the relationships they developed throughout the program. The mentoring relationship provided students with the experience of a successful relationship, which for many, was a novel experience (Grossman et al., 2012). As previous research indicated and this study confirmed, relationships were a powerful component of student success. When students felt connected to the school, they were more likely to attend and engage, and in the end, they were more likely to succeed.

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Appendix A: Schedule of Lessons

SCHEDULE OF LESSONS		
Week	Lesson Topic:	Content:
1	What is Overcoming Obstacles?	Starter & Part I
2	What is Overcoming Obstacles?	Part II
3	What is Overcoming Obstacles?	Part III & Conclusion
4	Setting Expectations	Starter & Part I
5	Setting Expectations	Part II
6	Setting Expectations	Part III & Conclusion
7	Giving & Earning Respect	Starter & Part I
8	Giving & Earning Respect	Part II
9	Giving & Earning Respect	Part III & Conclusion
10	Identifying Strengths	Starter & Part I
11	Identifying Strengths	Part II, Part III, Conclusion
12	Understanding Non-Verbal Skills	Starter & Part I
13	Understanding Non-Verbal Skills	Part II
14	Understanding Non-Verbal Skills	Part III & Conclusion
15	Listening	Starter, Part 1, Part II
16	Listening	Part III & Conclusion
17	Starting the Decision Making Process	Starter, Part 1, Part II
18	Starting the Decision Making Process	Part III & Conclusion
19	Gathering Information	Starter, Part 1, Part II
20	Gathering Information	Part III & Conclusion
21	Identifying Goals	Starter, Part 1, Part II
22	Identifying Goals	Part III & Conclusion
23	Setting Priorities	Starter, Part 1, Part II
24	Setting Priorities	Part III & Conclusion
25	Introducing Conflict Resolution	Starter, Part 1, Part II
26	Introducing Conflict Resolution	Part III & Conclusion
27	Uncovering Stereotypes	Starter & Part I
28	Uncovering Stereotypes	Part II
29	Uncovering Stereotypes	Part III & Conclusion
30	Problem Solving Techniques	Starter, Part 1, Part II
31	Problem Solving Techniques	Part III & Conclusion

Appendix B: Consent form for Freshman Students

Lindenwood University
School of Education
209 S. Kingshighway
St. Charles, Missouri 63301

Informed Consent for Parents to Sign for
Student Participation in Research Activities

A Mixed-Method Program Implementation: Investigating 9th Grade Students Participating in the *Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills Program* within a Large St. Louis County School District.

Principal Investigator: Jennifer Gross
Telephone: 314-467-7101 E-mail: grossj@mehlvilleschooldistrict.net

Participant _____ Parent Contact info _____

_____

Dear parent,

1. Your child is invited to participate in a research study conducted by Jennifer Gross under the guidance of Dr. Linda Leavitt. The purpose of this research is explore the effect of participating in the Overcoming Obstacles program during freshman year.

2. a) Your child's participation will involve participating in a one-on-one interview with an Oakville High School counselor, discussing their perception of the Overcoming Obstacles program that all freshman are participating in during ANP. Interviews will take place during the day and attempts will be made to minimize the time your student will be absent from class. Approximately 10 students may be involved in this research.

   b) The amount of time involved in your child's participation will be 30-45 minutes during a one-on-one interview.

3. There may be certain risks or discomforts to your child associated with this research. They include potential discomfort answering the questions in the interview; however, these risks are anticipated to be minimal.

4. There are no direct benefits for your child's participation in this study. However, your child's participation will contribute to the knowledge about transition, anxiety, and resilience and may help society.

5. Your child's participation is voluntary and you may choose not to let your child participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent for your child's participation at any time. Your child may choose not to answer any questions that he or she does not want to answer. You and your child will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to let your child participate or to withdraw your child.

6. We will do everything we can to protect your child's privacy. As part of this effort, your child's identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study.

7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Jennifer Gross at 314-467-7101 or the Supervising Faculty, Dr. Linda Leavitt at 636-949-4756. You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood

Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Jann Weitzel, Vice President for Academic Affairs at 636-949-4846.

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my child's participation in the research described above.

Parent's/Guardian's Signature	Date	Parent's/Guardian's Printed Name
Child's Printed Name		
Signature of Investigator	Date	Investigator Printed Name

Revised 1-21-2010

Appendix C: Leadership Mentor – Observation Form

Leadership Mentor – Observation form

Observer: _____ Observation date: _____

LTMs: _____

Description of activity: _____

_____

Area of Observation:	Present level/Comments:
1. Content: LTMs have selected appropriate topics to discuss, appear to have a command of the topic/lesson they are presenting	Needs improvement ☐ Making progress ☐ Proficient ☐ Comments:
2. Organization: LTMs show evidence of preparation of both content and materials, use time wisely	Needs improvement ☐ Making progress ☐ Proficient ☐ Comments:
3. Rapport: LTMs hold student interest, provide feedback, encourage participation, interact with students, show enthusiasm	Needs improvement ☐ Making progress ☐ Proficient ☐ Comments:
4. Presentation: LTMs maintain eye contact, speak in a clear voice, strong projection, proper enunciation, appropriate language	Needs improvement ☐ Making progress ☐ Proficient ☐ Comments:
5. Group dynamics: LTMs work well together as a group, show evidence of planning, function as a team	Needs improvement ☐ Making progress ☐ Proficient ☐ Comments:
6. Character: LTMs demonstrate the Stripes of Character, self-confidence, foster appropriate interactions	Needs improvement ☐ Making progress ☐ Proficient ☐ Comments:

Strengths Observed:	Suggestions for Improvement:	Overall Impression/Other:

Appendix D: Permission from School District

[redacted]

Doctoral Study
1 message

Brian Lane [redacted] Tue, Aug 19, 2014 at 9:20 AM
To: Jennifer Gross [redacted]

After reviewing your doctoral study I am giving you permission to proceed with your request for IRB approval and ultimately to conduct your study at [redacted]

--
Dr. Brian Lane
Assistant Superintendent/Supervision of Schools
[redacted]

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

NOTE: This electronic mail message contains information that is or may be (a) legally privileged, confidential, proprietary, or otherwise protected by law from disclosure, and (b) intended only for the use of the addressee(s) named. If you are NOT the intended recipient you are hereby notified that reading, using, copying, or distributing any part of this message is strictly prohibited. If you ARE the intended recipient or an addressee, you are hereby notified that copying, forwarding or in any other manner distributing any part of this message is subject to the rules/regulations of [redacted] District Board Policy. If you have received this electronic mail message in error, take the steps necessary to delete the message completely from your system and contact the sender.
~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Appendix E: Informational Letter to Parents

[redacted]

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am thrilled to share that your child will be participating in the Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills Program through ANP. Students in our Leadership program, serving as Leadership Tiger Mentors, will be delivering these lessons to your students, under the supervision of the ANP teacher. Topics include:

- Setting Expectations
- Giving & Earning Respect
- Identifying Personal Strengths
- Communication Skills
- Listening
- Decision Making
- Goal Setting
- Setting Priorities
- Conflict Resolution
- Problem Solving Techniques

Overcoming Obstacles provides students with hands-on activities, technology connections, service learning projects, and opportunities to form positive relationships with their teachers and peers. Schools that use this program report better attendance rates, decreases in incidents of bullying, and dramatic improvement in school culture. Students report improved self-esteem and an ability to see themselves in college and careers.

Data collected through this program will be used in a doctoral research project. No identifying information will be used, and your student's identity and personal information will remain completely confidential. Opportunities for students and parents to participate in interviews about student participating in this program will be made available later this year.

Overcoming Obstacles has been made available to our school at absolutely no cost through the support of corporate and private sponsors. To learn more about the program's benefits, please visit the Overcoming Obstacles website at www.overcomingobstacles.org. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at the phone number and e-mail address below. I am excited to bring this opportunity to your child and look forward to working with you this year!

Sincerely,

Jennifer Gross
Freshman Guidance Counselor
[redacted]

[redacted] [redacted]

Appendix F: Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills Program survey

Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills Program
Pre-Program Student Survey
Date: School:
Teacher's Name: Grade:

Dear Student,

Please rank how true the following statements are on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being never true and 4 being always true.

Statement	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
1. I can identify five of my personal strengths.	1	2	3	4
2. My decisions affect others.	1	2	3	4
3. I break my long-term goals into medium-range and short-term goals.	1	2	3	4
4. I consider the consequences of my decisions.	1	2	3	4
5. I prefer to resolve conflicts by talking instead of fighting.	1	2	3	4
6. It is hard for me to control my anger.	1	2	3	4
7. Cooperation reduces problems at home and school.	1	2	3	4
8. I can list three ways to manage my stress.	1	2	3	4
9. I prepare for exams at least one week in advance.	1	2	3	4
10. I am confident when I communicate with people.	1	2	3	4
11. I have strategies to deal with negative peer pressure.	1	2	3	4
12. I show respect to people whom I don't agree with.	1	2	3	4
13. I am prepared for the changes of high school.	1	2	3	4

What are your strongest skills? Please continue writing on the back of this paper if you need more space.

What do you need the most help with? Please continue writing on the back of this paper if you need more space.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey!

Please send completed surveys to:
Community for Education Foundation
125 Maiden Lane, 5th Floor, New York, NY 10038
Tel: (212) 406-7488 | Fax: (212) 406-7480
info@overcomingobstacles.org | www.overcomingobstacles.org

Appendix G: Permission to use CD-RISC and Spence Children's Anxiety Scale.

Dear Jennifer:

Thank you for your interest in the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC). We are pleased to grant permission for use of the CD-RISC in the project you have described under the following terms of agreement:

1. You agree not to use the CD-RISC for any commercial purpose, or in research or other work performed for a third party, or provide the scale to a third party. If other off-site collaborators are involved with your project, their use of the scale is restricted to the project, and the signatory of this agreement is responsible for ensuring that all collaborators adhere to the terms of this agreement.
2. You may use the CD-RISC in written form, by telephone, or in secure electronic format whereby the scale is protected from unauthorized distribution or the possibility of modification.
3. Further information on the CD-RISC can be found at the www.cd-risc.com website. The scale's content may not be modified, although in some circumstances the formatting may be adapted with permission of either Dr. Connor or Dr. Davidson. If you wish to create a non-English language translation or culturally modified version of the CD-RISC, please let us know and we will provide details of the standard procedures.
4. Three forms of the scale exist: the original 25 item version and two shorter versions of 10 and 2 items respectively. When using the CD-RISC 25, CD-RISC 10 or CD-RISC 2, whether in English or other language, please include the full copyright statement and use restrictions as it appears on the scale.
5. A fee of $ 30 US is payable to Jonathan Davidson at 3068 Baywood Drive, Seabrook Island, SC 29455, USA, either by PayPal (at: mail@cd-risc.com), cheque, bank draft, international money order or Western Union.
6. Complete and return this form via email to mail@cd-risc.com.
7. In any publication or report resulting from use of the CD-RISC, you do not publish or partially reproduce the CD-RISC without first securing permission from the authors.

If you agree to the terms of this agreement, please email a signed copy to the above email address. Upon receipt of the signed agreement and of payment, we will email a copy of the scale.

For questions regarding use of the CD-RISC, please contact Jonathan Davidson at mail@cd-risc.com. We wish you well in pursuing your goals.

Sincerely yours,

Jonathan R. T. Davidson, M.D.
Kathryn M. Connor, M.D.

Agreed to by:

Signature Jennifer Gross (printed) 3-26-14 Date

The Spence Children's Anxiety Scale may currently be downloaded and used free of charge by researchers and practitioners. The scale is copyrighted to the author and may not be reprinted in full in any publication nor resold for commercial purposes.

Press the button below to download a copy of the scale.

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Appendix H: Freshman Perception Survey

Freshman Perception Survey

All responses to this survey are confidential. If you have any questions, please see your administrator.

I enjoy working with my mentors.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very much

I liked the lessons from Overcoming Obstacles.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very much

The mentors care about me and want me to be successful.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very much

I feel anxious about high school.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very much

I know where to get helps if I need it.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very much

Submit

Appendix I: Interview Questions

Interview Questions:

Freshman:

1. Describe your experience with the mentoring program this year.
2. Did you experience a lot of anxiety this year? How did you handle that?
3. Is there anything you would change about this program? If so, what?
4. Describe some of the activities you have done during this program. Did you enjoy some more than others?
5. Have you used any of the skills taught in this program? If so, which skills have you used? If not, are there any skills you can see yourself using in the future?
6. How well do you feel you transitioned to high school? What were some positives/negatives?

Leadership Mentors:

1. Describe your experience with the Mentoring program this year.
2. Describe your relationship with your freshman students.
3. Do you believe the lessons were helpful to your freshmen? Why or why not?
4. Should Leadership continue to work with the freshmen during ANP? Why or why not?
5. Should Leadership students continue to do formal lessons? Why or why not?
6. Should we expand the mentoring program to other grades? Why or why not?
7. Are the any other comments or information you feel we need to know, changes that need to be made, or things we need to keep the same?

Teachers:

1. Describe your experience with the OOLSP this year.
2. Describe your relationship with your freshman students.
3. Do you believe the lessons were helpful to your freshmen? Why or why not?
4. Should leadership continue to work with the freshmen during ANP?
5. How smoothly do you think your freshmen made the transition to high school?
6. Are the any other comments or information you feel we need to know, changes that need to be made, or things we need to keep the same

Parents:

1. Describe your student's transition to high school.
2. How would you describe your relationship with your student? Has it changed this year?
3. Do you believe the mentors were helpful to your freshmen? Why or why not?
4. Should Leadership continue to work with the freshmen during ANP? Why or why not?
5. Do you feel your student has the skills to be successful in high school? Why or why not?
6. Are the any other comments or information you feel we need to know, changes that need to be made, or things we need to keep the same

Appendix J: Mentor Feedback Form

Teacher: _____

Mentors: _____

What is going <u>well</u>?	**What would you <u>change</u>?**
What can <u>you</u> do to improve the mentor experience?	**What can <u>we</u> do to improve the mentor experience?**

Appendix K: Teacher Perception Survey

Teacher perception survey

I enjoy working with the mentos on OOLSP lessons.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very much

My students enjoy the OOLSP lessons

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very much

I think the mentors are a valuable program.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very much

I think my students benefit from working with the mentors.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very much

My students enjoy working with the mentors.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very much

Submit

Appendix L: Parent Perception survey

Parent Perception Survey

My student has adjusted well to high school.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very much

My student has discussed the activities that the mentors do using the OOLSP.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very much

I feel that there are sufficient supports in place to help my student succeed at school.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very much

My student feels that there are people who care about him/her at school.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very much

I think the mentors are a valuable program.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very much

What are some positive experiences your student has had this year? How well do you feel that have transitioned to high school?

Are there any negative experiences that your student has this year?

Submit

Vitae

Jennifer Gross earned her undergraduate degree in Psychology from Benedictine College in Atchison, Kansas. During that time, she participated in an internship mentoring at-risk eighth grade girls, and discovered a passion for counseling in the school setting. After graduating, she began her Master's in Education – Counseling degree at Missouri Baptist University in St. Louis, Missouri. She accepted a position as the Alternative Education Counselor in St. Clair, Missouri, where she stayed for one year before moving to a position in the Mehlville School District, which was closer to home. She has held her current position for the past five years, serving as the counselor for each freshman class. Jennifer is passionate about the process of transition, especially as it relates to the mental health of her students, so she works closely with her feeder middle schools to begin the process of transition while students are in eighth grade. She plans to continue in her current career, and hopes to eventually move in to an administrative role serving a district through the student services office. Additionally, Jennifer hopes to move to the post-secondary level of education through an adjunct or full-time position at a college or university. She plans to continue championing for the integration of social-emotional education, and vows to always look for something new to learn.