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Model Orientation Plan for Students Entering Sixth Grade in the Clover Park School District

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MODEL ORIENTATION PLAN FOR STUDENTS ENTERING SIXTH
GRADE IN THE CLOVER PARK SCHOOL DISTRICT

A Project Report
Presented to
The Graduate Faculty
Central Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Education

by
Rosalynn McKenna
July, 1997

A MODEL ORIENTATION PLAN FOR STUDENTS ENTERING SIXTH
GRADE IN THE CLOVER PARK SCHOOL DISTRICT

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The purpose of this study was to develop a model orientation plan for incoming sixth-grade students in the middle school setting for a smoother transition from elementary to middle school. To accomplish this purpose, a review of current literature regarding middle-school transition programs was conducted. Additionally, materials were obtained on other transition programs. This orientation plan was designed to be implemented in the Clover Park School District, Lakewood, Washington.

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Chapter 1

BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT

Introduction

One of the main responsibilities of the middle-level school is to assure the smooth transition for students from elementary school to high school. Most school systems maintain three distinct, autonomous, and separate units that do little to coordinate their activities, programs, or curricula. The coordination that exists usually results from informal agreements and conversations between and among principals; it rarely stems from planned efforts to integrate the schools' programs across all grade levels (National Association of Secondary School Principals, Council on Middle Level Education, 1985, p. 17).

National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) Council on Middle Level Education emphasizes the fact that middle-level schools must assume more responsibility for an effective and smooth transition especially for students entering the middle-level school. Because the three separate school levels remain distinct in their environments, an effective transition plan must be designed and implemented to fit the needs of young adolescents entering the middle school.

One of the most consistent findings to emerge in the research is the need for a well-planned transition program for elementary students entering middle-level schools. As young adolescents leave the familiarity of the elementary school with one teacher and classroom and move to a much larger building usually farther away from home, many young adolescents experience fear and uncertainty as they first encounter the middle school.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this study was to design and develop a transition program for the sixth-grade students entering the middle-school setting. The project was intended as a school-based

model that can be implemented into the elementary school and incorporated into the middle school. To accomplish this purpose, current literature and research regarding the need for transition programs for the early adolescents was reviewed. In addition, the awareness of the need became even greater when it was learned that many school districts do not have transition plans in place for their entering middle-school students. This orientation plan is intended for the four middle schools and elementary schools in the Clover Park School District, Lakewood, Washington.

Limitations of the Study

For the purpose of this study, it was necessary to set the following limitations:

1. Scope: The model orientation plan was designed for sixth-grade students entering the middle school in the Clover Park School District, Lakewood, Washington.
2. Target Population Served: The target population of this model orientation plan was designed to meet the needs of the students and their parents transitioning from the elementary to the middle school in the Clover Park

School District.

3. Research: The preponderance of research and literature related to the transition from elementary to middle school was confined to the last five (5) years. Additionally, the transition plan used at Sedgewick Middle School in West Hartford, Connecticut, was obtained and analyzed.

Definition of Terms

Significant terms used in the context of this study have been defined as follows:

1. Middle Level School: A transitional school established to meet the needs of adolescents.
2. Middle School: A school housing grades sixth through eighth.
2. Adolescence: Refers to the period of rapid growth between childhood and adulthood (Atwater, 1992, p.2).
3. Transition: The move from elementary to middle school.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The review of related literature and research summarized in Chapter 2 has been organized to address:

1. Introduction
2. Elementary School Students
3. The Middle School
4. The Middle Level Student
5. Research Supporting the Need for an Effective Transition Plan
6. Summary

Research addressed in Chapter 2 was identified through Educational Resource Information Centers (ERIC) computer search and a direct hand search of several other applicable sources was also conducted.

Introduction

"The emerging adolescent years are crucial in determining the future success or failure of millions of American youth" (Carnegie Council, 1989, p. 10).

The middle schools were found to play a key role in the accomplishment or decline of our youth. The necessity to have programs designed to meet the needs of young adolescents was critical for their development, self-esteem, and achievement in school and later in life. To meet those needs, middle school programs needed to be designed to aid in the positive evolution of the pre-adolescent and needed to be developmentally appropriate to the middle-level youth (Carnegie Council, 1989).

As Roth (1991) expressed, the change from one school to another involves many variations and expectations with which the adolescent must cope in a new school setting: different classmates, teachers, rules, teaching styles, and schedules. Having a support system in place before the student enters the middle school allowed them to feel valued in this new environment.

The Elementary School Student

In elementary school, students are in self-contained classrooms with one teacher for the year. From kindergarten to fifth grade, students have one core teacher for each grade and, in many cases, have several of the same classmates year after year. A rapport is built between each teacher and the students due to the continued contact each child has with his or her teacher in the child-centered classroom. Teachers and students connect because of the closeness of the association established throughout the year.

In the area of academic performance, researchers found that the elementary teacher taught each subject and informed parents of the students' progress through parent-teacher conferences, phone calls, progress reports, and report cards. The atmosphere at the elementary school was family-like in structure, and parents felt comfortable in the school setting. The elementary school teacher understood the developmental attributes and academic needs of elementary children along with different behavior patterns this age group experiences (Ames, Ilg and Baker, 1988).

Fifth graders had only known the elementary school as prior

experience and were accustomed to the one-on-one interaction between the teacher and the student (Toepfer, 1997). Leaving the comfort of the elementary school with one teacher and going to a middle school with different procedures and adjusting to several teachers added a level of uncertainty that can cause trepidation in the lives of many eleven-year-olds entering sixth grade at the middle-school level (Carnegie Council, 1989). Many times, they were fearful; they worried about the unknown in this new locale, and, at times, they believed it was a complex and perilous place (Williamson, 1997). Addressing the fears and anxieties of these early adolescents and being sensitive to their needs allowed for a smoother transition from elementary to middle school (Camoni, 1996).

Fifth graders were used to being with their peers throughout the day. Social relationships, which tended to be casual and easy-going, were developed through continued contact year after year. The children played with whomever was available at the time (Ames, Ilg and Baker, 1988). Because their bodies had not changed much, mood changes were less common among fifth-graders than they were among older children.

Sobol (1987) found the typical fifth-grade child had reached a serene plateau. He had come to terms with his body, his family, his teachers, and his friends; he knew his world well and had a secure place in it. The ten-year-old had completed the struggles of childhood and paused now before the storms of adolescence (p. 171).

However, once fifth-graders recognized that they would soon be leaving the comfort of an elementary school, they no longer felt as confident or comfortable with their situation. Students leaving the elementary school behind faced many new challenges. They had to adjust to changing bodies, emotions, and attitudes about themselves and school. Leaving the environment of an elementary school with one teacher and going to a new school with different procedures caused a great deal of stress in the lives of many eleven-year-olds entering sixth grade at the middle-school level. As Williamson stated, "They're scared; they're worried; they're sure it's a hostile place" (Williamson, 1997, p. 2).

The Middle Level Student

To understand the middle-level student, one must appreciate the unique stages of development through which the middle-level

adolescent travels. The ranges of diversity of student development were found to be immense at the middle school, and yet all students traveled through the same developmental phases at some point in their lives. The most significant changes young adolescents experienced were physical, social, emotional, and intellectual.

As McKay (1995) presented, age was not a factor in determining the rate of growth each adolescent experiences. Other changes were seen to emerge: sexual maturation and more pronounced physical features such as hormonal changes resulting sometimes in acne, large noses, and changes in voices. Each of these changes caused young adolescents to become self-conscious of their appearance and the way they saw themselves. The middle school helped alleviate many of their concerns by providing a good health program to explain the changes taking place (Wiles & Bondi, 1993). Many young adolescents had questions they were too embarrassed to ask, but a good program anticipated those questions and worked toward answering them.

The social development was found to be much more intense at this level. Adolescents started moving away from their families and began identifying more with their peers. The family was still

important, but adolescents began to experiment with social activities and model their behaviors and standards by their peers' (Wiles & Bondi, 1993). Interaction became very important at this stage, and middle schools provided activities that incorporated peers working together. Such activities included debate teams, drama, student government, community projects, and flexible teaching that allowed students to work together and to be responsible in their choices (Wiles & Bondi, 1993).

Emotional development encompassed a wide range of feelings and emotions. As McKay (1995) stated, "Feelings of inadequacy, superiority or inferiority, and independence from parents are common among adolescents" (p. 20). The striving for independence and the understanding of the changes taking place in the body were found to be difficult struggles that caused many conflicts between home, school and friends, and self (Shoffner, 1997).

The school helped in this endeavor by providing a process for self-evaluation and role-playing activities that dealt with emotional issues. Allowing students to play out or talk about problem situations provided an outlet for raging emotions. The counselor helped by being a part of this process rather than being a

separate entity away from the masses (Wiles & Bondi, 1993).

Teachers also helped in this process by not expecting students to be able to explain unusual behavior because many times they didn't understand it themselves. Reading about other youths experiencing similar situations also helped along with positive responses from teachers (Wiles & Bondi, 1993).

The intellectual development called for a wide range of approaches to teaching. Students needed to be able to move around and to work with classmates. Cooperative learning activities along with hands-on materials helped to keep the motivation high for the adolescent. Students, at this stage, were very curious and wanted to learn things that they found interesting such as social issues dealing with a strong focus on real-life problems that they could understand and integrate (Manning, 1993).

The Middle School

Elementary school students going to the middle school faced the prospect of having as many as seven teachers throughout the day. Students entering the middle school no longer had one set of classroom rules for adaption, but several. Individual teachers held

different expectations and standards for their classrooms. Students adjusted to several different personalities and classroom rules.

At the elementary level, each teacher had between twenty and thirty students on a daily basis which made it much easier for individual contact. At the middle level, teachers saw as many as one hundred and fifty students. The one-to-one contact was not as prevalent at the middle school level, and many fifth graders felt they would be one of many instead of an individual acknowledged in his or her own right.

The middle school differed from the elementary and high school in many ways. The most significant was the teacher and student relationship. The middle-school teacher was more like an advisor who was responsive to the needs of the emerging adolescent and who worked to guide the students toward achieving their potential (Leiderman & Terzopolos, 1991). The school setting was found to differ from the other two settings in that it used interdisciplinary teams to enhance the interests of its students, to strengthen their abilities, and to offer opportunities for exploration and development which allowed for individual learning patterns (Wiles & Bondi, 1993).

Also, many middle schools offered a flexible schedule which allowed young adolescents to acquire material in depth and to build onto previous information that had already been learned (Hackmann, 1995). Middle-level schools with 50-minute periods were not always conducive to the needs of young adolescents who were used to the elementary school program which was much more flexible in its scheduling and self-contained in its environment. The traditional schedule of the middle school with six to seven periods often left students floundering in this new environment. It did not take into account the unique characteristics of the emerging adolescent (Hackmann, 1995).

Research Supporting the Need for an Effective Transition Plan

As Manning (1993) stated, "Young adolescents often feel anonymous after their transition from a smaller elementary school to a larger middle school" (p. 63). To alleviate many of the fears of fifth graders, a strong transition program was established and put into effect to facilitate continued success in the new school setting. As Camoni (1996) stated, "Such a plan reflects positively on the people and values of both the elementary and middle school

communities" (p. 49).

To counter the fears many young adolescents had toward middle school, information needed to be provided, and open communication allowed. In doing this, students expressed their thoughts and fears without feeling uncomfortable. Really listening to young adolescents about their apprehensions built trust and put many of their qualms to rest (Williamson, 1997).

Most researchers believed that a well-planned transition program led to later success at the middle-level school. For instance, Roderick (1991) found that students who did not benefit from a strong transition plan were more likely to drop out than elementary students who did not achieve well academically (Toepfer, 1997, p. 4). Many students had questions and concerns pertaining to the middle school, and these questions and concerns needed to be dealt with before students left the elementary school. Addressing the needs and concerns of pre-adolescents in a setting in which they felt comfortable showed a commitment of purpose by the middle-level personnel to the pre-adolescent student (NASSP's Council on Middle Level Education, 1993). This open communication and commitment to programs designed to meet the needs of young

adolescents demonstrated a dedication on the part of the middle-level staff toward the students and their future success. It also exhibited a commitment on the part of the middle-level staff to make the transition from elementary to middle school as comfortable and stress-free as possible (Curtis & Bidwell, 1977).

To combat this feeling of isolation, the middle school principal played a key role in planning a transition program that involved adolescents in activities designed to meet the needs of those emerging adolescents. Through the leadership skills of the principal and the incorporation of the middle school personnel with elementary staff and parents, students received a strong sense of importance and a belief that everyone wanted them to succeed in the new environment (Farmer, Gould, Herring, Linn, & Theobald, 1995).

For a smooth transition to occur at the middle school, NASSP's Council on Middle Level Education (1985) suggested that a panel be established with key personnel present. The panel consisted of elementary school principals, teachers, parents, and middle level personnel. The middle-school principal was the key figure in implementing the program. This panel discussed ways to achieve a smoother transition from elementary to middle school and ways to

implement it. As Williamson (1997) stated, "The initial contact between school and student is critical. Orientation activities create indelible impressions on students and their parents."

As Kizer (1997) presented, the middle school can work with the elementary school principals to establish time frames for meeting with the students in the elementary schools. The contact between the middle-school principal and the fifth graders set the tone for later adjustment in the middle school. The middle-school principal set up a time to meet with the fifth-grade students and to establish a rapport with them. That way, they felt comfortable talking with him or her if any problems or concerns arose. Also, the middle-school principal was the main authority figure the students recognized and the main person with whom they felt comfortable.

For any transition program to be a success in the eyes of the young adolescent, it involved more than a brief meeting with the principal. Students understood that this was just the beginning of the process and that other activities were developed to aid in the transition. The initial stage was to meet the principal, to ask questions, to learn about the principal as a person, and to form more questions for the next meeting. Activities also were planned and

implemented by the middle-school staff soon after these meetings occurred. It was not enough to meet with students in the elementary school. Plans were made to have the fifth graders experience the middle-school setting. Part of the fear fifth graders had was the size of the middle school. They were used to a much smaller learning environment. They had never been exposed to the use of lockers, the cafeteria, or six to seven teachers daily (Shoffner, 1997). To understand the procedures, young adolescents experienced a portion of middle school before they were enrolled full time.

Having the elementary student experience the middle-school setting while still in the elementary school allowed them to form questions and dispelled concerns they may have had in dealing with such a different environment (Williamson, 1997).

Parents also became a part of the process. They were given a tour of the building, an overview of the curriculum, and the procedures for which their children would be responsible. Involving the parents early allowed them to support their children in the process of change (Kizer, 1997). Elementary-level students also needed to understand the procedures and expectations of the middle school, and with parent involvement, they were given added support

throughout the process (Manning, 1993).

Middle-school teachers also supported the transition process by working with the elementary school teachers and learning about their future students. Later, the elementary and middle school teachers worked together to place students in programs that were most beneficial to the pre-adolescent. Every activity in a transition plan was designed to build a strong support system for the students. Day field trips to the middle school allowed the fifth-grade students a chance to talk with sixth graders about their experiences at the middle school (Camoni, 1996). Furthermore, this activity also allowed fifth graders an opportunity to form a buddy support system with sixth graders. The sixth graders gave fifth graders a tour on their day trip to the middle school. This activity allowed peer groups an opportunity to talk with members closer to the fifth-graders' age (Kizer, 1997).

Middle school students were in a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood. They were a diverse group dealing with many changes in their bodies, thought processes, peer groups, and family. To understand the emerging adolescents, the different characteristics that represent these young people at this stage in

their lives were understood (Wiles & Bondi, 1993).

Summary

An effective transition program is essential to the young adolescent entering the middle school for the first time. Support for this program must come from the principal and personnel of the school. Parents and students must fully participate. For students to be successful in a new environment, a transition plan must be put into place that focuses on the needs of these unique individuals.

CHAPTER 3

PROCEDURES OF THE PROJECT

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to design and develop a model orientation plan for incoming sixth-grades students in the middle school setting for a smoother transition from elementary to middle school. To accomplish this task, current research, literature, and programs related to the transition from elementary to middle school were examined.

Need for the Project

The need to develop a model orientation plan for students entering sixth grade in the Clover Park School District was determined by the following considerations:

1. The lack of a program in the Clover Park School District addressing the needs of elementary students going into the middle school.
2. The review of related literature summarized in Chapter 2

detailed the need for an effective transition plan between elementary and middle school.

3. The importance of a strong middle school program designed to meet the needs of young adolescents.

Development of Support for the Project

This project was designed to be used during the 1997-1998 school year in one or all of the middle schools in the Clover Park School District. At this writing, the writer had not been assigned to a particular middle school within the district.

This model orientation was designed to be used in any district that wanted a stronger transition program for its youth entering the middle school.

Procedures

The purpose of this project was to design and develop a model orientation plan for incoming sixth-grade students in the middle-school setting for a smoother transition from elementary to middle school. To achieve this task, current literature, research, and

transitions plans from other schools were reviewed. Thereafter, a program was designed and developed for use in the Clover Park School District, Lakewood, Washington.

Planned Implementation of the Project

This model orientation plan was designed and developed to be used in the Clover Park School District, Lakewood, Washington. It is anticipated that the project will be implemented in November of the 1997-1998 school year.

CHAPTER 4

THE PROJECT

A transition plan for students entering the middle school titled “A Model Orientation Plan for Students Entering Sixth Grade in the Clover Park School District” was developed and is presented here in Chapter 4. The plan’s intention was to prepare adolescents for the middle-school environment and the different procedures they will need to adjust too.

The transition plan has been divided into months to make it easier for the middle-school principal and personnel to plan for and implement.

Section 1: The Orientation Plan

Section 2: December

Section 3: January

Section 4: February

Section 5: March

Section 6: April

Section 7: May

Section 8: June

Section 9: July

Section 10: August

Section 11: September

Section 12: October

Section 13: November

CHAPTER 4

THE PROJECT

The Orientation Plan

For a smoother transition from the elementary to middle school, a year-long transition plan must be established and ready to be put into place. The importance of such a program is to deal with fears and concerns fifth-graders and their parents have. Fifth-graders need to know early that they are valued and that their concerns are important enough that a plan is put into place to ease those fears.

An orientation program for the transition to the middle school needs not only a brief visit from the middle school staff, but a well thought-out program that anticipates the future and plans for the adjustment of the youth and their well-being. A year-long project takes more time, effort, and money simply because it involves the fifth-graders at an earlier stage, but in the long run, the benefits outweigh the costs, and the rewards will be well-adjusted adolescents in the middle school. Both the elementary and the middle school work together for the benefit of our youth and their futures.

To have an effective orientation program, the middle school principal plays a key role in establishing a plan for the transition from elementary to middle school. The teachers, counselors, and other support staff in the middle school give their support; now it is the middle school principal's responsibility to set up the initial meeting with all the elementary school principals whose students feed his or her middle school.

The need for the middle school principal to take the leadership role in the transition phase allows for a higher potential success rate of the plan. When the person in charge of the school is involved in the process, others are more likely to commit to the plan. Early involvement of elementary school principals allows these principals greater input into the process. They are able to put a schedule into place in their schools which make it easier for the middle school principal to meet with each fifth grade class and later for those classes to experience the middle school setting.

Involving parents and students in activities and events gives a sense of commitment from the school community and builds the level of trust between parents, their children, and the schools. The activities and events allow for closer interaction among the groups

and give parents and students the opportunity to offer their input into the process. This process strengthens the bond between the school and community in which it serves.

The activities in this project were designed to involve both the students and parents in the transition process. The process begins with the middle school principal going into the fifth grade classrooms. Students are familiar with the role of the principal and need to establish a line of communication with the person who establishes the rules and procedures for the school. Other activities include the parents at the middle-school level. They are given a tour of the building, an overview of the curriculum, and the procedures for which their children will be responsible. Involving the parents early allows them to support their children in the process of change. The teachers at both the elementary and middle schools work together to place students in programs that are most beneficial to them. All activities are designed to build a strong support system for the students.

The orientation plan is organized into months beginning with December and ending the following November. The process is on-going and involves the students early so they feel at ease when they

are in middle school and have the people and resources available for assistance if needed during the school year. This plan also builds trust through continued interaction among the groups.

The design of this program is modeled on another orientation plan used in West Hartford, Connecticut that has a high rate of success involving parents, students, and the school community in the transition of students leaving the elementary school and entering the middle school. The principal at West Hartford, Joan Samuels Kizer, gave added insight to the writer and shared her material on the transition plan used at her school.

Kizer (1997) stated that the need to have a year-long transition plan was to address the concerns of parents and students moving to the middle school. To ease the anxieties and answer questions of parents and students, more than just a general meeting was needed to help in the adjustment of the young adolescent moving to a new school.

The writer looked at many orientation models focusing on the transition of fifth graders leaving the elementary school and moving to the larger middle school. The year-long plan offered added guidance to the young adolescent and seemed to reduce the fears of

many parents. The year-long plan showed a commitment by the school personnel and involved parents and students in the move from elementary to middle school.

In the writer's opinion, the year-long model is conducive to the needs of the students and parents in the Clover Park School District. The Clover Park School District is a large district that provides service to a diverse group of students. Many children are on free or reduced lunch while others benefit from a higher income level. This orientation plan benefits all children and gives equal opportunity for all students to build a relationship with the middle-school staff early before transferring into the middle school.

December

In early December, the middle school principal will meet with all elementary school principals whose students feed into the middle school. The meeting will focus on up-coming transition events in which the middle school principal will be engaged, and dates will be set for the principal to meet with each fifth-grade class in the month of December. During these class meetings, the principal will give an overview of the middle school setting, the sixth-grade teachers, elective classes offered, and future transition

events. A question and answer period will follow.

January

An additional newsletter will be sent to each fifth-grade household explaining the transition events scheduled for the following months. The newsletter will also give an overview of the middle school along with highlights on the sixth-grade teachers and their students.

February

Another newsletter will be mailed to each fifth-grade household keeping parents informed of up coming activities. This feature will focus on extra-curricular activities and the people who run the activities. Elective classes will also be discussed and elective-class teachers interviewed. Parents will be welcomed to call or come by with any questions they may have.

March

A general meeting will be held this month. Parents of incoming middle-school students will be given a tour of the building and will be introduced to the sixth-grade teachers, administrators, team leaders, guidance staff, and parents in the PTA. This meeting is essential to establish a positive relationship with the parents, to

alleviate any concerns they or their children have, and to establish a friendly and caring atmosphere with the parents.

Later in the month, the student council will furnish coffee and donuts for a morning get-together with parents. During this meeting, middle school students will talk about their classes, the different programs offered, and time management strategies. Also, the choir will end the session with a short program. The staff will give a presentation on the different stages of early adolescence and show materials used in classes. Text books will be available and discussed along with expectations the staff has of all students. The middle-school mission statement and goals will be presented by the principal or vice-principal. A question and answer period will follow. Selected students will then give the parents a tour of the building and answer questions along the way.

In late March and early April, in the evening, two more meetings will be scheduled for parents and their fifth-grade children. They will be given a tour of the building; curriculum will be presented, and sixth graders will be available to answer the fifth graders' questions. Sixth-grade students will conduct the tours. While on the tour, fifth graders will have more of an opportunity to

ask questions of the students in an informal way. These two meetings will be open to all family members. At the end of the meetings, parents will be given a short questionnaire to fill out while their children are on the tour. The questionnaire will be used to help plan the appropriate placements for their children during the next school year (see Appendix A).

April

In order to feel comfortable with the school and staff with which they will meet the following year, fifth-grade classes are scheduled for the students on a day visit. One or two classes will be scheduled each day for a more personalized introduction to the middle school and its staff. All fifth-grade classes will be given a brief orientation on the school, the rules and regulations which they will have to follow the following year, and a review of the textbooks they will be using. Each fifth grader will be matched with a middle school student for the length of time the fifth grader will be in the building. While their students are on a tour of the building, the fifth-grade teachers will meet with the school guidance counselors to discuss any special needs their students may have of which the school should be aware. Fifth-grade teachers will also meet with

the sixth-grade teachers to share information on the elementary school's program and concerns about any of their students. Sharing the elementary school program with the sixth-grade teachers gives them an overview of what the fifth graders have already covered along with specific strengths and weaknesses.

May

The principal will return to the fifth-grade classrooms to answer any questions the students may still have. The principal will then discuss the different responsibilities each student will have in the middle school. The homework policy will be reviewed along with the expectations the school holds for each student entering the building. Peer pressure will also be a topic of discussion along with interpersonal relationships and the new friendships each student will encounter. Being responsible and coming to school prepared will be highlighted and discussed.

June

The school guidance counselor and a group of volunteer sixth-grade students will visit the fifth-grade classes. They will give each student a middle-school handbook and a class supply list for the sixth grade. Any last-minute questions will be answered, and

wishes for a safe and happy summer will be given.

July

Key information will be sent to each fifth-grade household: class schedules, bus schedules, the price of lunches, rules and regulations, and the mission statement of the school. This information packet will also include telephone numbers and names along with working hours of middle- school personnel available during the summer for any questions or concerns parents or their children may have.

August

Orientation sessions will be held for any new students to the district. The dates of the sessions and the hour they will be given will be posted on the main door of the school and given to parents when they register their children for school. On the day their children register, parents will be asked to sign up for one of the sessions.

September

Sixth-grade teachers involve students in activities that will help reduce any anxiety the sixth-grade students may feel. For the first two weeks of school, the teacher will take his or her students

to classes outside the sixth-grade wing and point out different buildings to the group and answer questions.

Next, teachers will help students cover their books with paper bags as book covers and then color code them so it is easier to gather materials from their lockers between classes. Teachers will also help with time management by providing a daily planner which each student will be given on the first day of school. Study skills will also be a main focus the first two weeks to help organize assignments while adjusting to the expectations and the environment of a new school.

A parent night which will cover curriculum issues, time management, daily planners, homework issues, and up-coming projects will be held at the end of September. Parents will also be re-introduced to their children's teachers.

PTA members will be on hand to encourage membership in the Parent Teacher Association and in the school volunteer program. These members will also be available to talk about their children's experiences in the school and other issues concerning the middle-school years.

October

October is the month that monthly morning meetings will begin. Each month the principal will be available for a morning meeting with parents. A survey will be sent home with each sixth-grade student to determine which day of the week would be most convenient for most parents. These will be informal meetings to communicate with the principal on any concerns they may have.

A night meeting will also be set up this month to discuss conflict resolution, and anger management issues along with peer pressure in the middle school. Counselors will lead this discussion.

Progress reports will be sent home with students.

November

Sixth-grade students will fill out a survey on their experiences up to this point (see Appendix B). The information will be compiled to help improve the transition program of the school. This survey is important for the continued improvement of the transition from elementary to middle school. The principal will need this information when he or she meets with the elementary school principals in the following month of December.

The principal will hold a staff meeting with the middle-school personnel. This meeting will focus on the sixth-grade student

surveys and the changes that need to be made for the next fifth-grade classes. The goal is to continually improve the transition program to meet the needs of all incoming middle-level students.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this project was to design and develop a model orientation plan for incoming sixth-grade students in the middle school setting for a smoother transition from elementary to middle school. To accomplish this objective, a review of current literature and research regarding the transition from elementary to middle school was conducted. A program was designed and developed for implementation in the Clover Park School District, Lakewood, Washington.

Conclusions

Conclusions reached as a result of this project were:

1. Adolescents transitioning into the middle school are in need of a well-thought-out program that addresses the fears and concerns of both students and their parents before entering the middle level school.

2. The middle school principal and personnel play a key role in an effective transition plan and are instrumental in lowering the drop-out rate for many youth.
3. An effective transition plan benefits all students entering the middle school and should involve parents in the process.

Recommendations

As a result of this project, the following recommendations have been proposed:

1. Middle schools should offer entering students transitional activities that start while students are in the fifth grade and continue through the following year. This will allow fifth graders to become familiar with the environment of the middle school; it will acquaint them with the staff, and it will enable them to gain a sense of trust in the new school setting.
2. The middle-school principal and personnel need to commit to the plan for it to be a success.

3. Involving the parents of the young adolescents shows a commitment by school personnel to the adjustment and advancement of their children now and in the future.
4. This model orientation plan for incoming sixth-grade students developed in this project may be useful to other school districts and may be adapted to fit their unique needs.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

FIFTH-GRADE STUDENT SURVEY TO BE FILLED OUT BY PARENTS

Child's Name _____

Birthdate _____

Elementary School _____

Teacher's Name _____

Please describe your child's attitude toward school.

What is your child's favorite subject in school? Why it is a favorite.

What is your child's least favorite subject and why?

What physical activities does your child enjoy participating in?

Are there any educational needs of which the middle school should be aware concerning your child?

Is your child in band or orchestra?_____ Will your child be in band or orchestra next year?_____

Thank you for filling out this survey. The middle school staff appreciates it. If you have any questions, please feel free to call.

APPENDIX B
STUDENT SURVEY

To help us make the middle school a positive environment for you please answer the following questions:

1. How would you rate your transition/orientation to the middle school.
Please circle one.

Very Good Good OK Needs Improvement

2. Do you feel your academic, social, and personal needs or concerns are being met in this middle school?

Yes No

If no, please explain.

3. If you had a friend who had a problem or concern about something, who in the school might you tell this person to talk to?

4. In the space below, please tell us how we can improve the transition/orientation program for fifth graders entering the middle school.