

## **ABSTRACT**

Robin Hamilton, A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF KINDERGARTEN TRANSITION PRACTICES AND THE IMPACT ON CHILDREN'S KINDERGARTEN READINESS (Under the direction of Dr. William Rouse, Jr.). Department of Educational Leadership, November, 2013.

This comparative case study, with a phenomenological approach examined the effect of kindergarten transition practices on kindergarten reading achievement. Study participants were 4 administrators and 8 kindergarten teachers at 2 elementary schools in southeastern North Carolina. Findings included 61 transition practices and 4 barriers not previously reported in the literature. Data from multiple resources were triangulated and descriptive findings were compared to a Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model that revealed the number and intensity of school based transition practices were associated with more positive reading achievement in kindergarten. This finding was contradicted by factors not controlled for in this study. The findings from the research support policies for the creation and implementation of written kindergarten transition plans that may help children on a trajectory for improved reading achievement and help districts meet high-stakes testing demands.

A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF KINDERGARTEN TRANSITION PRACTICES AND  
THE IMPACT ON CHILDREN'S KINDERGARTEN READINESS

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to my father the late Robert “Bobby” Bridges and to my first grandchild, Baby Austin, who is expected in March 2014. Daddy, you set this expectation, and I know you are proud! Baby Austin, your impending arrival gave me the final push I needed to finish this quest. I hope I have modeled and inspired expectations of hard-work, perseverance and excellence for you.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES.....	xv
LIST OF TABLES.....	xvi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Historical Background.....	1
Increased Accountability.....	2
School Readiness.....	4
Kindergarten Transitions.....	5
Discontinuities Between Settings.....	7
Statement of the Problem.....	8
Purpose of the Study.....	9
Significance of the Study.....	11
Research Questions.....	12
Overview of Methodology.....	13
Definition of Terms.....	16
Study Boundaries.....	18
Limitations.....	20
Assumptions.....	20
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	22
Historical Background.....	22
Increased Accountability.....	26
Federal Funding and Accountability.....	26

State Funding and Accountability.....	30
Trickled Down to Kindergarten.....	31
Increase in Retention.....	35
School Readiness.....	40
Lack of Readiness/Lack of Success.....	48
At-Risk Children Less Likely to be Ready.....	49
Ready Schools/School Readiness.....	53
Transitions.....	59
Benefits of Transitions.....	59
Programmatic Transition Practices Offered by the Schools.....	63
Characteristics Influencing Transitions.....	68
Quantity of Transition Practices.....	73
Intensity of Transition Practices.....	73
Barriers to Implementing Transition Practices.....	83
Suggestions for Eliminating Barriers.....	91
Environmental Impacts.....	92
Discontinuities Between Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten Settings.....	103
Literature Assumptions.....	107
Kindergarten Program Logic Model Based on the Literature.....	108
Summary.....	109
<b>CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS.....</b>	<b>110</b>
Introduction.....	110
The Setting.....	112

River City Elementary.....	114
Bridge View Elementary.....	118
River City Elementary and Bridge View Elementary.....	122
Participants.....	124
Research Design of the Study.....	124
Case Study Design.....	125
Multiple or Comparative Case Study.....	126
Phenomenological Research Design.....	127
Synthesis of Research Designs and Application to Current Study.....	128
Instrumentation.....	131
Expert/Audit Group Review.....	132
Credibility.....	133
Dependability.....	135
Description.....	135
Threats to Credibility and Transferability.....	136
Data Collection Procedures and Processes.....	137
Analysis of Data.....	138
Analysis.....	138
Data Collection Techniques/Tools.....	142
Summary.....	143
CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS.....	144
Introduction.....	144
Participant Characteristics.....	145

School Characteristics.....	153
Summary.....	166
Research Question Findings Introduction.....	169
Research Question 1 Findings.....	172
Do.....	172
Resources.....	172
Activities.....	172
Programmatic transition practices offered by the schools.....	172
Characteristics influencing transitions.....	176
Barriers to implementing transition practices.....	179
Environmental impacts.....	181
Discontinuities between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten settings.....	184
Themes.....	185
Communication.....	185
Participant Perceptions.....	186
Research Question 1 Summary.....	188
Research Question 2 Findings.....	189
Do.....	189
Resources.....	189
Activities.....	193
Programmatic transition practices offered by the schools.....	193
Characteristics influencing transitions.....	201
Quantity of transition practices.....	203

Intensity of transition practices.....	204
Barriers to implementing transition practices.....	205
Environmental impacts.....	206
Outputs.....	207
Themes.....	208
Communication.....	208
Participant Perceptions.....	209
Research Question 2 Summary.....	209
Research Question 3 Findings.....	210
Do.....	210
Resources.....	210
Activities.....	210
Programmatic transition practices offered by the schools.....	210
Characteristics influencing transitions.....	230
Quantity of transition practices.....	235
Intensity of transition practices.....	236
Barriers to implementing transition practices.....	245
Environmental impacts.....	262
Discontinuities between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten settings.....	273
Themes.....	276
Research Question 3 Summary.....	278
Research Question 4 Findings.....	278

Do.....	278
Resources.....	278
Activities.....	279
Programmatic transition practices offered by the schools.....	279
Registration and communication.....	279
Orientation.....	283
Organization.....	285
Familiarization.....	289
Facilitation.....	295
Characteristics influencing transitions.....	279
Quantity of transition practices.....	296
Intensity of transition practices.....	300
Barriers to implementing transition practices.....	301
Environmental impacts.....	301
Location.....	303
District communication.....	306
Communication with parents.....	307
Relationships.....	311
Parent involvement.....	315
Resources.....	316
Discontinuities between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten settings.....	317
Themes.....	318
Communication.....	318

Participant Perceptions.....	319
Research Question 4 Summary.....	321
Research Question 5 Findings.....	321
Do.....	321
Resources.....	321
Activities.....	323
Programmatic transition practices offered by the schools.....	323
Characteristics influencing transitions.....	323
Quantity of transition practices.....	325
Intensity of transition practices.....	326
Barriers to implementing transition practices.....	327
Environmental impacts.....	328
Discontinuities between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten settings.....	329
Outputs.....	331
Get/Short-Term Outcomes.....	335
Themes.....	336
Research Question 5 Summary.....	336
Summary.....	337
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS.....	340
Procedures.....	341
Findings.....	341
Demographics.....	343

Research Questions.....	343
Research Question 1.....	343
Research Question 2.....	345
Research Question 3.....	346
Research Question 4.....	348
Research Question 5.....	351
Conclusions.....	352
Implications.....	357
Recommendations.....	360
Resources.....	360
Activities.....	361
Characteristics Influencing Transitions.....	361
Environmental Impacts.....	361
Limitations.....	362
Future Studies.....	362
Summary.....	363
REFERENCES.....	365
APPENDIX A: NATIONAL EDUCATION GOALS.....	384
APPENDIX B: NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOL DIESIGNATION CHART FOR SCHOOL PERFORMANCE.....	385
APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS.....	386
APPENDIX D: KINDERGARTEN TEACHER PARTICIPANT SURVEY.....	388
APPENDIX E: ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL PARTICIPANT SURVEY.....	391
APPENDIX F: PRINCIPAL PARTICIPANT SURVEY.....	394

APPENDIX G: SCHOOL DISTRICT APPROVAL.....	397
APPENDIX H: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL.....	398

## **LIST OF FIGURES**

1. Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature.....	10
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## LIST OF TABLES

1. School Demographics.....	19
2. DIBELS and TRC Proficiency Levels Based on Reading Skills.....	33
3. DIBELS Next and TRC Proficiency Levels with Overall Composite Score (2012-2013).....	34
4. Kindergarten Non-Promotion Rates in North Carolina Public Schools.....	38
5. Teachers Reporting Use of Practices Related to Kindergarten Transition.....	64
6. Categorized Transition Practices.....	75
7. Transition Practices Categorized by Intensity and Teacher Usage.....	77
8. Kindergarten Teachers Judging Transition Practices as Barriers.....	85
9. Pre-School Teachers Identifying Transitions as Barriers.....	87
10. River City Elementary Adequate Yearly Progress and Annual Measurable Objectives.....	116
11. River City Elementary 2011-2012 NC School Report Card Statistics.....	119
12. Bridge View Elementary Adequate Yearly Progress and Annual Measurable Objectives.....	121
13. Bridge View Elementary 2011-2012 NC School Report Card Statistics.....	123
14. Researcher’s Time Line.....	139
15. Demographic Features.....	147
16. Educational and Licensure Attainment.....	148
17. Administrative Longevity.....	151
18. Kindergarten Teacher Longevity.....	152
19. Kindergarten Class Demographics.....	154
20. Student Population Transient Rates.....	156
21. Overall Composite.....	158

22. First Sound Fluency.....	160
23. Letter Naming Fluency.....	161
24. Phoneme Segmentation Fluency.....	163
25. Nonsense Words Fluency, Correct Letter Sounds.....	164
26. Nonsense Words Fluency, Whole Words Read.....	165
27. Text Reading Comprehension (TRC).....	167
28. Knowledge of Written Kindergarten Transition Plans.....	191
29. Transition Practices from the Literature.....	211
30. Common Use of Transition Practices from the Literature.....	217
31. Transition Practices from the Current Study.....	219
32. Categorized Transition Practices from the Literature.....	238
33. Categorized Common use of Transition Practices from the Literature.....	244
34. Categorized Transition Practices from the Current Study.....	246
35. Transition Barriers from the Literature.....	256
36. Common Use Categorized by Intensity.....	268

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

This comparative case study used a phenomenological approach to examine transition to kindergarten practices at two public elementary schools in southeastern North Carolina. Pseudonyms were used to protect each school's identity. The schools were similar demographically. While this study was primarily qualitative, it incorporated mixed-methods to provide a comprehensive account of kindergarten transition practices at each school. The researcher described and compared kindergarten transition practices used at both schools. The study compared these practices to select measures of student achievement to determine if there was a correlation to participants' kindergarten transition practices at these schools and students' reading achievement in kindergarten.

A review of the literature for this study is presented in Chapter 2. The literature review was framed around five categories: (1) Historical Background, (2) Increased Accountability, (3) School Readiness, (4) Kindergarten Transitions, and (5) Discontinuities Between Settings. An overview of each of these categories is provided below.

### Historical Background

In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson engaged in a metaphorical war on poverty (Germany, n.d.). This metaphorical war resulted in the *Economic Opportunity Act of 1964* (Germany, n.d.; Miller, n.d.). This act included many federally funded anti-poverty programs designed to help citizens become productive members of society. One of these programs, Head Start, established in 1965, was among the first of these federally funded anti-poverty programs. Two decades later, *A Nation at Risk*, published in 1983, placed more importance on education. As a result of the attention generated by the 1983 report, President George H. W. Bush, along

with the Governors of all 50 states attended the first ever National Education Goals Summit in 1989. This conference resulted in the creation of the National Education Goals Panel. This panel ultimately created eight goals for our nation's educational system (see Appendix G).

The first of these national goals was "All children in America will start school ready to learn." Head Start, the founding school readiness program was in place, but with this goal set forth by the National Education Goals Panel, other school readiness programs such as North Carolina's More at Four program came into existence (United States Department of Health & Human Services, 2003; More at Four, n.d.). Later, the National Education Goals Panel members realized they had created a disproportionate focus on child readiness, which resulted in the creation of the 8<sup>th</sup> National Education Goal (see Appendix G). This additional goal stressed the importance of parental participation in student's education, along with school responsibilities for creating partnerships with parents (National Education Goals Panel, 1996), and his goal created a shift in focus, moving the burden of being ready for school from child readiness to school readiness (Dockett & Perry, 2002).

### **Increased Accountability**

National Education Goals were seen by some as the predecessor to *No Child Left Behind* and other accountability measures that were established in the 1990's (Ready for School Goal Team, 2002). This increased accountability was often accompanied with the awarding of school-level recognition for schools that reached accountability goals. These included bonus money to teachers, and special school designations, such as *Honor School of Excellence* (see Appendix A). The desire to receive these recognitions compounded academic pressure on schools and children.

One recent example of how states scurried to get the piece of federal funding was President Obama's \$4.35 billion *Race to the Top* federal grant fund (Weiss, 2009). *Race to the*

*Top* was the latest federal initiative touted to reform the educational system of the United States. As the name implies, states raced to meet eligibility requirements by changing existing practices through creating conditions for educational innovation and reform. With the President's formal announcement of this grant in July 2009 (United States Department of Education, 2009a), at least 40 states (United States Department of Education, 2009b) expressed intent of submitting an application for *Race to the Top Phase I*, which was due no later than January 19, 2010 (United States Department of Education, 2009a). From these applicants, only two states, Delaware and Tennessee were successful in obtaining funds (United States Department of Education, 2010a). A second phase, *Race to the Top Phase II*, applications were due June 1, 2010. From this applicant pool of 46 states and the District of Columbia, nine states, along with the District of Columbia were awarded a share of these federal dollars. North Carolina was one of the Phase 2 recipients (United States Department of Education, 2010b).

Accountability standards for states receiving *Race to the Top* grant funds were increased beyond the previously set federal accountability standards of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) and other individual state accountability systems such as North Carolina's School-Based Management and Accountability Program, more commonly known as the ABC's accountability program (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2010). Increased goals and expectations for academic performance, often driven by the desire for more federal and/or state funding, trickled down to the youngest public school children, kindergarteners (Wireless Generation, 2012b). Lin, Lawrence and Gorrell (2003) found kindergarten teachers viewed social preparedness for kindergarten as a higher priority than academic preparedness. The federal government's heavy focus on literacy resulted in preparing children to read as one of the state's key kindergarten goals (Wesley et al., 2003). The academically oriented kindergartens of today

made kindergarten classrooms look more like first grade classrooms (Moore, 2002). Teachers, especially of young children, were conflicted between developmentally appropriate practices and more stringent instructional expectations being placed upon them (Wesley et al., 2003).

### **School Readiness**

The situation was exacerbated when increased accountability measures were coupled with data indicating nearly half of the nation's kindergarteners experienced moderate to severe problems transitioning successfully to kindergarten (Pianta & Cox, 1998). As a result, not only was it important for children to be ready for school, but there was an exigency that schools were ready for all children, regardless of the child's level of readiness (Barnett & Taylor, 2009; Early, Pianta, Taylor, & Cox, 2001; National Education Goals Panel, 1998). The High/Scope Educational Research Foundation (2006) defined Ready Schools as:

. . . a concept – a vision of what schools can do to assure that all children who enter their doors will fulfill their potential as learners. The idea of a ready school broadens the definition of school readiness. Instead of only focusing on whether or not children arrive at school ready to learn, a more inclusive definition of readiness also considers whether or not school policies and practices support a commitment to the success of every child (The High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 2006).

The *School Readiness in North Carolina* report defined two categories of school readiness. The first category was the condition of children when they entered school, and the second included schools being responsible for being ready to educate all children regardless of their condition (School Readiness in North Carolina, 2000b). These categories of school readiness were aligned with the first key principle for ensuring that schools were ready for all

children (National Education Goals Panel, 1998), specifically that Ready Schools created a successful transition between home and school.

### **Kindergarten Transitions**

Recognizing this need for successful initial school experiences for children, many schools implemented transition practices that helped ensure successful transitions to kindergarten (Pianta, Cox, Taylor, & Early, 1999; Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005). This was especially important since research has shown that the quantity, or amount, of transition practices schools offered to children and families was associated with positive academic achievement scores at the end of kindergarten (Schulting et al., 2005) and was a critical time in children's academic and social development (Early et al., 2001; Entwisle & Alexander, 1999; Pianta, Cox et al., 1999). For example, positive transitions were facilitated through purposeful transition activities such as pre-kindergarten children visiting kindergarten classrooms, and through the development of positive child/adult relationships (Meyer & Mann, 2006; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). The effects of these school based transition practices were the strongest for low and middle socio-economic status children (Schulting et al., 2005).

Transition activities were also categorized by intensity (Pianta et al., 1999; Rous, Hallam, McCormick, & Cox 2010). High-intensity practices were highly individualized, while low-intensity transition practices were whole group in nature. The majority of transition practices utilized in schools was low intensity, defined as group oriented, (Early et al., 2001; LaParo, Pianta, & Cox, 2000) and did not reflect the Ready Schools movement (Pianta et al., 1999). Pianta et al. (1999) reported the most commonly used practices fell "woefully short" (p. 82) of building supports for children even though they had the potential to decrease the risk of school failure.

In addition to purposeful transition activities, the development of close teacher-student relationships were found to promote positive transitions to school (Howes, Burchinal, Pianta, Bryant, Early, Clifford, & Barbarin, 2008; Myer et al., 2006; Schulting, 2008), as the interpersonal conditions of children's school experiences influenced their ability to develop school competencies (Pianta et al., 2004). Improving teacher-child relationships was critical to positive academic and social outcomes (Howes et al., 2008; Jerome, Hamre, & Pianta, 2009; Pianta et al., 2004). Using Pianta's (2001) Teacher-Child Relationship Scale, Pianta et al. (2004) found that teachers who reported their relationship with a child as being "close" were more likely to identify the child as meeting social and academic expectations during their kindergarten year than teachers who reported a conflicted relationship with a child. Meyer et al. (2006) found that teachers who participated in home visits during the summer preceding the child's kindergarten year were more likely to report a "closer" relationship with the child, than a conflicted relationship. Positive outcomes for both teachers and families have resulted from the use of home visits (Schulting, 2009). These positive relational effects from home visits helped substantiate the categorization of home visits as a high intensity kindergarten transition practice (Rous et al., 2010).

Another high intensity kindergarten transition practice was Coordinating with Preschool Programs and the Community (Rous et al., 2010). Head Start was one preschool program available to pre-school aged children. The Head Start Impact Study (Zehr, 2010) suggested that participation in Head Start had positive effects on children's learning while they were attending Head Start, but that most of these academic advantages had disappeared by the end of first grade (Zehr, 2010). Only two empirical studies have been conducted to date (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011) linking the use of kindergarten transition practices to improved student outcomes. Most

research relies solely on teacher reports regarding the transition to kindergarten (Wildenger et al., 2011). Much research has been completed to determine which transition practices were used most, but more research was needed to examine the potential differential impact of transition practices on children's adjustment to school and later academic performance (Rous et al., 2010).

Ecological factors also impacted children's transition to kindergarten. Examples of these ecological influences included demographic and environmental factors such as families, neighborhoods, peers, schools, and teachers. According to this perspective, children were influenced by the people in their families, neighborhoods, schools, and by their peers. These relationships changed over time through natural processes such as death, or through demographic transitions such as moving to a new neighborhood or town. The changing relationships between the child and these ecological factors impacted children's readiness for school. The change and/or stability in these relationships, including adaptability when transitioning to kindergarten, influenced the child's development which ultimately impacted the child's school outcomes (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000).

### **Discontinuities Between Settings**

Discontinuities between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten settings also impacted the child's transition to formal schooling. These discontinuities arose from pre-kindergarten environments which were designed to encourage social and emotional development in children, and in essence emulated the culture of the family. Conversely, children entered kindergarten classrooms focused on higher demands for academic attainment (Graue, 1999; Love, Logue, Trudeau, & Thayer, 1992; National Education Goals Panel, 1998).

## **Statement of the Problem**

Research was replete with teacher surveys (Early et al., 2001; LaParo et al., 2000; Pianta, Cox et al., 1999; Rous et al., 2010; Schulting et al., 2005) where teachers responded to a pre-determined list of forced choice answer responses regarding the presence or absence of kindergarten transition practice features. These prepared, restrictive surveys constructed mainly of check-lists left literature devoid of exploration of the actual experiences teachers had during children's transition period into kindergarten. Hence, there was an absence of research on the context and characteristics of the settings where kindergarten transition practices took place. Thus the need to explore teachers' individual experiences emerged as an unexamined problem in current literature.

Secondly, this researcher found only two documents that sought the opinions or experiences of school administrators regarding kindergarten transition practices (Hanthorn, 2007; Wesley et al., 2003), even though school administrators were a critical element in shaping school culture (Seashore-Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011). The absence of administrative experiences documented in current literature hindered understanding of the influences school leaders had on kindergarten transition practices and represented another unexamined need in the literature.

Finally, effective kindergarten transition practices have been found as a positive predictive factor in a child's achievement scores at the end of kindergarten (Schulting et al., 2005), and in kindergarten behavioral and social outcomes when the child attended a pre-kindergarten program that provided transition practices (LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer, & Pianta, 2008). Even though behavioral and social outcomes were important to research, they were not the focus of this study. Schulting et al. (2005) provided the only study to link the use of effective kindergarten transition practices with academic outcomes in kindergarten (Wildenger et

al., 2011). This problem was reiterated by Rous et al. (2010) who posited for more research examining the impact of transition practices on student academic performance.

Moving beyond a check list of practices into a descriptive element of actual practices teachers and school administrators experienced, may determine ways in which the transition to kindergarten could be improved for all children; thus impacting the child's academic achievement. Findings from this comparative case study, using a phenomenological approach, provided information from school administrators and kindergarten teachers regarding their experiences with Ready Schools, specifically kindergarten transition practices in their respective schools. The researcher compared and contrasted the phenomenon between two schools, then compared the phenomenon at each school with the literature about kindergarten transition practices via a Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature that was created as a systematic method for guiding this study (see Figure 1). The potential differential impacts of these experiences on student reading academic achievement in kindergarten were also explored.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this comparative case study, with a phenomenological approach, was to examine the experiences of school administrators and kindergarten teachers regarding Ready Schools, specifically on the process of transitioning children to kindergarten. The researcher examined the experiences of people who have shared a common phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994), in this case, kindergarten transition practices. These results were compared with the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) and then to the kindergarten reading scores at each school to determine if there was a correlation between Resources and Activities used when transitioning children to kindergarten and student reading

Based on: Knowlton & Phillips, 2009

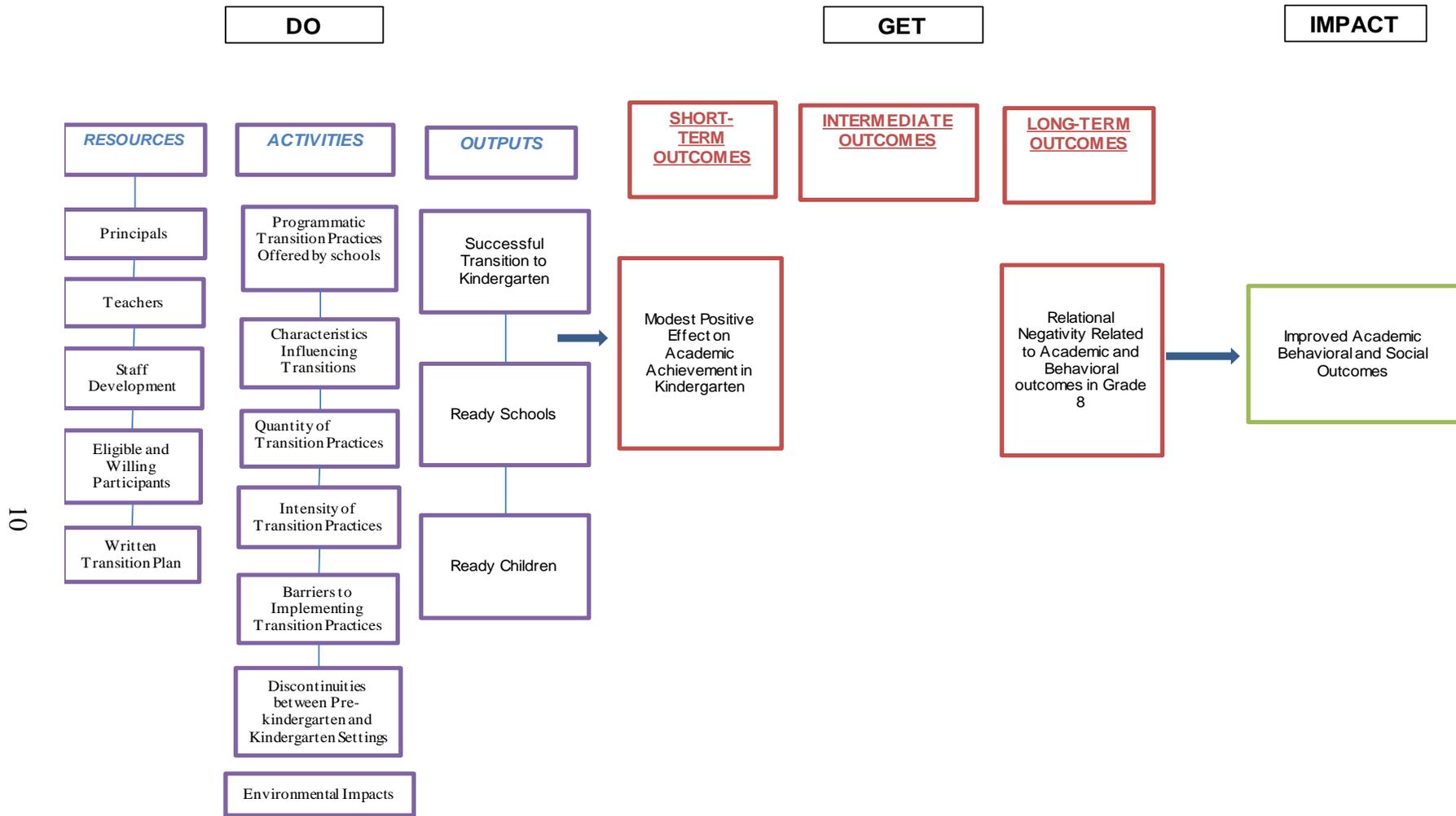


Figure 1. Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model based on the literature.

achievement in kindergarten (Wildenger et al., 2011). Notably, any correlation found between the use of Resources and Activities with student reading achievement was contradicted by a number of factors (e.g. instructional differences, student absences, class size, school culture, etc.); controlling for these variables was beyond the scope of this study.

### **Significance of the Study**

Researchers previously suggested that high-intensity kindergarten transition practices have been found to be a predictive factor in a child's future school success, specifically positive academic achievement (Schulting et al., 2005) at the end of kindergarten, along with social and behavioral successes (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). Even though the positive social and behavioral aspects of transitioning into kindergarten were important to explore, they were not the focus of this study. Though researchers suggested these aspects were important in kindergarten transitions, research has shown that most children did not receive these kindergarten transition supports (Love et al., 1992; Pianta et al., 1998; Pianta, Cox et al., 1999). Researchers suggested that almost one-half of our nation's kindergarteners entered kindergarten not ready for school (Pianta et al., 1998). Research is needed to ascertain why the implementation of kindergarten transition practices, or supports, are rare. Using the comparative case study method, data collected was compared to determine if there appeared to be a correlation between kindergarten transition practices and kindergarten reading achievement. These results may be of particular interest to states and school districts trying to meet the federal and state academic demands of high-stakes testing (Schulting et al., 2005).

As states race to reform educational policies and strategies to obtain funding, while increasing accountability standards for student success, it is important for school leaders and policy makers to create and implement successful kindergarten transition plans to maximize

students' potential of academic, social and emotional success. Identifying the experiences of administrators and kindergarten teachers related to kindergarten transition practices helps educational leaders see what kindergarten transition policies looked like in practice, and identifies barriers to implementing intended policies regarding transitioning to kindergarten. Finding a correlation between kindergarten transition practices and student achievement helps substantiate the pivotal role kindergarten transition practices play in academic success. Overall, these findings help educational leaders create changes that will enable them to meet the high-stakes demands placed before them, and help children find academic success.

### **Research Questions**

The researcher's focus of this comparative case study using a phenomenological approach, was to obtain the experiences of school administrators and kindergarten teachers from two elementary schools with similar socio-economic populations, and to search for evidence that correlated kindergarten transition practices to improved academic reading outcomes in kindergarten. In addition to the research questions used to guide this study, this section includes a brief explanation about forming phenomenological and case study questions.

The first step to conducting a comparative case study was to create specific research questions that sought to explain how current social phenomenon work. Creating extensive questions by asking "why" or "how" questions provided an in-depth description of a specific social phenomenon, in this case, kindergarten transition practices (Yin, 2009).

Phenomenological qualitative research questions were constructed using central or broad questions for exploration into the phenomenon, as not to limit the inquiry. The central question was followed by associated sub-questions, which were designed to narrow the focus of the study, while not limiting the inquiry (Creswell, 2009). In the current study, the researcher synthesized

the strategies for creating case study questions; with the strategies for creating qualitative research questions with a phenomenological approach to arrive at the development of the following synthesized research questions:

1. How did two elementary schools, in the same school district, with similar socio-economic demographics facilitate kindergarten transition practices?
2. To what extent has each school created a kindergarten transition plan?
3. How were kindergarten transition practices at each school described when compared to the literature on kindergarten transition practices?
4. How were the schools' kindergarten transition practices similar and how were they different?
5. To what degree was there evidence that suggested kindergarten transition practices had a positive influence on student achievement?

### **Overview of Methodology**

The focus of this comparative case study with a phenomenological approach was to study two cases (the same phenomenon in two separate settings), specifically transition to kindergarten practices at two elementary schools, and to ascertain the experiences of school administrators and kindergarten teachers with regards to transition to kindergarten practices at each school (Creswell, 2007). Using the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) (Knowlton & Phillips, 2009), kindergarten transition practices at each school were then compared to the literature. The researcher blended the approaches of case study, phenomenology, and comparative case study. A definition of each of the three approaches is provided below.

Creswell (2007) described case study research as:

A qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case bound themes (p. 73).

Creswell (2007) described phenomenological research as:

. . . the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. Phenomenologists focus on what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon. The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence (p. 57).

Kaarbo and Beasley (1999) described a comparative case study as “...the systematic comparison of two or more data points (‘cases’) obtained through the use of the case study method.” The priority of this comparative case study with a phenomenological approach was to examine a real-world phenomenon, (e.g. kindergarten transition practices), within its naturally occurring context, followed by a systematic comparison of the two case study sites. The analysis described the similarities and differences of the transition to kindergarten practices at two elementary schools in southeastern North Carolina to determine if there was a correlation between the essences, or mutually understood meanings among participants, of kindergarten transition practices and the student’s reading achievement. Overall, the ideal for this comparative case study using a phenomenological approach was to determine if the use of kindergarten transition practices were reflected in the academic reading performance of kindergarten students as measured by kindergarten Text Reading Comprehension (TRC) and Dynamic Indicators of

Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), which were the state of North Carolina's assessments for measuring grade level proficiency in kindergarten. Qualitative face-to-face interviews were conducted at two elementary schools. The principals, assistant principals, and kindergarten teachers were each interviewed separately. These educators' experiences were formulated for each school. The formulated experiences of the three different stake holder groups were compared to help triangulate data and add credibility to this study. Twelve participants in all were interviewed by the researcher. This number further validated this comparative case study using a phenomenological approach as Polkinghorne (1989) and Patton (2002) recommended there were no rules for sample sizes in qualitative studies. Polkinghorne (1989) wrote that the numbers of subjects in phenomenological studies ranged widely from 3 to 325 with averages of 25 or 30 subjects. Patton (2002) explained the sample size was dependent on the purpose of the inquiry. Rich in-depth studies from a small number of people were often more valuable than studies that had greater numbers of subjects. Twelve participants who all experienced the same phenomenon were interviewed in this phenomenological study, which added to the validation to this study.

Data were analyzed by following a blended approach for conducting a case study, a comparative case study and a phenomenological study. The phenomenon being studied in this comparative case study with a phenomenological approach was kindergarten transition practices. Twelve individuals, 5 at River City Elementary and 7 at Bridge View Elementary, who experienced the kindergarten transition practices phenomenon were interviewed by the researcher. Once data were collected, the researcher categorized common essences, themes and meanings found in the literature (see Figure 1) then included any additional essences, themes, and meanings found from all respondents at each school. Correlations between practices

identified in the literature and practices occurring in the schools were made. The researcher then wrote a textural description of these essences, themes or meanings. The researcher composed a description of kindergarten transition practices at each school (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). This information was compared to determine if the quantity, quality or intensity of kindergarten transition practices at each school correlated with the academic reading performance of kindergarten students, as measured by TRC and DIBELS (George & Bennett, 2005; Kaarbo et al., 1999) and compared to the Kindergarten Transition Program Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1).

### **Definition of Terms**

*ABC's* – The State of North Carolina's School-Based Management and Accountability Program. This plan measures schools' proficiency and growth, recognizes schools who meet targets, and identifies schools that fall short of goals.

*AYP* - An acronym which stands for Adequate Yearly Progress. AYP is the amount of academic progress that students are expected to make for each grade level and subject area within one year with appropriate instruction. Overall school attendance and total number of students tested are also calculated in the AYP formula (The Elementary and Secondary Education Act as reauthorized by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2001).

*Achievement gap* - The disparity in academic performance between groups of students, most frequently between African-American and Hispanic students and non-Hispanic Caucasian peers. This disparity is also frequently found between low and high socio-economic status groups.

*At-risk* – “Any event, condition, or characteristic that increases the probability of the occurrence of an identified target outcome (e.g. school failure)” (Pianta & Walsh, 1996, p. 17).

*Bracketing (or epoche)* – When investigators set aside experiences so that they can take a fresh, unbiased approach towards the phenomenon they are studying (Creswell, 2007, p. 59-60).

*Case study* – “A type of qualitative investigation that involves the in-depth study of instances of a phenomenon in its natural context and from the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005, p. 545).

*Essences* – Meanings that were mutually understood among the participants regarding the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007).

*Common use* – When 70% or more of the participants reported use of a transition practice (Pianta, Cox et al., 1999).

*Lived experiences* – The individual experiences of people who have shared a common phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

*Member Checking* - “The process of having individuals review statements in the researchers’ report for accuracy and completeness” (Gall et al., 2005, p. 322).

*Memo Writing* – A researchers thoughts, observations, or ideas that are written down for later reflection (Yin, 2011).

*Structural description* – In phenomenological research structural descriptions are descriptions of how participants experienced the phenomenon in terms of the conditions, situations, or context (Creswell, 2007, p. 60).

*Textural description* – In phenomenological research textural descriptions are descriptions of the experiences of the participants being interviewed, or of what they experienced (Creswell, 2007, p. 60).

*Title I Schools* – When 40% of a school’s student population fell below the district’s socioeconomic mean, the school was designated as a Title I school and was provided by

additional federal funding to organize, fund, and facilitate programs to benefit all students at the school (North Carolina Public Schools, n.d.b).

*Title I School in “School Improvement Status”* - Any Title I school not making AYP in the same subject(s) for two consecutive years. Schools in “school improvement status,” must take many actions to improve performance, including the development of a school improvement plan along with Title I funds used specifically for staff development. When schools continue not to meet AYP, sanctions increase including school choice and/or supplemental educational services provided to students after school hours to corrective action and restructuring. These final drastic actions can include the replacement of staff members.

*Triangulation* – “the use of multiple data-collection methods, data sources, analysts, or theories to increase the soundness of research findings” (Gall et al., 2005, p. 558).

### **Study Boundaries**

The research was confined to and conducted in two elementary schools in one school district in southeastern North Carolina. The study involved interviews with one principal, one assistant principal, and 3 kindergarten classroom teachers at River City Elementary, and interviews with one principal, one assistant principal, and 5 kindergarten classroom teachers at Bridge View Elementary. Both schools had similar student demographics in regards to total student population, and with the percent of children receiving free and reduced lunch. Dissimilar demographics included overall student academic proficiency as measured by the North Carolina End of Grade Tests for reading and mathematics for the 2011-2012 school year, percentage of African American students, and percentage of Hispanic students (see Table 1).

Table 1

*School Demographics*

	River City Elementary	Bridge View Elementary
Overall student population	316	363
Percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch (poverty indicator)	97.13%	90.58%
School's overall academic proficiency based on North Carolina end of grade tests in reading and math 2011-2012	60.5%	73.1%
School's overall academic proficiency based on North Carolina end of grade tests in reading and math 2010-2011	63.9%	57.0%
Percentage of African American students	83.54%	56.59%
Percentage of Hispanic students	6.3%	15.3%
Transition to kindergarten plan written in School Improvement Plan	Yes	Yes

### **Limitations**

1. This study focused qualitatively on the context and participants at two elementary schools in one school district in southeastern North Carolina. While the findings from this study are limited to these two schools, the researcher's findings suggest implications beyond this study.
2. Interview data collected by the researcher reflect the interviewees' perspective only. Some interviewees provided artifacts to substantiate their claims.
3. River City Elementary had two pre-kindergarten classrooms on-site. While Bridge View did not.

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions in this study were viewed through three lenses. First the assumptions of the researcher were identified, secondly assumptions in the literature were reviewed, and lastly assumptions of the research participants were uncovered. Assumptions in the literature were discussed at the conclusion of Chapter 2, and assumptions of the research participants were revealed in Chapter 4 as participant perceptions. The researcher assumed:

1. Students in each elementary school received the same curricular materials and the same quality of instruction, and the DIBELS and TRC assessments were implemented with fidelity.
2. Since students from each school were from similar socio-economic environments, other demographic and cultural features of their environments were also similar.
3. Parents received kindergarten registration information and other school related materials at the same time.

4. Parents and students received teacher assignments at open house, and teachers received their class lists on open house day.

During the data collection phase of this study, the researcher sought to look for disconfirming evidence of assumptions, and reported disconfirming evidence of assumptions in Chapter 4.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The researcher investigated kindergarten transition practices at two elementary schools in one school district located in southeastern North Carolina. Effective transitions to kindergarten helped set a positive trajectory for children's future academic and social successes (Alexander et al., 1988; Entwisle & Alexander, 1993; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Schulting et al., 2005). The researcher reviewed the literature related to kindergarten transitions by examining the Historical Background, Increased Accountability, School Readiness, Lack of Readiness/Lack of Success, Transitions and findings of how these concepts influenced children's transition from pre-school to kindergarten.

### Historical Background

During his 1964 State of the Union Address, President Lyndon B. Johnson officially launched a "War on Poverty." This antipoverty focus was carried out through the Johnson Administration, as evidenced by the amounts of antipoverty legislation that was passed (War on Poverty, n.d.). The *Economic Opportunity Act of 1964* (n.d.) was the first step in this metaphorical war, and the goal was to help those in poverty by enabling them to overcome the conditions of poverty on their own through better training, improved skills, and hard work (Miller, n.d.; War on Poverty, n.d.; Economic Opportunity Act 1964, n.d.). The premise behind the *Economic Opportunity Act of 1964* (n.d.) was that the United States could not reach its full social and economic impact potential as a nation until all citizens contributed and participated in our society to the fullest extent of their abilities (Economic Opportunity Act 1964, n.d.; Miller, n.d.).

The *Economic Opportunity Act* provided the basis for many antipoverty programs. The Community Action Program functioned as a federal grant program for local community agencies

(War on Poverty, n.d.). Federal funding was funneled into local communities because the president and congress felt poverty had to be pursued wherever it existed, such as in slums, small towns and migrant worker camps. These federal funds bypassed state and local governments and provided direct funding to community groups created to help eliminate poverty. Even states' governors were not authorized to give prior approval on Office of Economic Opportunity grant funds. A few big-city mayors became unhappy with the lack of control over these funds, and communicated their concerns to congress and President Johnson. As a result of these complaints, congress earmarked new funds into congressionally defined National Emphasis Programs, which in essence reduced the ability of Community Action Agencies to use the federal funds for other purposes. As a result, these Community Action Agencies which were intended to function as a local means for reform, became overshadowed by National Emphasis Programs (Masters, 1989). One such National Emphasis Program was Head Start, which emerged as one of the most influential National Emphasis Programs of this time (War on Poverty, n.d.).

Even though Head Start, which originated in 1965, was located in the United States Department of Health & Human Services (2003), with an initial focus on mental health and social services, it evolved into a national school readiness program. The Head Start program provided parental involvement, health, nutrition, and educational services to low-income children and their families. This broad focus resulted in Head Start becoming our Nation's founding school readiness program.

In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* was published, leading to more focus on the state of education in our nation. As a result, in 1989, the first educational summit to be held since nearly the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, The National Education Goals Summit, was held. The attendees were then President George Bush and the Governors of the 50 states. This summit resulted in the

formulation of The National Education Goals Panel. This panel was comprised of Governors, Members of the President's Administration, Members of Congress and State Legislators. Early in 1990, the panel created six National Education Goals. The Panel began reporting states' progress towards these goals in 1991 and continued reporting through the year 2000, which was shortly before the panel dissolved in April 2002. During this ten year process, the Panel added two additional goals, ultimately resulting in eight National Education Goals. National Education Goals were established to create a renewed focus on improving education in the United States. Two primary foci of this national plan were school readiness and parental involvement.

The first of these National Education Goals, "All children in America will start school ready to learn," demonstrated a national recognition of the importance of the context surrounding children as they entered their first formal schooling environment. This goal highlighted the need for quality early childhood education programs and emphasized the importance parents played as their child's first teacher. (National Education Goals Panel, 1991; National Education Goals Panel 1996; National Education Goals Panel, 1998). Spawned by the founding school readiness program, Head Start, and in response to the dire situation of our nation's schools, other state and local school readiness programs have evolved over the years. In 2003, President Bush established provisions allowing the integration of Head Start programs with other school readiness programs such as the North Carolina initiative, More at Four (United States Department of Health & Human Services, 2003; More at Four, n.d.). Some states, such as North Carolina, developed an interest in state and local school readiness programs that were born out of the formation of the National Education Goals Panel (Ready for School Goal Team, 2002). This continued focus on pre-school programs as a cure-all for a child's school readiness was brought into question when LaParo et al. (2000), found that fewer than one-fourth of children's

kindergarten achievement was accounted for by their preschool achievement (LaParo, et al., 2000; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). This definition of school readiness “implied that a child possessed a certain set of skills that determine if he or she was ready to start school” (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). Ramey and Ramey (1999), found this implication “. . . severely flawed by a disproportionate focus on the child’s skills” (p. 218). More specifically, Ramey et al. (1999) wrote that only focusing on the child’s skills failed to take into consideration the role the family and school environments played regarding a child’s readiness for school. This disproportionate focus on the child excluded family influences on the child and assumed schools were comparable in practices and expectations. The National Educational Goals Panel recognized this need to broaden the narrow child skill focus.

A shift from child readiness to school readiness came with the addition of Goal 8 to the 6 original National Education Goals (see Appendix G), that stressed the importance of parental participation in students’ education, along with schools’ responsibilities for creating partnerships with parents (National Education Goals Panel, 1996, p. xvii). Goal 8 called for every state to assist local education agencies and schools to increase parental partnerships by overcoming barriers families experienced which limited their school partnership opportunities. Goal 8 specifically listed schools focusing on disadvantaged, bilingual, or families of disabled children. Additionally schools were charged with engaging families in academics and educational decision making. Goal 8 completed the partnership circle by encouraging parents to ensure their schools were supported and to hold their schools to high accountability standards (National Education Goals Panel, n.d.). The National Education Goals were founded on the principles of outcome-based education, and as a result, parents were not the only group of stakeholders holding schools to higher accountability standards. The federal government and states jumped on the band

wagon, implementing accountability goals and benchmarks that were expected to be met. The National Education Goals were seen by some as the predecessor to No Child Left Behind and other accountability measures such as North Carolina's ABC program that were established during the 1990's (Ready for School Goal Team, 2002).

## **Increased Accountability**

### **Federal Funding and Accountability**

As a part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty, President Johnson proposed to the Eighty-Ninth Congress, his *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) of 1965. This act which was passed in both houses, by an overwhelming majority, marked "...the assumption by the federal government of its appropriate and long-overdue role in assuring adequate educational opportunities for all children" (McKay, 1965, p. 427). This act acknowledged that educational needs of a society growing in complexity were of a national scope, and could not be adequately funded from the state or local levels. Title I of ESEA recognized a relationship between ignorance and poverty by distributing money to the states based on the number of low-income children (McKay, 1965). Monies from Title I continued being filtered to states over the following decades in an attempt to provide equality in education for all children, specifically those living in poverty. In 2002, a big change occurred with ESEA, and Title I funds when Congress reauthorized ESEA. This action included the enactment of *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 (NCLB). NCLB had four principles: Accountability for results, parental choice, more local control and flexibility, and the use of educational methods that were scientifically research based.

Under NCLB, schools were required to have one-hundred percent of students' proficient by the end of the 2013-2014 school year. According to this federal mandate, each state set

benchmark target goals in reading and mathematics in an effort to reach this goal. The states' attainment toward these goals was reported through a report entitled, Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). Sanctions, such as after school supplemental educational services and school choice were put into place for schools and Local Education Agencies who continually failed to meet AYP target goals (No Child Left Behind, 2001; No Child Left Behind, 2008). In addition to student achievement targets, NCLB also incorporated teacher credentials as an accountability measure.

As a part of NCLB accountability, teachers were required to be highly qualified. To be highly qualified, teachers were required to obtain pre-determined educational attainments and certifications (No Child Left Behind, 2001). Recent studies recommended the federal government include criteria other than teacher certification as the determining factor for teachers being deemed highly qualified. This recommendation came from the findings that teachers with experience in a specific grade level had mediating effects for at-risk children, especially in reading (Crosnoe & Cooper, 2010). Researchers found while teaching practices, attitudes and beliefs were relevant to teacher effectiveness that mediating effects for teacher credentials were found to be either insignificant or less prominent than other teaching and organizational factors (Palardy & Rumberger, 2008).

An increased national focus and accountability for communication and partnerships between families and schools was also revealed through The National Education Goals Panel, along with *No Child Left Behind* guidelines. Communication and partnerships were so important under *No Child Left Behind*, that federal Title I funding was contingent upon the development of policies regarding family involvement (National Education Goals Panel, 1996; No Child Left Behind, 2001).

After ten years of implementing NCLB principles and accountability standards, as outlined in the 2002 ESEA reauthorization, public officials recognized that ESEA was long overdue for reauthorization (Children’s Defense Fund, 2011). One of President Barak Obama’s platforms was education reform, but the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress had “yet to follow through on rewriting the law” (Children’s Defense Fund, 2011). In response to Congress’ inaction, The United States Department of Education (USED) offered each State education agency the opportunity to request a flexibility waiver from some of the requirements of NCLB as specified in ESEA in exchange for state developed plans that were rigorous and comprehensive, and were designed to improve academic outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, increase equity and improve instructional quality (North Carolina Public Schools, 2012a).

On February 27, 2012 (North Carolina Public Schools, 2012a) the state of North Carolina applied for a NCLB flexibility waiver, and the request was approved by the USED on May 29, 2012 (North Carolina Public Schools, 2012a). This waiver remained in effect for the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 school years. Some ESEA waiver (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2012) implications for North Carolina Public Schools were:

- Adequately Yearly Progress (AYP) measures were no longer reported. Beginning in the 2011-2012 school year, The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction reported the number and percentage of Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO’s) met. The AMO’s were based on 2010-2011 data and were identified for each sub-group. The AMO targets varied for each sub-group based on each sub-groups 2010-2011 data. The ultimate goal of each sub-groups target was reduction of the percentage of non-proficient students by one-half in six years.

- Local Education Agencies were no longer required to implement supplemental educational services or offer school choice (North Carolina Public Schools, 2012a).

Title I was not the only big educational funding project promulgated by the federal government to improve education for all children. In 2010 another federal level of accountability was placed upon eleven states and the District of Columbia in exchange for a piece of the \$4.35 billion Race to the Top grant funds. This unprecedented funding was based on education reform in the areas of (1) adopted standards and assessments that would make students globally competitive, (2) had data systems that measured student growth, and provided teachers with professional development on how to improve instruction, (3) recruited, rewarded, and retained the top teachers and principals in the schools where they were needed most, and (4) turned around low achieving schools. Through the first two rounds of applications, forty-six states and the District of Columbia submitted plans for reforming education in states (North Carolina Public Schools, 2010a; United States Department of Education, 2010b). Even though only eleven states (including North Carolina) and the District of Columbia were awarded the funds, other states benefited from educational reforms created through the application process. As a part of the Race to the Top application process, forty-six states and the District of Columbia created comprehensive educational reform plans. Of these forty-six states, thirty-five adopted a rigorous curriculum and implemented college and career ready standards, and thirty-four states changed laws and policies to improve education. States set forth benchmark goals that satisfied the Race to the Top grant award (North Carolina Public Schools, 2012b; United States Department of Education, 2010b). In North Carolina for example, the Governor obtained grant funding for selected schools in North Carolina to pilot reading and math diagnostic assessments (North Carolina Public Schools, 2010b). Randomly selected North Carolina schools participated in the

National Assessment of Educational Progress to determine North Carolina's progress towards North Carolina's pre-determined target goals (North Carolina Public Schools, n.d.a). These growing accountability measures created increased academic pressures on states, school districts and schools.

### **State Funding and Accountability**

In 1995, the North Carolina General Assembly directed the State Board of Education to develop a plan for restructuring public education. A framework was outlined and piloted, and in 1996 a plan entitled the School-Based Management and Accountability Program, known as the ABC's, (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2010) was put into law. The ABC plan measured proficiency and growth, recognized schools that met targets, and publically identified those schools that fell short of the ABC goals. The North Carolina State Board of Education began making changes to the ABC program to ensure alignment with the ESEA reauthorization of 2002, specifically NCLB requirements. The public schools in North Carolina were held accountable under the dual accountability guidelines of *No Child Left Behind* and the North Carolina ABC plan (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2010). These dual systems outlined similar but not identical or fully aligned accountability requirements.

Just as Title I guidelines changed with the ESEA reauthorization of 2002 and the onset of NCLB, the North Carolina ABC plan changed in 2012 with the ESEA flexibility waiver and NC Senate Bill 795. NC Senate Bill 795 changed the state accountability ABC program much like the ESEA waiver (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2012) changed the Federal NCLB accountability requirements. NC Senate Bill 795 was also known as the *Excellent Public Schools Act*. Changes from this act that were approved June 21, 2012, by the North Carolina House and Senate were:

- Improving k-3 literacy which included an end to social promotion of third graders and included funding to expand the 21<sup>st</sup> Century assessment tool Reading 3D state-wide.
- School performance designations reported on a grading scale of A-F
- Funding for 5 additional student attendance days from 180 to 185, (North Carolina Association of School Administrators, 2012).

This section delineated growing and ever changing accountability measures that have increased academic performance pressures on states, school districts, and schools. These pressures were felt all the way down to our youngest students, kindergarteners.

### **Trickled Down to Kindergarten**

Friedrich Froebel, who was known as the father of kindergarten, envisioned kindergarten as a garden for children to become socialized to formal schooling and a place where learning could occur naturally through exploration and play (Moore, 2002). With the release of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, along with increased national and state accountability standards, academic standards have risen, and these standards have filtered down to the beginning years of school, resulting in a cultural change in the nature of kindergarten (Meisels, 1999; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; National Education Goals Panel, 1996; No Child Left Behind, 2001; Shepard & Smith 1986; Wesley et al., 2003). The most recent increase in academic standards for kindergarten students came when the North Carolina General Assembly passed the k-3 literacy component of the 2012 North Carolina Excellent Public Schools Act. This passage provided funding for all schools in the state of North Carolina to use the Wireless Generation Company's Reading 3D diagnostic assessment tool in grades k-3 beginning in the 2013-2014 school year. Wireless Generation's name changed to Amplify, Inc. Amplify Inc. was built on the foundation of Wireless Generation which pioneered mobile assessments and instructional

analytics to schools across all 50 states (Amplify, Inc., 2013). Prior to the 2012-2013 school year, Wireless Generations' Reading 3D measured Text Reading Comprehension (TRC) and Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). These were short one minute fluency measures used to regularly monitor the development of early reading and literacy skills (University of Oregon Center on Teaching and Learning, 2012). Examples of DIBELS measures included First Sound Fluency (FSF), Letter Naming Fluency (LNF), Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF), and Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF). The new legislative requirement correlated with changes in the benchmark proficiency goals set by Reading 3D. Wireless Generation conducted research during the 2009-2010 school year. This research was used to adjust benchmark goals for proficiency, cut points for risk and to develop a Composite Score. These new assessments were called DIBELS Next. DIBELS Next were measures that assessed the acquisition of early literacy skills. These new assessments were used to predict the probability of students reaching later important reading outcomes (Dynamic Measurement Group, Inc., 2010). Some of the measures from prior to the 2012-2013 school year remained the same, while some changed. New cut scores were determined which better reflected grade-level expectations associated with the Common Core Standards. Panelist making adjustments to the cut scores worked backwards from grade 3 to kindergarten to set cut scores (Wireless Generation, 2012b). Increased academic expectations were placed upon kindergarten students beginning in the 2012-2013 school year with the implementation of DIBELS Next and the Composite Score (see Tables 2 and 3).

Even though accountability standards such as *No Child Left Behind* did not delineate benchmarks for school readiness, accountability requirements in the current educational culture have placed increased pressure on kindergarten teachers leading them to lessen the amount of

Table 2

*DIBELS and TRC Proficiency levels based on reading skills*

Grade K	Initial sound fluency	Letter naming fluency	Phoneme segmentation fluency	Non-sense word fluency
Beginning of year	8	8	not measured	not measured
Middle of year	25	27	18	13
End of year	not measured	40	35	25

*Note.* Prior to the 2012-2013 school year (Dynamic Measurement Group, Inc., 2010).

Table 3

*DIBELS Next and TRC Proficiency Levels with Overall Composite Score (2012-2013)*

Grade K	Composite score	First sound fluency	Letter naming fluency	Phoneme segmentation	Non-sense word fluency correct / letter sounds	Text Reading Comprehension
Beginning of year	<b>26</b> 13	<b>10</b> 5		not measured	not measured	RB
Middle of year	<b>122</b> 85	<b>30</b> 20	Benchmark for LNF no longer set	<b>20</b> 10	<b>17</b> 8	C
End of year	<b>119</b> 89			<b>40</b> 25	<b>28</b> 15	D

*Note.* Beginning 2012-2013. Benchmark goal top number in bold, cut point for risk, smaller number in box (Dynamic Measurement Group, Inc., 2010).

unstructured play in kindergarten classrooms. In today's kindergarten classrooms the bar has been raised and kindergarten environments are more likely to be academically driven and structured to ensure children are ready to demonstrate proficiency on future standardized assessments (McCabe & Sipple, 2011; Ray & Smith, 2010; Wesley et al., 2003). Along with this increased academic focus came school districts inappropriately using the results of school readiness assessments to evaluate teachers, assign students and prevent student entry into kindergarten (Maxwell & Clifford, 2004). School districts also used grade retention as a remediation strategy to increase students' chances of meeting grade level performance standards (Hong & Yu, 2007).

### **Increase in Retention**

When children did not fit the cognitive, social, maturational, or emotional mold of traditional schooling, schools sometimes resorted to the easiest remediation remedy, grade retention (Hong et al., 2007). Children at the greatest risk for being the recipients of this easy school remedy, grade retention, were boys, children from low socio-economic backgrounds, and children who entered kindergarten younger than their typically aged peers (Burkam, LoGerfo, Ready, & Lee, 2007). Many times when children were retained, nothing different happened for them during their repeated year. These children often ended up simply being exposed to a second year of what they got their first go 'round, leaving them feeling frustrated with two years of instruction that did not work, which could lead to detrimental cognitive consequences (Burkam et al., 2007). Research suggested students who were behind their age-appropriate peers (because of grade retention), continued performing below their peers when repeating kindergarten, as repeating kindergarten rarely produced cognitive benefits in literacy skills or mathematics (Burkam et al., 2007). Grade retention could actually result in detrimental effects on literacy and

mathematic trajectories, as repeaters' cognitive skills remained below their peers both at the end of kindergarten and at the end of first grade (Burkam et al., 2007). Burkam et al. (2007) found no cognitive benefits from kindergarten retention. Students who were at risk of being retained, but were promoted anyway demonstrated more growth in their age-appropriate grade than did their retained peers. These promoted children demonstrated the capability of learning first grade academic content. Exposure to the first grade environment was a possible explanation for the achievement gains of these children (Hong et al., 2007).

In addition to disconfirming findings about the academic consequences of kindergarten retention came mixed findings regarding the socio-emotional effects kindergarten retention had on children. When children were retained, they were basically being told they were a failure at school, possibly impeding their future achievement and self-esteem (Finlayson, 1977). An additional consequence of retention was becoming over-aged when compared to their classmates. One study found that over-aged classmates (over-aged because of retention) were less likely to be socially accepted by their peers than their age-appropriate peers (Morrison & Perry, 1956). These socio-emotional consequences were substantiated by Burkam et al. (2007), who found that even during the repeated kindergarten year, and at the end of first grade, kindergarten repeaters remained socially and behaviorally behind their peers.

These negative socio-emotional findings were contradicted in other research. For example, Finlayson (1977), found kindergarten retention did not have a negative impact on retained children's self-concept. Some parents of retained kindergarten children reported their children had increased confidence, maturity, and readiness during their repeated year. These parents also reported they would make the same non-promotion decision if given the opportunity to make the same decision again (Finlayson, 1977). These findings are more recently

substantiated by Hong and Yu (2008), who found that kindergarten retention did not harm children's social-emotional development, and that being promoted to first grade could have caused the retained kindergarteners to have a lower self-confidence and a decreased interest in academics, while possibly resulting in increased behavior problems. In addition, Hong et al. (2008), suggested findings contradictory to Morrison et al. (1956), that being over-aged in kindergarten due to retention did not alienate students from their new peer groups. These findings were for kindergarten repeaters only and were not generalized to grades higher than kindergarten.

Even in light of research findings that repeating kindergarten produced little to no cognitive gains (in the short term or long term), along with the questionable socio-emotional consequences, educators tended to use this strategy as a last ditch effort to improve student achievement. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2000), about 5% of kindergarteners were retained in the United States each year. This national average is comparable with the number of retained kindergarteners in the state of North Carolina (see Table 4) (North Carolina Public Schools, 2009).

Wesley et al. (2003) reported an increase in the kindergarten retention rate in the state of North Carolina due to the increased academic accountability being placed on schools. During the 1991-1992 school year, only 2.9% of North Carolina kindergarteners were non-promoted. This trend gradually increased each subsequent year until kindergarten retentions reached a peak during the 2001-2002 school year with a 6.7% non-promotion rate. The retention rate remained at over 6% until the 2005-2006 school year, when it dropped to 5.5%. This decreasing trend has continued, as the latest published results indicated a 3.17% non-promotion rate during the 2011-2012 school year.

Table 4

*Kindergarten non-promotion rates in North Carolina Public Schools*

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Year	% non-promoted kindergarten
1991-1992	2.9
1992-1993	3
1993-1994	3.3
1994-1995	3.5
1995-1996	3.8
1996-1997	4.2
1997-1998	4.9
1998-1999	5.5
1999-2000	6
2000-2001	6.4
2001-2002	6.7
2002-2003	6.6
2003-2004	6.1
2004-2005	6.1
2005-2006	5.5
2006-2007	4.8
2007-2008	4.8
2008-2009	4.5
2009-2010	3.6

Table 4 (continued)

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Year	% non-promoted kindergarten
2010-2011	3.5
2011-2012	3.17

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*Note.* (North Carolina Public Schools, 2009; North Carolina Public Schools, 2012d).

Overall retention rates in grades K-5 were highest in kindergarten and first grades (North Carolina Public Schools, 2009), with a decline of kindergarten retentions since the 2001-2002 school year. With the passage of the 2012 North Carolina Excellent Public Schools Act, which included the end to social promotion at the end of grade 3 beginning in the 2013-2014 school year, third grade retention rates could exceed kindergarten and first grade retention rates.

With the increased accountability placed on schools and students, school failure was more costly than ever. Since academic and social difficulties could be traced back to children's transition into formal schooling, a thorough understanding was needed about the importance of a successful transition to school (Belsky & MacKinnon, 1994) so that children and schools could be ready for one another.

### **School Readiness**

The state of North Carolina categorized the description of school readiness into two parts

1. The condition of children when they entered school; and,
2. The capacity of schools to educate all children, whatever each child's condition may have been (School Readiness in North Carolina, 2000a).

The first category in the School Readiness in North Carolina report contained information pertaining to the readiness of the student. Student readiness for school referred to the condition of children when they entered school (School Readiness in North Carolina, 2000a). Researchers found that children's academic, social and emotional readiness impacted their success in kindergarten, which was predictive of later school success (Belsky et al., 1994; Entwisle et al., 1999). The term readiness implied homogeneity among kindergarteners, or that children possessed a pre-determined set of skills when entering kindergarten (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). This implication was far from the reality of the heterogeneous lives incoming

kindergarten students have experienced. To exacerbate the wide range of readiness children brought to schools, children entered schools that lacked uniformity. Examples of these varying schools included differences in curricula, expectations, and teaching methods which existed between states, counties, schools, and sometimes even between classrooms in the same school (McCabe et al., 2011; Meisels, 1999).

Meisels (1999) listed four types of readiness

1. Idealist / Nativist – This view asserted children were ready for school when they reached a level of maturity that allowed them to sit quietly, complete the work, and interact with their peers in socially acceptable ways.
2. Empiricist / Environmental – In this view, children were ready for school when they knew environmental basics such as colors, shapes, the alphabet, and basic counting. This view also deemed children ready when they could interact with their peers in a socially acceptable manner.
3. Social Constructivist – In this view readiness was seen in social and cultural terms. Assessment was not focused on the child, but on the community in which the child lived, and recognized a child may be ready in one community, but not in another.
4. Interactionist – This view focused on children’s learning and on the ability of the school to meet the needs of each child where they were.

Meisels’ (1999) solution to the alignment of these varying readiness concepts was the need for educators to recognize the varying life experiences, preparation, and educational experiences children brought with them when they entered formal schooling.

McCabe et al. (2011) argued that the reason children across the country experienced a lack of continuity with the entry into school was because the Tenth Amendment of the United

States Constitution provided each state government with the authority and responsibility to educate its citizens. Individual states independently created education policies and guidelines developed and led by the state's Department of Education. This system left the United States with "one of, if not the most, decentralized systems of education in the world" (McCabe et al., 2011). In addition to differences between states, schools within states had homogeneous perceptions of student readiness which were found in state policies for school entry. States established what they felt was the most equitable readiness standard, an entrance cut-off date. This eligibility determination was usually when children reached a certain age, typically 5, by a certain date, and sometimes if children demonstrated proficiency on readiness examinations. Age was the criterion used in most states for kindergarten eligibility and in response to readiness concerns and increased academic demands (Graue, 1999; Saluja, Scott-Little, & Clifford, 2000; Wesley et al., 2003), a national trend has been occurring since the late 1960s to move the kindergarten cut-off dates back, resulting in older kindergarteners (Wesley et al., 2003). Contradictory to this commonly used kindergarten entrance criteria, Morrison, Griffith, and Alberts (1997) found entrance age in and of itself was not a good predictor of learning or of academic risk. Younger first graders in their study made as much progress as older first graders, and much more progress when compared to older kindergarteners.

Expectations for readiness varied between states, and even within states. None of the fifty states had an official state-wide definition of school readiness (Saluja et al., 2000). When determining student readiness, most schools did not take into account the variability between children such as age, experience, and home language usage (Graue, 1999; Wesley et al., 2003). The student readiness construct failed to account for the contextual factors playing an equally important role in a child's transition to and success in kindergarten (Pianta, Rimm-Kaufman, &

Cox, 1999). These contextual factors included a mix-match between children's competencies and teacher's expectations when children entered kindergarten, and the discontinuities between the social environment children often experienced in pre-school, compared to the ever increasing academic demands placed upon children when they entered kindergarten (Pianta, Rimm-Kaufman et al., 1999).

When the National Education Goals Panel set goals for school readiness in 1990, they helped move the focus away from student readiness by focusing on readiness in a broader context including the importance that family, school, and community factors played during the transition to kindergarten (Pianta, Rimm-Kaufman et al., 1999). The first National Education Goal was "by the year 2000 all children will start school ready to learn" (National Education Goals Panel, 1991; National Education Goals Panel, 1995, p. 3; National Education Goals Panel, 1998, p. 1). This goal encompassed not only child related skills, but promoted family, health and community related resources such as access to high quality preschools (Pianta, Rimm-Kaufman et al., 1999)

The National Education Goals Panel (1997) identified the following domains of children's development and learning that were needed for success in school:

1. Physical well-being and motor development
2. Social and emotional development
3. Approaches toward learning
4. Language development
5. Cognition and general knowledge

These domains for student readiness in school were also recommended by the Ready for School Team commissioned by the North Carolina State Board of Education. This team was charged

with finding strategies for defining, measuring, and promoting success for all children in North Carolina (School Readiness in North Carolina, 2000b). If these domains were needed for children to be successful in kindergarten, one can deduce that children who experienced deficits in one or more of these domains may have been at greater risk than their counterparts who did not experience deficits in these domains of development.

Research suggested children at-risk for academic and social difficulties benefited most from pre-kindergarten experiences, especially those that provided high quality care and educational experiences (Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Pianta & Howes, 2002; Schulting, 2008; Schulting et al., 2005). If the intent of pre-kindergarten was increased academic and social/behavioral competencies in children when they reached kindergarten, how did we know children were achieving these goals (Howes et al., 2008)? One way to determine if pre-kindergarten classrooms were increasing academic and social/behavioral competencies in children was by looking at the quality of the pre-kindergarten classroom. The quality of the pre-kindergarten classroom, specifically classrooms with higher-quality instruction and closer teacher-child relationships, predicted academic achievement in both kindergarten and pre-kindergarten (Howes et al., 2008). Schweinhart, Weikart, and Larner (1986) substantiated this finding when they replicated the Perry Preschool Study. Schweinhart et al.'s (1986) findings suggested that high-quality preschool programs for at-risk children, specifically children who were considered at-risk due to their socio-economic situation, could lead to increased academic and intellectual performance longitudinally. Students whose pre-kindergarten teachers were responsive, warm, and sensitive to their students while providing instructional quality resulted in students who demonstrated greater acquisition of language, pre-social and academic skills through the end of kindergarten. High quality pre-kindergarten programs had a positive effect on

students. These encouraging findings were dampened by Burchinal, Howes, Pianta, Bryant, Early, Clifford and Barbarin's (2008) findings that most pre-kindergarten classrooms were not found to possess the high quality characteristics needed to help children experience increased academic and social achievement in kindergarten. Burchinal et al. (2008) found that on average, pre-kindergarten teachers were "moderately responsive and sensitive" but "less successful in engaging children in learning specific skills".

Child outcomes, in addition to academic and social outcomes, were found in children attending pre-school programs. In a study of preschool programs, Magnuson, Ruhm, and Waldfogel (2007) found increases in math and reading skills of children attending pre-kindergarten when these children entered kindergarten, but these children who attended pre-kindergarten also demonstrated an increase in externalizing behaviors, specifically increased aggression (fighting, arguing, exhibiting anger, impulsivity, or classroom disruptions) and decreased self-control (respecting others' property, temper control, acceptance of others' ideas, and responses to peer pressure). Approximately 75% of the cognitive gains children possessed at the beginning of kindergarten had faded by the spring of first grade, but their externalizing behavior persisted. In other words, cognitive benefits, specifically in math and reading at school entry faded by the end of first grade, but children's tendencies to fight, lose their temper or disrupt the classroom increased by the end of first grade. It was noted children attending pre-kindergarten may likely also attend center-based after school care programs, which may have contributed to these negative behaviors. Interestingly, for children who attended pre-kindergarten programs housed in the same school as their kindergarten program (or private school children attending preschool), these externalizing behaviors were not apparent. The externalizing behaviors may have been attributable to factors other than pre-kindergarten. Children who

attended pre-kindergarten in the same school as their kindergarten may have not exhibited externalizing behaviors due to increased familiarity with the schools for the children and the families (Magnuson et al., 2007).

Yet another benefit of pre-kindergartens housed in the same schools as the kindergarten programs was that pre-kindergarten teachers were more likely to discuss specific children with receiving kindergarten teachers, than teachers in separate settings. This collaboration was probably attributable to convenience, but, this teacher to teacher dialogue was found to have a strong association with children's adjustments as perceived by their kindergarten teachers (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). In a more recent, yet similar study, Howes et al. (2008) found small to moderate academic gains in literacy and social domains from the fall of pre-kindergarten to the spring of pre-kindergarten were linked to the quality of the child's classroom experience and instructional support, such as classrooms where children experienced closer teacher-child relationships and higher quality instruction, rather than being linked to the child's classroom structural factors, such as teacher-child ratios, teacher qualification, and program location. Howes et al. (2008), like Burchinal et al. (2008), found most pre-kindergarten classrooms did not provide the kinds of instructional support (clear instruction with specific feedback) needed to ensure children were ready to learn when entering kindergarten. This raised the question of what children should know when entering kindergarten, and what should be learned in kindergarten.

Kindergarten teachers expected students to have certain skills upon their entry into kindergarten, and these expectations influenced the way they taught (Lin et al., 2003; Stormont, Beckner, Mitchell, & Richter, 2005). Communication between families and teachers regarding teacher expectations, before the beginning of kindergarten, and preparing children for those expectations could increase the likelihood of a successful transition into kindergarten potentially

impacting a child's academic and social success. Using the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten (ECLS-K) database, one of the most comprehensive data sources in the nation (United States Department of Education, 2009c), Lin et al. (2003), found kindergarten teachers reported preparing children for the social aspects of kindergarten a higher priority than academic preparation. The social behaviors reported as most important were: (1) communicates wants and thoughts, (2) does not disrupt class, (3) follows directions, and (4) shares and takes turns. Proficiency in these social skills laid the framework for a safe, orderly, cooperative and attentive classroom. It was not surprising teachers found these skills pivotal, as they were prerequisites to successful academic performance. Even though all teachers in this study and other studies (Stormont et al., 2005; Wesley et al., 2003) ranked social skill attainment higher than academic skills, Lin et al.(2003) found younger teachers placed more importance on the acquisition of academic skills than older teachers. This possibly reflected a sign of our time with a growing national focus on student achievement.

Conversely, parents believed memorization of nominal knowledge (labeling environmental objects, counting, identifying colors, etc.) was more important than the inferential reasoning or social aspects of kindergarten. For example, parents were children's first teachers, so understanding parent readiness beliefs was important. As a consequence, parents were likely to be intentional in focusing on readiness concepts they deemed important, while children were likely to obtain skills that were important to their parents, directly linking parental beliefs with child outcomes. When parents and schools held similar beliefs about school readiness, there was an increased likelihood of student success. To achieve better outcomes for all children schools must form a close partnership with parents to bridge the gap between school expectations and

parental beliefs (Barbarin, Early, Clifford, Bryant, Frome, & et al., 2008; The National Center for Education Statistics, 1993).

In summation, readiness was not a single event; it was a process that occurred over time and continued beyond the first day of kindergarten. Readiness was a broad construct that encapsulated all aspects of a child's life that contributed to that child's ability to learn. Ultimately, the goal was for all children to begin school with an opportunity to engage in school success (Miesels, 1999).

### **Lack of Readiness/Lack of Success**

The National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDE) conducted a national transition survey of nearly 3,600 kindergarten teachers (Pianta et al., 1998). Teachers who participated in the NCEDE survey reported that while 52% of children experienced a successful transition to kindergarten, 48% had moderate to severe difficulties when transitioning to kindergarten. Specifically teachers perceived that 32% of the 48% experienced moderate difficulties, while the remaining 16% were perceived to experience severe difficulties. Teachers' mostly reported areas of concern with children's abilities to follow directions and engage in academic activities (Pianta et al., 1998; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox 2000). These statistics evidenced a large percentage of typically developing children who did not experience a successful transition to kindergarten (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta et al., 2000). These findings were generally consistent with the findings reported by parents of typically developing children, who revealed their perception regarding children's difficulty with transitioning to kindergarten. In a study conducted by Wildenger et al. (2011), 27.9% of these parents expressed significant concerns regarding their child's transition to kindergarten. Parents mostly expressed socio-behavioral concerns including getting used to a new school, following directions, displaying

behavior problems, and separating from their caregiver. Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta et al. (2000) found schools with higher levels of poverty, and with higher minority populations (populations often considered at-risk), positively correlated with increased rates of teachers reporting students experiencing difficulties with the transition into kindergarten.

This section discussed the numbers of typically developing children who were not ready for kindergarten, along with teacher and parent concerns regarding child readiness for kindergarten. The following section will discuss how at-risk factors can lessen a child's likelihood of being ready for school.

### **At-Risk Children Less Likely to be Ready**

The term at-risk referred to children's risk factors that might impede academic achievement in school. Risk factors were social inequities that were identified through membership in certain minority groups, socio-economic standing, level of parent education, and home factors such as single or married parents, and working, unemployed, or stay at home mothers. The most prevalent of these risk factors having the greatest impact on school success was socio-economic standing. Overall, family characteristics were one of the best predictors of children's outcomes, exacerbating the consequences for children coming from at-risk homes (Burchinal et al., 2002; Entwisle et al., 1993).

The National Center for Early Development and Learning study found that about 50% of incoming kindergarten students were eligible for free or reduced lunch. This national measure of economic disadvantage allowed us to infer many children were entering school at risk for success. High minority, urban schools had the highest percentages of students eligible for free or reduced lunch, followed by rural schools and suburban low minority schools having the lowest percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch (Early, Pianta, & Cox, 1999).

One objective tied to the National Education Goals Panel (1991) goal 1, All children in America will start school ready to learn, was specifically designed with preparing at-risk and disabled children for kindergarten. The objective stated that all at-risk and disabled children would have access to high quality child care or pre-kindergarten experiences that would increase their preparedness for school (Meisels, 1999). One readiness program available to at-risk children was Head Start. But, considering that only one of five of children ages three through five were being served in Head Start in 1993 (Entwisle et al., 1993), (this statistic had been stable since 1985), many eligible children were left un-served. This statistic has not improved with time. In 2011, Head Start served more than one million low income children nationally (Children's Defense Fund, 2011). This number paled in comparison to the fact that in 2010 North Carolina alone had 1,030,104 children reportedly living in poverty (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2010).

Educational policies such as eligibility for free or reduced lunch and *No Child Left Behind* target group identifiers relied solely on income to identify children as at-risk. Crosnoe et al. (2010) used other disadvantaged markers to identify children who may have been entering school at risk. These markers were:

1. income below poverty level
2. single-parent household
3. custodial parent did not graduate from high school
4. custodial parent had first child as a teen
5. family history of welfare receipt

These markers along with family socialization factors, such as marital conflict, amounts of affection provided to the child, parental depression, and parenting stress, were used to determine

if these factors exacerbated risk. As economic disadvantages accumulated, parent hardships and stress increased, while parenting behaviors decreased. The more difficulty parents had formulating a home environment supportive of children's learning, the more likely the children were to lag behind academically and socially from the beginning of their school careers, especially in the areas of reading and math. With each additional marker of disadvantage, came an increase in problematic child profiles (Raver, Gershoff, & Aber, 2007). Lower family income corresponded with lower parent investment and lower cognitive competence for Caucasian, African American and Hispanic children. For Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, and Asian children, family income correlated with the families' ability to spend money on material resources, such as cognitively stimulating materials for their children, and also with the amount of time parents spent with their children. For these poor families, parents were less likely to be involved in their child's education than more affluent parents. This demonstrated increased disadvantages for at-risk children since parents' investments of time and resources were strongly associated with higher student performance and optimal social competence (Cooper et al., 2010; Raver et al., 2007). The results of this study revealed more children than originally believed could be at-risk. One such group of children was those living just above the poverty line. When families earned enough money to exceed the poverty line, they often lost social services once received, making it more difficult for them to make ends meet. These families, living just above the poverty line, experienced material hardships, because their increased income supplanted what they previously received through social programs. These children were still at-risk, but often overlooked because they were no longer identified at-risk by state and federal guidelines (Gershoff, Aber, Raver, & Lennon, 2007).

Children considered at-risk, specifically African American children, and those in poverty, had difficulty adjusting to formal schooling (Alexander et al. 1988; Murray et al., 2008). African American and Latino families were more likely to have an accumulation of disadvantaged markers (4 or 5) in comparison to Caucasian families who were more likely to have no markers of disadvantage. The accumulation of risk factors resulted in negative academic effects on early education (Crosnoe et al., 2010). Poor children were more likely to exhibit behavior problems and to demonstrate low achievement (Cooper et al., 2010). Poor children were also at greater risk of being placed in special education classes (Blair & Scott, 2002), receiving low test scores (Cooper et al., 2010), dropping out of high school or of being retained than their non-poor peers. These children were also more likely to attend schools with higher concentrated populations of other children in poverty (Entwisle et al., 1993; Raver et al., 2007).

This section discussed the concept of student readiness. Even though there was no definition of what child readiness should look like researchers concurred children's academic, social and emotional readiness impacted their success in kindergarten, which was predictive of later school success (Belsky et al., 1994; Entwisle et al., 1999). Our nation's at-risk children were at greater risk for not being ready for kindergarten than their non-at-risk peers (Burchinal et al., 2002; Entwisle et al., 1993). This risk could be mediated by high quality pre-school care experiences (Burchinal et al., 2002; Schulting et al., 2005; Schulting, 2008; Schweinhart et al., 1986). Burchinal et al. (2008) found most pre-kindergarten classrooms were not high quality, and did not reach the objective of helping our neediest children be prepared for their transition to kindergarten. Overall, schools received a range of children from varying backgrounds and environments, with a broad array of experiences. This section discussed one piece of school readiness, the readiness of the child. The next section looks at the second category of school

readiness, the ready school's concept, or how schools were prepared to meet incoming kindergarteners regardless of the child's level of readiness.

### **Ready Schools/School Readiness**

The second category in the School Readiness in North Carolina report focused on school readiness, or the ability of the school to reach every child regardless of the child's level of readiness. This section defined what Ready Schools looked like and discussed steps schools could take to help all children transition successfully into kindergarten. Should children be ready for schools, or should schools be ready for children? Regardless of the answer to this question, the fact remains, every year a large number of children entered kindergarten for the first time in spite of child or school preparedness (Miesels, 1999). For most of these children, entering kindergarten was a big transition into their experience with formal schooling (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Children entered kindergarten with a vast array of pre-kindergarten experiences. Some of these pre-kindergarten experiences ranged from in home child care, license exempt family care, neighborhood arrangements, federally sponsored programs, and private pay child care centers. As a result, schools enrolled children with a plethora of experiences and preparedness for school (McCabe et al., 2011). Researchers agreed that collaborative practices between home and school helped ensure a successful transition into kindergarten, which enhanced the likelihood of early school success (Alexander et al., 1988; Entwisle et al., 1993; Schulting et al., 2005).

In alignment with the collaborative practices of the social ecological perspective of school readiness, The National Education Goals Panel (1998) emphasized the importance of Ready Schools. Discussions following the national goal, all children ready to learn, lead to a change in thinking and a focus on Ready School environments, specifically the school's

readiness for children transitioning into kindergarten (National Education Goals Panel, 1998). The National Education Goals Panel (1998) encouraged schools to build relationships with families, pre-schools, and within the community. Ready Schools employed practices that helped children and families transition successfully into kindergarten. Based on the National Education Goals' Panel (1998) 10 keys to ready schools (p. 5), and on Pianta et al.'s (1996) view that ready schools reach out to families over time and among different linkages in the community, Pianta, Cox et al. (1999) identified three characteristics of ready schools: (a) they reached out, linking families, pre-school setting, and communities with schools, (b) they reached backward in time, making connections before the first day of school, and (c) they reached with the appropriate intensity, such as personal contacts and home visits. These practices and behaviors were an important part of the school's readiness for children and families transitioning to kindergarten (Pianta et al., 1996). These practices opened the opportunity for implementation with a focus on individualization.

School readiness reached far beyond the condition of the child upon kindergarten entry. It was a shared responsibility between families, communities, children, schools, and early child care environments (Maxwell et al., 2004; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). This responsibility included readiness on the schools part to make connections between the formal learning of school with the places where early learning occurred. The National Education Goals Panel Ready Schools advisory council (National Education Goals Panel, 1998) believed that increasing achievement meant not only getting children ready for school, but also getting schools ready for children. The panel recommended ten key principles that communities should consider when ensuring schools were ready for children:

- Ready Schools smoothed the transition between home and school

- Ready Schools strived for continuity between early care and education programs and elementary schools
- Ready Schools helped children learn and make sense of their complex and exciting world
- Ready Schools were committed to the success of every child
- Ready Schools were committed to the success of every teacher and every adult who interacted with children during the school day
- Ready Schools introduced or expanded approaches that have been shown to raise achievement
- Ready Schools were learning organizations that altered practices and programs if they did not benefit children
- Ready Schools served children in communities
- Ready Schools took responsibility for results
- Ready Schools had strong leadership

Of these ten keys, at least three directly correlated with Pianta et al.'s (1996) definition of highly effective transitional practices. These transition practices described the transition to school as a forming of relationships. Ready Schools were defined as places that:

1. Smoothed the transition between home and school
2. Provided for continuity between early care and elementary schools
3. Served children in their communities

In the North Carolina Ready for School Goal Team's (2002) report, the following standards were defined:

1. Ready teachers

2. Ready curriculum and instructional strategies
3. Ready school environments
4. Ready administrators
5. Ready families and communities

In addition to these five readiness standards, the Ready for School Goal Team (2002) identified the following cornerstones of Ready Schools

1. Knowledge of growth and development of typically and atypically developing children
2. Knowledge of the strengths, interests, and needs of each child
3. Knowledge of the social and cultural contexts in which each child and family lived
4. Ability to translate development knowledge into developmentally appropriate practices (School Readiness in North Carolina, 2000b)

During this same time frame (2001) the W.K. Kellogg Foundation launched a nationwide initiative called Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids (SPARK) (Curtis & Simons, 2008). This initiative had several goals including developing infrastructures to support at-risk children in the areas of early care, education and school readiness. A piece of this initiative that was of particular interest to the researcher was the development of nine pathways to Ready Schools.

1. Children succeeded in school
2. A welcoming atmosphere
3. Leadership
4. Connections to early care and education
5. Connecting culturally and linguistically with children and families

6. Parental involvement
7. Partnering with the community
8. Using assessment results for individual student progress and improving school performance
9. Quality improvement including professional development

These pathways were not presented as an exhaustive list of every characteristic of a Ready School, but they were seen as characteristics that could help children succeed, and they defined a Ready School as one where children succeeded (Curtis et al., 2008).

Ready Schools could be prepared for families by reaching back in time, before the beginning of school (Pianta, Cox et al., 1999), and by communicating their expectations of child readiness to the families. Most studies found that parents and teachers had varying views regarding the skills children should have acquired when they transitioned into kindergarten. Among parents, these views varied between ethnic and socio-economic lines (Barbarin et al., 2008). Wesley et al.'s (2003) focus group methodology found parents and professionals agreed on the importance of social, emotional, and language development along with communication skills as pivotal readiness skills for children. Neither group professionals nor parents placed their greatest emphasis on children's acquisition of academics. Wesley et al.'s (2003) findings may have not been applicable to other settings due to the narrow sample size of 118 participants in 5 communities in the state of North Carolina.

Schools had different expectations for student readiness. As a result, the concept of school readiness was contradicted between schools. Regardless of these varying expectations, schools received children with a wide range of readiness skills, and it was the schools' responsibility to be ready to meet children where they were and work effectively with the skill

sets they brought to their entry into kindergarten (Barbarin et al., 2008). School readiness was the premise behind the Ready Schools' movement, an attempt to shift the focus from the readiness of the child onto the schools' readiness for incoming kindergarteners (National Education Goals Panel, 1998).

Early et al.'s (2001) study delineated clear interventions for schools attempting to create environments that were ready for children entering kindergarten. These interventions included professional development for teachers in effective transition practices, providing teachers with their class lists earlier, and having smaller class sizes. Another way schools demonstrated readiness was by maintaining teacher continuity in grade levels. Crosnoe et al. (2010) found for children who faced economic and family-based risk factors, teacher experience in the grade level was a buffer against these risk factors, especially in the area of reading.

To ensure schools were ready for children, research supported the need for clear and specific transition plans to help schools be ready for children by easing their transition into kindergarten (Ray et al., 2010; Wesley et al., 2003). Most schools or districts did not provide teachers with specific and comprehensive plans, or specialized professional development to help ease the transition between home and school (Early et al., 1999; Nelson, 2004).

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, in *Transition Planning for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools* (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.), developed an initiative for each local school district in North Carolina to develop and implement a transition plan that met the varying needs of individual children. The goal of the state initiative was to raise achievement for all children while closing the achievement gap, through creating schools that provided intentional transitions for children during pivotal transitional times. Practical experience suggested most schools in the state of North Carolina did not have a formalized

transition plan. Schulting et al. (2005) found intentional transition activities provided by schools such as parent-child visits to kindergarten classrooms prior to the beginning of school, along with parental involvement during kindergarten, increased children's academic achievement at the end of kindergarten.

In summary, in order for the transition to formal schooling to be successful, the experiences and characteristics children brought with them to school must be aligned with the expectations and resources of the school. For children to be successful, schools must be flexible in meeting the children's individual needs at kindergarten entry. Schools' willingness to be ready for and to reach out to children could be the determining factor between a child's chances of success or failure (Graue, 1999).

## **Transitions**

### **Benefits of Transitions**

The transition to kindergarten marks a pivotal time in the life of a child (Alexander et al., 1988; Entwisle et al., 1993). Children transitioned from being a home child to that of a school child (Entwisle et al., 1993; Graue, 1999). During this time children were expected to exhibit academic skills and increased independence while conforming to the rigidity and structure of a formal classroom. Children's successful adaptation to this new culture was pivotal, as it could impact their later academic success and long-term well-being. (Alexander et al., 1988; Entwisle et al., 1993; Graue, 1999).

Transitioning into kindergarten was a process designed to provide continuity between a child's pre-school experience and the formal school experience of kindergarten (Nelson, 2004). Effective transitions brought together the child's community of support systems and provided social and emotional support to the child while creating similarities in curriculum, experiences,

and expectations. Most effective transitions provided a welcoming and comfortable time for children and their families in the months and weeks leading up to the entry of school that helped all children build their social and emotional competence (Pianta, Rimm-Kaufman et al., 1999; Pianta et al., 1996).

Researchers suggested the use of transition practices by teachers and schools held great benefits for all children, but especially those at risk, (Schulting et al., 2005). This transition period was a critical time in children's lives (Alexander et al., 1988), since a successful transition to kindergarten impacted children's kindergarten success as well as their future social and academic successes (Alexander et al., 1988; Entwisle et al., 1993; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Schulting et al., 2005). Alexander et al. (1988) found that the successful adaptation of schooling in the first grade or two was likely to have long term implications for cognitive and affective development. Hamre and Pianta (2001) found relational negativity reported by kindergarten teachers with kindergarten children was related to negative academic and behavioral outcomes through eighth grade. As a result, early school performance could set children on a trajectory for future performance. Children who demonstrated early success in school tended to continue being successful both academically and socially, while those experiencing difficulties with social and academic transitions tended to continue lagging behind their more successful peers (Alexander et al., 1988; Entwisle et al., 1993; Hamre et al., 2001). Even beyond school performance, success at the onset of formal education improved children's chances in life, thus ultimately their overall well-being (Entwisle et al., 1993).

All children benefited from transition activities, even those children who would have likely transitioned successfully without additional supports in place (National Education Goals Panel, 1998). Affluent children were often associated with high social and academic levels of

success, and with parents who were involved in the home and schools. Research suggested affluent children were the least likely to benefit from transition practices, but were offered more transition opportunities than impoverished children. Conversely, low-income children and families who were at greater risk for failure, and who would benefit the most from transition planning and activities, tended to receive the least amount of transition planning and activities (Schulting et al., 2005). Using self-reporting surveys on the use of transition practices, parents of low-income, urban families reported being less engaged in fewer transition practices than their more affluent counterparts in suburban and rural areas (Wildenger et al., 2011). These findings suggested the use of kindergarten transition practices may have been effective in reducing or closing the achievement gap across socio-economic groups (Schulting et al., 2005; Schulting, 2008).

LoCasale-Crouch et al. (2008) found social economic risk factors (family poverty, race/ethnicity, child's low maternal education) were moderated by the number of transition activities offered by pre-kindergarten teachers. The number of transition practices offered positively influenced kindergarten teachers' reported perceptions of the children's social competencies. These associations were stronger for children from at risk families, and African American children. Additionally, the number of transition practices offered to children with low maternal education was positively correlated with increased literacy skills in these children. Ready Schools that offered clear and specific transition practices to families in poverty and with low levels of maternal education helped mediate these at-risk factors (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008).

Ready Schools that connected with homes, families, and child-care providers before the beginning of the school year and with the appropriate intensity were especially important for

families of low economic status, or where the economic status between home and school were discontinuous (Pianta et al., 1996). Discussions between kindergarten teachers and pre-school teachers regarding expectations, curricula, and specific children resulted in children being more positively evaluated on social competence by their kindergarten teacher, especially for low-income children (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). These findings highlighted the significance of communication that reached back and time with the appropriate intensity between sending and receiving schools.

One way kindergarten transitions impacted student achievement, particularly for children at-risk was through increased parent involvement. Schulting et al. (2005) found increased family involvement partially explained the connection between student achievement and transition activities. Schools offering transition opportunities demonstrated an increase in family involvement of moderately low to middle income families over schools that offered no transition opportunities. Thus, current transition practices benefited middle class families most. In contrast parents of the very lowest socio economic levels did not demonstrate an increase in school involvement overall. It was likely that current transition practices did not help these impoverished families overcome the barriers they faced regarding school involvement.

Overall, successful transitions to kindergarten were of the utmost importance as they allowed children to develop their perceptions about school and their abilities as a learner (Entwisle et al., 1999; Love et al., 1992; Pianta, Cox et al., 1999). Successful transitions set children on an academic and social trajectory for future school success at the end of kindergarten (Schulting et al., 2005).

## **Programmatic Transition Practices Offered by the Schools**

Most schools used some kind of transition practices to support successful transitions to kindergarten which could be important for children's academic and social successes. This finding was a result of a national survey conducted by The National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDE). NCEDE worked to help understand the transition to kindergarten and to make the transition better for families, schools, and children. NCEDE data from nearly 3,600 kindergarten teachers nationally, revealed nearly all schools used some form of practices related to kindergarten transitions. In the initial study (Pianta, Cox et al., 1999), kindergarten teachers reported on the use of 21 possible transition practices. Kindergarten teachers reported using a range of 5% to 95% of the practices. Common use of a specific practice was measured as 70% or more of the teachers reporting use of the practice. Pianta, Cox et al., (1999) reported 70% of kindergarten teachers used 5 of the 21 transition practices at the beginning of kindergarten. The study was informative when considering options for effective transition practices, but had a low return rate, a limitation that called into question whether the sample was representative. The researcher only collected teacher's views, and the teachers' responses were confined to the list of transition practices provided by the researchers (see Table 5) (Pianta, Cox et al., 1999).

In a collaborative extension of NCEDE's Kindergarten Transition Survey, Rous et al. (2010) added three adapted practices from the original study and one additional practice. These changes were made to modify appropriateness for pre-school and based on lessening ambiguity from the original survey. Public pre-school teachers were asked to report on their use of 25 transition practices. Public pre-school teachers reported using an average of 12.81 of the 25 practices, with a usage range of 22% to 95%. Again, common use of a specific practice was

Table 5

*Teachers Reporting Use of Practices Related to Kindergarten Transition*

Transition practices	Percent and standard error of reported use
Read written records	73.51% (.99)
Home visit before school began	4.8% (.44)
Home visit after school began	7.69% (.57)
Parent letter before school began	61.65% (1.04)
Parent letter after school began	88.08% (.72)
Talk with parent after school began	94.67% (.47)
Met child and family before school began	47.91% (1.08)
Sent flyer before school began	68.92% (.99)
Sent flyer after school began	76.58% (.89)
Sent letter to child before school began	38.41% (1.02)
Sent letter to child after school began	21.66% (.92)
Called child before school began	11.0% (.70)
Called child after school began	13.89% (.78)
Visited preschools	17.3% (.83)
Preschoolers visited kindergarten classes	38.71% 1.05
Open house before school began	62.26% (1.03)
Open house after school began	81.5% (.83)
Kindergarten registration	59.75% (1.06)
Regular meetings of community	28.53% (1.02)

Table 5 (continued)

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Transition practices	Percent and standard error of reported use
Coordinate curriculum with preschools	20.82% (.92)
Facilitated parent's contact	65.33% (1.05)

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*Note.* (Pianta, Cox, Taylor, & Early, 1999).

measured as 70% or more of the teachers reporting use of the practice. Rous et al. (2010) reported 70% of public pre-kindergarten teachers used 12 of the 25 transition practices included in the survey. Overall, pre-kindergarten teachers were more likely than kindergarten teachers to participate in transition activities such as communicating with the upcoming kindergarten teachers concerning individual children (Pianta, Kraft-Sayre, Rimm-Kaufman, Gercke, & Higgins, 2001). Pre-kindergarten teachers were more likely to participate in individualized, high intensity transition practices, and were more likely to contact families more frequently than kindergarten teachers (LaParo, Kraft-Sayre, & Pianta, 2003; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999; Rous et al., 2010). With home visits being a part of the curriculum in programs such as Head Start, children participating in programs such as these were more likely to receive high intensity practices such as home visits, but as children moved to kindergarten, these practices waned (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 1999).

From parent self-reported surveys, Wildenger et al. (2011) found families reported using 6.77 out of 14 transition practices selected from a finite list given to them by the researchers. This participation rate was equivalent with Rous et al.'s (2010) findings, and had the same limitations as Pianta, Cox et al. (1999) and Rous et al. (2010) in that parents were given a confined list of transition activities provided by the researchers. Parents in Wildenger et al.'s (2011) study reported most frequently being engaged in low intensity practices that were characterized by generic forms of contact such as visiting the child's classroom or school; attending kindergarten orientation; attending kindergarten registration, and receiving written communication from kindergarten staff.

These results were generally consistent with the results of the NCEDL study which revealed the most commonly used transitions took place after the beginning of school, were of

low intensity, generic in nature, and involved minimal contact with individual children or their families. The transitions reportedly used most often by teachers were (1) talked with the parents after the beginning of school (95% of teachers), (2) sent letters/flyers to parents after the beginning of school, and (3) held an open house after school started (Love et al., 1992; Nelson, 2004; Pianta et al., 1998; Pianta, Cox et al., 1999). These three most commonly used practices were the same for the pre-school teachers in the extension study, with the exception of the practices being commonly used both before and after school started (Rous et al., 2010). In a separate study of pre-kindergarten teachers, LoCasale-Crouch et al. (2008), found teachers used 6 of 9 practices with the most common being shared written records about children with the elementary school, and the least common being kindergarten teachers visited pre-kindergarten classrooms. Overall, the most commonly used practices were generic contacts which occurred after school started and were of low intensity. These were practices that were too little, too late, and impersonal (Pianta et al., 2003). These researchers warned the data may be an over estimate of kindergarten transition practices as it was difficult to differentiate between practices that occurred as a part of school-wide beginning of the year activities, and those that specifically supported the transition to kindergarten.

Even though the use of transition practices were common in most schools, practices involving direct contact with children and families or practices occurring before the start of school were the least frequently used. Some of these infrequently used, but high intensity practices were: (1) home visits, before or after the start of school, (2) called the child, before or after the start of school, and (3) kindergarten teachers visited pre-schools (Nelson, 2004; Pianta, Cox et al., 1999). Parents also reported receiving high intensity practices such as home visits, a phone call from the teacher over the summer, and the opportunity to serve on a transition

planning team less frequently than the more commonly used low-intensity practices (Wildenger et al., 2011).

### **Characteristics Influencing Transitions**

Positive student-teacher relationships were an important foundation for a successful transition into formal schooling. Positive relationships helped children successfully maneuver their new social and academic environment (Burchinal et al., 2002; Hamre et al., 2001), and promoted the social and emotional health of children (Burchinal et al., 2002; Murray et al., 2008). Children who engaged in a good relationship with their teacher were more likely to enjoy school and interacted better with their classmates (Hamre et al., 2001; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Hamre & Pianta, 2006). Close and supportive relationships between teachers and students potentially mitigated risk factors, especially for children entering school at risk (Burchinal et al., 2002; Jerome et al., 2009; Pianta et al., 2004). Home visits, considered a high-intensity transition practice (Early et al., 2001; Rous et al., 2010), increased the likelihood of the development of a close teacher child relationship (Meyer et al., 2006).

Teacher-child relationships in kindergarten also impacted children's subsequent academic performance, behavioral outcomes and overall success in school, even when children demonstrated behavioral or learning challenges (Hamre et al., 2001; Pianta et al., 2004). Children who demonstrated behavioral problems in kindergarten, but were still able to form a close relationship with their kindergarten teacher, were less likely to have behavioral difficulties in the future than children who had a negative relationship with their kindergarten teacher (Hamre et al., 2001) This finding was substantiated for children who were at-risk demographically, socially and academically as reported by their kindergarten teachers. When these children were placed in first grade classrooms that were supportive both instructionally and emotionally, these at-risk

children had achievement and student-teacher relationship scores commensurate with their low-risk peers (Hamre et al., 2005). When teachers had strained relationships with even one child, it negatively impacted the entire classroom environment, consequently negatively affecting many students (Hamre & Pianta, 2006) especially those children already identified as at-risk.

Student teacher relationships were impacted by the teachers' ethnicity. Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta et al. (2000) found that non-minority teachers perceived more problems with students transitioning to kindergarten from higher minority/poverty pre-schools than did minority teachers. These teacher perceptions reflected their opinions of the skills and competencies of the higher minority/poverty children in their classes, which meant teacher perceptions could negatively impact the future school success of minority/high poverty children. Teachers' perceptions also reflected the teachers' expectations of their kindergarten students, and were representative of their beliefs about certain children or groups of children. These expectations and beliefs increased the intensity of difficult teacher-child relationships (Saft & Pianta, 2001). When teachers and children shared the same ethnicity, teachers were more likely to report positive/close relationships with children than teachers of a different ethnicity (Murray et al., 2008; Saft et al., 2001). This ethnicity matching could not be used as a predictor of positive teacher-child relationships since children did not reciprocate that opinion (Murray et al., 2008). Ethnic mismatches required more professional development to ensure collaborative relationships could be formed between schools, teachers, children, and families (Early et al., 1999).

Even though all children benefited from positive teacher-child relationships, children in poverty and non-Caucasian children seemed to have profited more from positive relationships with their teachers than did Caucasian, middle class children (Burchinal et al., 2002).

Interestingly, teachers reported providing more emotional support to minority children than to Caucasian children (Murray et al., 2008).

Teachers were reportedly less involved with and were more likely to engage in increased conflicts with children who were male, African American, had greater hours of child care, were low academic achievers, and who displayed problem behaviors (Buyse, Verschueren, Doumen, Van Damme, & Maes, 2008; Jerome et al., 2009). Children who exhibited problem behaviors, accompanied by a lack of appropriate social skills, were placed at a greater risk of being rejected by their teachers and peers (Stormont, 2002). Displays of problem behaviors often indicated these children needed more emotional support from their teachers. Because of unrecognized beliefs about children, teachers were less likely to develop close, supportive relationships with children who were male, came from home environments teachers deemed lower quality, demonstrated low academic achievement levels, and displayed problem behaviors. Students exhibiting problem behaviors were more likely to be monitored more closely by their teacher, and received more aggressive responses from their teacher than their peers (Arbeau & Coplan, 2007; Jerome et al., 2009). Doumen, Verschueren, Buyse, Germeijs, Luyckx and Soenens (2008), found when children entered kindergarten demonstrating aggressive behaviors, there was an increase of conflicted teacher-child relationships by the middle of the year, which lead to increased student aggressive behavior by the end of the kindergarten year. The impact of these negative relationships were long-lasting. Hamre et al. (2001) found students, especially boys with behavior problems and those who had a conflicted teacher-child relationship in kindergarten, experienced negative academic and behavioral competence through as far as the eighth grade. The tendency for these negative relationships to form was reversed in classrooms with emotionally supportive environments and teachers. These supportive teachers and

classrooms lessened the likelihood that conflicted relationships would form between students and their teachers (Buyse et al., 2008). Close teacher-child relationships were also predictive of increased language skills for African American, Latino, Asian American and mixed racial background children, and of better reading skills for children whose parents reported having more authoritarian parenting styles. These findings stressed the importance teacher-child relationships could have as a protective factor against children coming to school with multiple risk-factors (Burchinal et al., 2002), as well as how teacher-child relationships affected successful school transitions. In addition to teacher/child relationships, other characteristics that were used to predict a successful transition to kindergarten were teacher certification, teacher experience, and staff development.

The types of kindergarten transition practices used were influenced by the professional development teachers received. Teachers who received specific professional development in children's transitions to kindergarten used more types of transitional practices than did teachers who received no specialized professional development, thereby mediating overuse of low-intensity transition activities. With the increased focus on the importance of successful transitions to kindergarten at the school and national levels, an increase in specialized professional development would be expected. The NCEDL survey found only 22.7% of kindergarten teachers received information about strategies for enhanced transitions to kindergarten, and only 24.1% received specialized professional development in kindergarten transition strategies. This was alarming when considering that teachers without professional development used fewer multiple and high-intensity types of transition practices. Since the majority of teachers did not have specialized professional development, most incoming kindergarten children did not receive transition practices that made the difference between school

success or failure (Early et al., 1999; Early et al., 2001). Rous et al. (2010) substantiated these findings. Professional development in the area of transitions for public pre-school teachers not only increased their use of transition practices, but also increased their use of practices across categories including increased use of high intensity practices.

Teacher characteristics other than specific professional development in transition activities were also studied. One such study correlated years of teaching experience and teacher educational attainment to teacher use of transition activities. Early et al. (2001) did not find a statistical difference between the number of years of teaching experience and the level of educational attainment with the use of transitional practices. The only difference was that more experienced teachers used slightly fewer whole group practices. This finding was contradicted in other studies. Rous et al. (2010) found public pre-school teachers with 8 or more years' experience working with pre-school children used more transition practices than teachers with less than 8 years' experience. This teaching experience was also positively associated with the use of individualized practices both before and after the beginning of pre-school. Nelson (2004) reported a significant difference in the use of 3 out of 7 transition items between veteran and novice teachers. Veteran teachers were more likely to invite preschoolers and their parents to visit the kindergarten classrooms and were more likely to engage in other transition activities, than were novices.

Teachers' area of certification was found to impact teachers' use of transition practices. Public pre-school and kindergarten teachers who had an early-childhood degree reported using more practices than teachers without this credential. Additionally, the practices used by teachers with an early childhood degree encompassed all categories and degrees of intensity (Nelson, 2004; Rous et al., 2010).

Pre-school teachers who had a high number of non-Caucasian children in their classrooms reportedly used more transition practices overall. Specifically, the pre-school teachers with a high number of non-Caucasian children in their classrooms more likely participated in individual and whole group practices before the beginning of the school year than the kindergarten teachers who participated in NCEDL's Kindergarten Transition Survey. These findings may have been biased because children served in public pre-school programs were typically in a targeted population that was more likely to be racially diverse, and were in programs that had specific requirements for teachers regarding transitions (Rous et al., 2010), lending themselves to the use of higher-intensity practices.

### **Quantity of Transition Practices**

The quantity or number of kindergarten transition practices offered to children and families was associated with positive achievement scores at the end of kindergarten (Schulting et al., 2005). This positive academic achievement at the end of kindergarten held true when family socio-economic status and other demographic factors were controlled for. The effect was stronger for low and middle socio-economic status children. High socio-economic status children were more likely than low and middle socio-economic status children to receive the largest number of kindergarten transition practices, even though low and middle socio-economic status children benefited more from being offered a greater number of kindergarten transition practices.

### **Intensity of Transition Practices**

Pianta, Cox et al. (1999) identified most effective transition practices in helping children and families experience a successful transition into kindergarten as those that (1) reached out, linking families, preschool settings and communities with schools; (2) reached back in time, before the first day of school; and (3) reached with the appropriate intensity. These transition

practices were planned and designed to intentionally create support and familiarity across the pre-kindergarten, home and kindergarten settings (Pianta et al., 1996).

Using the NCEdL transition to kindergarten survey, Early et al. (2001) organized transition practices into five categories: (a) individualized practices before the beginning of school, (b) whole group practices before the beginning of school, (c) individualized practices after school began, (d) whole group practices after school began, and (e) coordination with pre-schools and the community. These categories placed special emphasis on the timing of the transition, either before school started, or after school began (see Table 6).

In the collaborative extension of this study, Rous et al. (2010) extended these categories to address the intensity of transition practices in public preschool, based on the time and effort required to implement a specific practice. High-intensity practices were identified as those that were individualized or required the coordination of multiple programs such as coordination with pre-schools and the community. Low-intensity practices were identified as those that were utilized for all children such as open houses after the beginning of school and letters sent to families. These additional specifications resulted in the identification of 9 practices labeled low-intensity, and 16 as high-intensity (see Table 7).

Home visits were categorized as a high intensity transition practice that carried the potential to create strong connections between home, school and children. Home visits strengthened teacher, child and family relationships, along with academic work habits. Home visits enabled teachers to have a better understanding of the environments their children came from. This awareness increased teacher appreciation of parental contributions while helping to establish a stronger rapport, trust, and partnerships between teachers, children, and families. In addition, teachers attitudes and beliefs towards diverse families improved after participating in

Table 6

*Categorized Transition Practices*

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Five transition categories

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Practices that took place before school started and involved individualized interaction with a child or family

A visit to the child's home before school started

A talk/meeting with the child's parents before school started

A call to the child before school started

Practices that took place before school started and aimed at the class as a whole

A letter, flyer, or brochure sent to parents before school started

A letter to the child before school started

An open house for parents and children before school started

Participation in kindergarten registration for school or district

Practices that took place after the school year started and involved individualized interactions with a child or family

A visit to the child's home after school started

A talk with the child's parent after school started

A call to the child after school started

Facilitated contact between parents of children in class

Practices that took place after the school year started and aimed at the class as a whole

A letter, flyer, or brochure sent to parents after school started

A letter to the child after school started

An open house for parents and children after school started

Coordination with preschool programs and the community

Table 6 (continued)

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Five transition categories

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Written records of child's past experiences or status made available

Visits to preschools and programs for four-year olds in the community

Informal contacts with preschool teachers about children

Preschool teacher(s) took next year's children to kindergarten classroom

Regular meetings among school, early childhood, and preschools staff in the community

Contacts made to develop a coordinated curriculum with preschool programs

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*Note.* (Early, Pianta, Taylor, & Cox, 2001).

Table 7

*Transition Practices Categorized by Intensity and Teacher Usage*

Categorized transition practices	Percentage of teachers using practice
Individual and before school began (HI)	
Talked with child's parents before school Began	84.70%
Met with child & family before school Began	70.70%
Visited the child's home before school Began	37.60%
Called the child before school began	30.60%
Individual & after school began (HI)	
Visited the child's home after school began	39.90%
Talked with child's parents after school Began	95.00%
Met with child & family after school began	73.10%
Called the child after school began	22.40%
Facilitated contacts between parents of children in class	73.20%
Whole group & before school began (LI)	
Letter to child's parents before school Began	73.30%
Flyer or brochure sent before school began	72.40%
Letter sent to child before school began	42.80%
Open house for parents & children before school began	74.00%

Table 7 (continued)

Categorized transition practices	Percentage of teachers using practice
Participation in pre-school registration (district or school)	67.30%
Whole group & after school began (LI)	
Letter to child's parents after school began	84.40%
Flyer or brochure sent after school began	66.40%
Letter sent to child after school began	22.50%
Open house for parents & children after school began	76.90%
Coordination with programs and / or community (HI)	
Written records of child's past experiences made available	74.10%
Written records of child's past experiences Reviewed	72.40%
Visits incoming children's pre-school Programs	22.00%
Informal contact with sending teachers about children	44.10%
Pre-school students visit kindergarten Classes	28.90%
Regular meetings among school, preschool, and community	59.80%
Coordinated curriculum with preschools	48.00%

*Note.* (Rous et al., 2010). HI = high intensity transition practices; LI= low intensity transition practices.

home visits. These stronger relationships raised the comfort level between the home and school (Meyer et al., 2006; Schulting, 2009). As a result, teachers reported improved communication with parents after participating in home visits, and were more likely to contact parents, than teachers who had not conducted home visits. After conducting home visits, teachers felt more empathy towards children and demonstrated more positive attitudes towards helping students with their classwork (Meyer et al., 2006). Even though Schulting (2009) found home visits had the most positive impact on girls and among non-English speaking families, overall, they left the parents feeling better about the teacher and the school, and when the parents felt good about the teacher and the school, the child was more likely to do well. Of the teachers who conducted home visits, one-hundred percent wanted to conduct home visits again the following year (Meyer et al., 2006).

Intensity of transitions also impacted academic gains. Hindman, Skibbe, and Morrison (2013) compared teacher outreach practices with learning in literacy, math, and vocabulary skills. When parents were more often invited to volunteer in their child's classroom there was a positive association with children's mathematical problem solving. Hindman et al. (2013) concluded this could be because the parents were actively engaged in the classroom, observing, and engaging in the instruction and problem solving activities. Providing workshops and training for parents was positively associated with student vocabulary development. Phone calls to parents, which were transition practices that were less intensive than volunteering or trainings, were inversely associated with vocabulary and math development.

Teachers who received their class lists earlier, had professional development in specific transition practices, and had smaller classroom enrollments utilized higher intensity transitional practices than other teachers (Early et al., 2001). Kindergarten teachers expressed the importance

of knowing who their incoming students were early so they could contact the families to help them understand the demands and expectations of kindergarten. One group of teachers also thought that when school began, this would enable them to focus on teaching instead of administrative details (Wesley et al., 2003). Teachers with a primary certification used slightly more individualized practices than those not holding primary certifications both before and after the beginning of the school year. Caucasian teachers were more likely than African American or Hispanic teachers to use both group and individualized practices before the beginning of the school year (Early et al., 2001).

Transition practices most frequently used were far from optimal, and were practices that did not conform to the Ready Schools movement. The most effective practices known to facilitate successful transitions into kindergarten, those that reached out, back in time, and with appropriate intensity (Pianta, Cox et al., 1999) were rarely used (Love et al., 1992; National Education Goals Panel, 1998; Nelson, 2004; Pianta, Cox et al., 1999). Most types used were less optimal or of lower intensity occurring after the beginning of the school year and directed towards the class as a whole, such as group-oriented open houses. (Early et al., 2001; Nelson, 2004; Pianta, Cox et al., 1999; Rous et al., 2010) Practices that involved direct one to one contact with families and children, especially before the beginning of the school year were used the least frequently (Pianta, Cox et al., 1999; Rous et al., 2010). Public pre-school teachers reported using more transition practices before the transition than did kindergarten teachers, but those implemented were still more likely to be low-intensity, such as practices that were directed at the whole group, than high-intensity, individualized practices (see Table 7) (Rous et al., 2010).

Pianta, Cox et al. (1999) found teachers were less likely to endorse transition practices as good ideas if they focused on occurring before the beginning of school among home and pre-

school settings. The transition practices the teachers in this study most frequently endorsed as good ideas were transition practices considered to be low-intensity, non-individualized, and impersonal. The transition practices most endorsed as good ideas by the teachers in this study failed to help build the supports needed to help reduce the risk of school failure for children.

The least used transition practices, home visits, phone calls to children either before or after school started, and visits to community pre-schools were only used by 5% to 17% of kindergarten teachers (Nelson, 2004; Pianta, Cox et al., 1999). Teachers with larger class sizes were more likely to use fewer individualized, high-intensity transition practices. Teachers reported that high-intensity transitional practices were found to be challenging to implement. High-intensity transitional practices occurring prior to the beginning of school year required more preparation on the part of the school and the teacher, often requiring the teacher to work without pay (Early et al., 2001) and before teachers had information about their students (Early et al., 2001; Nelson, 2004). Researchers found that teachers less likely participated in activities that were time intensive, and more likely participated in activities that were less invasive on their time, such as sending home information through the mail (Nelson, 2004; Pianta, Cox, et al., 1999). In other words, transition activities that occurred within the school building, during the school day (Pianta, Cox et al., 1999). Teachers cited barriers such as class lists generated late as a reason for infrequently using high intensity practices such as home visits and visits to community pre-schools (Nelson, 2004; Pianta, Cox et al., 1999).

Children from homes of fewer financial resources were at greater risk for difficulties during the transition to kindergarten, and were less likely to receive effective transition practices (McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro, & Wildenger, 2007; Rous et al., 2010; Schulting et al., 2005). This exacerbated risk for problems throughout their school career. Parents receiving

government aide participated in fewer transition activities than those parents not qualifying for assistance. These parents may have felt they could not devote the time to transition activities. This scenario may have decreased the potential for home-school partnerships (McIntyre et al., 2007). The combination of schools unlikeliness to offer high-intensity transition practices to at-risk children, combined with at-risk children's parents' inability to participate in transition to kindergarten activities, may have left our most vulnerable children at the greatest risk (Rous et al., 2010).

Teachers in low poverty schools used whole group and community coordinated transition activities before school started more so than their high poverty schools' counterparts (Rous et al., 2010). Pianta, Cox et al. (1999) found in urban schools with higher percentages of minority students, and in high poverty schools, fewer intensive individualized practices were used prior to the beginning of the school year. For example, personal contacts before the beginning of the school year were fewer in high poverty than in low poverty, low-minority schools (Pianta, Cox et al., 1999; Rous et al., 2010). Rous et al. (2010) found that among pre-kindergarten teachers, more whole group and individualized practices occurred in high poverty pre-kindergartens after the beginning of the school year, than occurred in low-poverty pre-kindergartens.

Pianta, Cox et al. (1999), reported an interesting exception to the finding from the research that most transition practices used were of low intensity and occurred after the beginning of the school year. Although teachers across all stratification groups reported using home visits (before or after school starts) at a very low frequency, there was an increased likelihood of their use in schools with the greatest percentage of minority students and with the highest concentration of poverty. This author's common practice as an elementary school principal in the late 1990s, in a high minority, poverty area suggested a similar experience.

Poverty stricken homes were less likely to have telephones or cars, so home visits could have been the only manner in which to stay in contact with parents living in poverty.

In addition to Pianta, Cox et al.'s (1999) finding, Lo-Casale-Crouch et al. (2008) found another example of a high intensity practice that positively mediated for children, especially those at-risk. LoCasale-Crouch et al. (2008) found in pre-kindergarten classrooms where more transition practices were used, specifically when the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers discussed curricula and specific children, that receiving kindergarten teachers more likely perceived those students as having more positive social competencies and fewer behavior problems. These findings were particularly salient for children who experienced social and economic risks.

Whole group transition practices occurring after school began produced positive results on low-income, at-risk children (Schulting et al., 2005). Children whose pre-kindergarten teachers offered more transition practices (a mixture of high and low intensity practices) were rated more favorably in the area of social competence by their kindergarten teachers (Locasale-Crouch et al., 2008).

In summary, at-risk children received fewer high intensity transition practices than their non-at-risk peers. This finding was disturbing, as children, especially those who were minority and those in poverty were the most likely to benefit from high-intensity transition practices (McIntyre et al., 2007; Rous et al., 2010; Schulting et al., 2005).

### **Barriers to Implementing Transition Practices**

Teachers often cited barriers as the reason for not implementing effective kindergarten transition practices. This absence of effective kindergarten transition practices could have led to an abrupt kindergarten transition for children, especially those considered at-risk. The most cited

barrier listed by teachers to implementing high intensity practices was class lists generated too late (Early et al., 2001; LaParo et al., 2003; Nelson, 2004; Pianta, Cox et al., 1999). Overall, teachers received class lists an average of 15.4 days before the first day of school, (see Table 8) (Early et al., 2001; LaParo et al., 2000). The earlier teachers received class lists, the more likely they were to implement high-intensity transitional practices before school began (Early et al., 2001). Researchers deduced the reasoning for the late generation and distribution of class lists was due to the logistical difficulty of locating families prior to school. Early et al. (2001) referred to this problem a “systemic barrier preventing improved transitions for kindergarteners.”

Class size also impacted the use of highly effective transition practices. Teachers with larger class sizes used fewer transition practices prior to the beginning of the year. This could be because of the logistical difficulty and strain associated with dealing with greater numbers of children and families. Lack of teacher professional development in transition to kindergarten practices was also considered a barrier to teachers using high-intensity transition practices. One of the largest between group differences was found between teachers who received specific professional development in the use of transitions and teachers who had not received professional development. Teachers who received professional development in the use of transition practices more likely used all types of transition practices, specifically those transition practices that reached back before the beginning of the school year, and those that were individualized. Teachers who received professional development were more likely to communicate and collaborate with pre-school environments (Early et al., 2001).

Other transition barriers identified by teachers (see Table 8) included practices that required summer work without the support of salary, the lack of a school or district transition plan, and transition practices required too much time (LaParo et al., 2003; Pianta et al., 1998;

Table 8

*Kindergarten Teachers Judging Transition Practices as Barriers*

Transition practices with barriers	Percentage of teachers identifying as a barrier
Class lists too late	55.50%
Summer work, no salary	47.18%
Transition plan not available	42.57%
Takes too much time	37.10%
Dangerous to visit homes	32.75%
Parents don't bring child to school	31.38%
Can't reach parents	26.58%
Parents not interested	25.38%
Parents cannot read	20.52%
No school district support	20.44%
Materials not available	18.89%
I choose not to do it	10.81%
Preschool teachers not interested	8.68%
Concern about negative expectations	6.89%

*Note.* (Pianta, Cox, Taylor, & Early, 1999).

Pianta, Cox et al., 1999). Other barriers reported by public pre-school teachers including summer work with no pay, uninterested parents, and parents did not read materials sent home (see Table 9) (Rous et al., 2010). Too much time was reported mostly as a barrier by kindergarten teachers working in rural, low poverty and low minority schools. Transition barriers reflected demographic variables related to the school's population (Pianta, Cox et al., 1999) and increased in high ethnic minority, high poverty, large schools, and for public pre-schools and when the teacher did not hold an early childhood degree (Rous et al., 2010). With many of these barriers being administrative in nature, there was an indication that schools may not be ready for kindergarteners. The researchers did not feel however, these barriers were insurmountable.

In the National Center for Early Development and Learning survey, teachers were less likely to see a transition practice as a good idea if they saw it as having a barrier. If they saw a barrier to the practice, they were less likely to implement the practice, even if the practice was good in theory (Pianta, Cox et al., 1999). High intensity transition practices that were individualized, and reached back in time (Pianta, Cox et al., 1999; Rous et al., 2010), such as home visits and coordinated visits between pre-schools and community agencies were rarely conducted due to barriers (Pianta, Cox et al., 1999; Rous et al., 2010) even when they were reported by teachers as being a good idea (see Table 9). In Schulting's (2009) Home Visit Project, she considered the barriers cited by teachers and the hectic nature associated with the beginning of a new school year. In response to the hectic nature at the beginning of the year, she asked teachers to complete home visits by October 15<sup>th</sup>. Teachers were paid a stipend for each home visit and received a bonus if all families were visited

Table 9

*Pre-School Teachers Identifying Transitions as Barriers*

Transition practices with barriers	Percentage of teachers identifying as a barrier
Parents do not read letters sent home	56.5%
Some parents are not interested	53.8%
Summer work not supported by salary	51.1%
Class lists generated too late	47.0%
Funds are not available	40.7%
Too dangerous to visit some students' homes	37.5%
Transition plan not available in school or district	36.3%
Parents do not bring child for registration	35.6%
Records (IEP) not available before child/school starts	30.6%
Parents cannot read letters sent home	28.3%
It takes too much time to conduct these practices	26.6%
Materials are not available	23.6%
Limited number of pre-school programs available	22.1%
Cannot reach most parents of children who need these practices	20.0%
School/ district does not support a transition plan	16.2%
District service providers not included in transition meetings	15.6%
Sending teachers are not interested	14.1%

Table 9 (continued)

Transition practices with barriers	Percentage of teachers identifying as a barrier
Service options are limited due to the timing of transition	11.8%
Contacts with parents are discouraged prior to the start of school	8.8%
Concern about creating negative experiences	7.0%
Too many programs to choose from	4.6%
I choose not to do a transition plan	2.8%

*Note.* (Rous et al., 2010).

by October 1<sup>st</sup>. This time frame proved feasible in the study, with a 96% completion rate by the deadline. Seventy-seven percent of these teachers exceeded expectations by meeting the October 1<sup>st</sup> deadline.

Teachers in more urban schools that had a higher minority population, and were in high poverty districts reported perceptions that family characteristics were barriers to transition practices (Pianta, Cox et al., 1999). Some of these perceptions included not being able to reach parents, feeling it was too dangerous to visit children's homes, parents not bringing children to school, and parents could not read.

Like teachers, families also experienced barriers to participating in transition to kindergarten activities. Lack of resources such as child care for other children, transportation, limited reading or English speaking skills, and work schedules often impeded parents' ability to support the transition process (Stormont et al., 2005).

To continue the work originated by NCEdL's Kindergarten Transition Survey, The National Center for Early Learning and Development (NCEdL) conducted a Kindergarten Transition Project. Even though the Kindergarten Transition Project continued the work of the Kindergarten Transition National Survey, the Kindergarten Transition Project stood alone. In this project over 80 high risk children and families were provided with a family worker which helped facilitate transition to kindergarten activities. LaParo et al. (2003) found that even with the support of family workers in place, seventy-four percent of parents reported their work schedule interfered with their participation in kindergarten transition activities. Even with barriers such as work, parents in this study tended to help with the kindergarten transition at home. More than 66% taught their children skills such as their address and phone number, and more than 85% of

these parents spoke with other parents about kindergarten. Almost all parents expressed behavior expectations and discussed meeting new friends with their children.

During NCEDL's Transition to Kindergarten project, family involvement logs were kept in addition to interviews conducted by family workers. These data revealed more than one-half of fathers did not have contact with their child's kindergarten teacher. Most father-school contact was initiated by the school. Fathers who lived with their children were more likely, than other fathers, to interact with their child's school (Rimm-Kaufmann & Zhang, 2005). Teacher gender may have been one barrier to fathers' participating in their child's school environment. The majority of elementary school teachers were female (Heaviside & Farris, 1993), so, gender could be a barrier preventing fathers from establishing a relationship with schools, further limiting fathers' involvement with school programs (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2005).

Immigrant parents faced a unique set of barriers. Immigrant parents, especially minority immigrant parents, specifically those having spent little time in the United States, were less likely to participate in their child's school. Some unique barriers immigrant parents faced included problems with transportation, lack of child care, conflicting work schedules and language barriers. These barriers led to immigrant parents not feeling welcomed at their child's school, which decreased the likelihood that they made connections or were engaged at their child's school. These barriers faced by minority immigrant parents may have been misinterpreted by their child's teacher as a lack of caring about their child's education. These parental involvement barriers coupled with teacher misinterpretation created an additional source of disadvantage for often already disadvantaged immigrant parents and their children. This was especially alarming since parental involvement was found to increase the likelihood of academic success (Turney & Kao, 2009). Recognizing and identifying potential barriers was the first step

in creating strategies for overcoming barriers that impeded the implementation of transition to kindergarten practices.

### **Suggestions for Eliminating Barriers**

To help eliminate transition barriers and ease the transition to kindergarten for all children, Pianta et al. (1998) recommended school administrators provided classroom assignments as early as possible and ensured a clear transition plan was in place. The researchers also recommend providing professional development for teachers which increased awareness about effective transitions. Teachers with more professional development in specific transition practices used more transition practices than teachers who had not received professional development. This recommendation was corroborated by Rous et al. (2010) who recommended providing teachers with specific professional development in transitional practices which increased the use of high-intensity transition practices.

Children of immigrants, especially minority immigrants who had spent little time in the United States could experience fewer barriers if schools created specific strategies to make immigrant families feel more welcome. These included eliminating language or other logistical barriers faced by immigrant families (Turney et al., 2009).

Barriers that prevented fathers from participating in the transition to kindergarten could be eliminated through timing or scheduling activities at a time that was more appealing to fathers. Teachers and schools could be more innovative and proactive in creating parent involvement opportunities that were more appealing to both fathers and mothers. The transition to kindergarten provided schools with a gateway to establishing non-evaluative relationships with fathers, and to creating positive first impressions about their child's school (Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2005).

In summary, eliminating barriers to participation in transition activities was pivotal, since the transition to kindergarten impacted the broader family and community. In other words, the experiences family members and the community at large had regarding the transition to kindergarten, ultimately impacted the child's chances at experiencing a successful transition to kindergarten.

### **Environmental Impacts**

Ecological factors were pivotal since demographic and environmental factors left some children more at-risk for successful transitions to kindergarten than children without negative environmental influences. In an ecological perspective on the transition to kindergarten, the focus was directed away from the child to the larger interconnected and interdependent relationships and environment in which the child operated. These influential relationships in the child's environment included peers, teachers, schools, families, neighborhoods, and the community. These external relationships held as much responsibility for a child's successful transition as the child himself. When these external relationships were aligned to support a child's early schooling, successful transitions to school, and subsequently trajectories for a positive school experience were more likely to occur (Pianta et al., 1996). Several models were used to depict the ecological perspective of the transition to kindergarten. These models were described below (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000).

Transition to kindergarten models illustrated varying degrees of emphasis placed on the importance of ecological processes and influences attributed to children's success while transitioning to kindergarten. Four models presented by Rimm-Kaufmann and Pianta (2000) follow:

1. Child Effects Model
2. Direct Effects Model
3. Indirect Effects Model
4. Dynamic Effects Model

The Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition, Model 1, the Child Effects Model, used child characteristics such as cognitive readiness, intelligence, language abilities and poverty status as the primary factors for transitioning to kindergarten. This model consisted of a myopic view by just looking through the lenses at the child. Researchers, policy makers, and educators were aware of the limitations present when only looking at the child, thus they began expanding the view of influences which impacted children transitioning to kindergarten.

A model with a more expansive view of factors influencing a child's transition to kindergarten was the Direct Effects Model. In this model, the child's characteristics were considered and were seen as being in the center of teachers, peers, neighborhood, and family, with all four of these relationships influencing the child's transition to kindergarten (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000). The direct effects from these four contexts (teachers, peers, neighborhood, and family) were linked to child outcomes (Graue, 1999). Examples of these contexts that influenced child outcomes were class size, quality of peer relationships, parental sensitivity, and attributes of neighborhoods such as violence. The effects of these contexts and relationships impacted a child's behavior and performance at school (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000). These findings have led researchers to expand their view of the ecological perspective on transitioning to kindergarten even further by looking through the lenses with a more contextualized view of readiness (Meisels, 1999).

The Indirect Effects Model provided a more contextualized view of readiness. It extended the Direct Effects' Model of the child being at the center of influence from teachers, peers, neighborhoods, and families and added the view, or the context, of the relationships and interconnectedness amongst and between the four contextual influences, while adding the child's influences on the four contexts to the equation (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000). One example from this contextualized view would be the relationship between neighborhood, families and peers. When transient families moved from neighborhood to neighborhood, children were less likely to experience continuity with peer relationships, leaving transient children possibly at-risk for transitioning successfully to and through kindergarten (Masten, Miliotis, Graham-Bermann, Ramirez, & Neeman, 1993), since children with successful peer relationships were more likely to experience academic success (Ladd, 1990). Even though the Indirect Effects' Model provided a more contextualized view of the transition to kindergarten ecology, it focused on "the static nature of these relationships among contexts" (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000). The development of relationships between contexts was not taken into consideration in the Indirect Model, focusing little attention to the factors important in developing relationships that could have a substantial effect on a child's school outcome. Making classroom placement decisions based on a teacher's positive past relationship with the student's parents or older sibling was one example of cultivating a positive relationship that was left out of the Indirect Model (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000). This development of relationships between contexts was where the fourth model, The Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition, came into play (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000).

The Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition encompassed all the components of the Direct and Indirect Models, but emphasized the development of the relationships between

contexts over time. This model depicted the environment surrounding the transition to school as having “many changing interactions among child, school, classroom, family, and community factors” (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000). These relationships and interactions developed and changed overtime influencing the child’s development which ultimately impacted school outcomes. An example of this model was a teacher who failed to contact the parents of a child exhibiting behavior problems because based on her previous experience with this family, or with a family similar to this family, contacting parents did not improve the child’s behavior. In short, The Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition defined the transition to school in terms of the “interconnectedness of relationships among child characteristics; and peer, family, school, and neighborhood contexts, and how these connections developed and changed” (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000). Overall quality of the relationships during this pivotal time was important for helping carry the child through this crucial transition, and the presence of positive open communication between the contexts could have fostered the quality of the relationships between contexts. For example, communication between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers as well as communication between teachers and families may have contributed to open communication and positive relationships which may have increased the likelihood of early school success (Pianta et al., 1996). This open and expansive communication was particularly important since a child’s transition to kindergarten not only impacted him, but may have also affected his parents and other family members as well (Wildenger et al., 2011).

To provide optimal support to the child during his transition to kindergarten, it was important to develop and nurture positive relationships among the home, peers, teachers, schools, families, neighborhoods, and within communities (Pianta et al., 2003; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). For example, supportive and involved families, along with positive relationships between

home and school was as important, or perhaps of more importance than the child's cognitive, social, and behavioral skills in predicting school success. Parent-initiated involvement in their child's school was found to partially mediate the relationship found between achievement and the use of transition practices, the development of key academic skills needed for early school success (Schulting, 2008; Schulting et al., 2005), and has been shown to enhance children's motivation to learn (Hill, 2001).

Parent involvement may have increased when there was a transition plan in place at the school (Schulting et al., 2005). When schools design a transition plan, all stakeholders should be involved in the creation of the plan, and the transition plan should be specifically designed to fit the unique needs of families, schools and the communities involved (MacDonald, 2008).

It was possible that the implementation of a transition plan or activities increased parent initiated school involvement (Schulting et al., 2005), and parents' comfort levels, particularly when the family was involved in the transition planning (McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004). This increased comfort raised the likelihood parents would engage in self-initiated involvement, which in turn increased student achievement, especially for low to middle income families. When parents of low-income, ethnic minority children felt comfortable in their child's school, felt their contribution was important and were more informed of school activities, they were more likely to be supportive of the transition to kindergarten through talking to children about the importance of school, helping children practice skills, being actively involved in school activities, and being engaged in regular and routine communication with the school. This parent-initiated involvement increased the likelihood of children experiencing success in school both socially and academically (McWayne et al., 2004; Schulting et al., 2005; Sy & Schulenberg, 2005), while child success could have shaped parent involvement (Sy et al., 2005).

These results suggested parent involvement could be the protective buffer for low-income, ethnic minority children as they transitioned into kindergarten, lessening the likelihood of negative school trajectories for children. A distinction was made between parent-initiated involvement and teacher-initiated involvement. Teacher-initiated involvement did not yield the positive results found in parent-initiated involvement. This could be the result of teachers inviting parents for conferences or meetings only after there were problems behaviorally, socially, or academically (Schulting et al., 2005). Negative notifications, such as those that came after school began, disrupted parent teacher relationships, and undermined parental support for the teacher (Pianta, Cox et al., 1999). Teacher initiated involvement specifically in transition activities was most effective when the transition practices reached out, linking families, pre-school settings and communities with schools, when they reached back in time, before the first day of school, and when they did so with a high level of intensity (Pianta, Cox et al., 1999; Rous et al., 2010).

Whether parent initiated or school initiated, interactions and relationships among a wide array of context such as the family, elementary schools, kindergarten teachers, pre-school teachers, peers, and preschool friends could be sources of support that helped enhance the transition to kindergarten. These supports could be particularly beneficial to children considered at-risk. Within this context, the National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL) conducted a two year kindergarten intervention project (LaParo et al., 2003) to ease the transition to kindergarten for children considered high risk. In this project, family workers were employed to facilitate, substantially support, and encourage the use of specific transition practices, while helping make connections between home, school and community settings. The transition activities offered were structured around family-school connections, child-school connections, peer connections, and community connections. Through this supportive environment more than

50% of all families participated in almost all the transition practices offered. The most attended activity was pre-kindergarten children visiting kindergarten classrooms, while the least attended activity was kindergarten orientation (LaParo et al., 2003). In this study, pre-kindergarten teachers were more likely than kindergarten teachers to participate in transition activities, but nearly all the teachers found the transition activities they used helpful. The researchers found that when policies, practices, and supports were in place, there was an increased usage of transition practices. Coupling this with the knowledge that school transition practices increased parent involvement and academic achievement, provided strong data that schools should develop and implement transition plans (Schulting et al., 2005).

In a similar yet a separate study conducted by NCEDL (Pianta et al., 2001), 110 families participated in a collaboration between university researchers, pre-school and elementary staffs on improving the transitions to kindergarten. The focus of this study was an ecological approach to kindergarten transitioning with the key focus being on building continuous relationships, which was believed to be the key to successful transitions. The participants in this study were also supported by family workers, replicating the family workers from NCEDL's two year kindergarten intervention project. The nature, intensity, and number of transition activities presented to families were personalized based on the needs of the family or school setting. The results of this study found that taking pre-school children to visit a kindergarten classroom, conducting orientation meetings in the spring of the pre-kindergarten year, and elementary schools providing informational meetings, in the elementary schools, were the most commonly implemented practices. Researchers found kindergarten teachers were less likely to participate in collaborative transition activities than pre-kindergarten teachers, and kindergarten teachers were

more likely to use group oriented activities than were pre-kindergarten teachers (Pianta et al., 2001).

As described above, family involvement in the transition to kindergarten was important, but Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2005) found additional benefits when fathers were actively engaged in their child's formal schooling. So much so, that father involvement outweighed the benefits of other caregivers being involved in a child's schooling. Communication with fathers occurred less often than with other family members, with father communication occurring at about ten percent of the frequency of communication with other family members.

Looking through the lenses of the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000) revealed that in addition to impacting children, the transition to kindergarten also affected parents and other family members (Wildenger et al., 2011). A recent study compared and contrasted family concerns of students identified as special education students with family concerns of students enrolled in general education classrooms (McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro-Reed, & Wildenger, 2010). Similar concerns regarding the transition to kindergarten were reported by both general education and special education caregivers. Common concerns shared between special education and general education parents included being worried about:

- Their child attending a new school (moving away from the familiarity of their pre-school care environment)
- Their child separating easily from their family member
- Their child getting along with their peers
- Their child getting along with their new kindergarten teacher

Parents of children with special needs reported significantly more concerns than parents of children identified in the general education population. Caregivers of children with special needs were specifically more concerned than parents of general education students about

- Behavior
- Communication
- Academic readiness
- Overall readiness for kindergarten

Of note was that caregivers of special education students were less likely to identify themselves as the child's primary caregiver, be White/Caucasian, be employed, and more likely to be recipients of government aide, than caregivers of children identified as being in general education. Caregivers of children with special needs also reported fewer years of education and reported making less income than caregivers of students with a general education status.

Yet another study documented concerns of parents regarding the transition to kindergarten. The researcher followed parents of incoming kindergarten students who had completed early childhood education programs. These parents were primarily concerned about their child's adjustment to a new environment and learning to follow directions (McIntyre et al., 2007), but they were motivated to be actively involved with their child transitioning to kindergarten. The parents were curious and wanted information about their child's school. Specifically they were interested in their child's classroom placement along with academic and behavioral expectations. This eagerness provided a prime catapult for developing home-school relationships (McIntyre et al., 2007; Wesley et al., 2003), that was often a missed opportunity

because of the lack of high-intensity transition practices, such as home visits, being used in many schools (Pianta et al., 2003).

Caregiver concerns, such as the ones described above, can be lessened when schools eased the transition to kindergarten for incoming families by discussing academic, social, and behavioral expectations of kindergarten with families. These discussions were most effective when they reached backward in time (Pianta, Cox et al., 1999), and prior to the beginning of school (Eckert, McIntyre, DiGennaro, Arbolino, Perry, & Begeny, 2008), since parents reportedly wanted more information specifically about academic expectations and how their child's skills aligned with those expectations before school began (Wildenger et al., 2011). Home visits were one example of a high-intensity transition practice that could have provided information about academic expectations before the beginning of the school year, which would have lessened parents' concerns.

In Schulting's (2009) Home Visit Project, she found parents who received home visits by their child's kindergarten teacher were more likely to accept invitations to school, than were parents from the control group not receiving home visits. Parents in the home visit group visited the school less frequently than parents in the control group. Invitations to school were extended less often than control group parents. Degrees of parental involvement went beyond invitations to participate extended by the school. Other factors, such as parent characteristics, could have also influenced parental involvement.

Parent characteristics impacted their level of involvement in transition practices. Parents with higher levels of education were more likely to be non-poor, married, and employed full-time, and were also more likely to participate in home-school conferences and school based involvement. In homes where the two parents were married, they were more likely to be

involved in home-based activities along with home-school conferences (Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Childs, 2000). This finding was generally consistent with Wildenger et al.'s (2011) findings that family involvement in transition to kindergarten activities correlated with maternal education (the higher the education the more participation), and with family income (the higher the income the more participation).

Ethnic origin also influenced parent participation. Asian American families with high expectations for their children, who were less acculturated to the American society, and more associated with Asian cultural values, were more likely to provide more academic and learning supports at home than within the school (Sy et al., 2005). Unlike Caucasian, African American, and Hispanic children, poverty did not impact achievement levels of Asian children. Math and reading achievement levels for Asian children were similar for poor and non-poor Asian children in kindergarten (Cooper et al., 2010). European American families with high expectations for their children were more likely to provide academic and learning supports at school than within the home (Sy et al., 2005).

Parent participation was also impacted by socio-economic levels and ethnicity. Children of low-income ethnic minority parents who had inhibited contact with the school and provided less supportive home environments were more likely to demonstrate problem behaviors in school. These parents reported their limited amounts of involvement and support was the result of familial and work related stresses (McWayne et al., 2004). Parental involvement played a pivotal role in the education of economically disadvantaged children as it partially mediated poverty with math and reading achievement in kindergarten. Economically disadvantaged parents of African American, Caucasian, and Hispanic children who provided cognitively stimulating materials in the home (children's books, children's CD's, etc.), had the child

involved in organized activities outside the home (art, music, sports, etc.), and attended school based activities such as open houses, mediated math and reading achievement in kindergarten when compared to less involved parents. Poverty was not found to be related to African American children's participation in organized activities outside the home, but these activities did not mediate math and reading achievement for African American children. Hispanic parents who were born in the United States and who engaged their children in home-learning activities such as assembling puzzles, completing chores, reading, and storytelling, had children who had higher levels of reading achievement than the less involved parents (Cooper et al., 2010).

Families who maintained strong family support and communication with schools played a pivotal role in the successful transition to school. Since some families experienced stressors preventing them from providing optimal support, along with the ever changing family structure and interactive ecological systems, schools should find new ways to communicate with families and to assist families with engagement in their child's learning. Collaboration between schools and families enabled families to contribute to the educational experience of their child. This called for creativity in new solutions and ways to engage parents in their child's learning (McWayne et al., 2004) as they move from the world of pre-kindergarten to the very different world of kindergarten.

### **Discontinuities Between Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten Settings**

Along with students' first experience with formal schooling came a transition that constituted a significant change for children and their families, the ecological discontinuities between their experiences in pre-kindergarten and their experiences in kindergarten. Pre-school environments were designed to provide childcare and to encourage social and emotional development in young children. Pre-school cultures tended to emulate the culture of the family.

Conversely, the kindergarten classroom's focus was on academic attainment that sets the path for the child's subsequent academic career. This transition moved children into the context of a broader community where children's access to resources and people increased, along with the demands placed upon them (Graue, 1999; Love et al., 1992; National Education Goals Panel, 1998). Children with supportive family units had a better chance of successfully transitioning into the cultural and academic discontinuities children found in their kindergarten classrooms when compared to pre-school environments (Love et al., 1992; National Education Goals Panel, 1998). To exacerbate complications that arose from the discontinuities between the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten environments, were the heterogeneous children being placed into the middle of the discontinuous kindergarten environment. Incoming kindergarteners came to school with a wide-array of pre-school experiences. Some came from the home setting, some from private child care centers, some from private kindergartens, and others from public settings such as Head Start (Love et al., 1992; McCabe et al., 2011). In addition to the varying pre-school experiences students brought with them were varying student characteristics such as age, experience and home language usage (Graue, 1999; Wesley et al., 2003). These discontinuous environments and student characteristics along with the increase in academic demands in kindergarten lead to some children being more ready than others for the kindergarten environment (Love et al., 1992; McCabe et al., 2011).

Organizational discontinuities occurred for all children regardless of their preparedness. When children entered kindergarten they were faced with increased academic expectations (Pianta et al., 2003; Wesley et al., 2003) and more complex social interactions. Even pre-kindergarten teachers felt their students were not prepared for kindergarten skills such as letter and number recognition, sound identification, and memorization. The kindergarten environment

was more inflexible and more formal than the pre-kindergarten environment. Students moved from self-selected center activities in pre-kindergarten to teacher selected seat work in kindergarten. All these changes were coupled with an increased student teacher ratio, reduced teacher attention, and a decreased amount of family involvement and connection to the school (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003).

When children moved from pre-kindergarten to kindergarten, parents often perceived less of a need to be involved, and may have even felt a lessened competence with their involvement. In pre-kindergarten children were accustomed to their families being a central part of their learning experience. When children went to kindergarten, the absence of families as a part of their learning experience at school was yet one more discontinuity that could have exacerbated difficulties with transitioning to kindergarten (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 1999).

Parent contacts changed from pre-school to kindergarten. In pre-school students more likely received individualized high intensity practices such as home visits and frequent, positive parent/school communication. In kindergarten this communication lessened. More notes were used for communication purposes and more negative information about the child was shared (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 1999). In pre-school settings, parent contact with the school was often parent initiated, and the pre-school environment lent itself to more parental involvement and support (Pianta, Cox et al., 1999). A decline between school initiated contacts and parent initiated contacts between preschool and kindergarten was also reported (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 1999; Rimm-Kauffman et al., 2005). When parents shifted from close contact with pre-school teachers and environments, to reduced contact in kindergarten, this change in involvement and connectivity was perceived as negative, and was considered by parents to be a stressor in the transition experience (Pianta et al., 2003).

Parents and the home life of rising kindergarteners played a substantial role in children's transition to kindergarten as home environments tended to change after a child entered kindergarten. One example was a family's daily routines. Daily routines such as mealtimes, bedtimes, and awakening times offered predictability, stability, independence and security when routinely followed (Sytsma, Kelley, & Wymer, 2001; Wildenger, McIntyre, Fiese, & Eckert, 2008). When children began kindergarten, families often adjusted their routines to coincide with the school's schedule, usually resulting in family routines being shifted to earlier in the day. This shift exacerbated the stress already associated with kindergarten, thereby, enhancing adjustment difficulties during the transition to kindergarten (Quas, Murowchick, Bensadoun, & Boyce, 2002; Wildenger et al., 2008). Children experiencing the greatest amounts of change in their daily routines experienced the greatest degrees of psychological stress, as measured by salivary cortisol levels. Kindergarten presented an especially stressful challenge specifically for children with infrequent pre-school experiences (Quas et al., 2002). Wildenger et al. (2008) suggested schools ease this transition by helping families anticipate their child's future kindergarten routine so that the family could begin implementing the routine prior to the transition to kindergarten. The research suggested this practice would help alleviate the stress associated with the discontinuities between the pre-school and school environments, enabling children to better adjust to the increased demands of kindergarten.

Discontinuities between homes of impoverished, at-risk, minority children and the formal school setting also exacerbated children's difficulty in adjusting to formal schooling. Even though these children may have few academic and formal school socialization skills, they exhibited high levels of independence resulting from having no one to take care of them at home, and often being required to care for younger siblings. One group of teachers reported that even

though these children may not have known their colors, they tried to find someone to take care of at school (Wesley et al., 2003).

How can schools help lessen the discontinuities from the pre-kindergarten world to the kindergarten world, while balancing the needs of the heterogeneous students they received, to ensure the transition to kindergarten was successful for everyone involved? Love et al. (1992) wrote that it was critical for schools to develop intentional and purposeful transition activities and events designed specifically to help children overcome the discontinuities they experience from their pre-kindergarten to kindergarten environments. Even though little coordination and collaboration was found, the authors found greater amounts of collaboration and coordination between schools and pre-schools when (1) school staff were given the responsibility for the transition activities, (2) school staff exhibited positive attitudes towards children and parents, (3) pre-school classrooms were located in the same building as the elementary school, and (4) the schools exhibited high levels of poverty. These strategies could help lessen the discontinuous experiences faced by children and families to help make the transition to kindergarten more successful for all stakeholders.

### **Literature Assumptions**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, assumptions for this study were viewed through three lenses, researcher assumptions, literature assumptions, and participant assumptions. This section addresses assumptions found in the literature. The literature was replete with information on how important transition practices were to help children successfully move into kindergarten. These statements were followed by ambiguities such as, transitions were *likely* to have long-term implications on children's cognitive development (Alexander et al., 1988). Other leading statements included how the transition to kindergarten can have a long-term effect on

achievement (Nelson, 2004). Overall, there appeared to be assumptions in the literature that positive transitions to kindergarten increased children's academic performance. In reality, only one study found the number of school-based transitions to be associated with positive student achievement in kindergarten (Schulting et al., 2005). The need to examine the potential differential impact of transition practices on later academic performance was documented by Rous et al. (2010). These literature assumptions further substantiated the need for the current study.

### **Kindergarten Program Logic Model Based on the Literature**

To help clarify or untangle the assumptions from the literature about the effects kindergarten transition practices can have on students' academic achievement, a Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature was created (see Figure 1), (Knowlton et al., 2009). Logic models were evidence based mental models that provided a visual roadmap of a "planned action and its expected result," (Knowlton et al., 2009, p. 4). Program logic models helped provide clarity and an understanding between relationships. For example, program logic models provided a visualization between the planning (if you do this), with the results (you should get this). In other words, program logic models visually communicated what worked under certain, evidence based, conditions (Knowlton et al., 2009).

A Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature was created (see Figure 1) from this chapter so that research findings from the current study could be clearly and visually correlated and aligned with kindergarten transition practices in the literature found to be associated with increased academic achievement in kindergarten. In the current study, a visual alignment or misalignment of kindergarten transition practices occurring at each elementary school, with what the literature says about kindergarten transition practices that help

increase academic achievement in kindergarten, will help substantiate the transferability of kindergarten transition practices at each elementary school with overall kindergarten reading achievement.

### **Summary**

According to the research, school readiness was seen in two categories; the readiness of the child (child readiness) when the child entered kindergarten, and the readiness of the school (Ready Schools) to meet each child's differing levels of needs at the onset of kindergarten. School readiness reached beyond the doors of the school and included the whole ecological realm that influenced the child. This included schools reaching out and linking to homes, communities, families, pre-schools, and child-care centers, backward in time, before the beginning of the school year, and with the appropriate intensity such as personalized contacts and home visits (Pianta, Cox et al., 1999; Rous et al., 2010).

These high intensity transitional practices, when employed by schools helped ease the transition to kindergarten which could help all children, but especially those considered at-risk for social or academic failure, to acclimate better to school, which in turn increased their chances of short-term and long-term social and academic successes. Most schools were not ready to meet the plethora of child specific needs each fall, setting a negative trajectory for many children, especially those considered at-risk for social and academic failure. Specifically, most schools did not have a transition plan (Ray et al., 2010; Wesley et al., 2003) or intentionally offered transition activities that would help children, especially those considered at-risk to succeed (Early et al., 2001; Pianta, Cox et al., 1999; Rous et al., 2010).

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS**

### **Introduction**

This chapter describes the research method for this study. The previous chapter, A Review of the Literature, was the beginning point for the methodical decision made in this chapter (Yin, 2009). As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, research was replete with quantitative surveys representing data collected from teachers and parents regarding the transition to kindergarten for children. These data revealed most and least frequently used activities and procedures used during children's transition to kindergarten. One objective of this research study was to move beyond quantitative surveys and questionnaires to a deeper qualitative look into kindergarten transition practices. Therefore it was determined that a case study with a phenomenological approach best fit the needs of this study. A case study is used when a researcher has a desire to understand a social phenomenon (Yin, 2009) (in this study, kindergarten transition practices), and a phenomenological approach is used when a researcher wants to understand several individuals shared experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002) (in this study, the shared experiences of twelve administrators and teachers). The researcher used a comparative case study with a phenomenological approach. From the review of the literature, the researcher found only two empirical studies that linked the use of kindergarten transition practices with improved academic, behavioral and social achievement (Wildenger et al., 2011). Even though behavioral and social achievement was important, that was not the focus of this study. The researcher's focus was to ascertain if a correlation existed between Resources and Activities delineated in the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) with student reading achievement in kindergarten at two elementary schools with similar demographics, but dissimilar overall achievement (as measured by the

North Carolina End of Grade tests in reading). Reading achievement in kindergarten was one of several types of data examined in a search for evidence of achievement, but was contradicted by factors (e.g. instructional differences, student absences, class size, school culture, etc.) that were not accounted for in this study. Overall, the researcher compared kindergarten transition practices between two elementary schools, with practices in the existing research about transitions (see Figure 1), and with each school's kindergarten student achievement data in reading.

The first step to conducting a comparative case study was to create specific research questions that sought to explain how a current social phenomenon worked. Creating extensive questions by asking why or how provided an in-depth description of a social phenomenon in this case, kindergarten transition practices. This focusing was important, as all interesting aspects of a phenomenon could not be studied at one time (George et al., 2005).

Phenomenological qualitative research questions were constructed using a central or broad question for exploration into the phenomenon, as not to limit the inquiry. The central question was followed by associated sub-questions, which were designed to narrow the focus of the study, while continuing to not limit the inquiry (Creswell, 2009). In the current study, the researcher synthesized the strategies for creating case study questions; with the strategies for creating qualitative research questions with a phenomenological approach to arrive at the development of the following synthesized research questions:

1. How did two elementary schools, in the same school district, with similar socio-economic demographics facilitate kindergarten transition practices?
2. To what extent has each school created a kindergarten transition plan?

3. How were kindergarten transition practices at each school described when compared to the literature on kindergarten transition practices?
4. How were the schools' kindergarten transition practices similar and how were they different?
5. To what degree was there evidence that suggested kindergarten transition practices had a positive influence on student achievement?

In summary, this comparative case study with a phenomenological approach studied the experiences of administrators and teachers at two public elementary schools which had similar demographics, but yielded varying overall academic achievement results. Specifically, the overall student academic achievement at Bridge View Elementary was 12.6 percentage points higher than that of River City Elementary as measured by the North Carolina End of Grade tests in reading and mathematics. The essences, or mutually understood meanings among participants, of kindergarten transition practices as experienced by teachers and administrators at each school was compared to determine if there was a correlation between kindergarten transition practices and reading achievement in kindergarten between schools. A comparison between kindergarten transition practices at each school was also made with suggestions from the literature via the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1).

### **The Setting**

As described in the previous section, this comparative case study with a phenomenological approach examined kindergarten transition practices at two elementary schools to determine if there was a correlation between kindergarten transition practices and reading achievement in kindergarten as measured by Reading 3D TRC and DIBELS Next. This

section summarized the hierarchical design of the North Carolina Public School System and concluded with specific, detailed descriptions of the two schools that participated in this study.

At the top of the hierarchical structure of the North Carolina Public School System is the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction serves as the agency charged with implementing state school laws, the State Board of Education's policies, and procedures that govern public kindergarten through grade twelve education in North Carolina. The agency is headed by the elected State Superintendent. She functions under the directives of the State Board of Education. Local school districts, referred to as Local Education Agencies (LEA's) work under the directives of the Department of Public Instruction and the State Board. Most LEA's are composed of county agencies. The State of North Carolina has 100 counties. Due to the inclusion of a few city LEA's, the state has 115 LEA's. Each LEA has its own Board of Education and Superintendent.

The LEA involved in this study is a school district located in the southeastern region of North Carolina. Twenty-five public elementary schools are within the LEA involved in this study. Two elementary schools from this LEA were selected as participants for this study. These schools were selected based on similar free and reduced lunch demographics. River City Elementary has had two principals since it opened in the 2001-2002 school year, while Bridge View Elementary has had five principals since 2001-2002. The 2012-2013 school year marked the fourth year the principal at River City Elementary was in charge, and the second year at the helm for the principal at Bridge View Elementary. Student attendance hours were from 7:50 a.m. until 2:30 p.m. Monday through Friday at River City Elementary, and 8:00 a.m. until 2:25 p.m. Monday through Friday at Bridge View Elementary.

More specific descriptions of each participating school's background followed below. The descriptions of the participating schools began with River City Elementary, followed by Bridge View Elementary.

### **River City Elementary**

Beginning with the 2012-2013 school year, River City Elementary was a pre-kindergarten through fifth grade public elementary school. Prior to that year, River City Elementary served grades kindergarten through five. Even though some pre-kindergarten students attending pre-kindergarten at River City Elementary will transition into kindergarten at River City Elementary during the 2013-2014 school year, other students attending pre-kindergarten at River City Elementary lived in school attendance areas that required them to attend kindergarten at schools other than River City Elementary. The housing of pre-kindergarten classrooms was redesigned for the 2012-2013 school year. The LEA anticipated being awarded a Head Start Grant in the fall of 2012. In preparation for this grant (which resulted in more pre-kindergarten, specifically Head Start, classrooms) the LEA moved pre-kindergarten classrooms into three elementary schools for the 2012-2013 school year, making the total number of elementary schools housing pre-kindergarten classrooms four. The LEA also maintained two pre-kindergarten school sites in addition to the classrooms housed in regular attendance elementary schools.

Students at River City Elementary were required to wear uniforms to school. Uniform guidelines were posted on the school's web-site in both English and Spanish. Additionally, for the fourth consecutive year, The Landfall Foundation awarded River City Elementary a grant in the amount of \$4,000 to purchase uniforms for students in need.

Even though River City Elementary was considered one of three elementary magnet school choices in this southeastern North Carolina school district, River City Elementary also received students from a regularly assigned student attendance zone. Non-districted students electing to attend River City Elementary via the magnet school option, submitted an application to the school system's district office, where students were selected by random lottery. Data which the researcher will collect during this study will indicate the percent of students enrolled at River City Elementary that were districted to the school and the percent of students that attended via the magnet school lottery.

River City Elementary's mission statement was posted on the home page of the school's web-site and stated: "We are a community of student engineers who use team work, communication, and creative thinking to solve problems as we build dreams and become lifelong learners in a global society." This mission statement was posted in the School Improvement Plan which was also located on the school's web-site.

River City Elementary received school-wide Title I funding which required the school to adhere to *No Child Left Behind* regulations. This required River City Elementary to demonstrate adequate yearly progress (AYP), and beginning the 2011-2012 school year Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO) on North Carolina's measure of school progress. River City Elementary achieved 69.2% (or 9 of 13 target goals) as measured by AMO during the 2011-2012 school year, and they achieved 100% (or 13 of 13 target goals) as measured by AYP during the 2008-2009 school year (see Table 10). This accomplishment prevented River City Elementary from being held to *No Child Left Behind* sanctions (United States Department of Education, 2003).

Another characteristic of River City Elementary was the use of Positive Behavior Instructional Supports (PBIS), which was a school-wide focus on positive student behavior.

Table 10

*River City Elementary Adequate Yearly Progress and Annual Measurable Progress*

School year	Number of target goals	Number of target goals met	Percentage of target goals met
2011-2012	13	9	69.2%
2010-2011	13	7	53.8%
2009-2010	17	16	94.1%
2008-2009	13	13	100.0%
2007-2008	15	9	60.0%
2006-2007	17	14	82.4%
2005-2006	17	17	100.0%
2004-2005	19	19	100.0%
2003-2004	21	21	100.0%
2002-2003	21	19	90.5%

*Note.* As measured by *No Child Left Behind*.

Expectations for behavior had a common language throughout the school community and were phrased positively. Expectations were taught, practiced and reinforced school-wide, with students receiving tangible rewards for conforming to expected behaviors (Sugai & Horner, 2002). River City Elementary was recognized for Exemplar School Application of the Positive Behavior Intervention and Support System.

The state of North Carolina had a systemic template for school improvement planning that was to be used by all school across the state. The Title I School-Wide Compliance Review and Plan was incorporated into this school improvement template. One section of the Title I School-Wide Compliance Review and Plan to be completed by school-wide Title I schools was entitled Plans for Assisting Pre-School Students in the Successful Transition from Early Childhood Programs to Local Elementary School-Wide Programs. Additionally, the NC Department of Public Instruction in *Transition Planning for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools* (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.) developed an initiative for each local school district to develop and implement a transition plan. In River City Elementary's on-line School Improvement Plan, the following items were included in the written transition plan:

- Housing pre-kindergarten classrooms beginning 2012-2013
- Kindergarten teachers communicated with pre-kindergarten programs regarding needs and expectations for students
- Regular meetings scheduled with potential incoming students

According to the North Carolina Schools' Report Cards (North Carolina Public Schools, 2012c) from the 2010-2011 school year, River City Elementary was identified under North Carolina's ABC's testing program as having no recognition, and an overall proficiency of 63.9%. During the 2011-2012 school year, River City Elementary was identified as a School of Progress with

expected growth. The overall proficiency for the 2011-2012 school year was 60.5%, down 3.4% from the previous year. A School of Progress was identified as a school where at least 60% of the students were at grade level and achieved expected or high growth expectations in one year. Thirty-eight percent of the schools in this southeastern North Carolina School's district received this designation, and thirty-seven percent of the schools from across the state received this designation (see Appendix A). Teacher quality statistics for River City Elementary during the 2011-2012 were reported in the North Carolina School Report Card (see Table 11).

These data show that overall teachers at River City Elementary were similar to the district and state averages in teaching experience. Sixty-one percent of River City Elementary's teachers had ten or fewer years' experience which is slightly higher than the state and district with approximately 50% of teachers with ten or fewer years' experience. River City Elementary also had a disproportionately low teacher turnover rate (4%) for the 2011-2012 school year when compared to the district's teacher turnover rate of ten percent during the 2011-2012 school year and the state of North Carolina's teacher turnover rate of twelve percent.

### **Bridge View Elementary**

Bridge View Elementary was a kindergarten through fifth grade public elementary school. Students at Bridge View Elementary were required to wear uniforms, but no reference to uniforms was located on the school's web-site. Bridge View Elementary only received students through their regularly assigned student attendance zone. Bridge View Elementary's motto, Every Child, Every Chance, Every Day, was posted on the front page of the school's web-site. Their mission statement was posted in their School Improvement Plan which was also on the front page of the school's web-site.

Table 11

*River City Elementary 2011-2012 NC School Report Card Statistics*

	Total number of classroom teachers*	Fully licensed teachers	Classes taught by highly qualified teachers	Teachers with advanced degrees	National Board Certified teachers*	Years of teaching experience			Teacher turnover rate
						0-3 years	4-10 years	10+ years	
River City Elementary	24	100%	100%	15%	3	19%	42%	39%	4%
District	33	100%	100%	25%	8	14%	37%	49%	10%
State	35	99%	100%	30%	6	18%	32%	50%	12%

*Note.* \*The total number of teachers in this school and the average number of teachers in schools with similar grade ranges at the district and state level.

Since Bridge View Elementary received school-wide Title I funding, they fell under *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) regulations, and were required to demonstrate adequate yearly progress (AYP), and beginning in the 2011-2012 school year Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO), on North Carolina's measure of school progress. Bridge View Elementary achieved 100% (or 15 of 15 target goals) as measured by AMO during the 2011-2012 school year (see Table 12). This accomplishment prevented Bridge View Elementary from being held to *No Child Left Behind* sanctions (United States Department of Education, 2003).

Bridge View Elementary had a written transition plan in the Title I School-Wide Compliance Review and Plan section of the School Improvement Plan for assisting pre-school students with the successful transition from early childhood programs to local elementary school-wide programs. Activities listed in Bridge View Elementary's transition plan included:

- Pre-kindergarten students visit kindergarten classes in spring and work with kindergarteners on a classroom activity
- Kindergarten teacher representative to pre-kindergarten transition and informal meetings
- Fast-Start

According to the North Carolina Schools' Report Cards (North Carolina Public Schools, 2012c) from the 2010-2011 school year, Bridge View Elementary was identified under North Carolina's ABC's testing program as a Priority School without expected growth, and an overall proficiency of 57.0%. During the 2011-2012 school year, Bridge View Elementary achieved an overall proficiency of 73.1% which was up 16.1 percentage points from the previous year. This proficiency level identified Bridge View as a School of Progress with expected growth. A School of Progress was identified as a school where at least 60% of the students were at grade level and

Table 12

*Bridge View Elementary Adequate Yearly Progress and Annual Measurable Objectives*

School year	Number of target goals	Number of target goals met	Percentage of target goals met
2011-2012	15	15	100%
2010-2011	15	9	60.0%
2009-2010	13	13	100.0%
2008-2009	13	13	100.0%
2007-2008	17	11	64.7%
2006-2007	19	16	84.2%
2005-2006	17	16	94.1%
2004-2005	17	17	100.0%
2003-2004	19	19	100.0%
2002-2003	17	17	100.0%

*Note.* As measured by *No Child Left Behind.*

the school made expected or high growth. During the 2011-2012 school year, thirty-eight percent of the schools in the district received this designation ranking, and 37% of the schools across the state of North Carolina received this designation ranking (see Appendix A). The North Carolina School Report Card reported teacher quality statistics (see Table 13).

These data show that Bridge View Elementary had a highly inexperienced teaching staff when compared to the district and the state. Bridge View Elementary's teacher turnover rate (27%) was disproportionately high when compared to other schools in this district (10% during the 2011-2012 school year), and the state of North Carolina's teacher turnover rate of 12% for the same school year.

### **River City Elementary and Bridge View Elementary**

This section reviewed the overall similarities and dissimilarities of the two schools described above. Both schools were one of 25 elementary schools located within the same LEA in a school district located in the southeastern region of North Carolina. Both schools were eligible for and received school-wide Title I funding. Both schools were considered urban, specifically they were located within the city limits, near the downtown area. The schools had similar populations in the overall number of students, and were similar in the percentage of students considered at-risk as identified by the percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch through the Federal Child Nutrition Program. Dissimilar attributes of these two elementary schools included the number of African American students (River City Elementary had a greater percentage of African American students), the number of Hispanic students (Bridge View Elementary had a greater percentage of Hispanic students), teacher experience (River City's teachers had more experience), teacher turnover rate, (Bridge View had a greater teacher turnover rate), and overall academic proficiency as indicated on the North Carolina End of Grade

Table 13

*Bridge View Elementary 2011-2012 NC School Report Card Statistics*

	Total number of classroom teachers*	Fully licensed teachers	Classes taught by highly qualified teachers	Teachers with advanced degrees	National Board Certified teachers*	Years of teaching experience			Teacher turnover rate
						0-3 years	4-10 years	10+ years	
Bridge View Elementary	31	100%	100%	22%	5	20%	54%	26%	27%
District	33	100%	100%	25%	8	14%	37%	49%	10%
State	35	99%	100%	30%	6	18%	32%	50%	12%

*Note.* \*The total number of teachers in this school and the average number of teachers in schools with similar grade ranges at the district and state level.

Tests (as displayed in Table 1, Bridge View Elementary obtained higher achievement proficiency during the 2011-2012 school year). Another dissimilar attribute was the grade range served. River City Elementary served pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, while Bridge View Elementary served kindergarten through fifth grade. The 2012-2013 school year was the first year River City Elementary served a pre-kindergarten population. This section described background information used to describe the setting of the current study. The following section provided a description of the participants in each setting.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study included the principal, assistant principal, and kindergarten teachers from two elementary schools in southeastern North Carolina. Both schools had one principal and one assistant principal. A purposeful sample of professionals who had experience with rising kindergarten children transitioning into kindergarten due to their employment positions of principal, assistant principal, or kindergarten teacher at an elementary school participated in this comparative case study with a phenomenological approach.

In summary, this section described the hierarchical structure of the North Carolina public school system, along with a detailed description of two schools in southeastern North Carolina, whose kindergarten transition practices were examined in this study. A description of the participants was also presented.

### **Research Design of the Study**

The research design of a comparative case study along with the research design of a phenomenological approach was blended for the current study. Two cases (with the same phenomenon in two separate settings), specifically transition to kindergarten practices at two elementary schools, along with the experiences shared by principals, assistant principals, and

kindergarten teachers, at the same two elementary schools, was the focus of this blended research design.

This section first described the research design of a case study, then the research design of a comparative case study, which was followed by the research design of a phenomenological study. This section was concluded by providing a description of how these two research design methods were synthesized in the current study.

### **Case Study Design**

A case study design was used in research when how and why questions were being posed, when the investigator had little or no control over the events, and when the focus was on a contemporary phenomenon. Yin (2009), described five components of case study research design that were of particular importance:

1. A study's questions – The case study method most likely asked how and why questions.
2. Its propositions if any – Study propositions directed attention to what should be examined in the scope of the study.
3. Its unit(s) of analysis – The unit of analysis defined the bounded system, or the case being studied. Some examples of units of analysis, or cases were an individual, event, or program.
4. The logic linking the data to the propositions – This step was accomplished through processes such as pattern matching which helped facilitate the process for case study data to be combined or calculated so that the case study data could be a direct reflection of the study proposition. This procedure is described in specific detail later in this chapter.

5. The criteria for interpreting the findings – Case study analysis rarely relied on the use of statistics or statistical programs for determining significance. As a result, one way case study research identified data as significant was through the use of a general analytic strategy. This process included a reliance on the previously developed theoretical proposition aligning evidence with the study's questions, and using both quantitative and qualitative data. These techniques were described in more specific detail in the statistical analyses section of this chapter.

Once the researcher completed the five components of case study design above, the researcher developed a theory. This step occurred before any data collection occurred and was essential to the process. Through this process, the researcher determined if the case study was used to develop or test a theory.

### **Multiple or Comparative Case Study**

When a phenomenon or case was studied as an individual case, but the study as a whole covered several comparable individual cases, the study was considered a multiple case design or comparative case study. Multiple case designs were more compelling and reliable than single case designs. When selecting multiple cases the researcher ensured that they (Yin, 2009):

1. Predicted similar results (or literal replication) or
2. Predicted contrasting results but for anticipated reasons (a theoretical replication)

The first step in designing a comparative case study was theory development. Cases were selected, with each case being a whole study. The conclusion from each case then presented the information needing replication by other individual cases. When constructing the summary report, both the individual cases and the multiple cases were reported. Across the multiple cases,

the summary report delineated the extent of the replication logic along with the reasons certain results were predicted.

### **Phenomenological Research Design**

The purpose of a phenomenological research study was for the researcher to describe several individuals shared experiences with a particular phenomenon. Phenomenologists focused on individuals' common experiences with a phenomenon. The overall purpose of phenomenological research was to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon into describing the universal essence of the phenomenon. Essences were meanings that were mutually understood among the participants regarding the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007). The common essences of a phenomenon, rather than the respondents in a study, were the defining characteristics in a study (Patton, 2002).

Phenomenology had a strong philosophical background and drew on the writings of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), Creswell (2007), and others who expanded upon Husserl's views. Phenomenology was frequently used in the social and health sciences such as sociology, psychology, nursing, health, and education (Creswell, 2007).

Four philosophical perspectives were grounded in phenomenological research (Creswell, 2007):

1. A return to the traditional tasks of philosophy (A search for wisdom)
2. A philosophy without presuppositions (Epoche, or the suspension of all judgments about what is real)
3. The intentionality of consciousness (The reality of an object is related to one's consciousness of it)
4. The refusal of the subject-object dichotomy (The reality of an object is only

perceived within the meaning of the experience of the individual)

Two common approaches to phenomenology were van Manen's hermeneutic approach, and Moustakas' transcendental approach (Creswell, 2007). The main difference between these two phenomenological approaches was that van Manen's approach had an interpretive process in which the researcher created an interpretation of the meanings of the participants' lived experiences. Moustakas' approach was focused more on describing the participants' experiences and less on interpretations of these experiences (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). The researcher followed the processes for Moustakas' (1994) transcendental approach to phenomenological research by describing the kindergarten transition experiences of school administrators and kindergarten teachers.

### **Synthesis of Research Designs and Application to Current Study**

This section blended the processes of a comparative case study, with those of a phenomenological research study. The focus of this comparative case study with a phenomenological approach was to study two cases (the same phenomenon in two separate settings), specifically transition to kindergarten practices at two elementary schools, and to ascertain the shared experiences or essences of school administrators and kindergarten teachers with regards to transition to kindergarten practices at each school (Creswell, 2007). The analysis that followed described the universal essence of the transition to kindergarten practices at two elementary schools in southeastern North Carolina and compared these findings to practices suggested in the literature via the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1). Next the kindergarten transition practices at each school were compared to determine if there was a correlation between the essences of kindergarten transition practices and student reading achievement in kindergarten as measured by Reading 3D TRC,

Overall Composite and DIBELS Next. This evidence of achievement was contradicted by factors not accounted for in the current study.

The first step to conducting this comparative case study with a phenomenological approach was to create specific research questions for focused comparison. These questions sought to explain how a current social phenomenon worked. Using why or how questions created the opportunity for responses to provide an in-depth description of the social phenomenon being studied, in this case, kindergarten transition practices. In the current study, this process was combined with the phenomenological process of using central or broad questions for exploration into the phenomenon, to avoid limiting the inquiry. The central question was followed by related sub-questions, which were designed to narrow the focus of the study, while continuing to not limit the inquiry (Creswell, 2009). As with case study questions, Moustakas (1994) suggested creating phenomenological questions by using the key word how. Specifically Moustakas (1994) explained that the use of the word how facilitated clear, concise wording of the question and denoted (the researchers) openness to anything whatever that may emerge. In the current study the researcher synthesized the strategies for creating case study questions, with the strategies for creating qualitative research questions with a phenomenological approach to arrive at the development research questions:

1. How did two elementary schools, in the same school district, with similar socio-economic demographics facilitate kindergarten transition practices?
2. To what extent has each school created a kindergarten transition plan?
3. How were kindergarten transition practices at each school described when compared to the literature on kindergarten transition practices?

4. How were the schools' kindergarten transition practices similar and how were they different?
5. To what degree was there evidence that suggested kindergarten transition practices had a positive influence on student achievement?

The next step in case study research design was to identify a study proposition. In the current study the study proposition identified what was examined in the scope of the study. The proposition of the researcher was to delve deeper into the common essence or meaning experienced by school administrators and kindergarten teachers regarding kindergarten transition practices, and to determine if there was a correlation between the essences of kindergarten transition practices at these schools with practices suggested in the literature and with students' kindergarten reading achievement. The unit of analysis was identified. The unit of analysis was defined as the bounded system or case being studied. The unit of analysis for the current study was kindergarten transition practices. The fourth step in the components of case study research was the logic linking the data to the propositions. One way this was accomplished was through pattern matching. Pattern matching and its specific role in the current research was described below in the credibility section. The fifth and final step was the criteria for interpreting the findings, and was described below in the statistical analysis section.

In this particular study on the phenomenon of transition to kindergarten practices, qualitative data were collected through the use of face-to-face interviews. The researcher interviewed participants (principals, assistant principals, and kindergarten teachers at two elementary schools) one-on-one and posed a series of pre-determined, open-ended questions specifically designed to gather responses “. . . that led to a textural description and a structural description of the experiences, and ultimately provided an understanding of the common

experiences of the participants” (Moustakas, 1994). Participants were encouraged to share artifacts (e.g. letters, flyers, pictures, etc.) which helped illustrate kindergarten transition practices at their school.

Immediately following the face-to-face interviews, participants completed a paper-and-pencil demographic survey (see Appendices C, D, & E). These findings were used along with school demographic data in the final description, which described the universal essence of the phenomenon being studied. In other words, what all participants had in common as they experienced the phenomenon of kindergarten transition practices.

### **Instrumentation**

This study was based on participants’ responses to questions posed by the researcher/interviewer during face-to-face individual interviews. After all participants were asked the same two interview questions, the remainder of the participation questions was divided into two categories. The first category of sub-questions was developed for school administrators (principals and assistant principals) while the second set of sub-questions was developed for kindergarten teachers. These two sets of sub-questions were created due to the varying and differing nature, roles and responsibilities experienced by school administrators and kindergarten teachers. In both question sets, questions were created to help enable participants to richly describe their experiences in terms of the phenomenon being studied, along with evoking a description of the contexts or situations that influenced or affected the participants’ experiences. Responses to interview questions were audio-recorded (with participant permission), and each audio-recording was coded for participant identification purposes. In qualitative data collection, the interviewer was considered an instrument, the interviewer in this study engaged in the process of memo writing in an attempt to capture thought or ideas that came to the interviewer’s

mind during the interview process. These captured thoughts had the capacity to offer disconfirming evidence of prior assumptions, fresh insights, or other reactions to the picture of the phenomenon emerging from the data collection.

Immediately following the face-to-face interview, participants completed a paper-and-pencil survey (see Appendices C, D, & E) for the purpose of collecting participant demographic data. Items on this paper-and-pencil demographic, self-reporting survey included, but were not limited to, questions pertaining to the respondent's ethnicity, number of years teaching experience, licensure areas, age, formalized professional development in transition to kindergarten practices, and number of years' experience teaching pre-kindergarten or kindergarten. Assistance with creating the interview questions and developing the paper-and-pencil self-reporting demographic data survey was provided by the chair and methodologist of this researcher's committee, along with feedback from the Expert/Audit Group.

Materials needed were field notebooks for memo writing, strategic and focused note taking, pencils, pens, demographic surveys, questions to guide interviews, audio-recorder, power cord, extra batteries, written participant permission, a quiet space for interviewing and a substitute teacher.

### **Expert/Audit Group Review**

Three experts in the field of kindergarten transition were convened to conduct a dependability audit. This Expert/Audit Group consisted of one elementary school principal, one kindergarten teacher, and one retired kindergarten teacher. Before data collection began, this group of experts reviewed the interview questions, demographic surveys, and researcher's plan for data collection. This group provided feedback to the principal investigator.

Ambiguities and issues that arose from the Expert Group regarding participant interviews, demographic surveys, or with the overall process, were considered and when needed, the process, interview questions, or demographic surveys were altered to ensure clarity and ease of participation. Members of the Expert/Audit Group were encouraged to provide the researcher with specific feedback regarding needed changes to the overall research design. One member of the Expert/Audit Group engaged in a pilot one-on-one, face-to-face mock interview. This resulted in the principal investigator obtaining an estimation of the actual amount of time the interviews would take, and in the principal investigator verbally reviewing, summarizing and clarifying the participants' responses before the participants exited the face-to-face interview.

After data were collected these experts reviewed the transcriptions and descriptions from the interviews and conducted an audit trail of the principal investigator's interpretation of the data. The Expert/Audit Group continued to audit the principal investigator's progress to confirm the credibility of the data.

### **Credibility**

Credibility was achieved in this comparative case study with a phenomenological approach through a combination of case study and qualitative research credibility methods that were synthesized to fulfill the needs of the current study.

- Use of bracketing or epoche, whereby the researcher attempted to suspend her beliefs and experiences with the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1994). This allowed the researcher to set aside and look at the phenomenon under examination with a fresh perspective.
- Use of a written reflection of the researcher's personal experiences with the phenomenon being studied, along with the context and situations that influenced

the researcher's personal experiences with the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1994).

- Use of member-checking (Gall et al., 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), This process allowed study participants to review statements in the researcher's report for accuracy and completeness. Any errors revealed through this process were corrected.
- Use of low inference descriptors, or verbatim accounts to demonstrate that the findings were grounded in the data. In this process, participants' exact words were used allowing the reader to experience the dialect, language and personal meanings of the participant (Johnson, 1997).
- Use of triangulation. Multiple data sources (database records from principals, assistant principals, and kindergarten teachers' interviews, artifacts collected, survey data, and all other data collected) were used to corroborate and compare data at two different schools. These multiple data sources provided a more comprehensive, richer picture of the phenomenon being studied (Gall et al., 2005; Lincoln et al., 1985).
- Use of pattern matching. Pattern matching was step four in the case study research design method. Pattern matching held that for each outcome the predicted values were found, and when alternative patterns were found at the same time, a strong causal inference could be made. In the current study, the pattern to be matched was how the use of kindergarten transition practices impacted reading achievement in kindergarten.

The credibility efforts above were created to help ensure transparency, rigor and to help reduce the risk of bias or inaccuracy (Lincoln et al., 1985; Roberts, Priest, & Traynor, 2006).

### **Dependability**

Dependability in qualitative and case study research referred to the trustworthiness of the procedures and data generated (Lincoln et al., 1985) or in other words, the likelihood that similar or replicable results would be created in different circumstances assuming nothing else changed (Roberts et al., 2006; Yin, 2009). Dependability was achieved in the current study by using Yin's (2009) Three Principles of Data Collection.

1. Use of multiple data sources such as observations, interviews, surveys, observation, archival records, and collection of documents.
2. Creation of a case study data base. This was a process of a systematic and organized way to keep notes, documents, and tabular materials (such as survey and quantitative data) for easy retrieval.
3. Maintaining a chain of evidence. This included not losing evidence, dating evidence, and being able to trace the steps of the research in chronological order.

The researcher took great care in being technically accurate in recording and transcribing interviews; these transcripts were enriched with the non-verbal aspects of communication that were captured through memo writing and note taking. Dependability was achieved by the use of verbatim and illustrative quotations reflective of the range and tone of all responses generated.

### **Description**

During face-to-face interviews, participants were asked interview questions (see Appendix B). During the interviews participants were free to share pictures, images, parent communication, or any other types of representations of their experiences to fully reveal their

experiences with transitioning children to kindergarten. The paper-and-pencil demographic survey questionnaire (see Appendices C, D, & E) was administered immediately following the face-to-face interview to avoid boring participants at the onset of the interview session (Rudestam & Newton, 2001). The demographic questionnaire survey was designed to be aesthetic, using a clear print quality. The format was clear and easy to understand and complete. Response alternatives were formatted in columns rather than in rows for ease on the eyes (Rudestam et al., 2001).

School level demographic data were collected through the district's web-site, the schools' web-sites, the schools' principals or data managers, and through the North Carolina of Department of Public Instruction's web-site. Reading 3D school-wide kindergarten data were collected through the schools' principals or the schools' instructional coaches. Reading 3D data did not reveal the identity of students or teachers.

### **Threats to Credibility and Transferability**

Elements that possibly affected the credibility and transferability of this study could be the health or temperament of the interviewer or participants during the interview. During the teacher's absence from the classroom, she may have been concerned about classroom dynamics or activities occurring in the classroom. Dynamics and concerns about what occurred in the school during the principal and assistant principal interviews could have affected the credibility and transferability of this study. The appropriateness of the interview environment (noise, distractions, interruptions, etc.) could have affected the thoroughness of the responses provided during the interview session. In order to control the quality of the study, the triangulation method was used to gather and interpret data from different sources. The researcher transcribed the audio-recordings of the interviews and used memo writing or significant and related thoughts

that came to the researcher's mind during the interviews (Yin, 2011). The researcher developed clusters of meanings (Creswell, 2007) from significant statements or themes from the transcriptions and recordings. A description of what the participants experienced was written, along with a description of the context or setting that influenced how the participants experienced the phenomenon of kindergarten transitions. Participants engaged in member checking, or an analyses of the interview for validation purposes, and provided a confirmation of the correctness of the analysis (Groenewald, 2004). For transparency purposes, the researcher wrote about her own experiences (epoche or bracketing) and the context and situations that have influenced her experiences with kindergarten transition practices, (Creswell, 2007). Through purposeful sampling, the researcher carefully chose participants who had experience with transition to kindergarten practices. The credibility, transferability and dependability of the data were reinforced through triangulation (Lincoln et al., 1985).

### **Data Collection Procedures and Processes**

First the researcher obtained approval from East Carolina University's Institutional Review Board. Once permission was granted, the researcher obtained permission to conduct the study from the southeastern North Carolina school district. After permission was obtained from the school district, the researcher obtained permission from the principals of the two schools studied. Additional permission was obtained individually from each participant. When all permission was obtained, the researcher interviewed the participants at a time and location most convenient for them (on the school campus or off campus; during the school day, or after school hours). For teacher interviews that occurred on a student attendance days, the researcher provided a substitute teacher (a substitute teacher who was on the approved substitute list for the participating county) which provided release time for the kindergarten teachers who participated

in the interview process. Participants at River City chose to be interviewed on a teacher workday when students were not in attendance. A substitute teacher was therefore, not required for River City participants. Bridge View participants were interviewed on a student attendance day. A substitute teacher was provided for Bridge View teachers to have release time from their classrooms. Interviews lasted approximately 30 – 40 minutes, and were held in January 2013. Regardless of the interview setting, all interviews were held with just the individual participant and researcher present. All interviews were audio-recorded then later transcribed verbatim. Transcriptions, descriptions, and themes were returned to the participants for member checking. Any new or changing information discovered from this process was reflected in the final description. To obtain richness of data and images into the process of the transition to kindergarten as seen by school administrators and kindergarten teachers, the researcher interviewed 12 participants. Based on Polkinghorne's (1989) recommendation of interviewing 3 to 325 participants, with 25 to 30 being average, 12 participants was an adequate sample.

The next step was for the researcher to create a time line for the study. The time line delineated pivotal stages in the research project (see Table 14).

### **Analysis of Data**

#### **Analysis**

A blending of analysis techniques employed in both comparative case study research and phenomenological research was used to analyze the data collected. To begin with, the case study method of relying on theoretical propositions was employed. This analytical strategy required the researcher to look at the original objectives that the case study was based on, along with the how and why questions associated with the study. The researcher identified evidences that supported the theoretical proposition and research questions. The data were categorized into arrays, or

Table 14

*Researcher's Time Line*

Date	What?	Who or to whom?
August 31, 2012	Revised chapters 1 – 3	Committee chair
October, 2012	Proposal	Committee
November 12, 2012	Proposal defense	Committee
November 2012	Request to conduct research to IRB	IRB
November 2012	Request to conduct research in school district	School district
December 2012	Obtain IRB permission	Researcher
December 2012	Obtain permission to conduct research in school district	Researcher
January 2013	Obtain participant permission	Researcher
January through March 2013	Data collection	Researcher
March through June 2013	Data analysis	Researcher and methodologist
June and July 2013	Write Chapter 4	Researcher
July 2013	Apply for graduation	Researcher
July and August 2013	Write Chapter 5	Researcher
October 10, 2013	Submission of dissertation for defense	Committee
November 5, 2013	Final defense	Committee
November 2013	Revisions	Researcher
November 2013	Submission of completed dissertation	Researcher

orderly groupings (Yin, 2009). The Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) was used to help create these arrays and groupings. This process was then blended with the following phenomenological processes.

Once the categorized information was arranged based on the theoretical propositions of the study and the how and why questions, the researcher then followed Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological method for analyzing participants' transcripts, memo writing, and any other representation of experiences provided by participants. All interviews were transcribed verbatim. The interview transcripts were read several times, along with memo writing, notes and other representative items provided by participants to obtain an overall feeling of the participants lived experiences. The researcher, data analyst and Expert/Audit Group examined the interview transcriptions and identified significant statements, sentences, or quotations that provided insight and understanding in how the participants lived the transition to kindergarten phenomenon. This step was called horizontalization, or recognizing that every statement had equal value (Moustakas, 1994). Meaning was formulated from these significant statements and phrases. The formulated meanings were clustered or categorized into themes that provided the venue for all participants' common themes to emerge. These themes were blended with the themes created from the case study approach of categorizing data based on the objective of the study or the how and why questions (Yin, 2009). Once descriptions and themes were obtained, the researcher returned the data to the participants for member checking (Gall et al., 2005). Any new, differing, or relevant data that occurred from member checking was included and reflected in the final description.

Once the member checking process was completed, the researcher used the significant statements and themes, and wrote a textural description of the participants' experiences with the

transition to kindergarten. Imaginative variations or structural descriptions were written to describe how the context or setting influenced the participants' experiences with the transition to kindergarten. From the structural and textural descriptions, the researcher composed a composite description representing the essence of the phenomenon of transitioning to kindergarten as experienced by the participants in the study at each elementary school.

Once this analysis process was completed, the case study approach of pattern matching was used to determine if a comparison of an empirically based pattern was made with a predicted pattern. If the patterns coincided, it strengthened the credibility associated with the results of the study (Lincoln et al., 1985; Yin, 2009).

This pattern matching technique was used to fulfill the fifth and final component of case study research design, Criteria for Interpreting a Study's Findings, through the use of Rival Explanations as Patterns. The process involved the development of patterns of mutually exclusive practices. For example, in the current study the use of kindergarten transition practices via the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) was predicted in a pattern reflected in kindergarten reading achievement. This should have occurred regardless of other rival explanations such as percentage of African American or Hispanic students enrolled in the schools, or percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch (Yin, 2009). During data collection, this researcher listened with skepticism at an attempt to identify other possible rival explanations. Any newly identified rival explanations were included in the study (Yin, 2011).

In summary, verification of the data were fulfilled through a review of the literature, adhering to the phenomenological method and case study methods, epoche or bracketing the researchers past experiences, keeping notes or memo writing, using an adequate number of

participants in the sample, use of member checks, use of pattern matching, use of rival explanations as patterns, use of both quantitative and qualitative data, and interviewing participants until the data set was immersed with information.

### **Data Collection Techniques/Tools**

During the data collection portion of this study the participants, (principal, assistant principal and kindergarten teachers) responded to open-ended questions posed to each participant, by the researcher, during a face-to-face interview (see Appendix B). Immediately following the face-to-face interview, participants received a paper-and-pencil survey for the purposes of obtaining background information about each participant. With each participant's written consent, the researcher audio-recorded all interviews (Patton, 2002). Each interview was digitally-recorded in separate audio files and folders. The digital-recorder assigned a file name to each participant's interview such as "Folder A File Name DM620002.WMA". Following the school coding, participant identification was as follows: Principals were identified as Participant A, assistant principals were identified as Participant B, and kindergarten teachers were assigned codes Participant C, D or E at River City Elementary, and Participant C, D, E, F or G at Bridge View Elementary, according to their sequence of participation. The researcher ensured the environment was free from background noise, the recording equipment was functioning properly and that extra batteries, etc. were easily accessible. As soon after the interviews as possible, the researcher transcribed the audio-recordings (Patton, 2002). Each transcription was labeled with the digital-recorder assigned code and folder location. The transcription was also identified with an interview code such as "River City Elementary, Participant A, 22 January 2013" (Groenewald, 2004).

## **Summary**

The focus of this comparative case study, with a phenomenological approach, was to examine the experiences of school administrators and kindergarten teachers regarding Ready Schools, specifically experiences with kindergarten transition practices. Case studies occurred at 2 public, Title I, elementary schools in southeastern North Carolina. The findings from these two case studies were used to fill a void in current research by comparatively examining the essence of kindergarten transition practices used by teachers and administrators at two elementary schools. These results were compared to kindergarten transition practices suggested in the literature and to the schools' kindergarten reading achievement to see if there was an indication of a correlation of whether transition practices, procedures, and activities were linked to student reading achievement in kindergarten (Wildenger et al., 2011). Participant interviews were conducted in January 2013. The results of these qualitative findings were reported in Chapter 4.

## **CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS**

### **Introduction**

This comparative case study with a phenomenological approach was used to examine the experiences of school administrators and kindergarten teachers regarding Ready Schools, specifically experiences with kindergarten transition practices. Comparative case studies occurred at two Title I elementary schools located in one southeastern North Carolina school district. This chapter reported the researcher's findings by delineating the experiences of school administrators and kindergarten teachers with regards to transition to kindergarten practices at each school. Using the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) (Knowlton et al., 2009), kindergarten transition practices at each school were categorized through a comparison to the literature. A systemic comparison of the two case study sites was presented. The analysis described the similarities and differences of kindergarten transition practices at each school and with the literature to determine if there was a correlation between the experiences at the schools and if there was a correlation with the literature. These analyses were then used to determine any correlation with kindergarten students' reading achievement.

Face-to-face digitally-recorded interviews with principals and kindergarten teachers, in addition to paper-and-pencil demographic surveys completed by each participant were major sources of data collected by the researcher. One principal and one assistant principal at both schools participated in the face-to-face interviews and paper-and-pencil demographic surveys, along with a total of 8 kindergarten teachers from both schools. Other data were collected from the school and school district's web-sites, and from artifacts presented by participants during the interviews. Reading 3D TRC and DIBELS Next assessments scores were provided to the

researcher from the principal at River City Elementary School, and from the Instructional Coach at Bridge View Elementary School. Principal Monthly Reports were provided by the principals at both schools.

The analysis began with a description of the participants and the schools. Descriptions of the participants were obtained through the paper-and-pencil demographic surveys administered immediately following the face-to-face interviews. Schools' descriptions were obtained through the paper-and-pencil demographic surveys, the Principal's Monthly Report and Reading 3D DIBELS/TRC reading assessment data administered to kindergarten students by their teachers at the beginning and middle of the 2012-2013 school year. This was followed by comparing and contrasting participant responses to research questions answered during face-to-face interviews. These responses were transcribed by the researcher, then the researcher identified descriptions and themes based on each question posed to participants. Participant responses were returned to participants for member checking. Any new, differing, or relevant data that occurred from member checking was included and reflected in the final description. Descriptions and themes were categorized through the use of the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1).

### **Participant Characteristics**

Bridge View Elementary and River City Elementary each had one principal and one assistant principal. Bridge View had two more teachers than River City. All Bridge View participants reported being Caucasian in contrast to 40% of River City participants. The remaining 60% of River City participants identified themselves as African American. Bridge View participants were more similar in age than were River City participants. The Bridge View participant age span was 16 years compared to a 29 year participant age span at River City.

Bridge View's participants were on average approximately 10 years younger than River City's participants, with a median age of 15 years younger than River City's participants. All participants at Bridge View were female, compared to 80% at River City (see Table 15).

Educational and licensure attainment varied among participants. Bridge View's principal was the only administrative participant to reportedly hold a Bachelor of Science or Arts in Elementary Education. The principal at River City reported holding a Bachelor of Science in Education. Neither assistant principal held a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education. One reported holding a Bachelor of Science in Family and Child Development, while the other reported an undergraduate degree in music. All teachers at River City and 4 of 5 teachers at Bridge View reported a Bachelor of Science or a Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education. The fifth teacher reported a Bachelor of Science in Finance. Three of the four administrators held a Master of Arts in School Administration. The assistant principal at River City reported a Master of Arts in Administrative Leadership. All eight teachers held a North Carolina license to teach elementary school. Of the four administrators, the assistant principal at River City and the principal at Bridge View held a North Carolina license to teach elementary school. None of the participants had a Birth to Kindergarten Early/Childhood/pre-k teaching license. All four administrators had a North Carolina administrative license. From all 12 participants, only one kindergarten teacher from Bridge View Elementary reported having received specific professional development in transitioning children to kindergarten (see Table 16).

The administrative team at River City had been in place almost twice as long as the administrative team at Bridge View, and the River City administrative team had more than twice the number years of administrative experience as the Bridge View administrative team. In contrast, the Bridge View administrative team had about twice as much teaching experience as

Table 15

*Demographic Features*

	River City Elementary	Bridge View Elementary
Number of kindergarten teachers	3	5
Total number of participants (teachers and administrators)	5	7
Percentage of Caucasian participants	40%	100%
Percentage of African American participants	60%	0%
Average participant age	40.4	31.1
Range of participant age	28 – 57	26 – 42
Median participant age	42	27
Percentage of female participants	80%	100%
Percentage of male participants	20%	0%

Table 16

*Educational and Licensure Attainment*

	River City Principal	River City Assistant Principal	River City Teachers	Bridge View Principal	Bridge View Assistant Principal	Bridge View Teachers
Bachelor of Science or Arts Elementary Education			3	1		4
Bachelor of Science Education	1					
Bachelor of Science Family and Child Development		1				
Bachelor of Science Finance						1 (add on licensure)
Master of Arts Music Education					1	
Master of Arts Elementary Education				1		
Master of Arts School Administration	1			1	1	
Master of Education Special Education – Behavior		1				

Table 16 (continued)

	River City Principal	River City Assistant Principal	River City Teachers	Bridge View Principal	Bridge View Assistant Principal	Bridge View Teachers
Master of Arts Administrative Leadership		1				
Nationally Board Certified			1		1	
Elementary Education license		1	3	1		5
Middle Grades Language Arts license						1
Special Education license		1				
School Administration license	1	1		1	1	
Health and Physical Education license	1					
Music license					1	
Received specific professional development in transitioning children to kindergarten						1

the River City administrative team. One of the four administrators, (River City assistant principal), had previously taught kindergarten. None of the administrators had taught pre-kindergarten. The overall number of years in education was similar for both administrative teams (29 years at River City, 34 years at Bridge View.) The principals at both schools had more years educational experience than assistant principals (see Table 17).

Both schools had a similar combined total number of years teaching kindergarten at their current school, but the average number years River City teachers had taught kindergarten at their school was twice the amount Bridge View teachers had taught kindergarten at their school. River City teachers had more than twice as much average years' experience teaching kindergarten (in any school) than Bridge View teachers. River City teachers averaged 5.7 more years' experience teaching kindergarten than did Bridge View teachers with a range of 3 – 16 years' experience in contrast to Bridge View's 2-7 years' experience teaching kindergarten in any school. None of the teachers at either school had ever taught pre-kindergarten. When considering overall teaching experience, River City teachers had 18 more total years teaching experience than Bridge View teachers, with an average of 9.4 more years' experience, and a range of 7 – 20 years' experience versus Bridge View's range of 4 – 7 years' experience (see Table 18).

Participants were more racially diverse at River City than at Bridge View. River City's participants' race more closely correlated with the race of the student population than did the race of the participants at Bridge View. The participants at Bridge View were younger and had fewer years teaching experience than the participants at River City. The principals at both schools were 42 years old. The principal at Bridge View was a Caucasian female, and the principal at River City was an African American male. Of the three kindergarten teachers at River City two were African American and one was Caucasian. Their ages were 28, 42, and 57.

Table 17

*Administrative Longevity*

	River City Principal	River City Assistant Principal	Bridge View Principal	Bridge View Assistant Principal
Number years principal or assistant principal at current school	4	4	2.5	2
Total number years' experience as principal	5	0	2.5	0
Total number years' experience as assistant principal	8	4	2.5	2
Total number years teaching before school administration	6	8	13	12
Total number years taught kindergarten	0	3	0	0
Total number years taught pre- kindergarten	0	0	0	0
Total number years in education	17	12	20	14

Table 18

*Kindergarten Teacher Longevity*

	River City total	River City average	River City range	River City median	Bridge View total	Bridge View average	Bridge View range	Bridge View median
Years taught kindergarten at current school	17	5.6	2-12	3	14	2.8	1-5	2
Years taught kindergarten at all schools	31	10.3	3-16	12	23	4.6	2-7	5
Years taught pre-kindergarten	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Years teaching experience all grades	44	14.6	7-20	17	26	5.2	4-7	5
Years in Education (Including time as teaching assistant, etc.)	47	15.6	7-20	20	27	5.4	4-7	5

The teachers at Bridge View were more similar demographically than the teachers at River City. The 5 Bridge View teachers were all Caucasian and their ages were 26, 26, 26, 27, and 34. Participants had varying degrees, but they all had a North Carolina license for the area in which they worked. The administrative team at River City had been in place twice as long as the administrative team at Bridge View.

### **School Characteristics**

Bridge View had 44 more kindergarten students and 2 more kindergarten teachers and classrooms than River City. Due to historically low End of Grade tests scores, Bridge View was considered a priority school by the school district and state. The school district's plan for priority schools included a capacity of 15 students in classrooms with one teacher and one teaching assistant. River City was not a priority school, therefore did not fall within these parameters. The principal and assistant principal at River City reported about 50 – 60% of the students attended via the magnet school lottery option. Bridge View's class sizes were larger than River City's. Bridge View had an average of 19.4 students per kindergarten class while River City had an average of 17.66 students per kindergarten class. When Bridge View's principal was asked about the class sizes exceeding the priority school limit she said at the end of the 2011-2012 school year, Bridge View was allocated 4 kindergarten teachers for the 2012-2013 school year. As the school year approached the kindergarten student enrollment increased and they were allocated a fifth kindergarten teacher. This teacher began shortly after the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year. The principal acknowledged that with a 1:15 ratio there were enough kindergarten students for her school to be allocated six kindergarten teachers. She responded, "But I gained one (teacher) and I gained a TA, thankfully" (see Table 19).

Table 19

*Kindergarten Class Demographics*

	River City	Bridge View
Number of kindergarten students in school	53	97
Number of kindergarten classrooms	3	5
Class size average	17.66	19.4
Class size range	17-18	19-20
Class size median	18	19

Student population transient rates varied between the two schools. Bridge View's student transient rate (students enrolling after the beginning of the year, or withdrawing prior to the end of the year) was a little more than two and one-half times that of River City's at the end of the 2011-2012 school year. This statistical trend continued into the 2012-2013 school year. By the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> school month of the 2012-2013 school year (out of 9 school months) Bridge View's transient rate was almost twice that of River City's (see Table 20).

The academic reading performance of kindergarten students was measured by Overall Composite, DIBELS Next and TRC. The 2012-2013 school year was the first year Overall Composite scores were reported. The cut points determining proficiency for kindergarten children increased for both DIBELS Next and TRC during the 2012-2013 school year. DIBELS Next were composed of one minute fluency assessments. Students scoring at or above the benchmark goal for these assessments were in favor of achieving later reading outcomes assuming the child received appropriate research-based instruction in a core curriculum classroom (Dynamic Measurement Group, Inc., 2010). TRC represented running records with comprehension strategies. TRC gave teachers diagnostic information regarding students reading comprehension and instructional reading levels (Wireless Generation 2012a).

The Overall Composite Score was a combination of multiple DIBELS Next scores. The Overall Composite scores provided an overall estimate of a student's reading proficiency and/or acquisition of early literacy skills. Scores used to calculate the Overall Composite score varied by grade and by time of year, so Overall Composite scores could not directly measure growth over time. Since the procedures for establishing benchmark goals were consistent by time of year, the percent of students at or above benchmark were comparable, but mean scores could not be compared (Dynamic Measurement Group, Inc., 2010). Overall Composite scores had three

Table 20

*Student Population Transient Rates*

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	River City	Bridge View
End of Year 2011-2012	14.66%	37.08%
Through March 2013	11.11%	20.58%

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measures, intensive, strategic, and core. The researcher assigned numerical values to each alpha code for the purpose of analysis. A value of 0 was assigned to intensive, a value of 1 was assigned to strategic, and a value of 2 was assigned to core. Students scoring core were considered to be on track with early literacy skills, and on a trajectory for reading proficiency by the end of grade 3. Students who scored strategic or intensive needed interventions beyond the core curriculum in the classroom to get on the trajectory for reading proficiency by the end of grade 3. Some interventions included small group instruction, more instructional time, more practice time, more explicit instruction, or greater scaffolding (Dynamic Measurement Group, Inc., 2010). Overall Composite scores showed students at Bridge View began the year with approximately one-third more students demonstrating proficiency than River City students. Middle of the year results demonstrated a similar gap in proficiency between the two schools, indicating similar growth patterns in Overall Composite scores at both schools (see Table 21).

Another indicator of early literacy skills was achieved through the measurement of First Sound Fluency (FSF). Students' ability to identify the first phoneme of a word demonstrated students' understanding that words were made up of sounds, and was highly correlated to reading acquisition and achievement (Amplify Education, Inc., 2013).

First Sound Fluency (FSF) was only formally assessed through DIBELS Next at the beginning and middle of the kindergarten year. Similar to Overall Composite scores, Bridge View started the school year with a higher percentage of students demonstrating proficiency with FSF. At the beginning of the year, 48.2% more of Bridge View's students were proficient with FSF than were proficient at River City. This gap narrowed by middle of the year when 39.4% more of Bridge View's students were proficient with FSF than were proficient at River City.

Table 21

*Overall Composite*

Kindergarten 2012-2013	River City	Bridge View
BOY percent at or above grade level	39.2%	60.43%
MOY percent at or above grade level	49%	73.4%

*Note.* BOY=Beginning of Year; MOY=Middle of Year.

Even with the gap being narrowed, Bridge View increased the percent of students' proficient by 17.15%, compared to River City's increase in proficiency of 16% (see Table 22).

The next measure of early literacy skills analyzed was Letter Naming Fluency (LNF). Prior to the 2012-2013 school year, benchmark goals for LNF were set. With the onset of DIBELS Next during the 2012-2013 school year, LNF was still assessed, however, benchmark goals were not established. Benchmark goals were not set because LNF did not correspond directly to a Big Idea in Beginning Reading. Big Ideas in Beginning Reading were phonics, phonemic awareness, comprehension, vocabulary and fluency. LNF was used as an indicator of risk, but was no longer seen as a measure of achievement. LNF was assessed during all three benchmark assessments during kindergarten, and during the beginning of year (BOY) assessment in first grade. Data showed LNF results for the two schools in the current study. Kindergarten students at River City performed better in comparison to Bridge View Elementary kindergarten students on Letter Naming Fluency than on any other assessment given. By middle of the year, the percentage of students proficient at River City surpassed the percentage of students proficient at Bridge View. It should be noted the proficiency was measured on past years' benchmark goals, since LNF was no longer seen as a measure of reading achievement. Therefore, these results could not be used as an indicator for students' likelihood to achieve later reading outcome goals (see Table 23).

The next measure of early literacy skills collected, which predicted students later reading outcomes was Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF). PSF was a one minute assessment of the students' fluency with breaking words into sound segments. The assessor said a word such as sun. To be proficient the student responded with the individual sounds, or phonemes. For example, the correct response to sun would be the individual sounds /s/ /u/ /n/ (Amplify

Table 22

*First Sound Fluency*

Kindergarten 2012-2013	River City	Bridge View
BOY percent at or above grade level	33%	63.7%
MOY percent at or above grade level	49%	80.85%
BOY average	7.35	13.98
MOY average	29.16	34.52
BOY range	0 to 24	0 to 41
MOY range	0 to 47	0 to 58
BOY mode	0	0
MOY mode	30, 32	38
BOY median	2	14
MOY median	29	38

*Note.* BOY = Beginning of Year; MOY = Middle of Year. BOY benchmark goal = 10; MOY benchmark goal = 30.

Table 23

*Letter Naming Fluency*

Kindergarten 2012-2013	River City	Bridge View
BOY percent at or above grade level	68.6%	75.5%
MOY percent at or above grade level	88.6%	80.85%
BOY average	18.39	19.63
MOY average	43.71	42.39
BOY range	0 to 57	0 to 53
MOY range	8 to 64	0 to 80
BOY mode	2	0
MOY mode	45	35, 53, 54
BOY median	18	18, 19
MOY median	45	44

*Note.* BOY = Beginning of Year; MOY = Middle of Year. Benchmarks no longer set for 2012-2013. 2011-2012 benchmarks used for analysis purposes were BOY = 8; MOY = 27.

Education, Inc., 2013). PSF was assessed only during the middle of year and end of year assessments in kindergarten, and beginning of year in first grade. It was preferred for students to be able to completely segment words by the end of their kindergarten year. Similar to the Overall Composite score, a little more than one-third of Bridge View's students were proficient in PSF than were students at River City Elementary. These results also aligned with Overall Composite and FSF results. Approximately 80% of students at Bridge View demonstrated middle of year (MOY) proficiency with Overall Composite, FSF and PSF, and approximately 50% of students at River City were proficient in all three measures (see Table 24).

Next, the researcher analyzed data measuring alphabetic principle and basic phonics skills. The DIBELS Next measure for these skills was known as Nonsense Word Fluency. Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF) consisted of randomly ordered vowel consonant (VC) and consonant vowel consonant (CVC) words. Students had one minute during the assessment to either pronounce the sounds in the nonsense words, or to say the whole nonsense word without first sounding out individual sounds. Two scores were reported for NWF. Clear Letter Sounds (CLS) and Whole Words Read (WWR) (Amplify Education, Inc., 2013). The ultimate goal was for students to read whole words during NWF, however, this assessment helped teachers monitor students' development of alphabetic principle and basic phonics. Data indicated a narrower gap between River City and Bridge View students on NWF:CLS than was found on other indicators of early literacy skills reported above. The gaps reappeared however, with NWF:WWR. Students at Bridge View on average scored 57% higher on the ultimate goal of students reading whole words during NWF, than their counterparts at River City Elementary (see Tables 25 and 26).

The last measure of student reading achievement assessed during Kindergarten at the two schools in the current study was Text Reading Comprehension (TRC). TRC was a measure of

Table 24

*Phoneme Segmentation Fluency*

Kindergarten 2012-2013	River City	Bridge View
MOY percent at or above grade level	52.8%	81.9%
MOY average	24.05	39.71
MOY range	2 to 62	0 to 67
MOY mode	9	46
MOY median	22	46

*Note.* Only assessed Middle of Year (MOY). Benchmark Goal 20.

Table 25

*Nonsense Words Fluency, Correct Letter Sounds*

Kindergarten 2012-2013	River City	Bridge View
MOY percent at or above grade level	67.9%	77.65%
MOY average	23.66	29.17
MOY range	0 to 61	0 to 120
MOY mode	15	30, 43
MOY median	23	27, 28

*Note.* Only assessed Middle of Year (MOY). Benchmark Goal 17.

Table 26

*Nonsense Words Fluency, Whole Words Read*

Kindergarten 2012-2013	River City	Bridge View
MOY average	1.28	2.968
MOY range	0 to 14	0 to 42
MOY mode	0	0
MOY median	0	0

*Note.* Only assessed Middle of Year (MOY). No benchmark goal was set for Whole Words Read.

comprehension. TRC used leveled readers to identify students' instructional reading level. An instructional reading level was a level where the student was performing well while being challenged. This equated to a higher level than a student's independent reading level. After the student read a leveled reader, depending on the level of the text, students were then required to respond to oral or written comprehension questions, and were required to recall or retell information from the text. Similar to the Overall Composite scores above, TRC was reported in an alpha form. The researcher assigned numeric values to alpha codes for purposes of data analysis. The TRC beginning of year goal for kindergarten was Reading Behaviors (RB). Due to increased kindergarten TRC expectations during the 2012-2013 school year, fewer children reached middle of year proficiency. Middle of year proficiency for kindergarten was a level C, which was an increase from the 2011-2012 end of year proficiency level of B. These data correlated with other reading data indicating students at Bridge View Elementary came to school with more academic preparedness, and continued on that trajectory throughout the middle of the school year. Specifically with TRC, 22% more students started the year proficient at Bridge View than at River City, but by the middle of the year, 47% more students at Bridge View were proficient than at River City (see Table 27).

### **Summary**

Bridge View Elementary School had a larger student population and more kindergarten teachers than River City. Even though Bridge View was identified as a priority school and should have had smaller class sizes than River City, however the class size average at Bridge View was larger than River City's. Bridge View's population was more transient than River City's. In spite of larger class sizes, a higher teacher turnover rate and a higher student transient

Table 27

*Text Reading Comprehension (TRC)*

Kindergarten 2012-2013	River City	Bridge View
BOY percent at or above grade level	39%	50%
MOY percent at or above grade level	9%	17%
BOY average	0.823	1.144
MOY average	2.39	3.119
BOY range	<PC to RB	<PC to E
MOY range	<PC to C	<PC to E
BOY mode	<PC	RB
MOY mode	RB	RB
BOY median	<PC	PC, RB
MOY median	RB	RB

*Note.* BOY=Beginning of Year; MOY=Middle of Year. BOY benchmark goal = RB (Reading Behaviors); MOY benchmark goal = C. Values were assigned to alpha data for the purpose of analysis. <PC=0; PC=1; RB=2; A=3; B=4; C=5; D=6; E=7.

rate, Bridge View's students appeared to come to kindergarten more academically prepared than did students at River City. This academic advantage continued to be prevalent through middle of year kindergarten reading assessments. Bridge View's kindergarten students outperformed River City's kindergarten students in all areas measured by Reading 3D, Overall Composite scores, TRC and DIBELS Next assessments. The only area in which River City outperformed Bridge View at middle of the year was in Letter Naming Fluency. This was the only measurement that no longer had a cut score or was seen as a measure of current or future reading achievement in DIBELS Next. Letter Naming Fluency, therefore, could not be used as an indicator for attaining future reading proficiency. The similar discrepancies revealed throughout the BOY and MOY data, specifically the consistent outperformance of Bridge View Elementary's data over River City's data indicated the reading assessments were administered with consistency within schools. It cannot be assumed that consistency with administration equated to fidelity of administration. Checking for fidelity of administration within schools was beyond the scope of this research. A comparison of between school fidelity was also not available. These data correlated with the school's overall proficiency on the 2012 North Carolina End of Grade tests administered to grades 3 -5 and reported in Chapter 1. The two schools had a 12.6 percentage point span with Bridge View achieving 73.1% proficiency on the North Carolina End of Grade tests in grades 3 - 5 versus River City's 60.5% proficient rate. These results opened the door for the purpose of this comparative case study with a phenomenological approach, to describe transition to kindergarten practices that occurred at each school, while comparing them to what the research revealed about kindergarten transition practices. These descriptions were examined against the evidence of data to determine if there was a correlation between the essences of kindergarten transition practices and student reading achievement in kindergarten as measured by Reading 3D, Overall

Composite, TRC and DIBELS Next. This evidence of achievement was contradicted by factors that were beyond the scope of the current study.

### **Research Question Findings Introduction**

The Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) and five research questions were used to report the analyses of the data collected in this study. The Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) provided a framework for what the literature revealed about the use of Resources and Activities in kindergarten transition programming. The research questions were designed to help explain how the phenomenon of kindergarten transition programming looked at two Title I elementary schools in southeastern North Carolina. Questions designed specifically for school administrators and kindergarten teachers were posed in one-on-one, face-to-face audio-recorded interviews. Participants also completed demographic surveys immediately following the face-to-face interviews. Some participants provided artifacts to provide a clearer picture of their perception of kindergarten transition practices at their school. These artifacts documented participant self-reported data. Triangulated data included: Face-to-face interviews, transcriptions of audio-recorded interviews, participant paper-and-pencil demographic surveys, participant artifacts, participant member checking, use of the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1), Expert-Audit Group input, Principal's Monthly Reports, memo writing, schools' web-sites, the district's web-site, and the schools' improvement plans. The subsequent analyses were used to apply data to the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1), then to the five research questions. This systematic process helped the researcher provide a more comprehensive, richer picture of the phenomenon being studied.

The Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) consisted of three components: Do, Get, and Impact. The first component was the Do or the action component. The three categories under Do were: 1. Resources, 2. Activities, and 3. Outputs. Following the Kindergarten Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) the responses to the research questions in this chapter began with the resources used by participants and the researcher. Resources used included but were not limited to eligible and willing participants, school administrators, kindergarten teachers, the presence of a written transition plan, and any staff development provided to the participants.

Continuing to follow the Kindergarten Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1), following a discussion of resources used, activities reportedly used were described.

Activities found that helped guide the current study included:

1. Programmatic Transition Practices Offered by the School
2. Characteristics Influencing Transitions
3. Quantity of Transition Practices
4. Intensity of Transition Practices
5. Barriers to Implementing Transition Practices
6. Environmental Impacts
7. Discontinuities between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten settings

The final category of the Kindergarten Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) under the Do or action component was Outputs. The literature revealed when resources and activities described in the Kindergarten Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) were implemented and utilized they resulted in the following Outputs:

1. Successful Transitions to Kindergarten

2. Ready Schools
3. Ready Children

The second component of the Kindergarten Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) Get was then examined in response to the research questions. The current research was limited to the short-term outcome stage of the Get component of the Kindergarten Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1). If the Outcomes from the research demonstrated Resources, Activities and Outputs (the Do component of the Kindergarten Program Logic Model Based on the Literature, see Figure 1) modeled the tenants of Ready Schools, Ready Staff, and Ready Children and Families, then it could be assumed the children who attended the schools in the current study were on a trajectory for improved academic, behavioral and social outcomes. Even though behavioral and social outcomes were important to the literature, they were not a part of the current study.

Not all areas of the Kindergarten Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) were addressed in all questions. Some were not applicable to some questions or responses. During data analysis, two additional themes arose, communication and participant perceptions. After the systematic analysis outlined above was completed for each research question, the researcher discussed the findings of this study through the themes of communication and participant perceptions revealed through the lived experiences of participants. Chapter 1 of this dissertation revealed participant assumptions would be discussed in Chapter 4. These participant assumptions were discussed in the participant perceptions section of each research question. Consideration for the open-ended nature of the interviews should be given to responses. Since participants were not given a check list of pre-determined answer

choices to select from, omission of a response could not be assumed to mean the participant did not engage in or agree with the transition practice.

### **Research Question 1 Findings**

Research Question 1: How did two elementary schools, in the same school district, with similar socio-economic demographics facilitate kindergarten transition practices?

#### **Do**

**Resources.** To ascertain information regarding how the two elementary schools facilitated kindergarten transition programming, the researcher used a variety of resources. These resources included eligible and willing participants, face-to-face interviews, transcriptions of the face-to-face interviews, the school district's web-site, each school's School Improvement Plan retrieved from the schools' web-sites, and information ascertained from the and paper-and-pencil demographic survey administered at the conclusion of the face-to-face interviews.

#### **Activities.**

***Programmatic transition practices offered by the schools.*** This section described how both schools in the current study facilitated kindergarten transition practices. Transition practices commonly found as major findings between both schools was discussed in this section. A more specific delineation of findings, including between school and within school findings were described thoroughly in subsequent research questions.

Three transition practices were offered systemically and initiated by the school district. Both schools, in the current study, participated in all three of the district initiated kindergarten transition practices. The first district initiated transition practice offered by both schools was participation in district wide kindergarten registration. The district was responsible for publicizing the event which was held in the spring of each year. Advertisement for kindergarten

registration included flyers sent home with pre-kindergarten children, radio announcements, newspaper advertisements, flyers sent home with school-aged children, and via the district and schools' web-sites. Participants at both schools reported a low turnout for kindergarten registration.

All participants in the study reported hosting open house a few evenings prior to the first day of school. The open house date was scheduled by the school system. The school system advertised for open house via radio announcements, newspaper advertisements, and via the district web-site. Schools also used web-sites to advertise open house. The assistant principal at Bridge View and one teacher at River City said some years the teachers called families and invited them to open house. These were the only two participants who reported calling families, and both acknowledged calls in advance were not made each year.

Both schools hosted a district initiated program called Fast Start. Fast Start was reported as a program where students came to school for half days two weeks prior to the beginning of the school year. Schools hosted Fast Start in grades other than kindergarten, but both schools hosted Fast Start for some rising kindergarten students. The selection of students for Fast Start attendance was managed through the school district's pre-kindergarten centers. The pre-kindergarten teachers selected students with the greatest need to participate in Fast Start. In August 2012, Bridge View hosted two kindergarten Fast Start classes of approximately 8 – 10 students each, while River City hosted one kindergarten Fast Start class of approximately 8 – 10 students.

Some kindergarten transition practices, even though initiated at the school level were found to be common use practices at both schools. Transition practices were identified as common use transition practices when 70% or more of the participants reported use of a

transition practice (Pianta, Cox et al., 1999). Most participants reported the use of a welcome letter and welcome packet. These letters and informational packets were reportedly distributed at open house. For families enrolling after open house the letters and packets were provided immediately upon enrollment. Participants reported this as an effective practice to help families learn about the teacher and the school, and provided them with a means for parents to provide pivotal information about their child or family to the teacher.

Another common use school initiated transition practice found at both schools was the use of staggered entry. Staggered entry was reportedly used at the beginning of each school year, for kindergarten students only. One-hundred percent of the participants from both schools reported use of this practice and said it usually occurred the first three days of school. Teachers divided class lists into thirds. One third of the kindergarten students came to school the first staggered entry day, another third came the second staggered entry day, and the final third came on the third staggered entry day. The fourth day of school was the first day all students in the kindergarten classroom came to school as a whole group. Participants reported staggered entry as a positive, advantageous transition activity because it gave them time to work one-on-one with a small group of students, giving students the individual time and attention needed. One Bridge View teacher said staggered entry helped students “really get acclimated to the school setting” and provided teachers with a time to teach procedures and routines in a small group setting. Parents were informed of the staggered entry day at open house. Students and parents not attending open house, received a telephone call informing them of a staggered entry day. Parents enrolling children after open house were assigned a staggered entry day during enrollment.

Assessing students during staggered entry was another common use transition practice reported by all participants with the exception of one River City teacher. It should not be

assumed she did not participate in this practice, since she was not specifically asked about participation in the practice. Participants reported pulling students and working with them one-on-one. Participants had a conversation with the students and began establishing a rapport with them in addition to conducting required beginning of the year assessments. One Bridge View teacher said staggered entry was “advantageous because it helps with the smaller groups to get the battery of assessments done.” Participants reported this time allowed them to get to know the students personally, academically and behaviorally.

Teachers and administrators alike reported kindergarten students’ school tours during the staggered entry days. All reporting participants explained how they tied small group school tours in with literature. All reporting Bridge View participants integrated this tour with *The Gingerbread Man*. While one River City teacher used *The Gingerbread Man*, the other two used *Brown Bear, Brown Bear What do You See?* Regardless of the piece of literature used, teachers and administrators reported taking small groups of students around the school in search of the Gingerbread Man, or to see what Brown Bear sees. Through this process students were acclimated with the office area, the gym, cafeteria, media center and other common school areas and people they were likely to encounter on a daily or weekly basis.

Get to know you activities were school initiated practices reported by all teacher participants at both schools and one Bridge View administrator. These activities began during the staggered entry days and continued during the first several weeks of school. Participants reported actively participating in these activities with the students so the children could learn about them while they learned about the children.

One-hundred percent of participants reported talking with parents after school began as a kindergarten transition practice. Specifics of various ways this was accomplished was delineated

in subsequent questions, but included communication via phone calls, face-to-face parent conferences, Dress for Success/Class Chats, Family Nights, parents walking children to class, classroom volunteers, and home visits.

Because both schools had high levels of poverty and a school uniform policy, both schools had to find ways to manage mandating a uniform policy with the financial constraints faced by families. Participants at both schools reported providing uniforms to all children who were in need. Consequences for not adhering to the uniform policy were not mentioned by any of the participants, just that any child who needed uniforms were provided uniforms. Bridge View's principal elaborated on how a community partner provided uniforms to the school for students in need. In addition to providing uniforms, participants also discussed giving students the school supplies they needed. Many of these supplies came from community partnerships as well. Bridge View's principal said "No kindergartener walks in on the first day (without supplies) and doesn't walk out with a book bag with stuff in it." A teacher from River City also remarked about students not having supplies at home to be able to complete homework or projects. She sent supplies home with students so they had what they needed to complete work at home.

This section of question 1 provided an overview of how transition practices were facilitated at both schools, specifically with the use of transition practices offered by schools. The following section looked at how Characteristics Influencing Transitions were facilitated at both schools in the current study.

***Characteristics influencing transitions.*** Four Characteristics were identified in the literature that influenced transitions. These characteristics were teacher child relationships, teacher professional development in transitions to kindergarten, teaching experience and areas of certification. The way teacher child/family relationships were facilitated at both schools was an

overarching important finding in the current study. Establishing positive relationships with parents and students was reported as important by one-hundred percent of the participants at both schools. The establishment of relationships was facilitated in a multitude of ways by teachers and administrators and was described more thoroughly in subsequent questions. All Bridge View teachers along with one River City administrator and two teachers discussed intentionally and proactively ensuring the first contact with parents was positive. This practice helped facilitate the establishment of positive relationships with children and with families. The establishment of positive teacher child relationships was found in previous studies to be important to students' transition into school and were found to help mitigate risk factors for children entering kindergarten (Burchinal et al., 2002; Jerome et al., 2009; Pianta et al., 2004). The significance of all participants reporting establishing positive relationships as important could be especially pivotal for the children in the high poverty, high minority schools in the current study.

Teacher professional development in transitions to kindergarten was another characteristic influencing transitions. In the current study, the only information regarding teacher professional development in transitions to kindergarten was obtained from the paper-and-pencil demographic survey. Out of all participants from both schools, only one Bridge View teacher indicated she had received specific professional development in transitioning children to kindergarten. Since this was a direct question on the paper-and-pencil demographic survey, and all other participants responded no to this question, it can be assumed this one Bridge View teacher was the only participant who received specific professional development in transitioning children to kindergarten. No evidence was found of how the school, district or state planned to deliver teacher professional development in the area of transitioning children to kindergarten.

Teaching experience was a third characteristic that influenced transitions to kindergarten. River City teachers had more teaching experience overall than Bridge View teachers (see Table 18). The teachers at River City had at least twice as much experience teaching kindergarten in all schools and in their current school than did the Bridge View teachers. River City teachers had about three times the amount of overall teaching experience than Bridge View teachers. Results from the paper-and-pencil survey indicated that none of the teachers in the current study had ever taught pre-kindergarten. None of the participants, including the administrative participants discussed how they facilitated hiring teachers or placing teachers in grade levels based on teacher experience. This question was not explicitly asked by the researcher, therefore no evidence of how schools used teaching experience to facilitate kindergarten transitions was found.

The fourth and final characteristic influencing transitions was areas of teacher certification. All eight teachers from both schools in the current study and one administrator from each school were certified to teach elementary school. None of the participants were certified to teach birth to pre-kindergarten/early childhood/or pre-kindergarten. Hiring teachers or placing teachers in grade levels based on teacher certification was not reported in the current study. This question was not explicitly asked by the researcher, therefore no evidence was found of how schools used teacher certification to facilitate kindergarten transitions.

Evidence of how schools used characteristics influencing transitions to facilitate transitions to kindergarten was only found through the establishment of teacher child relationships. No evidence of using teacher professional development in transitions to kindergarten, teaching experience or areas of certification was found to be used by schools in the current study to facilitate transitions to kindergarten.

The next two activities used to guide the current study, quantity and intensity of transition practices were not be examined in question 1, but were thoroughly examined in subsequent questions. The next section for question 1 looked at how the schools in the current study managed barriers to implementing transition to kindergarten practices.

***Barriers to implementing transition practices.*** Five barriers were identified either explicitly or implicitly in the current study. The paper-and-pencil demographic survey showed at least 80% of all participants indicated that neither the school nor the district had written transition plans available. No evidence of a district plan was found during the current research, however a written transition plan for both schools was found as a part of the School's Improvement Plan. It was left unclear from the current study why both schools had a written plan, but the majority of participants from both schools were unaware of the plan.

The second barrier found in the current study was transient population. Data showed Bridge View had two and one-half times the student transient rate as River City (see Table 20). Participants described how to manage transient students in a variety of ways. Regarding students coming in after the beginning of the school year the River City assistant principal said, "You're starting over and re-teaching those expectations to the new students. You're out of your routine, you're starting all over." A Bridge View teacher talked about her plan for sustainability of information to students and parents for new students transitioning into the school after the beginning of the school year. Her teaching assistant saved all pertinent information sent home with students throughout the year. Then when a student transitioned into the classroom later in the year, the teaching assistant sent all information home with the child as a part of his welcome packet. None of the participants talked about how they managed students leaving the school

during the year, or what they might do to help transition those students to their new schools successfully.

The next barrier identified in the current study was students in poverty. Students in poverty presented unique barriers to the two schools in the current study. Many students reportedly came to school without needed supplies or uniforms. Some students did not have supplies at home to complete homework or other school related projects. Participants elaborated on how they managed this barrier and helped students overcome this barrier by ensuring all children had supplies and uniforms provided to them by the school or through community partnerships and donations. One River City teacher described sending supplies home with students to ensure they had what they needed to complete school work at home.

Late enrollees were another barrier cited by participants at both schools in the current study. Participants at Bridge View reported one way in which they managed late enrollees was to wait until after the staggered entry days to assign students to kindergarten classrooms. This provided the teachers with information about recently enrolled students and allowed for a couple of extra days for students to enroll before being placed in a classroom.

The final barrier listed by participants in the current study was parents/families with negative connotations about school. Teachers from both schools reported various ways in which to respond to families and students with negative connotations about school. One River City teacher remarked she had a difficult time getting parents to come for conferences due to their previous negative school experiences. To overcome this struggle, she asked parents to bring a class snack. When the parent arrived with the class snack, she used the snack time to conference with the parent. One Bridge View teacher explicitly remarked on how she worked to be nice to

help students and families overcome any negative connotations they had about school or teachers.

This section discussed the 5 barriers to implementing kindergarten transition practices explicitly or implicitly reported by participants in the current study, and gave an overview of how participants managed these barriers. The next section will describe environmental impacts faced by participants and schools in the current study, and how they were managed.

***Environmental impacts.*** Environmental impacts influencing transitioning children to kindergarten were managed both at the district level and at the school level. One district level decision that resulted in an environmental impact at River City beginning during the 2012-2013 school year was the placement of two pre-kindergarten classrooms in the traditionally kindergarten through fifth grade school. River City facilitated the placement of the pre-kindergarten classrooms by providing space in close proximity to the kindergarten classrooms. The proximity of the pre-kindergarten teachers to the kindergarten teachers reportedly increased collaboration and communication between pre-kindergarten teachers and kindergarten teachers housed in the same facility. All River City participants reported a positive experience with having pre-kindergarten classrooms housed in the building. River City participants felt the students, transitioning from pre-kindergarten at River City to kindergarten at River City, transition to kindergarten experience would be maximized due to their familiarity with the school's environment. Not all students in River City's pre-kindergarten were districted to attend kindergarten at River City. The assistant principal at River City said they were going to inform and encourage pre-kindergarten parents not in River City's district to apply for their child to continue attending River City via the lottery program.

Two teachers from each school reported the existence of a county wide pre-kindergarten/kindergarten committee. Some teachers reported the committee met monthly, while others reported it as meeting every so often. The participants reported the objective of the committee was to make the pre-kindergarten teachers aware of kindergarten expectations. One teacher stated even with the meetings there was “not a cohesiveness between the pre-k and the kindergarten teachers.” All reporting teachers stated one representative from the school attended. Only one Bridge View teacher identified herself as the teacher who attended the meetings. She said she assumed the committee was no longer in existence because she had not been invited to any meetings during the 2012-2013 school year. With the potential non-existence of the pre-kindergarten/kindergarten committee, it was unclear from the current study what the district was doing to facilitate a bridge between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers and curriculums.

All Bridge View participants along with the administrative participants at River City reported pre-kindergarten students from the pre-kindergarten centers visited the schools during the spring. Not all students visiting in the spring were districted to attend the visited school in the fall. Both schools managed these pre-kindergarten spring visits in a similar fashion. The schools allowed the students to take a tour of the school and participate in activities in the kindergarten classrooms.

Pre-kindergarten transition nights were also reported by participants at both schools. This was facilitated primarily by the pre-kindergarten centers. The pre-kindergarten centers arranged the nights and contacted the elementary schools to send a teacher representative to the pre-kindergarten centers. The pre-kindergarten centers reportedly had classrooms set up by elementary school district. The teachers from the elementary school went to an assigned room and met with parents assigned specifically to the school’s district. Kindergarten teachers

provided general information about the school and kindergarten to parents. Parents were provided with an opportunity to ask questions. No information was revealed indicating how the elementary schools in the current study offered similar nights for students not attending one of the school district's pre-kindergarten centers.

Students coming from a pre-kindergarten environment with an Individualized Education Plan, or some type of developmental delay were transitioned differently than children in the general education population. Three Bridge View participants reported an Exceptional Children's teacher from the school went to the pre-kindergarten environment and observed the children identified with an exceptionality. The Exceptional Children's teacher then arranged for and held transition meetings with school staff, pre-school staff and the child's parents.

Cumulative records sent from the pre-kindergarten centers to the elementary schools contained a transition card. The purpose of this card was to provide the kindergarten teacher with any needed information regarding the specific child. Teachers from both schools reported reading the transition cards provided for children coming from the district's pre-kindergarten centers, but as one River City teacher said the cards still left her not feeling "connected with the child."

This section looked at environmental impacts through the research question of how schools facilitated kindergarten transition programming. In-house pre-kindergarten classrooms, county wide transition meetings, pre-school students visiting elementary schools in the spring, pre-kindergarten transition nights at pre-kindergarten centers, Exceptional Children's observations and use of transition cards were described in the paragraphs above. The next section looked more closely at how discontinuities between the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten environments were managed.

*Discontinuities between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten settings.* Discontinuities between the kindergarten environment and pre-kindergarten environment were noted by participants at both schools. Discontinuities between cognitive, behavioral and social expectations were discussed. The researcher assumed one district initiative for attempting to alleviate discontinuities between the two environments was the county-wide pre-kindergarten/kindergarten committee. Reportedly, the committee was no longer in existence, and when it was in existence there was reportedly still a disconnect and divide between the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers, curriculum and expectations. One Bridge View teacher who attended the meetings said there appeared to be “no common ground” between the two worlds. Pre-kindergarten teachers reportedly sent transition cards with the cumulative records to kindergarten, but as one River City teacher reported the cards still left her not feeling “connected with the child.” The pre-kindergarten transition nights provided an opportunity for parents to hear about kindergarten, but did not help build a bridge between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten curriculum and expectations. All reported attempts at handling the discontinuities between pre-kindergarten and elementary school environments were only aimed at the county’s pre-kindergarten programs. This fell short of including other pre-kindergartens, daycare, or home care where children were kept prior to entering kindergarten. River City participants noted improved communication with the two pre-kindergarten teachers housed at River City, but felt more should be done to connect pre-kindergarten teachers who were not housed in elementary schools.

This section described how discontinuities between the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten environments were managed in the current study, and concluded the Activities category of the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) for

research question 1. The remaining components and categories from the Kindergarten Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) that addressed how the two elementary schools in the current study facilitated kindergarten transition practices were thoroughly discussed in subsequent questions and were not repeated in the current question.

This concluded the components and categories of the Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) that were analyzed for Research Question 1: How did two elementary schools, in the same school district, with similar socio-economic demographics facilitate kindergarten transition practices? The following section described the researcher's analysis of data through the themes of communication and participant perceptions.

## **Themes**

**Communication.** One of the first times the school district communicated with all parents of rising kindergarteners was immediately before kindergarten registration. Kindergarten registration occurred in February or March of the preceding school year. The school system systemically communicated with all parents through multi-media sources to reach the broader community. This systemic communication however, narrowed following kindergarten registration. Most of the subsequent communication reported between the school and rising kindergarteners occurred between the receiving school and children attending the district's pre-kindergarten centers. Only the administrators at River City reported going to private kindergarten centers to inform parents about the magnet program, and one Bridge View teacher's perspective was that private pre-kindergarten centers toured the school. Other than these three participants, all reporting participants cited activities such as school tours, transition nights, transition cards, cumulative folders, and Fast Start were only offered to students currently attending the district's pre-kindergarten centers. Ways in how the school system or schools communicated with parents

of students not attending the district's pre-kindergarten centers were not revealed in the current study.

Communication between the kindergarten and pre-kindergarten environments were reportedly ineffective. The county appeared to facilitate the communication between the two levels through a county-wide pre-kindergarten teacher/kindergarten teacher committee that met periodically. The participants in the current study reported the intent of the meeting was to keep pre-kindergarten teachers abreast of kindergarten expectations and curricular expectations. One Bridge View teacher reported the committee was disbanded, and that "no resolve" came from the committee. River City teachers reported similar frustrations with the county-wide committee, along with a lack of cohesiveness between kindergarten teachers and pre-kindergarten teachers located in the pre-kindergarten centers. These same River City teachers, however, strongly noted improved communication and collaboration with the in-house pre-kindergarten teachers. Ways in which the district facilitated communication between the two levels for teachers in schools without in-house pre-kindergarten classes, and without the continuation of the county-wide committee was not revealed in the current study.

This summary concluded the analysis of research question 1 through the theme of communication. The next section described question 1 through the theme of participant perceptions.

**Participant Perceptions.** Fast Start was a district initiated transition practice held at both schools in the current study. The district's pre-kindergarten centers reportedly managed the selection process for Fast Start attendees. Only the most at-risk students identified at the district's pre-kindergarten centers were invited to attend the two-week, half day, late summer program. River City hosted one Fast Start class of about 10 students, while Bridge View hosted

two Fast Start classes with about 10 students each. How the number of Fast Start classes at each school was determined was not revealed in the current study. Participants from both schools had varied perceptions regarding the best student candidates for Fast Start participation. One River City teacher said “I wish more students came to Fast Start.” A Bridge View teacher felt the students selected to attend Fast Start were already so far behind, that even though they made growth throughout the school year were still behind. She felt the program would be more beneficial for “bubble children” or those on the “brink of being successful in kindergarten.” How the school district communicated expectations of the Fast Start program to schools, or how Fast Start was communicated to parents was not reported in the current study.

Participants in the current study who discussed the pre-kindergarten teacher/kindergarten teacher county-wide committee reported through their assumptions as kindergarten teachers. One Bridge View teacher reported the purpose of the meeting was to “discuss expectations for the beginning of kindergarten,” and a River City teacher described the meetings as “there’s just not a cohesiveness between the pre-k and the kindergarten teachers.” One Bridge View teacher said as the kindergarten curriculum expectations had increased, pre-kindergarten expectations had not increased, making the gap between the two levels wider. In the current study, none of the participants held a certification to teach pre-kindergarten, nor had any of them previously taught pre-kindergarten. The only perspective they had to view the meeting from was from the perspective of a kindergarten teacher in an elementary school. It was beyond the scope of this study to examine the perceptions of the pre-kindergarten teachers regarding the meetings, licensure areas, or levels of experience.

River City’s teachers had a unique perception regarding the two pre-kindergarten teachers and classrooms that were housed at River City for the first time during the 2012-2013

school year. Their perceptions regarding pre-kindergarten teachers and programs working in facilities (public or private) outside the school building remained the same and compatible with the perceptions of the Bridge View teachers. For the two pre-kindergarten classrooms housed in the school, however, they expressed a positive view point and reported good working relationships which included communication and collaboration between the kindergarten and pre-kindergarten programs.

### **Research Question 1 Summary**

This concluded the data analyses for the first research question guiding this study, How did two elementary schools, in the same school district, with similar socio-economic demographics facilitate kindergarten transition practices? The data revealed how the two schools in the current study facilitated district initiated transition practices along with how they managed school initiated transition practices. Some school initiated practices, such as staggered entry, was found at both schools. No evidence was reported of how school initiated practices were communicated or commonly found at both schools. Variations were found in the way some of the transition practices were implemented between and within schools. There was no evidence of formalized professional development for teachers in transitioning students to kindergarten. None of the participants were licensed to teach pre-kindergarten nor did any of the participants have pre-kindergarten teaching experience. River City's teachers had at least twice as much teaching experience as did Bridge View's teachers. Similarities in barriers were found at both schools, along with ways in which the participants tried to overcome the barriers they were faced with. River City housed two pre-kindergarten classes during the 2012-2013 school year. The existence of these classrooms changed how the kindergarten teachers at River City viewed pre-kindergarten programming and how they communicated and collaborated between kindergarten

and pre-kindergarten classrooms. This change was limited to the two classrooms housed at River City. Participants reported a disconnect between the schools in the current study and pre-kindergarten centers. The current study found more reported contact with and more opportunities offered to parents and children attending the school district's pre-kindergarten centers than with other pre-kindergarten facilities. This concluded the summary for the first research question guiding this study. The following section addressed the second question to guide this study.

### **Research Question 2 Findings**

Research Question 2: To What Extent has each school created a kindergarten transition plan?

#### **Do**

**Resources.** To ascertain information regarding a written kindergarten transition plan, the researcher used a variety of resources. These resources included eligible and willing participants, a document published by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction entitled *Transition Planning for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools*, the school district's web-site, each school's School Improvement Plan retrieved from the schools' web-sites, face-to-face interviews, transcriptions of the face-to-face interviews and information ascertained from the and paper-and-pencil demographic survey administered at the conclusion of the face-to-face interviews.

To ensure schools were ready for children, research supported the need for clear and specific transition plans to help schools be ready for children by easing their transition into kindergarten (Ray et al., 2010; Wesley et al., 2003). The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, in *Transition Planning for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools* (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.), developed an initiative for each local school district in North Carolina to develop and implement a transition plan that met the varying needs of individual children. The goal of the state initiative was to raise achievement for all children while closing the

achievement gap, through creating schools that provided intentional transitions for children during pivotal transitional times. Schulting et al. (2005) found intentional transition activities provided by schools such as parent-child visits to kindergarten classrooms prior to the beginning of school increased children's academic achievement at the end of kindergarten along with parental involvement during kindergarten.

First, the researcher searched the district's web-site for a systemic transition to kindergarten plan. The researcher was unable to locate a kindergarten transition plan created by the district on the district's web-site. During the paper-and-pencil demographic survey when study participants were asked about the existence of a kindergarten transition plan created by the district, the principal at River City responded the district had a written plan, the assistant principal at River City responded "I don't know." Both administrators at Bridge View responded "no" the district did not have a written transition plan. Only one teacher from Bridge View Elementary responded "yes" to the question of the district having a written transition plan, and one teacher from River City responded, "no." All other kindergarten teachers from both schools (a total of 6 out of 8 teachers) responded "I don't know" regarding the existence of a district level transition plan. Data collected for the purposes of this research, did not reveal the existence of a kindergarten transition plan created for the district, even though the Department of Public Instruction had an initiative for each district to develop and implement a transition plan (see Table 28).

The next resource used by the researcher was the individual school's web-sites. This resource was used to search for information pertaining to the existence of a kindergarten transition plan created at the school level. Both schools had a link to the School's Improvement Plan on the front page of the school's web-sites. Both schools completed a section of the

Table 28

*Knowledge of Written Kindergarten Transition Plans*

	River City			Bridge View		
	Yes	No	I don't know	Yes	No	I don't know
Does your school <b>district</b> have a written plan for transitioning children to kindergarten?	1	1	3	1	2	4
Does your <b>school</b> have a written plan for transitioning children to kindergarten?	1	4	0	1	3	3

School's Improvement Plan called "Title I School-Wide Compliance Review and Plan." One of the forms in this Title I section was entitled "Plan for assisting preschool students in the successful transition from early childhood programs to local elementary school wide programs." Both schools had this section completed with the following kindergarten transition plans written for students transitioning to kindergarten:

Bridge View Elementary:

[Bridge View] sends a Kindergarten Teacher as a representative to Pre-K transition and informational meetings. We also host visitations in the spring for Pre-K students to tour our school and work with Kindergarteners on a classroom activity. Students rising from Pre-K to our Kindergarten are invited to attend Fast Start in August to begin their successful school experience.

River City Elementary:

[River City] School will be one of three new elementary schools who will be housing Pre-K students beginning the 2012-2013 school year. This will assist with easing the transition into the traditional kindergarten classroom. Our teachers in the past and looking into the upcoming year communicate with the pre-k programs as to their needs and the expectations for students as they transition. Regular meetings are also scheduled with any potential incoming students.

As outlined in Table 28, during the paper-and-pencil demographic survey when study participants were asked about the existence of a kindergarten transition plan created by the school, the principal and assistant principal at River City both responded the school did not have a written kindergarten transition plan. One of the three kindergarten teachers at River City responded "yes" to the question regarding a school level plan, while the other two responded "no". This equated to 80% of River City's participants responding that the school did not have a

transition to kindergarten plan. Only the principal at Bridge View Elementary responded “yes” to an existence of a school level plan. The assistant principal and all kindergarten teachers at Bridge View responded either “no” or “I don’t know” when questioned about the existence of a school level kindergarten transition plan. This equated to 86% of Bridge View’s participants reportedly being unaware of the school’s transition to kindergarten plan. Data collected for the purposes of this research did reveal the existence of a kindergarten transition plan written for both schools, as a part of the School Improvement Plan.

Research revealed most schools or districts did not provide teachers with specific and comprehensive plans (Early et al., 1999; Nelson, 2004). In this comparative case study with a phenomenological approach, the district did not appear to provide a plan, however, the schools did have a plan written as a part of the School’s Improvement Plan. The plans were written, however, at least 80% of respondents at both schools were not aware the plans existed.

This section described resources used to help ascertain the extent to which each school had created a written kindergarten transition plan. The next section will describe Activities found in the schools’ written transition plans and the extent to which those Activities were implemented.

### **Activities.**

*Programmatic transition practices offered by the schools.* In the current research River City listed the following programmatic transition practices in the school’s transition to kindergarten plan:

- Housing pre-kindergarten classrooms beginning 2012-2013
- Kindergarten teachers communicated with pre-kindergarten programs regarding needs and expectations for students

- Regular meetings scheduled with potential incoming students

Bridge View Elementary listed the following programmatic transition practices in the school's transition to kindergarten plan:

- Pre-kindergarten students visit kindergarten classes in spring and work with kindergarteners on a classroom activity
- Kindergarten teacher representative to pre-kindergarten transition and informational meetings
- Fast-Start

This section begins with an analysis of River City's written transition plan and evidences of implementation of the plan. After a thorough analysis of River City's plan, an analysis of Bridge View's plan was described.

One hundred percent of River City's participants (administrators and teachers) mentioned housing pre-kindergarten classrooms in the elementary school building as a kindergarten transition practice. This arrangement was made at the district level, but was seen as a positive addition at the school level. One kindergarten teacher remarked, "We see them (the pre-kindergarten students) every day in the hallway and they have the rules and procedures down." Both administrators at River City confirmed pre-kindergarten students may not attend kindergarten at River City, due to pre-kindergarten and elementary district lines being different. Both administrators, however, expressed a hope that all the pre-kindergarten students attending the in-house pre-kindergarten will be able to attend kindergarten at River City either through being in the district, or through the magnet school lottery option. In addition, the principal of River City stated students attending the in-house pre-kindergarten would be more familiar and acclimated with the school when they began kindergarten. All five respondents from River City

felt students coming from the current in-house pre-kindergarten would be more supported in their transition to kindergarten due to their familiarity with the school.

Information from data collected varied regarding the second transition practice listed in River City's transition plan which was: Kindergarten teachers communicated with pre-kindergarten programs regarding needs and expectations for students. Both administrators mentioned school staff such as administrators, counselors, social workers, teachers, etc. went to pre-kindergarten centers in the evenings for parent meetings. School staff were available to meet and talk with parents about school expectations. None of the teachers referred to this as a transition activity, however two of the three teachers discussed county-wide kindergarten/pre-kindergarten teacher meetings. These meetings were described by one kindergarten participant as where "One of us a couple times a year goes and meets with the pre-kindergarten to share what's going on with the curriculum." Neither of these teacher participants confirmed having ever been the teacher representative in attendance, yet one of them stated having pre-kindergarten classes in the building right beside her was "much more beneficial than a couple meetings a year." The other teacher commented on a "lack of communication and cohesiveness between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers across the county," but she did not feel this way about the pre-kindergarten teachers housed in her school. The principal and all three kindergarten teacher participants remarked on how closely the kindergarten teachers worked with the pre-kindergarten teachers housed in the school.

Two of the kindergarten teachers mentioned transition cards that were sent to the elementary schools from the district based pre-kindergarten centers. These cards contained child specific information. One of the participants said the transition cards "left me feeling

disconnected.” The same two teachers explicitly stated that kindergarten teachers did not meet one-on-one with teachers from the pre-kindergarten centers regarding specific children.

The assistant principal discussed communication with pre-schools before the beginning of the year and using paperwork and other information from the pre-kindergarten centers to help create class lists. None of the other participants mentioned these transition activities.

The final kindergarten transition practice delineated in River City’s transition to kindergarten plan was: Regular meetings scheduled with potential incoming students. No evidence of this programmatic transition practice was discovered in the current research.

Of the three programmatic transition practices listed in River City’s written transition to kindergarten plan, only the first one, housing pre-kindergarten classrooms beginning 2012-2013 was apparent during the research based on 100% of participants reporting this practice.

Kindergarten teachers communicated with pre-kindergarten programs regarding needs and expectations for students was more evident with the pre-kindergarten program housed at River City than it was with pre-kindergarten programs located in centers within and across the county. The last transition practice listed, regular meetings scheduled with potential incoming students, was not identified by participants as a transition practice currently being practiced at River City. Approximately 50 transition practices were mentioned in the current research during the face-to-face interviews by participants that were not delineated in River City’s written transition document. This concluded the section regarding River City’s written transition plan. The next section described Bridge View’s written transition plan, along with evidence of implementation of the written transition plan.

All participants (administrators and teachers) at Bridge View acknowledged existence and implementation of the first activity listed in the written transition plan, pre-kindergarten

students visit kindergarten classes in the spring and work with kindergarteners on a classroom activity. The principal said she communicated with the pre-kindergarten directors to arrange the visits in the spring. The only other participant to mention how the arrangements were made was a kindergarten teacher. Her perception was that the pre-kindergarten centers contacted the school requesting a tour. Three participants commented on which pre-kindergartens visited, and these reports varied. The principal said only school system pre-kindergartens visited in the spring. One kindergarten teacher participant reported More and Four and the school system's pre-kindergartens visited, while another kindergarten participant reported only private pre-kindergarten centers visited. The structure of the visits was also described in varying ways. Both administrators and one kindergarten teacher (three participants) reported pre-kindergarten students "buddy up" with kindergarten classes for about half a day. The pre-kindergarteners toured the school and engaged in activities such as cutting, pasting, coloring, etc. Two kindergarten teachers described the structure of the visits as just visiting or touring. One of these kindergarten teachers started after the beginning of the year. She stated her comment was based on what was reported to her from the other teachers. One kindergarten teacher participant reported the visits as "buddy them up and show them around the class." The final kindergarten teacher participant said they split the pre-kindergarten children up while the kindergarten students were in itinerants (art, music, etc.). The teachers gave the pre-kindergarten students a craft to complete and let them walk through the lunch line. All seven participants acknowledged pre-kindergarten visits in the spring, however, there were varying perceptions on which pre-kindergarten groups attended, how arrangements for visits were made, and regarding the structure of the visits.

The second transition practice listed in Bridge View's written transition plan was: Kindergarten teacher representative to pre-kindergarten transition and informational meetings. Three responses were given by varying participants that addressed the fulfillment of this activity listed in Bridge View's written transition plan. The three responses were:

- Teacher representative at pre-kindergarten transition meetings held at pre-kindergarten centers
- County-wide pre-kindergarten/kindergarten transition committee
- Exceptional Children's staff observe students with IEP's in the pre-kindergarten setting

A total of five participants, the principal and four kindergarten teachers, described Bridge View's participation in having teacher representation at the pre-kindergarten center for transition meetings. These meetings were similarly described by all five participants. One teacher participant likened it to a "parent orientation." The pre-kindergarten center gave each school a room so parents could meet with representatives from the school where their child was assigned to attend kindergarten. Teachers from the school answered questions parents had and gave them information about how the kindergarten day looked, transportation, dress code, snack time, nap, etc. One teacher participant responded, "It helps parents feel more comfortable."

Two kindergarten teacher participants reported on a county-wide pre-kindergarten/kindergarten transition committee. One of these participants reported that they met monthly to share curricular expectations and to plan the pre-kindergarten transition meetings. This participant did not report ever having attending any of these meetings. Another kindergarten teacher participant, however, did report being the school representative on this committee. She explained the purpose of the committee as creating a "bridge, or a connect between what they

were learning and required to do in pre-kindergarten, and what it looked like in kindergarten.” She reported the group met over the last two years, but to her knowledge the group was not in existence during the 2012-2013 school year. When describing her experience she said:

It was a valuable experience to see what they were learning in pre-k and me knowing where they had to be by the end of kindergarten. What I took away from that was that we had a huge gap. Just being aware of it was a starting point. After the conclusion of that experience, we didn’t really have a solution. There was just no common ground. While it was valuable to be aware of that, I kind of left feeling like we didn’t have any resolve from it.

Both administrators and one kindergarten teacher discussed members of the Exceptional Children’s staff observing students with IEP’s in the pre-school settings. All three participants similarly described this transition activity. Exceptional children’s teachers, including the speech teachers, went into pre-kindergarten centers and Easter Seals to observe children with IEP’s or special needs. Then they came back and held a transition meeting with the school’s administration so that everyone knew the child’s needs, and to help make a good classroom placement decision.

The final transition practice written in Bridge View’s written transition plan was Fast Start. Both administrators and 3 of the 5 teachers discussed Fast Start during the face-to-face interviews. All five participants described Fast Start as a program that occurred two weeks before the beginning of the school year. It lasted for half a day. Students were selected for the Fast Start program upon recommendation from the pre-kindergarten centers. One participant described the pre-kindergarten teachers “hand-picked them based on those that need more support at the beginning of the year.” The assistant principal remarked, “Fast Start is a great

transition practice. I wish we could have all our kindergarteners attend Fast Start.” In August 2012, Bridge View had two classes of Fast Start. One was taught by the Instructional Coach, and the other by a kindergarten teacher. The kindergarten teacher who taught Fast Start had different thoughts about students who should be selected to attend. She said the children who attended Fast Start were:

Those who are still struggling, still falling behind . . . In my opinion I think Fast Start would be more beneficial for bubble children . . . who need a little extra push . . . those kids (who came) have made growth, but was Fast Start as effective for them as much as it could have been for that bubble population is something to consider.

Of the three programmatic transition practices listed in Bridge View’s written transition to kindergarten plan, all participants (100%) reported that pre-kindergarten students visited the school in the spring. Participant perceptions differed of exactly which pre-kindergarteners visited the school, how the visits were arranged, and what their exact experience was during the visits. Both administrators and four kindergarten teachers (86%) reported experiences with the second programmatic transition practice listed in Bridge View’s plan, kindergarten teacher representative to pre-kindergarten transition and informational meetings. Three different examples that aligned with this category emerged from participant interviews. Fast Start was the final practice listed in the written plan. Seventy-one percent, or both administrators and 3 teachers reported on Fast Start. The participants reported a shared or similar experience with Fast Start regarding when it occurred, how long it lasted, and how students were selected. Participant perceptions varied on which students would be best served during Fast Start. Approximately 60 transition practices were mentioned by Bridge View participants in the current research during

the face-to-face interviews that were not delineated in Bridge View's written transition to kindergarten plan.

This concluded the section entitled Programmatic Transition Practices Offered by the School. This section delineated the transition practices identified in the schools' written transition to kindergarten plans and the extent to which participants fulfilled the practices listed in the plan. The next section examined Characteristics Influencing Transitions in relation to the schools' written transition to kindergarten plans.

*Characteristics influencing transitions.* Characteristics that influenced transitions were:

- Teacher Child Relationships
- Teacher professional development specifically in transitions to kindergarten
- Teaching experience
- Areas of certification

This section will begin with an examination of River City's written transition to kindergarten plan in relation to Characteristics Influencing Transitions, and will conclude with a similar look at Bridge View's written transition to kindergarten plan. The first transition activity listed in River City's plan was: Housing pre-kindergarten classrooms beginning 2012-2013. This practice could help teachers build teacher-child relationships due to the fact of their close proximity to one another during the students' pre-kindergarten year. If intentional efforts were being made to develop teacher child relationships with the pre-kindergarten students, none of the participants reported the efforts. All three kindergarten teacher participants commented on seeing the pre-kindergarten students daily in the hallway and the pre-kindergarten students seeing them and knowing they were the kindergarten teachers. None of the teachers reported intentionally developing or creating teacher child relationships with any of the pre-kindergarten students.

River City's second transition activity listed in the plan was: Kindergarten teachers communicated with pre-kindergarten programs regarding needs and expectations for students. No evidence was collected to support this transition activity was a characteristic that influenced transitions. All activities reported were between programs, teachers, and or parents.

The final activity listed in River City's written transition to kindergarten plan was: Regular meetings scheduled with potential incoming students. This activity appeared to have the ability to build teacher child relationships. No evidence of this activity being implemented was reported by the participants in the current study. This summarized characteristics influencing transitions as they related to River City's written transition to kindergarten plan. Bridge View's plan will now be examined through the lenses of Characteristics Influencing Transitions.

The first transition activity listed in Bridge View's written transition to kindergarten plan was, pre-kindergarten students visit kindergarten classes in spring and work with kindergarteners on a classroom activity. The potential was present for this activity to be used as the beginning formation of teacher child relationships, but this was not explicitly planned for in Bridge View's plan, nor did any of the participants report using this activity to build relationships with pre-kindergarten children.

Of the varying and multiple responses provided by participants regarding Bridge View's second written transition activity, kindergarten teacher representative to pre-kindergarten transition and informational meetings, most activities reported were between programs, teachers or parents. One activity reported by both school administrators at Bridge View and one kindergarten teacher involved the Exceptional Children's staff visiting students with IEP's or special needs in their pre-kindergarten environment. It was not explicitly stated if these staff members began developing a teacher child relationship with students during these visits. It did

seem possible relationships could begin being formed during these visits, but there was no evidence that this was done with intentionality.

Bridge View's last transition practice listed in the written transition to kindergarten plan was Fast Start. This program at Bridge View was taught by the instructional coach and one kindergarten teacher. A teaching assistant was also employed during this summer program, however, it was not explicitly stated if the teaching assistant was one assigned to kindergarten during the regular school year or if she was assigned to another grade. This would clearly be a time when teachers and school staff could begin building teacher child relationships, however, it was not explicitly stated that this was an intentional part of the program. No mention was made of any intentionality with placing Fast Start students in the classroom with the kindergarten teacher they had during Fast Start.

No evidence was found of other Characteristics Influencing Transitions in the written transition to kindergarten plans of either school. These included no evidence of teacher professional development in transitions to kindergarten, teaching experience for kindergarten teachers, or areas of certification. This concluded the section entitled Characteristics Influencing Transitions. This section delineated Characteristics Influencing Transitions included in the schools' written transition to kindergarten plans. The next section will examine the quantity of transition activities found in both schools' plans.

***Quantity of transition practices.*** Schulting et al., (2005) found that the quantity, or number, of transition practices schools offered to children and families was associated with positive academic achievement scores at the end of kindergarten. Both schools in the current study had three transition practices listed in the schools' transition to kindergarten plans. Implementation of two out of three practices at River City was confirmed to varying degrees in

the current study. All three transition practices listed in Bridge View's transition to kindergarten plan were confirmed to varying degrees. At River City, participants reported approximately 50 additional transition to kindergarten practices that were implemented by a range of one to all participants with varying degrees. At Bridge View participants reported approximately 60 additional transition to kindergarten practices that were implemented by a range of one to all participants with varying degrees. None of these transition to kindergarten practices were listed in the schools' written transition to kindergarten plan. This section examined the quantity of transitions in both schools' plans. The following section will examine the intensity of transition practices found in the schools' written transition to kindergarten plans.

*Intensity of transition practices.* Transition practices could be viewed through intensity. Low intensity transition practices were categorized as those occurring either before or after the beginning of the school year, and were aimed at the class as a whole. High intensity transition practices were those occurring either before or after the beginning of the school year, but were individualized for students and families. Other high intensity practices included those that involved coordination with pre-school programs or the community (Early et al., 2001; Rous et al., 2010). Of the three transition practices listed in River City's written transition to kindergarten plan, all three could be considered high intensity. Housing pre-kindergarten classrooms in the school required coordination with the pre-school program and the community, as did kindergarten teachers communicating with pre-kindergarten programs. Meetings scheduled with incoming students could be considered high intensity because of the individualized nature of the practice. For Bridge View's three transition practices listed in the transition to kindergarten plan, the first two practices, pre-kindergarten students visiting the school in the spring and kindergarten teacher representation at pre-kindergarten transition and informational meetings

could be considered high intensity because they required coordination with pre-school programs. The intensity of the Fast Start program was debatable. Earlier studies regarding the most effective transition practices defined them as practices that reached out, back in time and with the appropriate intensity (Pianta, Cox et al., 1999). Fast Start did reach out and back in time. By earlier definitions this would identify Fast Start as an effective transition practice. By later definitions of intensity, however, practices that were whole group in nature were not considered high intensity. Fast Start, albeit a smaller group of students, was from the information discovered in the current research, aimed at the whole group of students attending the program. This absence of individualization sparked the debate about how to categorize Fast Start. It could be argued that the program was individualized based on the student selection criteria.

This section compared and contrasted intensity of transition practices as described in the literature. It then categorized both schools' transition practices listed in the written transition to kindergarten plan as a high or low intensity practice. All three practices at River City could be categorized as high intensity. Two of Bridge View's practices could be categorized as high intensity, with the intensity of the third practice being debatable. The next section examined barriers to implementing transition practices.

*Barriers to implementing transition practices.* Pianta et al. (1998) recommended administrators ensured a clear transition plan was in place. Pianta, Cox et al. (1999) found 42.57% of kindergarten teachers reported lack of a transition plan as a barrier to creating a successful transition plan for kindergarteners. In the current study, a district plan was not discovered. Both schools had a plan in place, and five of the combined six practices were implemented to varying degrees. It did not appear this was an intentional implementation of the written plans at either school. Processes for monitoring or communicating the plans were not

found during the current research. Additional evidence that implementation of the plans was not intentional came from the paper-and-pencil survey administered to participants. Eighty percent of participants at River City and 86% of Bridge View participants were not aware of the school's written transition to kindergarten plan. The lack of communication about or knowledge that a kindergarten transition plan was in place could be considered a barrier for both schools in this study. This section outlined potential barriers associated with the extent to which each school had created a kindergarten transition plan. The following section will look at environmental impacts surrounding the schools' kindergarten transition plans.

***Environmental impacts.*** Previous research suggested it was possible that the implementation of a transition plan or activities increased parent initiated school involvement (Schulting et al., 2005), and parents' comfort levels, particularly when the family was involved in the transition planning (McWayne et al., 2004). In the current study, both schools had an existing written transition plan. No evidence was collected indicating families were involved with the creation of the transition to kindergarten plans. Examining the scope of parent involvement in the schools, and parent comfort levels was beyond the scope of the current study.

Communication and coordination between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers and programs were specified in both schools' written transition to kindergarten plans. Pianta et al. (1996) found this communication between programs and teachers increased the likelihood of school success. Based on the literature, these areas of communication and coordination between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers and programs could be considered strengths in both schools' written transition to kindergarten plans. This section described the environmental impacts associated with the schools' written kindergarten transition plans. This was the final activity discussed for research question 2. Discontinuities between pre-kindergarten and

kindergarten settings were not discussed for research question 2. The following section examined Outputs that could be expected when one Resource from the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1), a written transition plan, was in place.

**Outputs.** Researchers suggested if schools and school districts created and implemented clear and specific kindergarten transition plans, it would help schools be ready for kindergarteners, help smooth children's transition to kindergarten (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.; Ray et al., 2010; Wesley et al., 2003), and potentially help raise students' achievement (Schulting et al., 2005). In the current study, data revealed the district did not appear to have a written kindergarten transition plan but both schools did. The data showed Bridge View implemented all three practices listed in the school's written plan, and River City implemented two out of the three practices in the school's plan. These practices, however, appeared to occur as a part of the district or school's way of doing business, not as the intentional implementation of a written kindergarten transition plan. An alignment between what the literature revealed about the creation and implementation of kindergarten transition plans, and what the data in the current study revealed about the creation and implementation of transition plans in this school district and in these two schools, could not be exactly made. This lack of a direct correlation between the literature and practice could negatively impact these two schools' overall readiness for incoming kindergarten students.

This was the final section of the Kindergarten Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) that will be analyzed for research question 2: To what extent has each school created a kindergarten transition plan? The remaining sections of the Kindergarten Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) were not applicable to this research question, and were not considered as a part of the response to this question. The following

sections continued the analysis for question two by discussing the researcher's findings through the themes of communication and participant perceptions revealed through the lived experiences of participants.

## **Themes**

**Communication.** The extent to which the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction communicated the desire for each school district in the state of North Carolina to develop a transition plan, or the extent to which they monitored the existence of district-wide plans was beyond the scope of this study. Lack of communication or monitoring on the Department of Public Instruction's behalf could be one possible reason a district-wide plan did not appear to be in existence in this southeastern North Carolina school district.

Both Schools written transition to kindergarten plans were communicated electronically. Links to both schools' School Improvement Plans were on the front pages of the schools' websites. The transition to kindergarten document was one small part of the overall School Improvement Plan. It was beyond the scope of this study to investigate other ways in which the school-level transition to kindergarten plan was communicated. With the majority of participants being unaware of the existence of a school level plan (including 3 of the 4 administrators), it could be concluded that communication of the plan was not effective, and it raised the question if the written plans were being used. The data from the current research revealed a lack of communication regarding transition to kindergarten plans at both the state and school levels. Even with this lack of communication, Bridge View participants reported some degree of implementation of all activities listed in the plan, and River City participants reported some degree of implementing two out of three activities listed in the plan. From this perspective, activities in the plans were implemented, but it raised the question if the participants realized

what they were doing was a part of a larger school-wide plan. Perhaps the school level plans were not explicitly explained to them or kept in the forefront of their minds. Someone created the school-level plan, but it was beyond the scope of this study for the researcher to examine how the school-level plans were created or how they were communicated. How does this lack of systemic communication impact participant perceptions regarding transition to kindergarten plans?

**Participant Perceptions.** Mixed participant perceptions were reported regarding the existence of district and school level transition to kindergarten plans. A majority of participants either did not know if district or school plans existed or responded that a plan did not exist. At both schools the majority of participants did not perceive a school level written plan existed, even though one did actually exist. If participants did not perceive the existence of a district or school-level plan, a conclusion could be made that the school-level written plans were not being intentionally implemented. Implementation of activities or strategies may have occurred as a part of what teachers or administrators routinely did, instead of being implemented because they were the part of a strategic plan.

### **Research Question 2 Summary**

This concluded the data analyses for the second research question to guide this study, To what extent has each school created a kindergarten transition plan? The data revealed no plan was created at the district level, however both schools had written plans as a part of the School Improvement plan. The School Improvement Plan was listed on the front page of both schools' web-sites, however, most participants were not aware of the existence of the plans. Bridge View fully implemented the practices listed in the school's plan, while River City participants reported implementing two out of three practices in the school's written plan. In light of the data that revealed most participants were not aware of the school level plan, it could be concluded that the

practices were not implemented as a result of the plans. The following section will address the third question to guide this study.

### **Research Question 3 Findings**

Research Question 3: How were kindergarten transition practices at each school described when compared to the literature on kindergarten transition practices?

#### **Do**

**Resources.** To ascertain information regarding how kindergarten transition programming at each school was compared to the literature on kindergarten transition programming, the researcher used a variety of resources. These resources included face-to-face interviews, transcriptions of the face-to-face interviews, information from the school's web-sites, data from the Schools' Improvement Plans, information obtained from a review of the literature, the Principal's Monthly Report and information ascertained from the and paper-and-pencil demographic survey administered at the conclusion of the face-to-face interview.

#### **Activities.**

***Programmatic transition practices offered by the schools.*** Transition practices offered by schools were identified in the literature based on pre-determined lists whereby teachers identified items as practices they used with their students or in the schools. The first list provided the percentage of kindergarten teachers reporting use of practices related to kindergarten transitions (see Table 29) (Pianta, Cox et al., 1999). The major difference between this list and the data collected in the current study was, in the current study, kindergarten teachers were not given a pre-determined list of transition practices from which to choose. Participants in the current study responded to open-ended questions during a face-to-face interviews. Since a pre-determined list was not used in the current study, omission of a transition practice, by a

Table 29

*Transition Practices From the Literature*

Transition practices	From the literature	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City Participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both Schools
Read written records	73.51%	50%	100%	80%	0%	60%	43%	25%	75%	58%
Home visit before school began	4.8%	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	14%	0%	13%	8%
Home visit after school began	7.69%	0%	33%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	13%	8%
Parent letter before school began	61.65%	50%	100%	80%	50%	80%	71%	50%	88%	75%
Parent letter after school began	88.08%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Talk with parent after school began	94.67%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 29 (continued)

Transition practices	From the literature	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City Participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both Schools
Met child and family before school began	47.91%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Sent flyer before school began	68.92%	0%	33%	20%	100%	40%	57%	50%	38%	42%
Sent flyer after school began	76.58%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Sent letter to child before school began	38.41%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Sent letter to child after school began	21.66%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Called child before school began	11.0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 29 (continued)

Transition practices	From the literature	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City Participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both Schools
Called child after school began	13.89%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Visited preschools	17.3%	100%	0%	40%	50%	80%	71%	75%	50%	58%
Preschoolers visited kindergarten classes	38.71%	100%	0%	40%	100%	100%	100%	100%	63%	75%
Open house before school began	62.26%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Open house after school began	81.5%	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	14%	0%	13%	8%
Kindergarten registration	59.75%	50%	33%	40%	100%	60%	71%	75%	50%	58%
Regular meetings of community	28.53%	50%	0%	20%	50%	0%	14%	50%	0%	17%

Table 29 (continued)

Transition practices	From the literature	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City Participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both schools
Coordinate curriculum with preschools	20.82%	0%	66%	40%	0%	40%	29%	0%	50%	33%
Facilitated parent's contact	65.33%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

*Note.* (Pianta, Cox, Taylor, & Early, 1999). Percentage of kindergarten teachers from the literature reporting use of practices related to kindergarten transition compared to percentage of administrators and kindergarten teachers in this study reporting use of practices related to kindergarten transitions. Admin.=Administrators.

participant in the current study, cannot be assumed to mean the teacher did not engage in that practice. A comparison between reported use in the literature was made with reported use by participants in the current study. Between school and within school comparisons were provided. Data were reported by administrator reported use, teacher reported use, and a combined reported use from both schools. Kindergarten teachers from Pianta, Cox et al.'s. (1999) study reported using a range of 5% to 95% of the practices on the pre-determined list. The participants in the current study reported using a range of 0% to 100% of the practices on the list. Common use of a specific practice was measured at 70% or more of the teachers reporting use of the practice (Pianta, Cox et al., 1999). Using this definition, teachers from Pianta, Cox et al.'s (1999) study reported common use of 5 of the 21 transition practices they were given to choose from. Using the same measurement indicators in the current study resulted in findings similar to those in Pianta, Cox et al.'s (1999) study, with all categories of participants in the current study reporting common use of either 4 or 5 of the 21 same transition practices. These results could be an underestimation of common use of transition practices reported in this section, due to the fact that participants in the current study were not asked if they implemented these transition practices. Reported participation in these practices was obtained from face-to-face interviews and from transcriptions of face-to-face open-ended interviews. Another factor that could contribute to an underestimation of common use of transition practices reported in the current study was the total number of participants at each school. With only 3 teachers at River City, 2 of the 3 teachers could have reported use of the same transition practice, which only calculated to 66% use. At Bridge View, 3 of the 5 could have reported use of the same transition practice, equating to 60%. In other words, a majority of teachers at both schools could have reported use of the

same transition practice, without meeting the 70% criteria to be considered common use (see Table 30).

Transition practices reported as common use in the literature that were not reported as common use by a combination of all participants in the current study were read written records, parent letter after school began, sent flyer after school began, and open house after school began. Transition practices reported as common use by a combination of all participants in the current study that were not reported as common use in the literature included parent letter before school began, preschoolers visited kindergarten classes and open house before school began. One common use practice found both in the literature and by a combination of all participants in the current study was talk with parent after school began. Three common use practices found at both schools were parent letter before school began, talk with parent after school began, and open house before school began. River City participants reported common use of one transition practice not reported by Bridge View participants, read written records. Bridge View participants reported common use of three transition practices not reported by River City participants, visited preschools, preschoolers visited kindergarten classes, and kindergarten registration. Common percentages of use found in both the literature and in the current study were home visit before school began (less than 9% in both), home visit after school began (less than 9% in both), talk with parent after school began (greater than 94% in both), and kindergarten registration (about 60% in both).

Approximately sixty-one transition practices not found in the literature were reportedly being used by at least one of the two schools in the current study. Use of these practices could be an underestimation of transition practices schools in the current study participated in due to the fact that participants were not asked if they implemented these transition practices. Reported

Table 30

*Common Use of Transition Practices from the Literature*

	From the literature	River City administrators	River City teachers	Bridge View administrators	Bridge View teachers	Administrators both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both schools
Number of transition practices reported as common use	5 out of 21	4 out of 21	4 out of 21	5 out of 21	5 out of 21	5 out of 21	4 out of 21	4 out of 21

*Note.* Number of transition practices reported as common use by participants in this study.

participation in these practices was taken from face-to-face interviews and from transcriptions of face-to-face open-ended interviews. An underestimation may have also occurred in reported common use of transition practices due to the total number of participants at each school. A majority of teachers at both schools could have reported use of the same transition practice, without meeting the 70% criteria to be considered common use (see Table 31).

Two transition practices found in the current study but not in the literature were reported as common use by all individual participant subgroups. These practices were staggered entry and establish positive relationship with students. Seven transition practices were reported as common use when all participants' responses were combined. These included student tour of school during staggered entry, teachers create class lists before open house, staggered entry, assess students during staggered entry, welcome informational packets, establish positive relationships with students and families, and get to know you activities.

Combined administrative responses from both schools indicated 4 common use practices not reported by combined teacher responses. These common use practices were Fast Start, pre-kindergarten parent transition night held at pre-kindergarten center, students informed of teacher assignments via class lists posted at open house, and uniforms and supplies provided for students. River City administrators reported 3 common use practices not reported by Bridge View administrators. These were pre-kindergarten parent transition night held at pre-kindergarten center, pre-kindergarten classes held in elementary school, and uniforms and supplies provided for students. Bridge View administrators reported 7 common use practices not reported by River City administrators. These included Fast Start, sibling placement, Exceptional Children's transition meetings, Exceptional Children's pre-kindergarten observations, student

Table 31

*Transition Practices from the Current Study*

Transition practices	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both schools
Names on seats and cubbies prior to student arrival	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	14%	0%	13%	8%
Takes anecdotal notes about students on roster at Open house before school begins	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	14%	0%	13%	8%
Poem / goody filled baggie on desks	0%	33%	20%	0%	20%	14%	0%	25%	17%
Question & answer box for parents at open house before school	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	14%	0%	13%	8%

Table 31 (continued)

Transition practices	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both schools
Question & answer box in classroom and at Class Chats	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	14%	0%	13%	8%
Fast Start	50%	66%	60%	100%	60%	71%	75%	63%	67%
Sibling placement	0%	0%	0%	100%	20%	43%	50%	13%	25%
Staff search for no shows	50%	0%	20%	50%	0%	14%	50%	0%	17%
Welcome call inviting families to open house	0%	0%	0%	50%	0%	14%	25%	0%	8%
Kindergarten open house before 4 <sup>th</sup> day of school	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	14%	0%	13%	8%
Exceptional children's transition meetings	0%	0%	0%	100%	20%	43%	50%	13%	25%

Table 31 (continued)

Transition practices	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both schools
Exceptional children's pre-kindergarten classroom observation	0%	0%	0%	100%	20%	43%	50%	13%	25%
Pre-Kindergarten parent transition night held at pre-kindergarten center	100%	0%	40%	50%	80%	71%	75%	50%	58%
Pre-kindergarten transition cards	0%	66%	40%	0%	60%	43%	0%	63%	42%
Talk with pre-kindergarten teachers about students	0%	0%	0%	0%	40%	29%	0%	25%	17%
Incoming night	50%	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%	25%	0%	8%

Table 31 (continued)

Transition practices	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both schools
Tour of school for early enrollees	50%	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%	25%	0%	8%
Student tour of school during staggered entry	50%	100%	80%	100%	60%	71%	75%	75%	75%
School tour for parents	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	14%	0%	13%	8%
Play dates	0%	0%	0%	50%	40%	43%	25%	25%	25%
Teachers create class lists before open house	50%	100%	80%	50%	80%	71%	50%	88%	75%
Teachers create class lists after staggered entry assessment data were collected	50%	0%	20%	50%	80%	71%	50%	50%	50%

Table 31 (continued)

Transition practices	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both schools
Students informed of teacher assignment via class lists posted at open house	50%	33%	40%	100%	20%	43%	75%	25%	42%
Staggered entry	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Assess students during staggered entry	100%	66%	80%	100%	100%	100%	100%	88%	92%
Welcome informational packets	50%	100%	80%	50%	80%	71%	50%	88%	75%
Pre-kindergarten classes housed in elementary school	100%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	50%	38%	42%
Uniforms and supplies provided for students	100%	66%	80%	50%	40%	43%	75%	50%	58%

Table 31 (continued)

Transition practices	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both schools
Parents walk students to classroom	0%	33%	20%	50%	40%	43%	25%	38%	33%
Teach and practice school wide rules	0%	66%	40%	0%	40%	29%	0%	50%	33%
Weekly family positive contact (call, note, post card)	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	14%	0%	13%	8%
Establish positive relationships with students and families	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
First parent communication positive	50%	66%	60%	0%	100%	71%	25%	88%	67%
Open door policy	50%	0%	20%	0%	60%	43%	25%	38%	33%
Welcoming environment	0%	33%	20%	0%	60%	43%	0%	50%	33%

Table 31 (continued)

Transition practices	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both schools
Respectful environment	0%	33%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	13%	8%
Make each child feel important	0%	33%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	13%	8%
School-wide morning meetings	0%	33%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	13%	8%
Teacher motivates students	0%	33%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	13%	8%
Attend to students' emotional needs at the beginning of the year	50%	33%	40%	0%	20%	14%	25%	25%	25%
Treasure box items based on student interests	0%	33%	20%	0%	20%	14%	0%	25%	17%
Use of literature to transition students	0%	66%	40%	0%	40%	29%	0%	50%	33%
Eat lunch with students	0%	66%	40%	0%	20%	14%	0%	38%	25%

Table 31 (continued)

Transition practices	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both schools
Get to know you activities	0%	100%	60%	50%	100%	86%	25%	100%	75%
Family bulletin board	0%	33%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	13%	8%
High expectations	0%	100%	60%	0%	100%	71%	0%	100%	67%
Newsletters	0%	33%	20%	0%	100%	71%	0%	75%	50%
Daily folder communication	0%	66%	40%	0%	60%	43%	0%	63%	42%
Share common interests/personal situations	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	14%	0%	13%	8%
Class Chats/Dress for Success	0%	0%	0%	0%	40%	29%	0%	25%	17%
Family curriculum or involvement nights	50%	33%	40%	0%	40%	29%	25%	38%	33%

Table 31 (continued)

Transition practices	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both schools
Gather family information from teachers of older siblings	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	14%	0%	13%	8%
Parent volunteers	0%	66%	40%	0%	80%	57%	0%	75%	50%
Parent conferences	0%	100%	60%	0%	80%	57%	0%	88%	58%
Greets Spanish speaking parents in Spanish	0%	33%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	13%	8%
Sustainability of information for late enrollees	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	14%	0%	13%	8%
Staff members eat in community restaurants	0%	0%	0%	50%	0%	14%	25%	0%	8%
Staff participates in community cultural events	0%	0%	0%	50%	0%	14%	25%	0%	8%

Table 31 (continued)

Transition practices	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both schools
Participates in community meetings	50%	0%	20%	50%	0%	14%	50%	0%	17%
Community partnerships	0%	0%	0%	50%	0%	14%	25%	0%	8%
Grandparent volunteers from community senior center	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	29%	50%	0%	17%

*Note.* Percent of reported use of transition practices by participants in this study. Admin.=Administrators.

tour of school during staggered entry, students informed of teacher assignments via class lists posted at open house, and grandparent volunteers from community senior center.

Combined teacher responses from both schools indicated 8 common use practices not reported by combined administrator responses. These responses were teachers create class lists before open house, welcome informational packets, first parent communication positive, get to know you activities, high expectations, newsletters, parent volunteers and parent conferences. River City teachers reported 2 common use practices not reported by Bridge View teachers which were: Student tour of school during staggered entry and pre-kindergarten classes housed in elementary school. Bridge View teachers reported 6 common use practices not reported by River City teachers. These included pre-kindergarten parent transition night held at the pre-kindergarten center, teachers create class lists after staggered entry assessment data were collected, assess students during staggered entry, first parent communication positive, newsletters and parent volunteers.

Participant responses from all River City participants compared to participant responses from all Bridge View participants yielded 6 common use practices reported overall at both schools, establish positive relationships with students and families, student tour of school during staggered entry, teachers create class lists before open house, staggered entry, assess students during staggered entry, and welcome informational packets. River City participants reported common use of two transition practices not reported as common use by Bridge View participants, pre-kindergarten classes housed in elementary school and uniforms and supplies provided for students. Bridge View participants reported common use of 7 transition practices not reported as common use by River City, newsletters, Fast Start, pre-kindergarten parent transition night held at pre-kindergarten center, teachers create class lists after staggered entry

assessment data were collected, first parent communication positive, get to know you activities and high expectations.

In summary, the current literature reported common usage of 5 out of a possible 21 transition practices, or 24%. Participants in the current study reported either 4 or 5 out of the same 21 transition practices, a range of 19% to 24%. Responses from the current study produced responses similar to the literature even though participants from the literature were given a check list of transition practices to choose from that participants in the current study were not provided. Participants in the current study reported at least 61 transition practices that were not previously reported in the literature. Teachers from both schools reported common use of more practices than did administrators, and Bridge View teachers and administrators reported common use of more practices than River City's teachers and administrators. At both schools, administrative common use transition practices tended to be in areas that involved the community or school-wide efforts, while teacher common use transition practices tended to be more directed towards students and families. This section examined transition practices offered by schools as compared to the literature. The next section examined specific characteristics influencing transitions at the schools as compared to the literature.

*Characteristics influencing transitions.* Positive student-teacher relationships helped children successfully maneuver their new social and academic environment (Burchinal et al., 2002; Hamre et al., 2001), and promoted the social and emotional health of children (Burchinal et al., 2002; Murray et al., 2008). Close and supportive relationships between teachers and students potentially mitigated risk factors, especially for children entering school at risk (Burchinal et al., 2002; Jerome et al., 2009; Pianta et al., 2004). In the list of transition practices reported in the literature none of them explicitly listed establishing positive relationships as a

transition practice even though some of the practices listed such as called child before school began could lead to the establishment of positive relationships. In the current study however, establish positive relationships with students and families was reported by 100% of the participants and was one of only four transition practices reported by 100% of participants. Other transition practices reported in the current study that could lead to the establishment of positive relationships included first parent communication positive, welcoming environment, respectful environment, make each child feel important, attend to students' emotional needs at the beginning of the year, and eat lunch with students. This alignment with the literature about the importance of establishing positive relationships boded well for both schools in the current study.

Home visits were reported in the literature as a transition practice (Early et al., 2001; Rous et al., 2010), that increased the likelihood of the development of close teacher child relationships (Meyer et al., 2006). Reported participation in home visits was similar between the literature and the current study. Reported usage was home visits before school began, less than 9% in both, and home visits after school began, less than 9% in both.

Children who demonstrated behavioral problems in kindergarten, but were still able to form a close relationship with their kindergarten teacher, were less likely to have behavioral difficulties in the future than children who had a negative relationship with their kindergarten teacher (Hamre et al., 2001). Even though behavioral outcomes were important to research, they were not the focus of this study.

Student teacher relationships were impacted by the teachers' ethnicity. Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta et al. (2000) found that non-minority teachers perceived more problems with students transitioning to kindergarten from higher minority/poverty pre-schools than did minority teachers. When teachers and children shared the same ethnicity, teachers were more likely to

report positive/close relationships with children than teachers of a different ethnicity (Murray et al., 2008; Saft et al., 2001). Even though ethnicity was important to research, it was not a focus of the current study.

All children benefited from positive teacher-child relationships, however children in poverty, and non-Caucasian children seemed to have profited more from positive relationships with their teachers than did Caucasian, middle class children (Burchinal et al., 2002). Poverty levels at both schools in the current study were greater than 90% and non-Caucasian percentages ranged from 72% at Bridge View to 90% at River City. With 100% of all participants reporting the importance of establishing positive relationships with students, this could be seen as a positive indicator for students at both schools.

Teachers were reportedly less involved with and were more likely engaged in increased conflicts with children who were male, African American, had greater hours of child care, were low academic achievers, and who displayed problem behaviors (Buyse et al., 2008; Jerome et al., 2009). Even though these factors were important to research, they were not a focus of the current study.

Teacher child relationships were found in the literature to be important for successful school transitions and for potentially mitigating risk factors for children entering kindergarten (Burchinal et al., 2002; Jerome et al., 2009; Pianta et al., 2004). One of the most prominent findings of the current study was that all participants reported establishing positive relationships with students as a transition practice used in the schools. In addition to establishing relationships with students participants also described ways in which they established relationships with parents. The alignment between the literature and the current study was a positive indicator for students transitioning into kindergarten at both schools.

Teacher certification was another characteristic found in the literature which influenced transitions to kindergarten for children. Public pre-school and kindergarten teachers who had an early-childhood degree reported using more practices, in all categories and with all degrees of intensity than without this credential (Nelson, 2004; Rous et al., 2010). None of the participants in the current study held an early-childhood degree, nor did they hold a birth to kindergarten early childhood or pre-kindergarten teaching license. The principal at River City along with Bridge View's assistant principal did not hold licenses in elementary education. A comparison of teachers with pre-school credentials and those without pre-school credentials could not be made in the current study because none of the participants held these credentials.

Teaching experience was a characteristic from the literature that reportedly influenced transitions to kindergarten for children. Teachers who had experience in specific grade levels had mediating effects for at-risk children, especially in reading (Crosnoe et al., 2010). Rous et al. (2010) found public pre-school teachers with 8 or more years' experience working with pre-school children used more transition practices than teachers with less than 8 years' experience. This teaching experience was also positively associated with the use of individualized practices both before and after the beginning of pre-school. Nelson (2004) reported a significant difference in the use of 3 out of 7 transition items between veteran and novice teachers. Veteran teachers were more likely to invite preschoolers and their parents to visit the kindergarten classrooms, than were novices, and veteran teachers were more likely to engage in other transition activities.

In the current study, River City teachers had exactly twice as much experience teaching kindergarten in the current school than did Bridge View teachers. River City teachers on average had more than twice as much experience teaching kindergarten in all schools than did Bridge View teachers. Even though River City teachers had more years' experience, Bridge View

teachers used more transition practices. This finding is a contradiction to previous findings in the literature. Another study correlated years of teaching experience and teacher educational attainment to teacher use of transition activities. Early et al. (2001) however did not find a statistical difference between the number of years of teaching experience and the level of educational attainment with the use of transitional practices. A comparison of educational attainment among the kindergarten teachers could not be made in the current study because all of the teachers except one held a bachelor's in elementary education, but none of them held master's degrees.

One comparison between administrative participants could be considered from the current study. The principal at Bridge View and the assistant principal at River City both held bachelor's degrees in elementary education. The assistant principal at Bridge View held a bachelor's degree in music education while the principal at River City held a bachelor's degree in health and physical education. From this group of 4 administrators, the two that held degrees in elementary education reported use of more transition practices than the two administrators who held bachelor's degrees in areas other than elementary education. Specifically Bridge View's principal and River City's assistant principal (bachelor's in elementary education) reported use of at least 27 and 26 transition practices respectfully, and Bridge View's assistant principal and River City's principal (bachelor's in other) reported use of at least 21 and 15 transition practices respectfully.

Staff development training, specifically in transitioning children to kindergarten, was another example of teacher characteristics that were used to predict a successful transition to kindergarten (Burchinal et al., 2002). The literature reported teachers who received specific professional development in transitioning children to kindergarten used more types of transition

practices (Early et al., 1999; Early et al., 2001). The literature also cited most schools or districts did not provide teachers with specialized professional development in transitioning students to kindergarten (Early et al., 1999; Nelson, 2004). This finding from the literature was corroborated in the current study. Only one Bridge View teacher reported having received specific professional development in transitioning children to kindergarten. When responding to teacher participant question 1: How would you describe your experiences with transition to kindergarten practices, procedures or activities at your school, the Bridge View teacher who reported having specific professional development in transitions to kindergarten reported use of more transition practices than all other participants from both schools. The teacher who received professional development reported the use of at least 34 transition practices with a range of at least 17 to 28 practices reportedly used by at least one of the other 6 Bridge View participants, and a range of at least 15 to 31 practices reportedly used by at least one of the River City participants. No evidence was reported of staff development provided for teachers, or of any planned staff development in the area of transitioning children to kindergarten. The current study reported fewer teachers received professional development in transitions to kindergarten than did previous research. On the paper-and-pencil demographic survey, one out of 8 teachers in the current study, or 13%, reported receiving specific professional development in transitioning children to kindergarten. The National Center for Early Development and Learning study found 22.7% of kindergarten teachers received information about kindergarten transition strategies and 24.1% received specialized professional development (Early et al., 1999; Early et al., 2001).

***Quantity of transition practices.*** In previous research Schulting et al. (2005) found the quantity, or number of transition practices offered to children and families was associated with positive academic achievement scores at the end of kindergarten. In the current study, Bridge

View participants reportedly offered a total of 64 transition practices to their students and families, while River City participants reportedly offered 51 transition practices to their students and families. Twelve of Bridge View's reported transition practices had previously been reported in research, while 52 were practices not previously reported in research. Eleven of River City's reported transition practices were previously reported in research, while 40 were practices not previously reported in research. An alignment of the data collected during the current research with previous research regarding quantity of transition practices suggested Bridge View kindergarteners would be associated with more positive academic achievement scores than River City's kindergarteners.

*Intensity of transition practices.* Early et al. (2001) categorized the transition practices listed in Table 6 by intensity. This resulted in five categories: (a) individualized practices before the beginning of school, (b) whole group practices before the beginning of school, (c) individualized practices after school began, (d) whole group practices after school began, and (e) coordination with pre-schools and the community. In a collaborative extension of this study, Rous et al. (2010) extended these categories to address the intensity of transition practices in public preschool, based on the time and effort required to implement a specific practice. High-intensity practices were identified as those that were individualized or required the coordination of multiple programs such as coordination with pre-schools and the community. Low-intensity practices were identified as those that were utilized for all children such as open house after the beginning of school and letters sent to families. These specifications resulted in the identification of 9 practices labeled low-intensity and 16 as high-intensity. Pre-kindergarten teachers from the literature chose responses from a pre-determined, restrictive list of kindergarten transition practices. Participants in the current study were not provided with this list therefore, responses in

the current study could be an underestimation of participation in kindergarten transition practices (see Table 32).

Rous et al. (2010) added three adapted practices from the original NCEdL Kindergarten Transition Survey and one additional practice to modify appropriateness for pre-school and based on lessening ambiguity from the original survey. In this survey public pre-school teachers reported a use range of 22% to 95% of the 25 practices. In the current study reported use of all participants and all combinations of participant groups ranged from 0% to 100% of the 25 practices. Common use of a specific practice was measured as 70% or more of the teachers reporting use of the practice. Rous et al. (2010) reported 70% of public pre-school teachers used 12 of the 25 transition practices included in the survey, with 7 of the practices considered high intensity, and 5 of the practices being low intensity (see Table 33).

Findings from the current study corroborated with findings from the literature in that pre-kindergarten teachers were more likely to participate in individualized, high intensity transition practices than kindergarten teachers (LaParo et al., 2003; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 1999; Rous et al., 2010). A comparison between the schools in the current study indicated similar numbers of reported usage of transition practices listed in the literature with similar degrees of intensity. Bridge View Elementary did report slightly more use in quantity of transition practices reported from the literature than River City.

The 61 kindergarten transition practices reported in the current study that were not previously reported in the literature were categorized in the same format as above (see Table 33). The researcher categorized each of the 61 practices by intensity and percentage of participants using the practice.

Table 32

*Categorized Transition Practices from the Literature*

Categorized transition practices	From the literature	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both schools
Individual & before school began (HI)										
Talked with child's parents before school began	84.70%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Met with child and family before school began	70.70%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Visited the child's home before school began	37.60%	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	14%	0%	13%	8%
Called the child before school began	30.60%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 32 (continued)

Categorized transition practices	From the literature	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both Schools
Individual & after school began (HI)										
Visited the child's home after school began	39.90%	0%	33%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	13%	8%
Talked with child's parents after school began	95.00%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Met with child and family after school began	73.10%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Called the child after school began	22.40%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Facilitated contacts between parents of children in class	73.20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 32 (continued)

Categorized transition practices	From the literature	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both Schools
Whole group & before school began (LI)										
Letter to child's parents before school began	73.30%	50%	100%	80%	50%	80%	71%	50%	88%	75%
Flyer or brochure sent before school began	72.40%	0%	33%	20%	100%	40%	57%	50%	38%	42%
Letter sent to child before school began	42.80%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Open house for parents and children before school began	74%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%



Table 32 (continued)

Categorized transition practices	From the literature	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both schools
Open house for parents and children after school began	76.90%	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	14%	0%	13%	8%
Coordination with programs and/or community (HI)										
Written records of child's past experiences made available	74.10%	50%	100%	80%	0%	60%	43%	25%	75%	58%
Written records of child's past experiences reviewed	72.40%	50%	100%	80%	0%	60%	43%	25%	75%	58%
Visits incoming children's pre-school programs	22.00%	100%	0%	40%	50%	80%	71%	75%	50%	58%

Table 32 (continued)

Categorized transition practices	From the literature	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both Schools
Informal contact with sending teachers about children	44.10%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Pre-school students visit kindergarten classes	28.90%	100%	0%	40%	100%	100%	100%	100%	63%	75%
Regular meetings among school, preschool and community	59.80%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Coordinated curriculum with preschools	48.00%	0%	66%	40%	0%	40%	29%	0%	50%	33%

*Note.* (Rous et al., 2010). Percentage of pre-kindergarten teachers from the literature reporting use of practices related to kindergarten transition by intensity compared to the percentage of administrators and kindergarten teachers in this study reporting use of practices related to kindergarten transitions by intensity. Admin.=Administrators; HI=High Intensity Transition Practices; LI=Low Intensity Transition Practices.

Table 33

*Categorized Common Use of Transition Practices from the Literature*

	From the literature	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both Schools
Total number of transition practices considered common use	12 out of 25	4 out of 25	5 out of 25	5 out of 25	5 out of 25	5 out of 25	6 out of 25	5 out of 25	5 out of 25	4 out of 25
Number of high intensity common use transition practices	7 out of 12	3 out of 4	3 out of 5	3 out of 5	2 out of 5	3 out of 5	3 out of 6	3 out of 5	3 out of 5	2 out of 4
Number of low intensity common use transition practices	5 out of 12	1 out of 4	2 out of 5	2 out of 5	3 out of 5	2 out of 5	3 out of 6	2 out of 5	2 out of 5	2 out of 4

*Note.* (Rous et al., 2010). Number of transition practices in current study considered common use categorized by total number and intensity and compared to pre-kindergarten teachers from the literature. Admin.=Administrators.

Table 34 correlated the 61 kindergarten transition practices identified in the current study that were not previously discussed in research with a level of intensity. The kindergarten transition practices were aligned with previous research through categorization based on criteria determined in previous research (Rous et al., 2010).

This section described how transition practices were categorized by intensity. The current study resulted in findings similar to previous research, whereby pre-kindergarten teachers reportedly used more individualized and high-intensity transition practices than did kindergarten teachers. Sixty-one transition to kindergarten practices identified in the current research that had not previously been reported in the literature were also categorized by intensity in this section. Due to the open-ended nature of the responses in the current study, omission of use of a transition practice cannot be equated to lack of participation in the practice. As a result, reported usage of kindergarten transition practices by participants in the current study may be under reported. The following section described how barriers described in the current study were compared to the literature on kindergarten transition programming.

***Barriers to implementing transition practices.*** The literature revealed barriers kindergarten teachers listed as reasons hindering the implementation of kindergarten transition practices (Pianta, Cox et al., 1999). Data from research was compared with data obtained from participants in the current study. Participants in the current study were not directly asked about barriers to implementing transitions. The information reported was what participants supplied via the open-ended format of the current comparative case study with a phenomenological approach. Due to the open-ended questioning format a zero percent response cannot be assumed to represent participants' did not see the item as a barrier to implementing transition practices to kindergarten (see Table 35).

Table 34

*Categorized Transition Practices from the Current Study*

Categorized transition practices	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both schools
Individual and Before School Began (HI)									
Names on seats and cubbies prior to student arrival	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	14%	0%	13%	8%
Takes anecdotal notes about students on roster at open house before school begins	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	14%	0%	13%	8%
Fast Start	50%	66%	60%	100%	60%	71%	75%	63%	67%
Sibling placement	0%	0%	0%	100%	20%	43%	50%	13%	25%
Welcome call inviting families to come to Open House	0%	0%	0%	50%	0%	14%	25%	0%	8%
Tour of school for early enrollees	50%	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%	25%	0%	8%

Table 34 (continued)

Categorized transition practices	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both Schools
Individual and After School Began (HI)									
Staff search for no shows	50%	0%	20%	50%	0%	14%	50%	0%	17%
Teachers create class lists after staggered entry assessment data was collected	50%	0%	20%	50%	80%	71%	50%	50%	50%
Staggered entry	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Assess students during staggered entry	100%	66%	80%	100%	100%	100%	100%	88%	92%
Uniforms and supplies provided for students	100%	66%	80%	50%	40%	43%	75%	50%	58%
Parents walk students to classroom	0%	33%	20%	50%	40%	43%	25%	38%	33%

Table 34 (continued)

Categorized transition practices	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both Schools
Weekly family positive contact (call, note, post card)	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	14%	0%	13%	8%
Establish positive relationships with students and families	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
248 First parent communication positive	50%	66%	60%	0%	100%	71%	25%	88%	67%
Make each child feel important	0%	33%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	13%	8%
Attend to students' emotional needs at the beginning of the year	50%	33%	40%	0%	20%	14%	25%	25%	25%
Treasure box items based on student interests	0%	33%	20%	0%	20%	14%	0%	25%	17%

Table 34 (continued)

Categorized transition practices	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both Schools
Daily folder communication	0%	66%	40%	0%	60%	43%	0%	63%	42%
Share common interests/personal situations	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	14%	0%	13%	8%
Gather family information from teachers of older siblings	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	14%	0%	13%	8%
Parent volunteers	0%	66%	40%	0%	80%	57%	0%	75%	50%
Parent conferences	0%	100%	60%	0%	80%	57%	0%	88%	58%
Greets Spanish speaking parents in Spanish	0%	33%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	13%	8%
Sustainability of information for late enrollees	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	14%	0%	13%	8%

Table 34 (continued)

Categorized transition practices	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both schools
Whole group and before school began (LI)									
Poem/goody filled baggie on desks	0%	33%	20%	0%	20%	14%	0%	25%	17%
Question and answer box for parents at Open House before School	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	14%	0%	13%	8%
Incoming night	50%	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%	25%	0%	8%
Play dates	0%	0%	0%	50%	40%	43%	25%	25%	25%
Teachers create class lists before open house	50%	100%	80%	50%	80%	71%	50%	88%	75%
Students informed of teacher assignment via class lists posted at open house	50%	33%	40%	100%	20%	43%	75%	25%	42%

Table 34 (continued)

Categorized transition practices	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both Schools
Welcome informational packets	50%	100%	80%	50%	80%	71%	50%	88%	75%
Whole group and after school starts (LI)									
Question and answer box in classroom and at Class Chats	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	14%	0%	13%	8%
Kindergarten open house before 4 <sup>th</sup> day of school	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	14%	0%	13%	8%
Student tour of school during staggered entry	50%	100%	80%	100%	60%	71%	75%	75%	75%
School tour for Parents	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	14%	0%	13%	8%
Teach and practice school wide rules	0%	66%	40%	0%	40%	29%	0%	50%	33%

Table 34 (continued)

Categorized transition practices	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both Schools
Open door policy	50%	0%	20%	0%	60%	43%	25%	38%	33%
Welcoming environment	0%	33%	20%	0%	60%	43%	0%	50%	33%
Respectful environment	0%	33%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	13%	8%
School wide morning meetings	0%	33%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	13%	8%
Teacher motivates students	0%	33%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	13%	8%
Use of literature to transition students	0%	66%	40%	0%	40%	29%	0%	50%	33%
Eat lunch with Students	0%	66%	40%	0%	20%	14%	0%	38%	25%
Get to know you Activities	0%	100%	60%	50%	100%	86%	25%	100%	75%
Family bulletin Board	0%	33%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	13%	8%

Table 34 (continued)

Categorized transition practices	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both Schools
High expectations	0%	100%	60%	0%	100%	71%	0%	100%	67%
Newsletters	0%	33%	20%	0%	100%	71%	0%	75%	50%
Class Chats / Dress for Success	0%	0%	0%	0%	40%	29%	0%	25%	17%
Family curriculum or involvement nights	50%	33%	40%	0%	40%	29%	25%	38%	33%
Coordination with programs and/or community (HI)									
Exceptional children's transition meetings	0%	0%	0%	100%	20%	43%	50%	13%	25%
Exceptional children's pre-kindergarten classroom observation	0%	0%	0%	100%	20%	43%	50%	13%	25%

Table 34 (continued)

Categorized transition practices	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both schools
Pre-kindergarten parent transition night held at pre-kindergarten center	100%	0%	40%	50%	80%	71%	75%	50%	58%
Pre-kindergarten transition cards	0%	66%	40%	0%	60%	43%	0%	63%	42%
Talk with pre-kindergarten teachers about students	0%	0%	0%	0%	40%	29%	0%	25%	17%
Pre-kindergarten classes housed in elementary school	100%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	50%	38%	42%
Staff members eat in community restaurants	0%	0%	0%	50%	0%	14%	25%	0%	8%
Staff participates in community cultural events	0%	0%	0%	50%	0%	14%	25%	0%	8%

Table 34 (continued)

Categorized transition practices	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools	All participants both Schools
Participates in neighborhood community meetings	50%	0%	20%	50%	0%	14%	50%	0%	17%
Community partnerships	0%	0%	0%	50%	0%	14%	25%	0%	8%
Grandparent volunteers from community senior center	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	29%	50%	0%	17%

*Note.* (Rous et al., 2010). Admin.=Administrators. HI=High Intensity Transition Practices; LI=Low Intensity Transition Practices.

Table 35

*Transition Barriers from the Literature*

Transition practices with barriers	From the literature	River City admin.	River City teachers	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers
Class lists too late	55.5%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Summer work, no salary	47.18%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Transition plan not available	42.57%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
*District transition plan not available	n/a	50%	100%	100%	80%
*School transition plan not available	n/a	100%	66%	50%	100%
Takes too much time	37.10%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Dangerous to visit homes	32.75%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Parents don't bring child to school	31.38%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Can't reach parents	26.58%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 35 (continued)

Transition practices with barriers	From the literature	River City admin.	River City teachers	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers
Parents not interested	25.38%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Parents cannot read	20.52%	0%	0%	0%	0%
No school district support	20.44%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Materials not available	18.89%	0%	0%	0%	0%
I choose not to do it	10.81%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Preschool teachers not interested	8.68%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Concern about negative expectations	6.89%	0%	0%	0%	0%

*Note.* (Pianta, Cox, Taylor, & Early, 1999). The literature specified “Transition plan not available.” For the purposes of these data analyses report was specified by district transition plan or school transition plan. Admin.= Administrators.

In the literature, 42.57% of respondents cited transition plan not available a barrier. For a richer analysis of the current data, existence of a written transition to kindergarten plan was drilled down to a district plan and a school plan. Eighty percent of River City's participants and 86% of Bridge View's participants reported either no plan existed, or they did not know if a district level plan existed. This is a combined 83% of participants from both schools reporting a district level written plan did not exist. Based on data collection procedures during the current study, the district did not appear to have a written transition to kindergarten plan. These percentages were twice the amount reported in the literature. If, as indicated through the current research, no district level plan existed, this would validate the high percentage of respondents citing no written transition plan was available. As for the school level plan, both schools did have a written transition to kindergarten plan in the School's Improvement Plan. Three out of four administrators reported the school did not have a written transition to kindergarten plan. Only the principal at Bridge View reported having a written transition to kindergarten plan. Sixty-six percent of the teachers at River City and 100% of Bridge View's teachers reported the school did not have a written transition to kindergarten plan. This was a combined 83% of participants from both schools reporting a school level written transition to kindergarten plan did not exist. This percentage was the same as the percentage reported for a district level plan, however in this case school level written transition to kindergarten plans did exist in both Schools' Improvement Plans. Just as with the district level plan, the number of participants in this study reporting a plan did not exist was twice the number reported in the literature. Discovering the reason administrators and teachers from both schools were not aware of the schools' written transition to kindergarten plans, or why the number in the current study was twice as many as in the literature was beyond the scope of this study.

In the literature, the most frequently cited barrier preventing improved transitions was class lists generated too late (Pianta, Cox et al., 1999). This was cited by 55.5% of respondents in the literature. In the current study, approximately 60% of participants which included all administrators from both schools, one kindergarten teacher from River City, and two from Bridge View remarked on students enrolling late or at the last minute. Late enrollees was not listed in previous literature as a barrier, however late enrollees could constitute a reason for generating class lists too late to provide transition practices to incoming kindergarteners. In the literature respondents cited class lists generated too late as a barrier preventing improved transitions for kindergarteners. In the current study the comment regarding late enrollees was listed as a reason for not creating class lists earlier, but that was not explicitly identified as a barrier for preventing improved transitions for kindergarteners. If late enrollees were correlated with class lists generated too late, the percentage of teachers reporting this barrier in the literature (55%) correlated with the percentage of teachers reporting this barrier in the current study (60%).

Five participants from Bridge View (both administrators and 3 kindergarten teachers) and the principal from River City had a different perspective regarding class lists being generated late, a perspective that prevented it from being a barrier. All five participants from Bridge View reported that in years prior to the 2012-2013 school year, they used the staggered entry days to assess students formally and informally. This gave them the opportunity to know their students, since due to late enrollments they had not previously had this opportunity. As Bridge View's principal said, "We use staggered entry days as a transition time to get to know the students." After the three staggered enrollment days, the teachers then met with their combined knowledge of students' academic abilities, mental health and behavioral observations to create classrooms that were more well-balanced than just randomly assigning students to classrooms. Bridge

View's principal said this process was her preference for assigning students to classrooms, because "Who is in what class is crucial here." One Bridge View teacher noted that when classroom assignments were created after staggered entry days, the kindergarten teachers hosted another, kindergarten only, open house on the night before the 4<sup>th</sup> day of school. During the 2012-2013 school year, Bridge View did not follow this procedure. The teachers placed students in the classrooms prior to open house. The principal stated the only thing she liked about the way they did it during the 2012-2013 school year was it made open house more traditional for kindergarten students and their families. Four of the five reporting Bridge View participants (all except for the assistant principal) commented on the classrooms not being as balanced this year. All three Bridge View kindergarten teachers said they thought it was better at open house and as a result, they knew their parents better and their parents knew them better. As one Bridge View teacher stated, "It's better for families to see their child's name posted at a table or up in a cubby that they already felt, this is where I'm going to be. This is where I belong." Another kindergarten teacher remarked in years past, it was really hard at open house not knowing which students were going to be assigned to their classrooms. Two of the three kindergarten teacher participants explicitly stated they preferred having class lists prior to open house. The third teacher respondent said "It depends on the kids." She said her feelings were mixed because the classes were not balanced, but she feels it was good for parents and students at open house to already know their teacher. She added that in years past "It was cool for them to go to each classroom." The principal at River City reported his teachers used staggered entry data to create class lists following staggered entry days. All other River City participants, however, reported class lists were made by teachers prior to open house.

In addition to late enrollees, three other barriers to implementing kindergarten transitions were implied during the face-to-face interviews that were not found in the previous literature. These three were transient population, students in poverty, and parents/ families with negative connotations about school. These four barriers, not previously found in the literature, were discussed, but none of them were specifically identified as being barriers to transitioning children to kindergarten. Regarding a transient population, as shown in Table 20, at the end of the 2011-2012 school year River City had a transient rate of 14.66%, which was far less than Bridge View's 37.08%. The Principal's Monthly Report was used as a resource to gather transient rate data. The transient rate was calculated by adding the number of students who enrolled after the beginning of the school year to the number of students who withdrew after the beginning of the school year and dividing the sum of the two numbers by the total number of students.

Participants at both schools discussed challenges with transient populations, even though the principal at River City perceived they enrolled more children than they withdrew, and that the school was not very transient. He said, "They might come in, but they don't go out." The data showed River City enrolled 23 students after the beginning of the 2011-2012 school year and withdrew 27 students. Bridge View did, however, enroll more than they withdrew. Bridge View enrolled 97 students after the school year began, and withdrew 71 students. Students in poverty was another implied barrier at both schools not found in the literature. Participants at both schools described how students lacked supplies and uniforms needed at school due to their parents' financial situation. The final barrier revealed in the current study that was not found in the literature was parents/families with negative connotations about school.

Only one barrier found in the literature was identified in the current study as a barrier. The identification of transition plan not available, in the current study was made by a response to

a question on the paper-and-pencil demographic survey. At least 80% of the participants at both schools in the current study reported the school did not have a written transition to kindergarten plan, when in fact both schools did have a written transition to kindergarten plan as a part of the School's Improvement Plan. Four barriers (late enrollees, transient population, students in poverty, and parents/ families with negative connotations about school) not listed in the literature were implied as barriers during the face-to-face interviews in the current study. These barriers were late enrollees, transient population, students in poverty, and parents/families with negative connotations about school. This concluded how barriers to kindergarten transition programming faced by participants at each school were described as compared to barriers found in the literature. The following section looked how environmental impacts reported in the literature compared to what was reported in the current study.

*Environmental impacts.* The literature cited internal and external environmental relationships such as relationships between and within peers, teachers, schools, families, neighborhoods and the community held as much responsibility for a child's successful transition to kindergarten as the child himself. When these relationships were aligned to support a child's early schooling, successful transitions to school and subsequently trajectories for a positive school experience were more likely to occur (Pianta et al., 1996).

The literature discussed how positive and open communication between the environmental contexts could help foster the quality of relationships between the environmental contexts. An example provided in the literature that contributed to open communication and positive relationships which could help increase the likelihood of early school success was communication between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers and communication between teachers and families (Pianta et al., 1996). Open and expansive communication was important

because a child's transition to kindergarten may not only impact him but may have affected his parents and other family members as well (Wildenger et al., 2011). Teachers at both schools in the current study reported evidences of establishing relationships between the environmental contexts. Only one area reported appeared to be strained, or not successful. That area was communication between pre-kindergarten teachers and kindergarten teachers. Reportedly, there was a district initiated pre-kindergarten/kindergarten committee that meet monthly or several times a year. Data from the current study revealed the purpose of this committee was to bring pre-kindergarten teachers together with kindergarten teachers for communication. Teachers in the current study reported this committee as a venue for them to keep the pre-kindergarten teachers updated regarding kindergarten curricular expectations. Participants reported "a disconnect" between the two groups of teachers and that no resolve came from the committee. The committee was reportedly disbanded and has not met since the 2011-2012 school year. One exception to pre-kindergarten teacher/kindergarten teacher relationships was reported at River City. The school district housed two pre-kindergarten classrooms at River City during the 2012-2013 school year. Teachers at River City, even when reporting a lack of communication and understanding with pre-kindergarten teachers in the pre-kindergarten centers, reported a collaborative and cohesive relationship with the two pre-kindergarten teachers and their classrooms held in the elementary school. One-hundred percent of the participants from River City made positive remarks regarding the pre-kindergarten classrooms housed in the schools, and they all thought students transitioning to them from the in-house pre-kindergarten would have transition advantages other in-coming kindergarteners would not have.

The district pre-kindergarten centers also communicated with the elementary schools by sending transition cards with the students' cumulative records. Pre-kindergarten teachers

reportedly wrote information regarding the students on the transition card they thought the kindergarten teachers might find helpful regarding the child. As one River City teacher remarked, however, the cards left her not feeling “connected with the child.”

Teachers and administrators from both schools reported a number of ways in which they created and maintained positive open communication with families. Participants from both schools reported having an open door policy, allowing parents to walk students to class during the first days, holding face-to-face conferences, sending weekly or monthly newsletters, calling parents, making home visits and hosting family nights at the school. Participants from River City talked about maintaining updated communication with parents via web-sites, and one teacher from River City who spoke Spanish remarked on greeting Spanish speaking parents in their native language. One teacher from Bridge View had a question and answer box set up in her classroom. When parents had questions they were not comfortable asking they put the question in the box. The teacher compiled all the questions from the box and formulated responses. She then sent the questions and answers to all the parents in the room. This same teacher maintained positive communication with all parents every week. She had a rotating schedule of mailing a post card, sending a positive note home in the child’s folder, or calling the parent. Every week every child received one of the three modes of positive communication. She kept the children on a rotating schedule so they each received a phone call, post card and positive note once every three weeks.

Communication and collaboration within the community was also reported in the current study. The principals at both schools reported going into the community to speak at community/neighborhood meetings. The principal at Bridge View also shared that they had grandparent volunteers from the community’s senior center helping in the kindergarten

classrooms. Another unique community involvement was shared by Bridge View's principal. She encouraged her teachers to eat at restaurants in the community on teacher workdays, and to attend cultural events held at a nearby lake. This allowed families to see and interact with the teachers in the community and neighborhood.

The development and nurturing of positive relationships among home, peers, families, neighborhoods and communities were important, as supportive and involved families was as important or perhaps more important than the child's cognitive, social and behavioral skills in predicting school success (Pianta et al., 2003; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). One-hundred percent of participants from both schools in the current study reported on the establishment of positive relationships with families and children as an important part of the transition to kindergarten processes and activities held at the schools. This was only one of 4 kindergarten transition practices reportedly used by 100% of all participants in the current study. One way participants in the current study reportedly established positive relationships with children and families was by ensuring their first communication with the parents was positive. As one Bridge View teacher explained, if she does have to communicate a message with a more negative tone "the parents are more receptive to that because they have already heard the positive." This one transition practice which helped ensure the maintenance of positive parent/teacher relationships was a pivotal part of the transition processes reported at both schools since negative notifications were found to disrupt parent/teacher relationships and undermined parental support for the teacher (Pianta, Cox et al., 1999).

Previous research showed all stakeholders from the environmental contexts, specifically parents should be involved in the development of the school's written transition to kindergarten plan. The plans should be uniquely designed to fit the needs of the families, school and

community involved (MacDonald, 2008). Parent comfort levels were reportedly increased when they were involved in the transition planning process (McWayne et al., 2004) and when parent comfort levels were increased, parents were more likely to be involved in and supportive of their child's transition, increasing their child's likelihood of school success (McWayne et al., 2004; Schulting et al., 2005; Sy et al., 2005). Implementation of the transition plan increased when parents were involved in the planning process. Since transition planning increased parental involvement and subsequently academic achievement, all schools should develop and implement transition plans (Schulting et al., 2005). Data from the current study revealed both schools had written transition to kindergarten plans as a part of the overall School's Improvement Plans, and both schools listed coordination between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programs as an environmental context strategy. At least 80% of participants from both schools reported either the school did not have a transition to kindergarten plan, or they did not know if the school had a plan. Only one participant from each school (Bridge View's principal and a River City teacher) indicated the existence of a plan. No data were collected in the current study to determine which school personnel were involved in the creation of the plans, or if parents were involved. The number of school personnel unaware of the plans' existence, could be an indicator that members from the broader environmental context did not participate in the creation of the plans. No data were collected in the current study to determine if parents had an awareness of the plans.

Other environmental factors that impacted student likelihood of success were teacher initiated transition practices. Transition practices found to most effectively facilitate successful transitions into kindergarten, were those that reached out, back in time, and with appropriate intensity (Pianta, Cox et al., 1999; Rous et al., 2010). In the current study Bridge View participants overall reported common use of more high intensity transition practices than did

River City's participants. Bridge View administrators reported common use of more high intensity practices than did River City's administrators, as did Bridge View's teachers when compared to River City's teachers. Administrators and teachers reported the same number of high intensity practices as common use, but administrators reported more common use of school-wide types of high intensity practices, such as Fast Start, than teachers. Teachers were more likely to report common use of student specific high intensity practices such as read written records (see Table 36).

Previous studies revealed pre-kindergarten teachers were more likely to use transition practices than kindergarten teachers (LaParo et al., 2003; Pianta et al., 2001; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 1999; Rous et al., 2010). From the list of 25 transition practices given to pre-kindergarten teachers (Rous et al., 2010), pre-school teachers reported a use range of 22% to 95%. Aligning responses from the current study teachers reported a use range of 0% to 100%. In the literature Rous et al. (2010) reported 70% (or common use) of public pre-school teachers used 12 of the 25 practices with 7 high intensity practices and 5 low intensity practices. In the current study kindergarten teachers from both schools commonly used 5 of the 25 practices, 3 of which were high intensity, and 2 of which were low intensity. Findings in the current study corroborated with the findings from the literature. Caution must be used when interpreting these results, as the pre-kindergarten teachers in the previous research were given a check list to identify transition practices they used, while kindergarten teachers in the current study were not provided with a check list, rather the responses were derived from open-ended questions.

Findings from NCEDL's two year kindergarten intervention project, revealed the most attended kindergarten transition activity was pre-kindergarten children visiting kindergarten classrooms, with the least attended kindergarten transition activity being kindergarten orientation

Table 36

*Common Use Categorized by Intensity*

	River City admin.	River City teachers	All River City participants	Bridge View admin.	Bridge View teachers	All Bridge View participants	Admin. both schools	Teachers both schools
Reported common use of high intensity transition practices	9	7	8	10	11	10	9	9
Reported common use of low intensity transition practices	1	7	5	5	7	9	4	8

*Note.* Admin.= Administrators.

(LaParo et al., 2003). In the current study all Bridge View participants and the administrative participants from River City reported hosting pre-kindergarten children visiting kindergarten classrooms. This constituted 9 out of 12, or 75% of all participants reporting use of this practice, which equated to common use. Eight of the 9 reporting participants said only the district's pre-kindergarten centers visited kindergarten classrooms. A correlation with the literature could not be made because student participation or attendance in kindergarten transition practices was important to research, but was beyond the scope of the current study.

The least attended transition activity, kindergarten orientation (LaParo et al., 2003) was also corroborated in the current study. The schools in the current study did not offer kindergarten orientation. The majority of Bridge View participants, and the administrative participants from River City reported the district's pre-kindergarten centers held kindergarten transition nights. River City's administrators reported they also go to private pre-kindergarten facilities to discuss the school's specific magnet program. The number of parents attending the pre-kindergarten parent transition meetings held at pre-kindergarten centers were important to research, but were not collected as a part of the current study. The only other evidence of a variation of kindergarten orientation was reported by River City's principal. He reported an incoming night. During incoming night parents could obtain information about the school and speak with administrators and counselors. No other elaboration or details regarding participation in incoming night were collected in the current study.

A majority of reporting participants cited only the district's pre-kindergarteners participated in kindergarten classroom visits, and the kindergarten transition nights were held at the district's pre-kindergarten centers. Students attending the district's pre-kindergarten centers were therefore offered a disproportionate number of opportunities not offered to children

involved in pre-kindergarten experiences in settings other than the district's pre-kindergarten centers. One possible explanation could be that these children were already in the system, so the schools knew who these children were.

Similarly to the previous research in which LaParo et al. (2003) found all teachers reported the kindergarten transition practices they used helpful, teachers from both schools in the current study cited kindergarten transition practices were beneficial to children and their families. Participants from both schools described the school environments as “supportive for children and families” during the transition to kindergarten.

Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2005) reported benefits when fathers were actively engaged in their child's formal schooling. Participants from both schools in the current study talked about parent conferences and parent volunteers but only one Bridge View teacher specifically mentioned the role of a father in this scenario. This teacher reported that a “mother and father from one family volunteers one day a week in the classroom.”

Positive associations between parents who volunteered in their child's classrooms with their child's mathematical problem solving were previously found (Hindman et al., 2013). This resulted from parents being engaged in the classroom and observing instruction and problem solving activities. Four teachers from Bridge View reported the use of parent volunteers in the classroom as did two River City teachers. One of the River City teachers, however, remarked on a direct correlation with the previous research regarding mathematical problem solving. She said:

I remember even before I went back and got my teaching degree. I volunteered in my children's room and I was more apt to . . . they always had me playing a math game with the kids and so then I would go home and start thinking of math games to do with my children.

Hindman et al. (2013) found providing trainings and workshops for parents positively associated with students' vocabulary development. Teachers at both schools in the current study talked about family academic nights, but only two Bridge View teachers actually mentioned practices that were closely aligned with parent trainings. These teachers had quarterly activities called Class Chats, or Dress for Success. During these lunch-time meetings, the teachers reviewed report card expectations for the upcoming quarter with parents. The teachers explained what items on the report cards meant and gave examples of how to help their child reach benchmark expectations for the quarter. The teachers discussed areas the class as a whole was struggling with to give parents a specific area on which to focus.

The literature revealed that parents of children with special needs often had more concerns than parents of children from the general education population (McIntyre et al., 2010). One Bridge View teacher reported a similar finding. She said:

Some parents contact you just as soon as they register their kids. They will talk to the EC staff and say my child already has an IEP, I'm worried about kindergarten. They're already having trouble with these skills. The EC staff then gets a member of the kindergarten team to have a parent conference before the beginning of the year.

Home visits were a high intensity practice found minimally practiced in the literature and in the current study. Schulting (2009) found parents were more likely to accept invitations to school and reported lessened parent concerns following home visits. One Bridge View teacher reportedly made home visits to families she was familiar with over the summer. She knew she would have younger siblings assigned to her classroom the following year, so she made home visits during the summer to ensure the child had the needed school supplies and materials. A

River City teacher who reported conducting home visits did so in a less formal manner than did the Bridge View teacher. The River City teacher said:

Sometimes I just show up in the neighborhood at people's doors. Once I knocked on a door and the parent told me to come on in, thinking I was her neighbor. I stepped in the door and they were like who's that? Shaneya was like, that's my teacher. You should have seen the look on their faces. They had never seen my face. It was almost halfway through the year and I am trying to get them to come in and I'm like ok, I'm going to make sure they see my face.

This River City teacher explained how once the parents saw her face and understood she cared about their child, they were more receptive to her.

Previous research revealed other findings impacting children's successful transition to kindergarten and subsequent school career including parental educational attainment (Fantuzzo et al., 2000; Wildenger et al., 2011) Asian family home learning supports (Sy et al., 2005), and economically disadvantaged children who were involved in organized activities outside the home (Cooper et al., 2010). These and other areas regarding transitions to kindergarten were important, but they were not included in the data collected for the current study. Cooper et al. (2010) found poverty impacted achievement levels in Caucasian, African American and Hispanic children. One Bridge View teacher reportedly felt more than just poverty impacted children's achievement levels. She said, "Even economically stable and well-educated people don't know what to expect for their children in kindergarten because of the constantly changing and increasing expectations". She elaborated on this statement by saying well-educated parents at her child's daycare still viewed kindergarten as it was when they attended kindergarten, completely unaware of the increased expectations and demands for accountability in kindergarten.

This section responded to research question 3 by examining the environmental impacts found in the current study when compared to the literature. The establishment of positive relationships was reported by 100% of the participants in the current study. The development of these relationships was reported in all context of the environment ranging from developing relationships with children to community partnerships. The next section will examine discontinuities between the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten environments and how they were described in the current research when compared to the literature.

*Discontinuities between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten settings.* Previous research showed discontinuities between pre-kindergarten settings and kindergarten settings impacted the child's transition to formal schooling. These discontinuities arose from pre-kindergarten environments which were designed to encourage social and emotional development in children, and in essence emulated the culture of the family. Conversely, children entered kindergarten classrooms focused on higher demands for academic attainment (Graue, 1999; Love et al., 1992; National Education Goals Panel, 1998). These specific discontinuities were reported by 3 Bridge View teachers in the current study. These teachers reported the need to narrow the cognitive, behavioral and social gap between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten environments. One Bridge View teacher reported her perspective as a parent of a pre-school aged child. She said:

I'm finding out as a parent and a teacher, there is a huge gap between what the child development locations are allowed to do legally to prepare them for school and what is expected of them by the end of kindergarten.

Children with supportive family units had a better chance of successfully transitioning into the cultural and academic discontinuities children found in kindergarten classrooms when

compared to pre-school environments (Love et al., 1992; National Education Goals Panel, 1998). Family support was beyond the scope of the current study.

Heterogeneous children from a wide-array of pre-school experiences (public pre-schools, private child care centers, private kindergartens, home settings, Head Start, etc.) exacerbated the discontinuous kindergarten environments (Love et al., 1992; McCabe et al., 2011). Bridge View's principal reported about 60% of her students attended pre-kindergarten. She attributed this high attendance rate to low socio-economic issues and learning disabilities which allowed them to qualify for pre-kindergarten services. She reported most of these 60% attended the school system's pre-kindergarten centers with very few of them attending private pre-kindergartens. Of the ones attending private pre-kindergartens, she reported they mostly attended a church based center. For the remainder of the students entering kindergarten Bridge View's principal said, "Almost half of them are coming from home." River City's assistant principal concurred with the statement. She reported, "A lot of our students haven't been in a (formal) pre-kindergarten environment." A Bridge View teacher reported correspondence regarding incoming students from the district's pre-kindergarten centers but said we "Don't get any correspondence from private pre-kindergartens." Another Bridge View teacher spoke about the inability to contact families of children not enrolled in the district's pre-kindergarten centers because "If they're in private pre-kindergarten or just at home we don't know who they are."

One Bridge View teacher elaborated on the differences between pre-kindergarten environments. She said:

You can't make a blanket statement that says my child went to pre-kindergarten so they're ready (for school) because it depends on if they were in a babysitting daycare, a

daycare that implemented NC Reads or the NC pre-kindergarten curriculum, or a private day care that starts implementing what the kids are ready for.

Student characteristics such as age, experience and home language usage also varied the pre-school experiences students brought with them (Graue, 1999; Wesley et al., 2003). Other factors which exacerbated the discontinuities' between the pre-school and kindergarten environments were: Organizational discontinuities (Pianta et al., 2003; Wesley et al., 2003), an increased student teacher ratio along with a decreased amount of family involvement and connection to the school (Pianta et al., 2003), a reduced amount of parent contacts from pre-kindergarten to kindergarten (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 1999), home life (Sytsma et al., 2001; Wildenger et al., 2008), and the effects of impoverished, at-risk, minority children's homes (Wesley et al., 2003). Data on these factors that exacerbated discontinuous environments were not collected in the current study.

This was the final section of the Kindergarten Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) that was analyzed for research question 3: How were kindergarten transition practices at each school described when compared to the literature on kindergarten transition practices? The remaining categories and components from the Kindergarten Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) addressing the comparison of kindergarten transition practices in the current study with the literature were thoroughly discussed in responses to other research questions and were not repeated in the current research question. This concluded the components and categories of the Kindergarten Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) that was analyzed for research question 3. The following section described the researcher's analysis of question 3 through the themes of communication and participant perceptions revealed through the lived experiences of participants.

## **Themes**

This section examined research question 3 through the combined themes of communication and participant perceptions. In previous research, data on use of transition practices were collected and communicated by providing teachers with a pre-determined checklist of transition practices. Teachers in previous research checked the items on the lists they used. Data collection in the current study allowed participants to create and discuss open-ended responses regarding their use of kindergarten transition practices. This comparative case study with a phenomenological approach resulted in broader perceptions of the questions being asked and wider communication of transition practices being used in classrooms and by schools than had previously been communicated in the literature.

Similar findings occurred when comparing barriers reported in the literature with barriers found in the current study. The method of data collection had to be considered. In the literature participants were provided with a list of barriers from which to choose. In the current study participants were responding to open-ended questions, and direct questions regarding barriers to implementing transition practices were not posed to participants. This difference in communicating and perception resulted in many of the barriers listed in research not reported in this study.

Previous research rarely sought the opinions or experiences of school administrators regarding kindergarten transition practices (Hanthorn, 2007; Weasley et al., 2003), even though school administrators were a critical element in shaping school culture (Seashore-Louis et al., 2011). The current research helped fill the gap of school administrator perceptions by including both the principal and assistant principal at both schools as participants. This allowed a broader view of kindergarten transition programming to be communicated through the eyes of

participants other than kindergarten teachers. Findings from the current study revealed administrators' perceptions were more whole-school oriented than teacher perceptions, which were more classroom or child oriented. This finding was not previously reported in the literature.

Evidence of how the schools' written transition to kindergarten plans were communicated to stakeholders, other than them being posted on the schools' web-sites as a part of the School's Improvement Plans, was not found. Data showed the existence of these plans were not clearly communicated to stakeholders, since 80 or more percent of participants' perceptions from both schools were that a plan did not exist. Methods by which use of transition practices were communicated between schools, between administrators and teachers, or between teachers were important to research, but were not a focus of this study.

Assistant principal perceptions were also found to vary from other participant perceptions. The assistant principals at both schools reported school staff looking for students who failed to report to school at the beginning of the year as a transition practice found at the schools. This was a practice not found in the current literature, but interestingly the assistant principals were the only two participants who reported this practice. It was assumed in the current research to be one of the roles of an assistant principal, since they were the only reporting participants.

The omission of communicating kindergarten transition practices from participant interviews cannot be inferred in the current study as the participant not using that practice. Since the face-to-face interviews were open response, the participants may have used a practice they failed to mention during the interviews, or during the member checking process. This concluded the response to research question 3 through the themes of communication and participant perceptions. Following is a summary of research question three.

### **Research Question 3 Summary**

The third research question to guide this study was: How were kindergarten transition practices at each school described when compared to the literature on kindergarten transition practices? The data revealed more similarities than dissimilarities between the literature and kindergarten transition practices reported in this study. Similarities included written to kindergarten transition plans at both the school and district levels, and teacher professional development in transitioning children to kindergarten. The potential association of implementing transition practices with improved reading achievement in kindergarten was another similarity. Dissimilarities were mostly due to the qualitative nature of this study versus the quantitative nature of previous studies. This concluded the response to research question 3. The following section responds to research question four.

### **Research Question 4 Findings**

Research Question 4: How were the schools' kindergarten transition practices similar and how were they different?

**Do**

**Resources.** To ascertain information regarding the similarities and differences of the schools' kindergarten transition programming, the researcher used a variety of resources. These resources included face-to-face interviews, transcriptions of the face-to-face interviews, the school district's web-site, each school's School Improvement Plan retrieved from the schools' web-sites, and information ascertained from the and paper-and-pencil demographic survey administered at the conclusion of the face-to-face interview. The analyses of these data were applied to the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) which helped the researcher provide a more comprehensive, richer response to research

question four. The same systematic format used in the responses for research questions one through three was applied to the response to research question four.

**Activities.**

*Programmatic transition practices offered by the schools.* A plethora of transition practices offered by schools were shared during the face-to-face interviews. These practices included 5 of the 6 combined practices listed in the two schools' written transition to kindergarten plans. Many more transition practices reportedly occurred that were not written in the schools' current written transition to kindergarten plans. At least 41 practices were reported by at least one participant at both schools, and at least 33 more practices were reported by at least one participant at individual schools. The omission of kindergarten transition practices from participant interviews cannot be inferred as the participant not using that practice. Since the face-to-face interviews were open response, the participants may have used a practice they failed to mention during the interviews, or during the member checking responses. From the multitude of responses, there were many high and low intensity transition practices offered by schools that were not found in the review of the literature. These findings were discussed in the response to research question three. Comparing and contrasting programmatic transition activities offered by the schools were presented through the following themes: Registration and communication, orientation, organization, familiarization, and facilitation.

*Registration and communication.* A district-wide kindergarten registration period in the spring (February/March) was reported by participants at both schools. Only participants at Bridge View reported ways in which the registration period was communicated. Forty-three percent of Bridge View's participants shared communication techniques such as "We send out flyers about kindergarten registration," and "One way to reach incoming kindergarteners was by

sending flyers home with older siblings who are currently in school.” Another participant had a more comprehensive description of communication procedures including the Alert Now phone calling system, use of the school’s web-site, and distribution of flyers through the pre-kindergarten centers. Even though participants at River City did not report ways in which registration was communicated it should not be interpreted as an omission of communication. It was possible that both schools communicated the kindergarten registration period in the ways mentioned by the participants at Bridge View, and it was also possible that kindergarten registration was communicated to families via means not revealed during the current research.

For the most part, the way teacher assignments were communicated to parents and students were reported similarly at both schools, but were dependent on when class assignments were made. During the years class assignments were made prior to open house, (versus waiting until after staggered entry to use beginning of year assessment data to create class lists) both schools posted class lists at open house. Parents and students arrived at open house and looked for the kindergarten lists. Once they found their child’s name, they went to that teacher’s classroom. The assistant principal at Bridge View described this process by saying:

I don’t know an easier way to do it. When I was in school, the last day of second grade I knew who my third grade teacher was. I’ve worked in two different counties and it has been the same in both counties. It’s hard to place the students early in the summer not knowing how many students you are going to have enroll throughout the summer which is something that happens here a lot. We are like a revolving door. It’s good to wait so if you get an influx of IEP’s or behavior plans then you can switch or move the child around as much as you need to because the parents don’t know where the child was originally placed.

The Principal at River City reported class assignments were made after open house, but the assistant principal and all the teachers reported they were made before open house. The assistant principal at River City and one of the three kindergarten teachers reported class lists were posted at open house, with one of those teachers stating in previous years post cards had been mailed. Another kindergarten teacher at River City said, “From my understanding the teacher assignment is mailed to students about a week before open house.”

Two teachers at Bridge View discussed how parent communication began at open house. The teachers talked about how difficult it was when all the parents wanted to talk to the teacher at the same time. One teacher said, “Sometimes parents come in at open house and I’ll have them just lay everything out to me.”

Similarly at both schools the assistant principal and almost all the teachers (100% at River City and 80% at Bridge View) discussed welcome to kindergarten letters and packets. These were letters and packets that were distributed at open house, or on the first day the child attended school. These packets allowed teachers to communicate a wealth of information in one format, and allowed for the teachers to receive communication back from the parents. One Bridge View teacher said, “I have a big welcome packet that shares about the teacher, the teacher assistant and everything that happens in the classroom, like the daily schedule.” A Bridge View teacher said, “The welcome packets include a get to know you packet that goes home for parents to complete on their child and the child has input in it as well, such as setting goals for kindergarten.” A teacher from River City said, “The welcome packet also includes forms for parents to return including questions about the child that helps me learn more about the child.” Another teacher from River City remarked, “The welcome packet has a section where parents can jot down fears or questions they have.”

Teachers from both schools mentioned the importance of communicating with parents via newsletter. Some teachers reported monthly newsletters, while others reported weekly newsletters. Four teachers from Bridge View talked about newsletters, as did one from River City, but at both locations, it was discussed as common knowledge, as if everyone sent them. One teacher at Bridge View said, “Some teachers have weekly newsletters and some have monthly newsletters.” Another Bridge View teacher who sent hers weekly said, “The newsletters keep parents up to date with what’s going on in the classroom.” Two Bridge View teachers said, “We do a monthly newsletter as a grade level that gives parents information about upcoming dates and general information.” The teacher at River City expanded on her weekly newsletter by saying, “The newsletter is where they get their conduct and information about what’s going on, homework and other notes as well.”

All teachers from both schools mentioned parent communication in some form and to varying degrees. One teacher at Bridge View stood out during the interviews with the unique, weekly parent communication strategy she used. She was the only participant from either school to report on this type of intentional, strategic parent communication technique. She said, “I have a system where every family is contacted once a week whether it’s a post card in the mail, a phone call or a note in the folder.” The communication was always positive. She said, “I have a spreadsheet and I make 3 – 4 contacts a day, so in 3 weeks they’ve received a post card, phone call and note. It’s simple. You just have to organize it.”

Teachers from both schools also similarly reported using literature as a transition practice to help communicate about feelings, missing parents, and new school culture components such as friends, responsibility and respect. At least one teacher from each school specifically reported reading *The Kissing Hand* to her class at the beginning of each year. One teacher said, “It’s a

really good thing to help the kids feel comfortable and know Mommy, Daddy or Grandparent misses them and are thinking of them too.”

Two teachers from River City reported using lunch time as a time to communicate with and get to know their students better. One teacher said, “We have lunch with them and we talk with them during lunch,” while the other said, “We have lunch in the classroom sometimes so we can talk more.” One Bridge View teacher discussed eating lunch with her families and students during her quarterly Dress For Success. She said this gave her time to really engage with and know her students and families.

Both schools spoke of transient populations, but only one teacher from Bridge View addressed the need for sustainability in communication with students who transitioned in after the beginning of the year. She credited her teaching assistant for managing the process. She reported that the teaching assistant “. . . keeps copies of all the beginning of the year forms and informational paperwork. When students come in later in the year she sends those home so they can get a feel of what our classroom is like.”

This section looked at the similarities and differences of transition practices offered by both of the schools in the current study through the themes of registration and communication. The next section will look at the similarities and differences of transition practices that helped orient parents and children to the new school.

*Orientation.* One-hundred percent of the participants listed open house as a programmatic transition practice offered at the schools. All participants acknowledged open house was a district mandated event. The principals at both schools, one teacher from River City and three teachers from Bridge View talked about how kindergarten students visited each classroom during the years when kindergarten class assignments had not yet been made. One of the teachers from

Bridge View stated, “It’s hard at open house when class lists haven’t been made yet and they go from room to room.” The principal at Bridge View said during the years of unassigned kindergarten classrooms during open house, they hosted an open house for the kindergarteners after class assignments were made. River City’s principal said they hosted an “Incoming Night for pre-kindergarten parents to come to an informational night and talk with administrators and counselors.” The principal and one teacher from Bridge View discussed how much smoother open house was this year due to class assignments being made in advance. Bridge View’s principal said, “It was nice this year. Parents went home that evening knowing this is going to be my child’s teacher and started preparing the child for that.” One Bridge View teacher talked about having a scavenger hunt in the classroom for students and their parents to explore the classroom during open house. Teachers from both schools discussed having poems and baggies for students and parents with items that represented certain meanings. Some of these items included Hershey’s kisses, erasers and tissues. A Bridge View teacher noted the importance of having students’ names on their seats and in their cubbies so they already knew where they belonged. Teachers from both schools talked about trying to find a few minutes to speak individually with parents. One kindergarten teacher from Bridge View said, “At open house I have a class roster and beside it I have lines with a space to write what the parents are telling me about each child.” A Bridge View teacher had a unique remedy to all the questions being posed by parents at open house. She shared, “At open house I have a question box where parents can anonymously write their questions down, and one of the first things that goes home is my questions and answers following up with those questions.” In responding to expectations being set at open house, a River City teacher said, “They (the parents) can see me and know I’m going

to be their child's teacher." I let them know "I'm a mothering type of teacher, but they're going to be acting like they are in school."

Another forum set up to orient students and parents to the new school for kindergarten was pre-kindergarten transition nights. These were set up by the school system's pre-kindergarten centers. The pre-kindergarten centers invited representatives from the feeder kindergarten schools in to meet with the parents of students assigned to the elementary school for kindergarten. Almost all staff members at Bridge View reported knowing about this event, or having attended the event. Only the administrative staff at River City reported the event. The following comment from a Bridge View teacher summarized all the teachers' remarks. She said:

They invited us to the pre-k center and we had a whole room just to ourselves so we could talk to the parents and answer any of their questions. We did an overview of what their (the students) day would look like and addressed their concerns.

This section described programmatic transition practices offered by the schools in the current study through the theme of orientation practices. Differences and similarities between the two schools were discussed. The next section examined similarities and differences of organizational programmatic transition practices at both schools.

*Organization.* The researcher's fourth assumption listed in Chapter 1 of this dissertation was, "Parents and students received teacher assignments at open house, and teachers received class lists on open house day." The first organization programmatic transition practice offered by the two schools in the current study proved that assumption false. Most of the respondents in the current study revealed kindergarten teachers made the class lists. If the kindergarten teachers made the lists, there were not lists for teachers to receive. The only waiver in these reports was from the assistant principal at River City who reported classroom teachers and the principal

created lists. All Bridge View participants who listed the creation of class lists as a programmatic transition practice (6 out of 7) were in agreement about when the lists were created. All the participants reported in years past class lists were created after staggered entry, and were based on assessment and observational data collected during staggered entry. This year, they all reported class lists were created before open house. One Bridge View teacher described the most recent process for creating class lists as:

Just a random, luck of the draw, other than our friends who came from pre-k. Somehow some schools are able to even before summer break split up the classes and make contact over the summer. I don't know if that's feasible here, our population is so transient that I don't know if that would be more work than it's worth, but it would be amazing if we could do that.

It appeared River City followed a process similar to the one conducted at Bridge View this year. The assistant principal and one teacher reported class lists were created by teachers before the beginning of school. One River City teacher said "They're created early enough to look at the pre-k cards before open house." The principal, however, reported teachers made class lists assignments after beginning of the year assessments occurred during staggered entry days. The conflicting reporting within River City could be the result of a similarity with Bridge View. Participants at Bridge View reported in previous years using the assessment data during staggered entry to place children. Only during the current year did they place children prior to open house. The River City principal may have been thinking of another year, or since the teachers reportedly created the class lists, his assumption of how they accomplished that task may be different than how they actually performed the task. The researcher provided member

checking for participants in this study. The principal acknowledged the responses provided during member checking were accurate.

The next organizational feature discovered through the current research was staggered enrollment or staggered entry. One-hundred percent of participants from both schools acknowledged the use of staggered entry. The participants concurred that staggered entry lasted for 3 days, and it was a time when one third of the kindergarten class (approximately 6, 7 or 8 students) came to school while the other two-thirds did not come. This time allowed teachers and students to have a small group or one-on-one time together for the children's first day. A kindergarten teacher at Bridge View said:

Staggered enrollment makes the class sizes smaller for the first day that they come and that's really when we spend a lot of time getting to know the kids one-on-one trying to figure out some of their interest and it seems to really help with some of the nervousness because they are not walking into a classroom full of students, they're coming in with more like 5 or 6.

Another similar description of staggered entry came from the assistant principal at River City. She said:

I think staggered enrollment is very helpful and I think it's great for students. If a lot of them haven't been in a pre-k environment, to take on this big overwhelming view of an elementary school in a smaller group and get that quick response from their teachers before it becomes a big group of them (is helpful).

Another Bridge View teacher credited the small group staggered entry days as a valuable tool in helping them complete the battery of assessments that had to be completed, while a teacher at

River City remarked, “You can have a little bit more time with each child, but then when they all come, it’s on.”

Another programmatic transition practice that was reported by 60% of River City’s participants and 70% of Bridge View’s participants was Fast Start. All participants from both schools reported Fast Start as a programmatic transition and had similar perceptions and descriptions of the program. Fast Start was described as a half day program that occurred two weeks prior to the beginning of school. Both schools had Fast Start for kindergarten this year. River City had one classroom of kindergarten students while Bridge View had two classrooms of kindergarten students. Fast Start housed about 10 students per class, and the pre-kindergarten teachers from the pre-kindergarten centers recommended the students for the program. The pre-kindergarten teachers reportedly chose the students who they felt needed the most help transitioning to kindergarten. As one Bridge View teacher who taught Fast Start this year said about students who needed more support, “Fast Start. That’s why they call it that, right?” The assistant principal at Bridge View remarked,

Fast Start is a great transition practice because not only are you building that relationship ahead of time personally, but you’re also figuring out how they are academically and behaviorally and then you can definitely place them in an appropriate class and feel good about your decision of where you’ve put them.

The teacher from River City who taught Fast Start this year stated not all the students she taught during the two week Fast Start program were assigned to her class for kindergarten.

This concluded the look at programmatic transition practices offered by the schools in the current study through the theme of organization. The next section examined similarities and

differences of programmatic transition practices at both schools through the theme of familiarization.

*Familiarization.* Ten programmatic transition practices were found that helped familiarize students and families with the new school, to kindergarten and with the teachers. Eight of the ten were revealed by participants at both schools, then the schools each mentioned one practice that was not discussed by participants at the other school.

The first common practice found at both schools was the use of home visits. The practice of home visits did not appear to be consistent within or between the two schools. At River City, the assistant principal mentioned home visits as a thing of the past. She said before they became a magnet school, and the district was larger, they used to conduct home visits. She attributed the large amounts of students enrolling at the last minute as the reason home visits were no longer conducted. Only one teacher at River City sited home visits as a practice she utilized. She described her home visits more as riding through the neighborhood and seeing lots of children and families, including those from her current class and previous classes. Her visits were mostly unannounced. She said:

As an individual I go above and beyond because I feel it's more important especially being around this environment knowing where the child comes from, knowing their home environment, what they're dealing with, and so I do home visits and make sure I'm accessible and know what's going on in the neighborhood. I'll pop up at a child's home especially if they're doing something they're not supposed to do in the classroom and I haven't seen their parent. I just want to make my face known to those people because sometimes the parents don't get involved like they should and a lot of times they don't think the teacher cares, but if they know you'll show up there for their child, you're there

for them, then sometimes it turns the situation around and makes it better for them if they feel more accepted, that we're on the same page. I hug my parents and they know I'm not afraid to show up in their neighborhood.

One participant at Bridge View also commented on making home visits. Her comments regarding home visits had a more narrow focus than the teacher at River City. Like the teacher at River City, it appeared this teacher was the only one at Bridge View who made home visits. The teacher at Bridge View described her expense of home visits as few, and elaborated they were with families of whom she already had established a relationship with because she had taught their older children. Her home visits were made during the summer months and she stopped by to give them supplies so the children would have them before the first day of school.

Another programmatic transition practice found at both schools was reviewing cumulative records or information that came from the pre-school environment to the kindergarten environment. The only administrator who listed this as a transition practice was the assistant principal at River City. Two teachers at each school named reviewing records as a programmatic transition practice. Besides pre-school cumulative records, one teacher at River City listed reviewing the cumulative records of students who were retained in kindergarten. All four of the teacher participants cited the importance of looking through the records to find out what the students knew and what they needed.

Almost 100% of participants (all except for one teacher at River City) cited the use of administering assessments during the staggered entry period as a beneficial transition practice. All responding participants spoke of the advantages of having students in small numbers so they could spend one-on-one time with the students learning more about them personally, socially and

academically. Participants from both schools reported using the assessment results for creating classroom placements.

Two teacher participants from both schools, (a total of four) commented on taking the time to teach and practice school-wide rules. Teachers from both schools cited this process began at open house and then continued through the first few weeks of school. One River City teacher said she stressed the importance of learning the rules before she started overwhelming parents with academics. A teacher from Bridge View listed some of the rules and procedures as walking in a line in the hallway, behaving in class, how to sit in a chair, and holding a pencil.

Tours of the school were another frequently mentioned (80% of River City participants, and 71% of Bridge View participants) programmatic transition practice, and they were reported as occurring in various forms. The only administrative participant to respond from River City commended on students who enrolled early. She stated when students and parents enrolled early they took them on a tour of the school to familiarize both students and parents to the school. One teacher from Bridge View described a tour for parents. She said during her first quarterly Class Chat she took the parents on a school tour. This familiarized the parents with the school and allowed them to see where their child goes on a daily basis. Both administrators at Bridge View, along with three teachers from Bridge View and three teachers from River City described students taking a tour of the school during the staggered entry days to help familiarize them with the new environment. All the teachers from Bridge View and one teacher from River City tied the student tour in with the book *The Gingerbread Man*. Students toured around the school in search of the Gingerbread Man who had escaped. During this time students were learning where the nurse, principal, gym, cafeteria, etc. were located. The remaining two River City teachers

reported a similar activity, however they used the book *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* to guide their students on the tour.

Three teachers from River City and all participants from Bridge View, except the assistant principal reported the use of get to know you activities and packets to help teachers familiarize themselves with the students and families. Participants from both schools discussed providing parents with packets to complete giving teachers' insight into students' interests, strengths, and weaknesses. Participants from both schools talked about the importance of the staggered entry days when they had time to sit and learn about students one-on-one. A common practice revealed from both schools was using student interests and likes to purchase items for incentives in the treasure box. Teachers at both schools also discussed participating in get to know you activities with students so the students could learn about their teachers as well. All responding participants talked about how much was learned about students during sharing times and through their writings and drawings. One teacher at River City said they had a school-wide morning meeting time, and she learned a lot about students through the sharing that occurred during this time.

Both schools reported parents walk child to class as another programmatic transition practice used to help familiarize students and parents to the new school environment. One teacher at River City reported using this practice and cited that it was especially beneficial for students and parents who did not attend open house. This teacher said it gave her time to give the parents a brief overview, while letting the parents get to know her better. The principal and two teachers from Bridge View reported using this practice. According to the principal, they told parents they could walk down for the first week, but in reality they walked with them for about 2 weeks before the staff began trying to wean parents off of walking students to the classroom.

One teacher from Bridge View described the experience much like the River City teacher described it. The other Bridge View teacher said:

Staggered start gives the parents an opportunity to really walk their kids in to have that first day experience to take pictures to sit and feel comfortable in the classroom for a little bit. That gives their children time to get in and feel comfortable with their parents still there. When the parents leave, their children are hopefully happy.

Another common programmatic transition practice found at both schools that helped familiarize parents with the classroom and the curriculum (Hindman et al., 2013) was welcoming parents to volunteer in the classroom. This practice was reported by two River City teachers and four Bridge View teachers. One teacher from River City and one Bridge View teacher specifically tied volunteering in the classroom with increasing the parents' capacity to help their child at home academically. The River City teacher described it as follows:

I try to get parents to come in and volunteer whenever they can. Before I went back and got my teaching degree I volunteered in my children's rooms, they always had me playing a math game with the kids and so then I would go home and you know start thinking of math games to do with my children at home.

Bridge View's teacher explained how being in the classroom helped parents see what was going on which kept the parents prepared and helped them see how the curriculum progressed.

This concluded the eight common programmatic transition practices found at both schools which helped familiarize parents and students with the new school environment, and helped familiarize teachers with their parents and students. One transition practice was found at River City, and one at Bridge View that were not common between the two schools. A description of these two unique practices that assisted with familiarization follows below.

The first unique programmatic transition practice used to help familiarize students to the new classroom and teacher was reported by a teacher at River City. At the beginning of each year she creates a bulletin board with pictures of the children's families. She said,

I like to have the children bring in pictures from home and we make a classroom portfolio of the child with their siblings and their moms and dads. We put that on the bulletin board and it just kind of helps them feel a little bit more comfortable. We look back and talk about specifically the actual roles of Mom, Dad, Brother, Sister so they get a good idea of my role as their teacher. That helps us become more of a family unit and everything else kind of falls in place after that.

The second unique programmatic transition practice used to help familiarize students and families to the school was summer play dates. This practice was reported by the principal and two teachers at Bridge View. Even though there were some differing perceptions amongst the three participants, the overall picture of the play dates came through. All three participants reported having a play date on the playground where rising kindergarteners came with their parents and participated in activities such as finger painting, sidewalk chalk, playing on the swings, bubbles, and painting pots. All the reporting participants said teachers and administrative staff mingled with students and parents and answered any questions the parents had. The principal mentioned having refreshments, while one of the teachers said they served a pizza lunch. One participant stated they had a bag filled with manipulatives and supplies for the children to take home. The principal and one teacher described the play dates as being held on a Saturday in the summer, while the other teacher described them as being in April. The principal and one teacher spoke of the disappointing turnout with the principal describing maybe one-fourth of students and parents attending, and a teacher describing 4 - 5 families in attendance.

Both of them attributed the low attendance to a transient population, which resulted in late enrollments. All three participants reported this as something that had happened at least two years ago, but that did not occur with the current kindergarten class. One of the teachers felt the play dates were very successful, while the principal reported, “I would rather save that money I’m spending for resources (for the play dates) and spend it on the children that we have in the building and using it at the right time.”

This completed the section describing the 10 programmatic transition practices used to familiarize families and students with the new school and teachers, and used to familiarize teachers with their incoming students. The next section of programmatic transition practices used by schools described practices used to facilitate a smooth transition into kindergarten for students and families.

*Facilitation.* Two programmatic transition practices were found at both schools that helped with the facilitation of creating a smooth transition to kindergarten for students and their parents. The first of these practices was providing school supplies and uniforms for students. Three of the seven participants at Bridge View and four of the five participants at River City cited this as a transition practice offered to students and families. The principal at Bridge View said, “A neighboring drug store (community partner) provides uniforms for incoming kindergarten students and our neighborhood association donates school supplies. If they come without supplies, they leave on the first day with a book bag filled with supplies.” A teacher at River City included how students were provided with a daily snack at school, and that she sent materials and supplies home with students so they could complete homework or projects. Another River City teacher stated, “We provide uniforms and food for the kids, extra things they need to make sure the kids feel like they’re taken care of. Some of them get Christmas presents.”

The second programmatic transition practice found at both schools that helped with the facilitation of creating a smooth transition to kindergarten for students and their parents was an open door policy. The principal at River City along with three of the Bridge View Kindergarten teachers discussed open door policies. River City's principal said they were trying to, "Let them know our doors are open, offering parent nights and educational nights. It's good for them to know we're not just here for a complaint or because something is not going your way."

The three Bridge View teachers reported parents were welcomed in the classroom at any time, and they purposefully informed parents of the open door policy. As one Bridge View kindergarten teacher explained, "I welcome the parents in my classroom. They're more than welcome to sit or volunteer anytime."

This concluded the section describing similarities and differences found in programmatic transition practices offered by both schools in the current study. The next section will look at similarities and differences found in the Characteristics Influencing Transitions at both schools.

***Characteristics influencing transitions.*** Characteristics Influencing children's transitions to kindergarten through the development of teacher child relationships will be examined in this section through the lenses of establishing relationships, tending to the student's emotional needs, and environmental relationships. Establishing a positive relationship with students was reported by 100% of participants from both schools in the current study. During the face-to-face interviews, the researcher got a feel for how much all participants cared for students and their families. One teacher participant from River City remarked about building family type relationships with her students and families. Another River City participant talked about building relationships to ensure every child felt important. Participants from both schools talked about the importance of starting off with positive communication so the first thing parents heard was

positive. A Bridge View teacher commented that if she had to call the parents with a situation that had a negative overtone, parents were much more receptive of that news if the previous contacts had been positive. One Bridge View teacher said:

Lots of students are upset when they come to school and they don't want to leave Mom at the door. So at the end of every child's first staggered day I send home a happy note saying the child had a great first day of kindergarten. This along with the fun activities on the first day makes them want to come back the next day.

The principal at Bridge View remarked about teachers and families having established relationships, and capitalizing on that relationship when younger siblings enrolled in school. She intentionally placed students in classrooms with teachers where the families already had a positive rapport established.

All participants from both schools reported establishing relationships through a variety of ways. Times teachers established relationships with students included talking and playing with children on the playground or during centers. Another time teachers learned a lot about students was during whole group sharing time, or when students arrived at school in the mornings and shared informally with their teachers. Teachers also reported learning about students through their writings and drawings. All participants stressed the importance of the one-on-one time they had during staggered entry to learn about their students personally and academically. The small group time during staggered entry was reported by all participants as a pivotal time for developing and establishing teacher-child relationships.

One Bridge View teacher had a unique perspective on the establishment of teacher-child relationships. She reflected on a letter her kindergarten teacher sent her the summer leading into

her kindergarten year. This act on the behalf of the kindergarten teacher made a lasting impression on the teacher. She said, “I still have the letter!”

Participants from both schools discussed tending to the emotional needs of children. Most of these responses came from the assistant principal at River City, however one teacher participant from both schools also commented on the importance of meeting the emotional needs of children. The River City teacher talked about ensuring each and every child felt like they were important. While the Bridge View teacher discussed how some students were upset when they came to school and did not want to separate from their mother. The teacher said she tried to alleviate their fears by telling the child, “We’re going to see Mommy soon. If you want to you can draw a picture of her and we’ll send it home for her.” River City’s assistant principal discussed taking care of the emotional needs of the children by giving them lots of “hugs and TLC” when they were crying and weepy. She also recognized that her teachers were patient with themselves and with the children to enable the children to get through the transition time effectively.

The classroom environment shaped characteristics influencing transitions. One teacher from both schools discussed filling up the treasure boxes with items the children told them they liked. Participants from both schools discussed a welcoming environment. This extended beyond sending welcome letters, having welcome packets at open house, or having the baggies with welcoming items available at the beginning of the year. One teacher at River City said, “It’s important to make them feel like this is their home.” While three teachers at Bridge View talked about establishing a welcoming environment. The teachers discussed welcoming late enrollees into the classes with open arms, and welcoming parents to sit in the classroom so they could feel comfortable. One Bridge View teacher described the overall welcoming environment of the

school. She was hired after the beginning of the school year, and she described the school's environment as:

I felt very welcomed as soon as I got here. I think the kids feel that way when they come in too. I've had a couple of parents mention to me that when they come they've wondered is everybody always this friendly? Well I'm going to catch them on a bad day one day. One of the parents told me she said everybody is always so happy. Is it really that happy of a place here? I said yes, we do make the best of it.

All teachers from both schools also discussed the increased kindergarten academic expectations, and high expectations for their students, which they communicated with the parents. Teachers from both schools reportedly let parents know what to expect at the beginning of the year, and then through each quarter and at the end of the year. Teachers also reportedly gave parents strategies to assist their children with meeting these expectations.

One teacher from River City talked about being motivational, specifically motivating students to learn. This teacher also spoke a little Spanish. She communicated with her Hispanic families in Spanish which helped them "feel more respected, connected, loved and cared for." This same teacher let children and their families know they were accepted and respected, they were important to her and that she cared about them. Another River City teacher described how she and her teaching assistant demonstrated respect towards one another, which modeled a respectful environment for the students. The third River City teacher described how she taught respect in her classroom:

As far as getting rules and procedures down I let them know I have my time and you have your time and just the importance of respecting each other's time. I let them know there are 3 or 4 times during the day when it's ok to talk to your friends and socialize, which is

typically lunch and recess. That's your time. You take your time to have fun and socialize. But during reading and math, that's my time. And if you're respectful of my time, I'll be respectful of your time.

The final characteristic influencing transitions in the classroom environment was described by a River City teacher. She often took students back to the classroom to eat lunch so she and the students could talk more. She said: "You'll be surprised at the table manners and they don't have table manners." "Watching a child eat will tell you how they are at home, like what type of home life they have." She used this time to explain to children how to properly use utensils, napkins, etc.

This section described similarities and differences between the two schools in the current study, specifically characteristics that influenced transitions at both schools. This section revealed both schools reported the importance of relationships between teachers, children and families. Both schools were concerned with meeting the emotional needs of children, and both schools had environmental factors that influenced transitions. The next section discussed the similarities and differences of the kindergarten transition programs at each school relating to the quantity of transitions found at each school.

*Quantity of transition practices.* The quantity or number of transition practices schools offered to children and families were associated with positive achievement scores at the end of kindergarten (Schulting et al., 2005). In the current study, specifically in this section responding to research question 4, there were at least 41 common transition practices found being practiced to some extent at both schools. At least 51 transition practices reportedly occurred at River City and at least 64 transition practices reportedly occurred at Bridge View. This section described the

similarities and differences in quantities of transition practices found at both schools. The next section examined the intensity of these practices.

***Intensity of transition practices.*** Low intensity transition practices occurred either before or after the beginning of the school year, and were aimed at the class as a whole, while high intensity transition practices occurred either before or after the beginning of the school year, but were individualized for students and families. Other high intensity practices included those that involved coordination with pre-school programs or the community (Early et al., 2001; Rous et al., 2010). Even low-intensity practices such as open house could have a positive impact on achievement by the end of kindergarten (Schulting et al., 2005). In the current study, of the at least 74 transition practices reportedly being practiced to some extent at both schools 44 of the 74, or 60% fit the criteria of high-intensity transition practices. Out of the at least 51 transition practices reportedly being offered at River City 28, or 55% could be considered high-intensity. Thirty-nine or 61% of the at least 64 transition practices at Bridge View could be considered high-intensity transition practices. This section described the similarities and differences between the intensity of transition practices reportedly practiced between and within both schools in the current study. The following section described similarities and differences regarding barriers both schools faced.

***Barriers to implementing transition practices.*** A common barrier to facilitating kindergarten transition practices discussed by about 60% of participants at both schools was last minute or late enrollees. All administrators at both schools talked about this as a barrier. In addition to administrators one teacher from River City listed this barrier, as did two teachers from Bridge View. The principal at River City said, “Unfortunately there are quite a few parents almost school wide that come in last minute to register.” The assistant principal at River City

said that even children who had contact with the pre-kindergartens and who had older siblings in school often enrolled or registered late. She also remarked on how late enrollees hindered attendance at open house. River City's assistant principal continued with, "Most of our kindergarten work takes place in August when we get more of our kindergarten registration." Comments from Bridge View participants were very similar in comparison to those at River City. Bridge View's principal said it would make the transition to kindergarten more ideal if they knew earlier who was coming to kindergarten. She attributed the late enrollment of students to transient families. She said, "Sometimes our parents don't decide until the last minute where they are going to be living and where their children are going to school." Bridge View's assistant principal concurred by affirming, "We don't have a high percentage of early enrollees." She added, not knowing who the students were made placing children in classrooms early difficult. The Bridge View teachers also remarked on students enrolling at the last minute. One teacher discussing summer play dates said, "We have such a transient population they may be coming here in April but by the time we had the play date their plans might have changed."

A barrier listed by only one kindergarten teacher at River City was a lack of communication and cohesiveness between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers. She specifically stated this was between the kindergarten teachers and the pre-kindergarten teachers working in the pre-kindergarten centers. This statement did not apply to the pre-kindergarten teachers housed in her school. In contrast to this barrier, two kindergarten teachers at Bridge View stated they talked with pre-kindergarten teachers regarding students. Teachers from both schools reported a gap in curricular expectations. As a Bridge View teacher explained there was a committee for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teacher representatives to meet and discuss

curricular expectations at both levels, but there was no resolve from the committee which had since disbanded.

This concluded the section describing the similarities and differences between barriers identified by participants at both schools participating in the current study. The following section examined the similarities and differences that environmental impacts had on kindergarten transition practices.

*Environmental impacts.* Similarities and differences in the influences environmental factors played on the transition to kindergarten was examined in this section. This section was presented through six themes for clarity and ease in reading. The themes were location, district communication, communication with parents, relationships, parent involvement and resources. Examining similarities and differences in location began this section.

*Location.* All five River City participants reported the 2012-2013 was the first year pre-kindergarten classrooms were located in the building. The location of two pre-kindergarten classrooms at River City Elementary School was a district based decision. The district maintained two pre-kindergarten centers, and during the 2012-2013 school year, River City was one of 4 elementary schools that housed two classrooms each of pre-kindergarten in addition to the two district-wide pre-kindergarten centers. Bridge View was not one of the schools assigned pre-kindergarten classrooms. Not all students assigned to River City's pre-kindergarten program were districted to attend kindergarten at River City. The out of district parents, could however, apply for admission to River City through the lottery program. Not all children attending kindergarten in the fall of 2013 will have had a formal pre-school experience, and some of them will have had formal pre-school experiences in programs other than the pre-kindergarten program at River City. All five participants at River City presented a positive reaction to housing

pre-kindergarten classrooms in the elementary school. All but one kindergarten teacher remarked on how students' transition to kindergarten would be better for those students going from pre-kindergarten to kindergarten in the same school. One kindergarten teacher said:

We see them (the pre-kindergarten students) every day in the hallway and they have the rules and procedures down. So it's going to make it a lot easier for the kindergarten teachers next year for the students that were in pre-kindergarten here.

River City's assistant principal and one of the kindergarten teachers remarked on how much more comfortable the pre-kindergarten students would be in the same school next year, while another kindergarten teacher said she felt the students would feel more connected. One kindergarten teacher summed it up by saying, "The kids will be more comfortable with the school." River City's assistant principal commented on how parents of children currently in school were inquiring about how to enroll their younger children in the pre-kindergarten program housed at the school.

The principal at Bridge View commented on a unique type of community involvement that was not mentioned at River City. She discussed teachers spending time in the community where they could be seen by and engaged with parents. She said:

I pretty much ask them (the teachers), I mean because I can't tell them what to do and I can't tell them how to spend their money but I mean there are a lot of restaurants, there are a lot of little opportunities going on around here and hum I pretty much ask them like on teacher workdays, on you know times like that and they will they will go eat at (a restaurant name). They'll go so that we're seen in the community around here. We go to the lake to different things they have a lot of activities going on out there that that we participate in.

Bridge View's principal was the only participant to mention this type of community involvement.

Principals' at both schools talked about being involved with the neighborhood/community meetings. River City's principal said he visited community centers' residential meetings. At these meetings he talked about the school as a whole to the residents in attendance. Bridge View's principal described her involvement at the neighborhood meetings. She also elaborated on how supportive the community was of the school.

We're partners with them. We're on their mailing lists for everything from yard sales to historical events anything that's going on with the (school name) neighborhood association. I've been to the (school name) neighborhood association meetings at night and spoken to them. Kind of like my state of the union address you know how the school is doing and how as a community that they could support the children. They have worked with us with supplies for incoming students. No student coming into (school name) has to buy any school supplies. Everything is donated from the community. (Name of drug store in the community) they provide uniforms for my kindergarteners that can't have uniforms to start out. The (school name) neighborhood association does book bags, lunch boxes, pencil, paper all that kind of stuff. They all work with us, we work with them. No kindergartener walks in on the first day and doesn't walk out with a book bag with stuff in it.

This section described the similarities and differences regarding environmental impacts specifically on how location influenced kindergarten transition programming approaches at both schools. Differences included pre-kindergarten housed only at River City, and community involvement via patronizing area restaurants and participating in community activities found

only at Bridge View. Similarities included both principals attending and participating at community neighborhood meetings. The following section examined environmental impacts through the theme of district communication.

*District communication.* Four teachers, two from each school, discussed county-wide pre-kindergarten/kindergarten transition meetings. The common perception was that one teacher from each school served as a representative on this committee. All four teachers perceived this committee as a venue to discuss curricular expectations. One Bridge View teacher said she was the teacher representative from her school. She described the committee as follows, “Our goals for that group were just to kind of have a bridge, a connection between what they were learning and required to do in pre-k and then what it looked like in kindergarten.” This Bridge View teacher stated it was a valuable experience to see what they were doing in pre-kindergarten and being able to compare that to where she knew students had to be by the end of kindergarten. Overall she said what she took away from the meetings was “just that we had a huge gap,” and that “after the conclusion of that experience we didn’t really have a solution.” To this teacher’s knowledge, this committee was not in existence during the 2012-2013 school year, and she was the only teacher who reported being the school’s representative on the committee. The other three teachers spoke as if this committee was still in existence. The lack of a common ground between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, particularly when the pre-kindergarten classrooms were not located in the elementary schools was explicitly expressed by a River City kindergarten teacher when she said, “There’s not a cohesiveness between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten.” She was quick to add that she wasn’t referring to the two pre-kindergarten classrooms located in her school.

The school district's pre-kindergarten centers sent transition cards to receiving elementary schools. This practice was reported by two River City teachers and three Bridge View teachers. These cards had information regarding students and had the intent of helping communicate and smooth the transition to kindergarten for the students moving from the district pre-kindergarten centers to the elementary schools. The responding participants reported reviewing the cards, but as one River City participant expressed they still left her feeling disconnected.

The two methods of district communication listed above were the extent of district supported communication between pre-kindergarten centers and kindergarten centers reported in the current study. The only other type of communication came from one Bridge View teacher who said when there was information a pre-kindergarten teacher did not want to put in writing she wrote a note on the transition card asking the kindergarten teacher to call. This was the only teacher who remarked that at times she had called for further information.

This concluded the section that looked at environmental impacts through the theme of district communication. The next section examined environmental impacts through the theme of communication with parents.

*Communication with parents.* All eight teachers from both schools in the current study, and no administrators, remarked on the importance of making the first communication with parents positive. All participants relayed efforts to frequently and intentionally communicate positive news to parents about their children. One Bridge View teacher explained how frequent positive communication helped parents be more receptive to listening when the need arose to communicate something negative.

One River City kindergarten teacher and all five Bridge View teachers commented on the use of newsletters as a communication tool with parents. The River City teacher provided an example of her weekly newsletter that contained information about the classroom and included a weekly conduct report for the child along with nightly homework assignments. Two Bridge View teachers reported using a newsletter format to help parents learn about the teacher and the teaching assistant at the beginning of the school year. Three Bridge View teachers discussed monthly grade level newsletters that gave parents information regarding important dates and events for the upcoming month, while two Bridge View teachers said in addition to the monthly newsletters they also sent weekly newsletters.

Face-to-face conferences were also a way most of the teachers in the current study communicated with parents. All teachers except one Bridge View teacher reported this parent communication strategy. Teachers from both schools reported using face-to-face conferences as a strategy to communicate with parents how their child was doing academically and behaviorally, where their child needed to be by the end of the year, and what the parent could do to help their child reach his/her goals. The three River City teachers reported holding beginning, middle and end of year conferences, and two of them specified the child's needs really determined the number of conferences that were held. Three of the four Bridge View teachers reported having quarterly parent conferences, with the fourth Bridge View teacher only mentioning beginning of the year conferences. One Bridge View teacher said she liked being able to sit down with parents. She said, "When I look at them face-to-face hopefully they have heard me and received that information." Only one River City teacher discussed difficulties with getting parents to attend parent conferences. She explained to help overcome this obstacle she asked them to bring in the class snack. Then when they arrived with the class snack, she used

snack time to hold a conference with them. Three of the five Bridge View teachers and two River City teachers talked about a folder they used for communicating with parents. This folder went home every day with students with any communication the teacher needed to share with the parents. The parents then returned any needed communication back to the teacher the following day in the folder.

Parent communication techniques reported only by teachers at River City included communicating through teacher web-sites (reported by two River City teachers), and calling parents before the beginning of the school year to introduce herself (reported by one River City teacher). Another River City teacher who had some Spanish speaking abilities discussed greeting Spanish speaking parents in Spanish. She felt her ability to greet families in their native language made them “feel more connected and respected, loved and cared for.” River City’s principal said:

We’re trying to improve communication with parents and let them know a little more about what it’s all about coming here, what to expect and things like that beforehand. So, I think the more we do prior is going to help in the long run.

Bridge View participants reported parent communication techniques not reported by the teachers at River City. These included comments about parents’ willingness to share thoughts, concerns and feelings with the teachers, and to willingly ask questions. Two Bridge View teachers remarked about parents of children with an exceptionality, and their eagerness to ask questions of and seek advice from the exceptional children’s staff. One Bridge View teacher shared her willingness to talk with parents on a personal level when they were experiencing situations that she had experienced in her personal life. All five teachers talked about weekly communication with parents in the form of phone call, newsletters, folder communication, post cards, notes or progress reports. One Bridge View teacher described her system of providing a

positive contact to families once a week either by post card, phone call or note. All students received some kind of positive communication every week. She had them on a rotating schedule so that once every three weeks she had made a positive phone call to every parent. This same teacher had a question box at open house and at her quarterly parent meetings. Parents may opt to write questions and place them in the question box. Afterwards, the teacher compiled the questions and wrote responses to them. Then she distributed the questions and answers to all the parents in her classroom. This same teacher and another teacher in the school hosted what one of them called quarterly Class Chats, and the other called, quarterly Dress for Success. The idea behind both of these activities was basically the same. Parents came to the classroom each quarter and the teacher discussed academic expectations for that quarter. Teachers distributed blank report cards to the parents and discussed what each item on the report card meant. Then they demonstrated for parents what their child had to be able to do to demonstrate proficiency in each area. The teacher provided information on concepts students were struggling with and provided parents with materials and strategies to help their children with the concepts at home. One difference between Class Chats and Dress for Success was reported between the two teachers. The Dress for Success teacher began by having a family lunch in her classroom. She brought table clothes to make the environment warm and inviting. They ate as a family and the teacher ate with them engaging in conversations with the children and their parents. Students shared their portfolios with their parents during lunch. Following lunch, the students went outdoors for recess while the teacher met with the parents. The Class Chats' teacher had her question and answer box available. This allowed parents to write any question they felt uncomfortable asking publicly. Responses were distributed to all parents helping to ensure everyone had the same information and that any misunderstandings were clarified. Another

Bridge View teacher had a different perspective about communicating with parents. She tried to communicate that school is a happy, friendly and helpful place. She recognized that due to some parents own negative connotation of school, from their personal experiences, or from experiences where older children had negative school experiences, they may not have the “best perception of what school is going to be like.” She said once a student said, “You are not like my brother said that teachers were like.”

This section described the similarities and differences between and within both schools regarding environmental impacts through the theme of communication with parents. Similarities between both schools included the importance of starting with positive parent communication, and frequent communication through the use of newsletters. Teachers at both schools also reported face-to-face conferences and meetings with parents as an important means of communication. Communication strategies unique to each school, or to individual teachers within each school were also described. The following section described the similarities and differences of environmental impacts through the theme of relationships.

*Relationships.* All participants from both schools described the importance of building positive relationships with families. Participants from both schools cited transition practices offered by the schools as ways in which they established positive relationships with families. Some practices described by participants at both schools that helped build relationships with families included a pre-kindergarten transition parent night at the pre-kindergarten center, open house, parents walking students to classrooms during the first days of school, multiple forms of written communication, academic/family nights at the school, phone calls, frequent communication via a variety of formats, parents volunteering in the classrooms, survey/questionnaires, parent conferences, and the importance of beginning with positive

communication. One Bridge View teacher and River City's assistant principal talked about school tours for parents as a way to build relationships. One teacher from each school reported conducting home visits. The principal at River City and one Bridge View teacher reported ways to address negative perceptions brought to school by children and families. River City's principal said, "We're still working on that relationship a little bit more due to any type of misconception the parents may have about schools in general and any hidden innate fears they may have about schools in general." Two major unique findings came from Bridge View. The first was Saturday play dates for rising kindergarteners prior to the beginning of the school year. A play date was not held for the current kindergarten class due to low turnout in previous years. One teacher reported how they remained in contact with the families who attended the play dates throughout the summer via phone calls and letters back and forth. She said, "For those families, it was really a valuable experience." The other unique finding regarded siblings was revealed by one Bridge View teacher who talked to the teachers of older siblings to get a feel for the family. She said, "It gives me a lot of knowledge about the families. Just kind of what they look like at home." The other way Bridge View used siblings in building relationships was via teacher assignment, or class placement. When kindergarten students enrolled, if they had an older sibling who previously had a teacher at the school, and if the relationship between the teacher and the family was positive, they assigned the child to the teacher who taught the older sibling. Having students of families where relationships were already established was reported as a positive transition practice at Bridge View. As one teacher reported, "You can pick up with that family because they already know who you are." Overall participants from both schools felt the kindergarten transition practices were designed to be supportive of and met the needs of children and families coming to the school. One Bridge View teacher said that even though she felt like she knew her

students very well, the experience of her face-to-face interview during this research study caused her to reflect. She said, “I feel like I know my students very well. I feel I could do a better job getting to know the families, especially the families here at this school. I may do more with getting to know the families next year.”

Participants from both schools talked about establishing relationships with pre-kindergarten students when the pre-kindergarten centers visited the school in the spring prior to the kindergarten year. The principal at River City reported that relationships with families began being forged during this time as well, because sometimes parents accompanied their child on the visit. Between school and within school variations were reported. Some participants said just private pre-kindergartens visited, while others said just the school systems pre-kindergartens visited. Other variations included the amount of time the visits lasted from about 2 hours to half a day. Most participants reported students were buddied up with existing kindergarten students and participated in a mock kindergarten day. All reporting participants described that pre-kindergarten students were taken on a tour of the school. Another common between and within school description was not all pre-kindergarten students visiting the school in the spring were districted to the school for kindergarten in the fall. River City’s assistant principal said she enjoyed seeing faces in the kindergarten classrooms in August that she saw the previous spring on the pre-kindergarten visits.

River City’s principal, one River City teacher and three Bridge View teachers talked about building relationships through an open door policy. All responding participants talked about this through the vein of providing opportunities for parents. River City’s principal specifically talked about opportunities at the school wide level, while the teachers talked about classroom opportunities. The principal discussed events at night that got the parents involved in

the school such as parent nights or curriculum nights. He felt these events helped parents feel more involved by “letting them know our doors are open” for positive events, not just when there’s a problem. The teachers discussed how parents were welcome to come in and volunteer, and that they explicitly expressed to the parents that the doors were always open. One Bridge View teacher said if parents just “want to come and sit” in the classroom, they can if that helped them feel more comfortable.

Both administrators and one teacher from Bridge View shared the procedure of placing siblings in classrooms where the teacher and families had a previously established relationship. All three participants expressed they only followed the sibling class placement policy if the existing relationship was positive. The decision to place siblings with the same teacher as their older sibling was highly individualized. As the teacher remarked, “in some cases it’s better for that family to experience a different teacher.” The principal ensured this was an explicit, intentional transition practice. She explained this transition practice as:

. . . you already have that positive relationship with the parent then they actually know and this is spoken not unspoken, they know that my preference is to keep the next sibling coming going into that same classroom. I mean to me that just makes good sense. Unless there has been some kind of an interaction that has been a negative and doing that is going to just continue us down that path then we’ll make a shift we’ll make a change. But otherwise, we actually do the follow the whole sibling thing.

Other relationship comments were made by singular respondents at both schools. One teacher at River City said she established respectful relationships with parents and tried to create a mindset with parents of collaboration. This teacher also said several years ago when the school was transitioned into a magnet school, any staff members not wanting to remain with the magnet

focus was allowed to leave. She and the other teachers who remained were “here by choice.” This teacher described the resulting climate that existed amongst staff members was one of a “caring family environment.” One Bridge View teacher remarked on how students and families perceptions from their own school experiences or those of older children could impact teacher child/family relationships. She worked hard to establish positive relationships and erase any negative connotations parents or children came with.

This section described environmental impacts through the theme of relationships. All participants felt establishing positive relationships with children, pre-kindergartens and families was an important part of helping successfully transition students to kindergarten. Varying reports of how relationships were established and maintained were given both between and within schools. The next section described environmental impacts through the theme of parent involvement.

*Parent Involvement.* The environmental impact on transitioning children to kindergarten was reported by describing two types of parental involvement. The first type reported by teachers at both schools was opportunities for parents to volunteer. Reporting teachers from both schools talked about a willingness and desire for parents to come in the rooms and read with children, tutor children, or perform clerical duties. One River City teacher recognized how parents volunteering in the classroom built their capacity to assist their child academically at home, while a Bridge View teacher said the volunteer was, “a different adult and some of the kids gravitate to those volunteers more so than myself or my assistant because hey, it’s good for them that they can strike up that relationship.”

The second type of parental involvement reported by 4 participants between both schools was school-wide family nights. The principal at River City reported incoming nights where

families could talk to administration and counselors about the school. He also reported school-wide education nights. The one reporting teacher from River City corroborated these family nights by elaborating on how they hosted engineering, reading, math and science nights. She said typically reading nights were in conjunction with the Book Fair. This year the theme was The Magic School Bus. Students visited the Book Fair followed by a night that integrated Science, Reading and engineering all in one. She described family nights as a time where:

They (the parents) come out and they work with the children with engineering and with reading and with science and with math throughout the year. Those have been very successful. The parents I think really enjoy sitting down on the floor and working through something with their child.

Two Bridge View teachers reported similar nights where parents came out and got involved with their children. In addition to reading and math nights, they mentioned End of Grade preparation nights, and a parent involvement night focused on Covey's *7 Habits of Happy Kids*.

This concluded the section on environmental impacts through parental involvement. The following section examined resources found in the environment used to help children transition successfully to school.

*Resources.* Resources reportedly used by participants at both schools to help ease the transition to kindergarten and make schools more ready for students included reviewing pre-kindergarten records, reviewing transition cards from pre-kindergarten centers, information from Individual Education Plans (for students with and Individual Education Plan) and school staff calling and searching for students who were enrolled, but did not show up for school.

Only the administrators from Bridge View talked about the use of grandparent volunteers from the local senior center. Within school discrepancies included the number of grandparent

volunteers. The principal reported 3 total volunteers and the assistant principal reported four. The principal reported they were used as shadows for children, while the assistant principal described them as working with small groups of children. Both administrators reported that the grandparent volunteers only worked in kindergarten, even though the assistant principal said one of them helped some at-risk children in the upper grades in addition to the kindergarten children. The principal said a group of staff members from her school attended the annual banquet at the senior center to help recognize and celebrate the service they provided.

This concluded the examination of the similarities and differences in the influences environmental factors played on the transition to kindergarten. This section was presented through the six themes of location, district communication, communication with parents, relationships, parent involvement and resources. The next section of the Kindergarten Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) to be examined in response to research question 4 was discontinuities between the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten settings.

*Discontinuities between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten settings.* Teachers from both schools reported discontinuities in cognitive, behavioral and social expectations between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten. One River City teacher expressed the need for more cohesiveness and improved communication between kindergarten teachers and pre-kindergarten centers. She noted improved communication with the two pre-kindergarten teachers housed at River City, but felt more should be done to connect pre-kindergarten teachers who were not housed in elementary schools with kindergarten teachers. A teacher from Bridge View who served on the county pre-kindergarten /kindergarten committee said that even though it was valuable for her to see what was happening in pre-kindergarten, and valuable for the pre-kindergarten teachers to see what was happening in kindergarten, they still had to teach their own

curriculum and there seemed to be “no common ground” between the two curricula. To her knowledge, this committee was no longer in existence and there “was not any resolve from it.”

This section described how discontinuities with kindergarten transition programming approaches between the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten environments were similar and how they were different. The remaining components and categories from the Kindergarten Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) were thoroughly discussed in other research questions and were not repeated in the current question. An analysis of question 4 through the themes of Communication and Participant Perceptions follows.

### **Themes**

**Communication.** Forty-one transition to kindergarten practices were found in common between the two schools in the current study. Other than the district sponsored kindergarten registration and open house along with the district pre-kindergarten centers that worked with feeder schools to arrange visits in the spring, there was no supporting evidence during the current study of any communication between schools at the district or school level communicating expectations for, or participation in certain kindergarten transition practices. Communication of kindergarten transition practices within schools were found to be shared when the event was a school sponsored activity such as staggered entry or when the event was agreed upon within the kindergarten team such as taking the students on a tour of the school during staggered entry. Other high intensity transition practices were reported by one or two teachers that did not appear to be used by other teachers. Some of these transition practices included home visits, Dress for Success/Class Chats, and weekly positive communication with parents either via phone, note, or post card. It was beyond the scope of the current study to determine if communication regarding specific strategies occurred either within or between schools. Events such as the kindergarten

play dates at Bridge View were communicated by participants during the face-to-face interviews with different perceptions. Evidence of how communication within and between schools occurred was not revealed in the current study. Both schools had a written to transition plan, however there was no evidence the plans were communicated to stakeholders. This concluded this section that described communication of similarities and differences with kindergarten transition practices between and within schools. The following section described similarities and differences regarding participant perceptions.

**Participant Perceptions.** One assumption listed in Chapter I of this dissertation was “Teachers received their class lists on open house day.” This perception was proven to be mistaken. Participants at both schools reportedly made the class lists. River City participants reported teachers created class lists prior to open house, on one of the first workdays when teachers returned for the year. The principal at River City assumed the teachers assessed students during staggered entry and then placed children in classrooms on the fourth day of school. Bridge View teachers also reported creating class lists. During the 2012-2013 school year they created the list on one of the first teacher workdays, prior to open house, just as River City teachers did. In previous years Bridge View’s teachers used data collected during staggered entry to create class lists after the first three staggered entry days. All Bridge View participants who discussed this procedure agreed open house was better this year because students knew their class assignment. Bridge View’s principal’s assumption was that due to unbalanced classrooms this year they should return to making class assignments after staggered entry next year. Two of the three Bridge View teachers responding about when to create class lists said their preference was to continue making lists prior to open house, while the third teacher found pros and cons to both methods.

The researcher asked two of the three River City teachers if the pre-kindergarten students attending the in-house pre-kindergarten program would attend kindergarten at River City. Neither of them knew, with one of them saying, “I guess I assumed they would.” These perceptions varied between teachers and administrators within the school as the administrators were confident that not all in-house pre-kindergarten students would be assigned to River City for kindergarten.

Two Bridge View teachers helped unify parent perceptions of report card and academic expectations by holding quarterly parent meetings they called Class Chats and Dress for Success. The teachers reviewed the quarterly academic expectations with parents and provided parents with strategies to help their children at home. This took away the need for parents to try to create their own perception or interpretation of quarterly kindergarten academic expectations.

Three Bridge View participants (the principal and two teachers) reported varying perceptions regarding a kindergarten play date. Differences in activities were listed. All three participants reported students used sidewalk chalk and that parents had the opportunity to mingle with and talk to teachers. The principal and one teacher reported a low turn-out while the other teacher reported the event was successful because they advertised families would have lunch and take home bags filled with manipulatives. The principal expressed even though she thought the concept was good it lost its effectiveness due to low turnout. She assumed the teachers agreed with her preference to save the money to use on the children who showed up for school in August. Her assumption was contrasted by one of the teacher’s perception which was a desire to revisit the play date and come together to make it more effective since it was such a “valuable” transition practice.

#### **Research Question 4 Summary**

The fourth research question to guide this study was: How were the schools' kindergarten transition practices similar and how were they different? The data revealed at least 41 similar practices shared between the two schools with between school and within school variations within these practices. River City participated in or offered at least 51 transition practices while Bridge View participated in or offered at least 64 transition practices. Approximately 55% of both River City's overall transition practices could be considered high intensity transition practices, compared to approximately 60% of Bridge View's. River City reported participating in 10 practices not reported at Bridge View. Of these 10 practices 5 (50%) could be considered high intensity practices. Bridge View reported participating in about 23 practices not reported at River City. Of these 23 practices 16 (70%) could be considered high intensity transition practices. Overall Bridge View used more transition practices than River City and more high intensity transition practices when compared to River City. The following section addressed the fifth and final question the researcher used to guide this study.

#### **Research Question 5 Findings:**

Research Question 5: To what degree was there evidence that suggested transition practices had a positive influence on student achievement?

**Do**

**Resources.** In the current study the focus on student achievement was narrowed to examining kindergarten reading achievement during the beginning and middle of year reading assessments. To ascertain information regarding the degree to which there was evidence that suggested transition practices had a positive influence on student reading achievement in kindergarten, the researcher used a variety of resources. These resources included Reading 3D

TRC and DIBELS Next data, the North Carolina Schools' Report Cards, face-to-face interviews, transcriptions of the face-to-face interviews, and information ascertained from the and paper-and-pencil demographic survey administered at the conclusion of the face-to-face interviews. In order to get the desired Outcomes from the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) Resources in the form of principals, teachers, eligible and willing participants, a written transition plan and staff development also had to be in place. In the current study all teachers and administrators exhibited a willingness to create smooth transitions for the incoming kindergarteners. Both schools in the current study had a written transition to kindergarten plan in the School's Improvement Plan, even though most participants did not know the plans existed. Only one Bridge View teacher participant reported having received specific professional development in the area of transitioning children to kindergarten. Professional development was also included under Activities in Characteristics Influencing Transitions, and was explored further in that section. How these resources helped the schools in the current study with achieving a positive influence on student achievement was questionable. The eligible and willing participants could have had a significant influence on student reading achievement. In contrast, participants not being aware of the transition plans, coupled with no reported professional development could have hindered efforts to successfully transition children to kindergarten. The extent of how these factors impacted the current findings was beyond the scope of the current study.

Resources found in the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1), needed to achieve a positive influence on student reading achievement were delineated above. A description of the extent to which resources were used at the schools in the current study was provided. Following the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model

Based on the Literature (see Figure 1), the next section examined how Activities from the current study potentially had a positive influence on student reading achievement in kindergarten.

### **Activities.**

*Programmatic transition practices offered by the schools.* Programmatic transition practices were offered at both schools that were commensurable with the literature and the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) used to help guide the analysis in the current study. These transition practices were thoroughly described in previous research questions. How the use of transition practices could have had a positive influence on student kindergarten reading achievement was examined in the sections below.

*Characteristics influencing transitions.* Research question 3 elaborated on how Characteristics Influencing Transitions created conditions that enhanced a successful transition to kindergarten for children. The first of these characteristics was teacher child relationships. In the current study 100% of all participants expressed the importance of establishing relationships with their students. Teachers cited having one-on-one conversations with their students and talking with them while having lunch as two of many reported practices that helped build teacher/child relationships. The heavy emphasis on establishing relationships with children found in the current study suggested this area of the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) was fulfilled. This could have benefited the schools in the current study with having a positive influence on student kindergarten reading achievement.

Providing teachers with specific professional development in transitions to kindergarten was found in the literature to have a positive influence on teacher use of transition practices. As previously cited and discussed, the quantity of transition practices used was associated with increased academic achievement. In the current study only one teacher participant from Bridge

View Elementary reported specific professional development in transitioning children to kindergarten. This absence of teacher professional development in the current study failed to fulfill this component of the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) needed for schools to reach the desired outcome, specifically a positive influence on student kindergarten reading achievement.

Teaching experience, particularly with experience in the same grade level was the third Characteristic Influencing Transitions that influenced teacher use of transition practices. As previously cited and discussed, the quantity of transition practices used was associated with increased academic achievement. In the current study River City teachers had more than twice as much experience teaching kindergarten than did Bridge View teachers. According to the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1), River City teachers, based on their teaching experience, should have reportedly used more transition practices than Bridge View teachers. This increased use could have had a mediating effect for at-risk children especially in reading at River City. Findings from the current study did not align with the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1), as Bridge View participants reportedly used more transition practices than River City's participants. Bridge View participants reported a total of 64 transition practices being used by one, some or all participants, while River City participants reported a total of 51 transition practices being use by one, some or all participants. Bridge View's participants used more high intensity practices than did River City's participants. Of Bridge View's reported 64 transition practices 39 were categorized as high intensity, and 25 were categorized as low intensity. River City reported 28 transition practices categorized as high intensity, and 23 categorized as low intensity.

As previously cited and discussed, the final Characteristic Influencing Transitions was areas of teacher certification. None of the participants in the current study held an early-childhood degree, but all teacher participants were licensed to teach elementary school. The principal at River City along with Bridge View's assistant principal did not hold licenses in elementary education. Since none of the participants in the current study held an early-childhood degree or certification, this component of the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) was not fulfilled.

Of the four Characteristics Influencing Transitions discussed in this section, only one, teacher/child relationships, was found to be a significant part of the kindergarten transition program at both schools. Teacher professional development and early childhood certification were not a significant finding at either school, and the data collected in the current study confounded previous research regarding teacher experience. Implications and recommendations based on the findings from this section will be made in Chapter 5. This concluded the section on how Characteristics Influencing Transitions created conditions that positively influenced student achievement through a successful transition to kindergarten. The next section looked at how quantity of transitions positively influenced student achievement by creating a successful transition to kindergarten.

***Quantity of transition practices.*** As previously discussed and cited, quantity of transition practices were found to positively influence student achievement by the end of kindergarten. Bridge View participants reported one or more participants used a total of 64 transition practices. River City's participants reported one or more participants used a total of 51 transition practices. Bridge View also reported common use of more transition practices than River City. Bridge View participants reported common use of 19 transition practices, while River City reported

common use of 13 transition practices. Following the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) used to guide the analysis of the current study, the reported quantity of transition practices used by Bridge View participants could produce more positive influences on student academic achievement in kindergarten than River City. The next section coupled intensity of transition practices reportedly used with quantity reported in this section.

*Intensity of transition practices.* High-intensity or more individualized kindergarten transition practices were found to be a predictive factor in a child's future school success, specifically with positive academic achievement by the end of kindergarten (Schulting et al., 2005). Implementing high-intensity practices was a way schools could be ready for children and families, specifically those from low economic statuses (Pianta et al., 1996). Of the 64 transition practices one or more participants from Bridge View Elementary reported use of, 39 were categorized as high-intensity and 25 were categorized as low intensity practices. Bridge View reported common use of 19 transition practices, 10 of which were categorized as high-intensity, and 9 categorized as low-intensity practices. Of the 51 transition practices one or more participants from River City Elementary reported use of, 28 were categorized as high-intensity practices and 23 were categorized as low-intensity practices. River City reported common use of 13 transition practices, 8 of which were categorized as high-intensity, and 5 categorized as low intensity.

Following the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) used to guide the analysis of the current study, the reported intensity of transition practices used by Bridge View participants could produce more positive influences on student

academic achievement in kindergarten than River City. The next section examined barriers to successful transitions that prevented positive influences on student achievement.

*Barriers to implementing transition practices.* Participants in the current study were not directly asked about barriers to implementing transition practices, so barriers participants may have experienced were possibly omitted from their responses. One barrier, however, found in the literature was transition plan not available. Research supported the need for clear and specific transition plans to help schools be ready for all children by easing the transition to kindergarten (Ray et al., 2010; Wesley et al., 2003). In the current study a question on the paper-and-pencil demographic survey asked participants about the existence of a district-level plan, and of a school-level plan. At least 80% of respondents at both schools said either “no”, or “I do not know” in response to both these questions. Following the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) the existence of a written kindergarten transition plan helped to create Ready Schools that were ready for all children entering kindergarten. In the current study, both schools had a written transition to kindergarten plan as a part of the School’s Improvement Plan, but most participants were not aware of the plan. This raised the question, if participants were not aware of the plan, did the mere existence of the plan fulfill the need to help create a Ready School? Both schools had 3 kindergarten transition practices listed in the respective plans. Bridge View reported use of all 3 practices in the written plan, while River City reportedly used 2 of 3 of the practices listed in their written plan. It was beyond the scope of the current study to determine if the existence of written transition plans at both schools had a positive influence on student kindergarten reading achievement. The next section looked at how environmental impacts reported in the current study could have had a positive influence on student achievement in kindergarten.

***Environmental impacts.*** As previously discussed and cited, environmental impacts were found to positively influence students' transition to kindergarten. Major findings in relation to environmental impacts in the current study included establishing positive relationships with students and parents, open communication between home and school, communication and collaboration between the school and the community, and communication and collaboration between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers.

Establishing positive relationships with students and parents was reported by 100% of participants in the current study. This was one of only 4 transition to kindergarten practices reported by 100% of all participants in the current study. Participants from both schools also reported frequent, open and positive communication between school and families. Various ways of communicating with families was reported. A third area that demonstrated both schools in the current study utilized environmental impacts to help achieve a smooth transition to kindergarten was through communication and collaboration with the community. Administrators at both schools collaborated with the surrounding community. Bridge View's principal reported more use of community communication and collaboration than did River City's principal. Local businesses and the neighborhood association reportedly supplied uniforms and school supplies for the students at Bridge View. River City's principal's omission of this information in his responses cannot be assumed to mean the same collaboration did not occur between River City and its community, since this question was not directly posed to the study participants. These three reported practices by both schools aligned with the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) as practices that could lead to the desired outcome of positive academic performance in kindergarten.

Communication between pre-kindergarten teachers and kindergarten teachers was one area in the current research that did not align with the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) to potentially reach the desired outcome of positive academic achievement in kindergarten. Participants from both schools reported a disconnected relationship between the pre-kindergarten settings and elementary schools. The only exception to this was at River City. Two pre-kindergarten classrooms were housed for the first time during the 2012-2013 school year at River City. River City participants reported a collaborative relationship with the two pre-kindergarten teachers and classrooms housed in the school that they did not report with pre-kindergarten teachers and classrooms housed outside the school. From the major environmental impact findings in the current study, 3 of the 4 were found to have occurred at both schools.

Following the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) used to guide the analysis of the current study, the desired outcome of positive influences on kindergarten academic achievement from environmental impacts could potentially be found for children at both schools in the current study. The next section described discontinuities between settings.

*Discontinuities between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten settings.* Research previously discussed and cited showed discontinuities between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten settings impacted the child's transition to formal schooling. These discontinuities arose from pre-kindergarten environments which were designed to encourage social and emotional development in children, and in essence emulated the culture of the family. Conversely, children entered kindergarten classrooms focused on higher demands for academic attainment (Graue, 1999; Love et al., 1992; National Education Goals Panel, 1998). In the

current study Bridge View participants reported concerns about discontinuities between academic expectations between the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten environments. The principal at Bridge View and River City's assistant principal reported high percentages of students who did not experience a formal pre-kindergarten environment prior to coming to kindergarten. River City participants expected an easier transition to kindergarten for students who attended one of the two pre-kindergarten classrooms housed in the school, than they did for other students entering kindergarten at their school during the 2013-2014 school year.

Following the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) used to guide the analysis of the current study, and based on reported efforts to minimize discontinuities between environments, the desired outcome of positive influences on academic achievement in kindergarten would be most likely for students who attended one of River City's pre-kindergarten classrooms during the 2012-2013 school year, and subsequently attended River City's kindergarten during the 2013-2014 school year. Not all students assigned to River City's pre-kindergarten classroom attended kindergarten at River City, so the number of pre-kindergarten students transitioning to kindergarten at River City could likely be a small percentage of students.

This section described the discontinuities between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten settings and the evidences that suggested efforts to minimize discontinuities between environments could produce the desired outcome of positive influences on academic achievement in kindergarten. This was the final Activity in the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) used to guide the current study. The following section examined the final category under the Do component of the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1), Outputs.

**Outputs.** The final category of the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) under the Do or action component was Outputs. Outputs occurred when Resources and Activities from the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) were implemented and utilized. This integration of Resources and Activities resulted in Outputs in the forms of successful transitions to kindergarten, Ready Schools and Ready Children. The evidence of the existence of these Outputs came in the form of Short-Term Outcomes, or positive influences on kindergarten academic achievement. The current study narrowed that focus to kindergarten reading achievement. An examination of and comparison between the two schools of the 14 resources and activities listed in this research question revealed Bridge View participants reportedly fulfilled 8 or 57% of the Resources and Activities in alignment with the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) to have a positive influence on kindergarten reading achievement, compared to River City's 7 or 50% of Resources and Activities. Specifically the 14 Resources and Activities were analyzed and compared in the following manner:

Resources:

1. *Eligible and Willing participants (teachers and administrators)*- Eligible teachers and administrators at both schools demonstrated a willing attitude to help transition students smoothly to kindergarten. This willingness at both schools was commensurable with the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) for a positive influence on kindergarten reading achievement.
2. *Written Transition Plan* – Both schools had a written transition plan but at least 80% of the participants were not aware of the existence of the plan. Since participants were

not aware of the existence of the plan, neither school was commensurable with the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) for a positive influence on kindergarten reading achievement.

Activities:

3. *Programmatic Transition Practices Offered by the Schools* – Both schools reportedly offered transition practices that were commensurable with the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) for a positive influence on kindergarten reading achievement.
4. *Characteristics Influencing Transitions:*
  - a. *Teacher/Child Relationships* – Both schools reportedly developed teacher child relationships that were commensurable with the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) for a positive influence on kindergarten reading achievement.
  - b. *Teacher professional development* – Neither School reportedly offered teacher professional development in the area of transitioning children to kindergarten. Neither school was commensurable with the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) for a positive influence on kindergarten reading achievement.
  - c. *Teacher experience* – River City’s teachers reportedly had more teaching experience than Bridge View’s teachers. Based on teaching experience, River City was more commensurable with the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) for a positive influence on kindergarten reading achievement.

- d. *Teacher certification* – Teachers nor administrators from either school reportedly held an early childhood certification. Neither school was commensurable with the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) for a positive influence on kindergarten reading achievement.
5. *Quantity of Transition Practices* – Bridge View participants reported use of more transition practices than did River City participants. Based on quantity, Bridge View was more commensurable with the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) for a positive influence on kindergarten reading achievement than River City.
6. *Intensity of Transition Practices* - Bridge View participants reported use of more high-intensity transition practices than did River City participants. Based on intensity, Bridge View was more commensurable with the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) for a positive influence on kindergarten reading achievement than River City.
7. *Environmental Impacts*
  - a. *Positive Relationships* – Both schools reportedly established positive relationships that were commensurable with the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) for a positive influence on kindergarten reading achievement.
  - b. *Open Communication* – Both schools reportedly maintained frequent and open communication with families that were commensurable with the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) for a positive influence on kindergarten reading achievement.

- c. *Communication and Collaboration with the community* – Both principals reportedly established relationships with the community surrounding the schools that were commensurable with the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) for a positive influence on kindergarten reading achievement.
  - d. *Communication and Collaboration between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers*. Both schools reported an overall disconnect between pre-kindergarten teachers housed outside the school building and kindergarten teachers. The in-house pre-kindergarten at River City was not considered as a way to provide continuity between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten environments since a large portion of the students did not attend pre-kindergarten and only a small portion of students attending the in-house pre-kindergarten would attend kindergarten at River City. This lack of communication between settings resulted in neither school being commensurable with the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) for a positive influence on kindergarten reading achievement.
8. *Discontinuities Between Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten Settings* – Neither school reported effective measures to lessen the discontinuities between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten environments, resulting in neither school being commensurable with the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) for a positive influence on kindergarten reading achievement.

Based on these findings and the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model based on the Literature, Bridge View demonstrated more evidence than River City of resources and activities that could produce the outcome of a positive influence on student kindergarten reading achievement. Determining the statistical significance of this finding was beyond the scope of the current study.

This is the final section of the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) that was analyzed for research question 5: To what degree was there evidence that suggested transition practices had a positive influence on student achievement? The final section for research question 5 examined the Get component of the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1), specifically Short-Term Outcomes found in the current study. This section considered Bridge View's kindergarten reading achievement compared to River City's kindergarten reading achievement.

### **Get/Short-Term Outcomes**

According to the literature and the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) used to guide the current study, if certain Resources and Activities were in place, the desired Outputs of Ready Schools, Ready Children, and Smooth Transitions to Kindergarten should be achieved. These Outputs resulted in the Short-Term Outcomes of increased academic achievement in kindergarten (Schulting et al., 2005). Findings in the current study were narrowed to examine potential effects found in kindergarten reading achievement.

As described in question 5 above, when all data were triangulated, Bridge View's participants reported more evidence of participation in Resources and Activities that produced Outputs which should lead to the desired Short-Term Outcome of positive kindergarten reading

achievement. As delineated in Tables 21, 22, 24, 25, 26 and 27, Bridge View Elementary kindergarteners demonstrated more positive reading achievement as measured by Reading 3D TRC and DIBELS Next, than did River City's kindergarteners during both beginning of the year and middle of the year assessments. River City kindergarteners had a higher percent proficient in Letter Naming Fluency during the middle of the year assessment than Bridge View kindergarteners, however, Letter Naming Fluency was not seen as a measure of reading achievement.

These findings corroborated with the predictability of the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1), indicating the use of certain Resources and Activities could lead to the Outputs of Ready Schools, Ready Children and Smooth Transitions to Kindergarten. These Outputs could ultimately produce the Short-Term Outcomes of a positive influence on reading achievement during kindergarten. Consideration of other moderating and mediating factors that may have contributed to these Short-Term Outcomes was beyond the scope of the current study.

### **Themes**

The themes of Communication and Participant Perceptions were not presented for research question 5. The themes were omitted for this research question as these themes did not arise from the data the researcher collected in this study.

### **Research Question 5 Summary**

The fifth research question to guide this study was: To what degree was there evidence that suggested kindergarten transition practices had a positive influence on student achievement? Bridge View participants used more transition practices and more high intensity practices than River City's participants. Bridge View's students produced more positive academic achievement

on all areas of the TRC and DIBELS Next measures of reading achievement than River City's students.

### **Summary**

This comparative case study, with a phenomenological approach, explored kindergarten transition practices at two elementary schools in southeastern North Carolina. Data from multiple Resources were triangulated and descriptive findings were compared to a Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1).

Both schools participated in district-wide initiatives such as kindergarten registration, Fast Start and open house. Participants from both schools reported school initiated transition practices such as staggered entry and using a children's book to help guide students on a school tour. A plethora of teacher initiated transition practices were reported by only 1 or 2 participants at each school. Some of these included home visits and Class Chats / Dress for Success. Data from the current study left findings unclear of why many teacher-initiated transition practices were reported in small numbers. It could not be determined from the current study if the seemingly limited use of some practices were due to lack of communication between teachers, lack of a clear or underdeveloped written transition plan, or if these practices were left unreported by some participants.

Participants from both schools reported district-wide, school-initiated and teacher-initiated transition practices not previously reported in the literature. Accounts of participants' participation in specific transition to kindergarten practices was viewed with skepticism, as unreported participation could not be automatically assumed the participant did not actually use the kindergarten transition practice. Unlike previous research, participants in the current study were not provided a check list of transition practices whereby they indicated use of specific

practices. Participant use of kindergarten transition practices in the current study was taken from face-to-face interviews and the paper-and-pencil demographic survey.

The current study sought to capture a picture of kindergarten teachers' experiences with transitioning children to kindergarten and included administrators' perspectives, which were rarely included in previous research. Comparisons between the two groups revealed administrators reported more district-wide and school-wide kindergarten transition practices while teachers included more teacher-initiated practices. Two of the administrators in the current study who did not hold degrees in elementary education reported use of fewer kindergarten transition practices than the two administrators who held degrees in elementary education.

Similarities with the literature were found regarding teacher professional development and teacher certification. The literature revealed most schools did not have a written kindergarten transition plan. In the current study, both schools did have a written transition plan as a part of the School's Improvement Plan as required by the state of North Carolina. Most practices listed in the plans were implemented, but whether or not they were intentionally implemented as a part of the plan, or just because they were what the schools normally did was questionable as 80% or more of participants from both schools were not aware of the existence of the written plans.

Bridge View Elementary participants reported use of more kindergarten transition practices and use of more high intensity practices than did participants at River City Elementary. Bridge View's kindergarteners exhibited more positive academic outcomes on the beginning of the year and middle of the year reading assessments than did River City's kindergarteners. This correlation between use of transition practices and student achievement was corroborated in previous research. When a comparison of an empirically based pattern (Bridge View's use of more Resources and Activities) was made with a predicted pattern, such as the pattern found in

the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1), the credibility of a case study was strengthened (Lincoln et al., 1985; Yin, 2009). Notably, however, any correlation between use of transition practices and student kindergarten reading achievement was contradicted by factors and controlling for these variables was beyond the scope of the current study. The case study nature of the current research revealed at least 61 transition to kindergarten practices that were not identified in previous research. These 61 the practices found in the current study included 36 practices categorized as high intensity practices and 25 practices categorized as low intensity practices.

This summary concluded the researcher's findings that were reported in Chapter 4. The next section, Chapter 5, discussed the researcher's findings, conclusions, implications and recommendations from this study.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

The purpose of this comparative case study with a phenomenological approach was to examine the experiences of school administrators and kindergarten teachers regarding Ready Schools, specifically experiences of transitioning children to kindergarten. Data from Resources and Activities used were triangulated and categorized. These results were compared with a Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) and then to the kindergarten reading scores at each school to determine if any correlation existed between Resources and Activities used and Short-Term Outcomes, specifically student reading achievement in kindergarten (Wildenger et al., 2011). Notably, any correlation between Resources and Activities used and the Short-Term Outcome of student reading achievement was contradicted by a number of factors (e.g. instructional differences, student absences, class size, school culture, etc.); controlling for these variables was beyond the scope of this study.

As previously discussed and cited, the current study broadened past research which was limited to teachers' responses to pre-determined lists of forced choice answers regarding the presence or absence of kindergarten transition practice features. The current research fulfilled the need in the literature to explore teachers' individual lived experiences with the phenomenon of transitioning children to kindergarten.

The current research also documented administrative experiences with the phenomenon of transitioning children to kindergarten. Administrative experiences had rarely been examined in previous research. It was important to capture the experiences of administrators because they were a critical element in shaping school culture (Seashore-Louis et al., 2011).

Effective kindergarten transition practices were found as a positive predictive factor in helping ease kindergarten transitions for children. Only one previous study linked the use of effective kindergarten transition practices with academic outcomes in kindergarten (Schulting et al., 2005; Wildenger et al., 2011). Rous et al. (2010) called for more research examining the impact of transition practices on academic performance. The current study sought to determine if there was a correlation between the use of Resources and Activities related to kindergarten transition programming at two southeastern North Carolina public schools with positive outcomes in kindergarten reading achievement. Other factors (e.g. instructional differences, student absences, class size, school culture, etc.) that possibly influenced student reading achievement were beyond the scope of the current study.

## **Procedures**

### **Findings**

Eleven major findings surfaced through the analyses of the data in the current study:

1. Administrators were more likely to report whole school/group transition practices, while kindergarten teachers were more likely to report classroom or child specific transition practices.
2. Four barriers not reported in previous research were either explicitly or implicitly reported in the current research (late enrollees, transient population, students in poverty, and parents/ families with negative connotations about school).
3. Communication between the schools with pre-kindergarten teachers, parents and children mostly occurred only with children attending a school-district sponsored pre-kindergarten program.

4. Analyses of results from the current study led to an indication that collaboration between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten settings may be improved when pre-kindergarten classrooms were housed in elementary schools. This finding could help lessen the discontinuities between the two settings.
5. The existence of a written kindergarten transition plan did not equate to the intentional implementation of the plan.
6. An analyses of the data found an alignment with the literature indicating teacher professional development in specific kindergarten transition practices may increase teacher usage of kindergarten transition practices.
7. Sixty-one kindergarten transition practices not previously reported in the literature were reported in the current study. Of these 61 practices (see Table 34), 36 could be categorized as high-intensity practices, and 25 could be categorized as low intensity practices.
8. An analysis of the data found an alignment with the literature indicating that the use of more kindergarten transition practices and the use of more high-intensity kindergarten transition practices may be correlated with increased reading achievement in kindergarten.
9. Teacher experience did not impact use of transitions in the current study as was previously reported in the literature.
10. This qualitative research study produced a broader view of kindergarten transition programming than previous quantitative studies produced.
11. One-hundred percent of participants in the current study cited the importance of establishing relationships with children and families. In previous studies, the

establishment of positive relationships was found to mitigate risk factors and impacted children's future academic, social and behavioral outcomes. This finding boded well for students and families in the current study.

## **Demographics**

This study was confined to and conducted in two elementary schools in one school district in southeastern North Carolina. The researcher conducted interviews with one principal, one assistant principal, and 3 kindergarten classroom teachers at River City Elementary, and interviews with one principal, one assistant principal, and 5 kindergarten classroom teachers at Bridge View Elementary. Both schools had similar student demographics in regards to total student population, and with the percent of children receiving free and reduced lunch. Dissimilar demographics included overall student academic proficiency as measured by the North Carolina End of Grade Tests for reading and mathematics for the 2011-2012 school year, percentage of African American students, and percentage of Hispanic students.

## **Research Questions**

Each research question was addressed after the data were analyzed. The data were triangulated and categorized in alignment with the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1). Responses from data collection were used to address the research questions, and Reading 3D TRC and DIBELS Next data were used to examine any possible correlation between kindergarten transition programming with kindergarteners' reading achievement.

### **Research Question 1**

How did two elementary schools in the same school district, with similar socio-economic demographics facilitate kindergarten transition practices?

Kindergarten transition programming and practices in this southeastern North Carolina school district were facilitated by district-initiated, school-initiated and teacher-initiated programming and practices. Commonalities in programming and practices were found to be initiated at all three levels in the current study. More school-initiated programming and practices were found to have occurred than district-initiated programming and practices, and more teacher-initiated programming and practices were found to have occurred than school-initiated.

Both schools reportedly experienced similar barriers to implementing kindergarten transition programming and practices. No district-initiated guidance was found on how to eliminate these barriers, but they were found to be managed similarly at the school levels. Like with the use of kindergarten transition programming and practices, kindergarten teachers reported more specific ways of handling the barriers than were reported at the school level.

Both schools reported a disconnect between the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten environments. This discontinuity included communication between teachers in both environments and with academic expectations. About half of the incoming kindergarteners from both schools reportedly did not experience a formal pre-kindergarten program. Both schools communicated with the teachers from the district's pre-kindergarten centers more than with other teachers or workers from other formal or informal pre-kindergarten environments. Students and their families attending the district's pre-kindergartens were offered more transition opportunities before the beginning of the school year than students not enrolled in the district's pre-kindergartens. One exception to the disconnect between the two environments was at River City. The school district housed two pre-kindergarten classrooms at River City for the first time during the 2012-2013 school year. When River City participants reported a lack of communication, collaboration and discontinuities between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten environments, they

were quick to exclude the two pre-kindergarten classrooms held in the school from their statements.

The overall findings from research question one was both schools facilitated kindergarten transition programming and practices through a variety of ways. Teachers used more kindergarten transition practices and more practices that were more individualized than the district or school levels.

## **Research Question 2**

To what extent has each school created a kindergarten transition plan?

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction developed a state wide initiative for each school district to develop and implement a transition plan. In the *Transition Planning for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools*, they provided districts and schools with a framework for designing, implementing and evaluating a transition plan. Both of the schools in the current study received federal Title I funds. All schools in North Carolina who received Title I funds, must complete a section of the North Carolina's School Improvement Plan template entitled Title I School-Wide Review. Findings from the current study revealed even though the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction developed an initiative for district transition planning, the southeastern North Carolina school district in the current study did not have a written transition plan. Both schools in the current study did have a written transition to kindergarten plan as a part of the overall School Improvement Plan that was posted on the school's web-site. At least 80% of participants at both schools, however, responded "no" or "I don't know," to the question, "Does your school have a written plan for transitioning children to kindergarten?" on the paper-and-pencil demographic survey at the end of the face-to-face interview. This finding was important because previous research suggested schools and districts should create and implement successful

kindergarten transition plans to help maximize students' potential of academic, social and emotional success (Ray et al., 2010; Wesley et al., 2003). If participants in the current study reportedly did not know or thought the schools did not have a written plan, that suggested the written plans were not intentional, or driving kindergarten transition practices at the schools. This lack of intentionality could lead to haphazard or isolated use of kindergarten transition practices. This could limit the schools' potential to work with all stakeholders to create a plan, which could help smooth the transition to kindergarten for all students. A transition to kindergarten plan written by all stakeholders could potentially increase children's kindergarten reading achievement and set them on a trajectory for future school success.

### **Research Question 3**

How were kindergarten transition practices at each school described when compared to the literature on kindergarten transition practices?

A comparison between kindergarten transition practices between the schools in the current study to what the literature revealed on kindergarten transition programming resulted in more similarities than dissimilarities. Similarities and dissimilarities were specifically examined in the Resources and Activities delineated in the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) used to guide this study.

Similarities were found between both schools and the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) used to guide the current study in Resources and in Activities. Two major similarities with the literature were most schools or districts did not provide teachers with specific and comprehensive written kindergarten transition plans to help schools be ready for children (Ray et al., 2010; Wesley et al., 2003), and lack of specialized professional development to help ease the transition between home and school (Early et al.,

1999; Nelson, 2004). Like in the literature, findings from the current study did not reveal a district level transition to kindergarten plan, and even though both schools had a written plan, at least 80% of the participants were not aware of the plans. This finding suggested there may be potential benefits, albeit unintentional, since there was little evidence of participant knowledge of a written transition to kindergarten plan intentionally driving transition to kindergarten programming at either school. Schools in the current study were also similar to the literature in that findings from the current study revealed most participants had not received professional development or information on transitioning children to kindergarten.

Dissimilarities were found in more concentrated areas. Researchers previously cited and referenced suggested Characteristics Influencing Transitions such as teacher experience could result in teachers using more transition practices, and more high-intensity transition practices. In the current study, River City teachers had more experience than Bridge View teachers, yet contradictory to the research, Bridge View teachers used more transition practices, and more high-intensity practices than did River City teachers. Researchers previously referenced and cited suggested Environmental Impacts such as coordination with pre-school programs, or the community, were high-intensity activities that helped facilitate a smooth transition to kindergarten for children. Both schools in the current study reported a disconnect between kindergarten programs and pre-school programs. The anomaly to this finding was at River City. Participants at River City made an exception to this statement when discussing the two pre-kindergarten classrooms housed in their building.

Many of the differences between the literature and the current study were found due to the qualitative nature of the current study when compared to the quantitative nature of previous

research. The researcher's findings from this study revealed administrative perspectives previously not explored and 61 transition practices (see Table 34) not found in previous research.

Both schools in the current study demonstrated an alignment with the literature in many areas that could be considered strengths. With intentional transition planning, both schools could capitalize on these areas to strengthen kindergarten transitions for children. This finding highlighted two Activities where improvement could be focused, Characteristics Influencing Transitions (teacher professional development in transitions to kindergarten) and Environmental Impacts (coordination with pre-school programs, and collaboratively creating a transition plan). Teacher professional development could potentially strengthen the all components of the Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1). Improvement in availability of Resources at the district and school levels, specifically a written transition plan that was created by and communicated with stakeholders, could also strengthen transitions to kindergarten at the two schools in the current study.

#### **Research Question 4**

How were the schools' kindergarten transition practices similar and how were they different?

Kindergarten transition practices were very similar at both schools. Both schools had written transition to kindergarten plans, but only one participant at each school was aware of the existence of the plans. Kindergarten teachers at both schools employed kindergarten transition practices that were mostly directed towards families and children. Administrators at both schools were more likely to report transition to kindergarten practices that were more whole-school oriented. Both schools implemented district initiated activities such as open house, Fast Start and kindergarten registration. Some school-wide kindergarten transition activities occurred such as

staggered entry. Usage of most teacher activities varied between teachers within schools and between schools.

Between the two schools in the current study, at least 61 kindergarten transition practices (see Table 34), both high-intensity and low-intensity, were reported that had not previously been found in the literature. Similarities in transition practices were found at both schools as were differences within schools and between schools. One example was the use of *The Gingerbread Man* to guide students on a school tour. All reporting participants at Bridge View used this book for the student tour, while only one River City teacher used this book. The others used *Brown Bear, Brown Bear*. A few transition practices were identified in the current study that could have a positive influence on transitioning children to kindergarten. Participants at both schools reported use of Fast Start and Staggered Entry. Participants at Bridge View included summer play dates and sibling placement as transition activities.

Only four findings in the current study yielded a 100% response rate from all 12 participants, one of which was establish positive relationships with students and families. This previously cited and discussed Characteristic that Influenced Transitions was found in previous research to mitigate risk factors and impact children's subsequent academic performance, behavioral outcomes and overall success. This finding boded well for students and families at both schools.

Another positive finding for schools in the current study was the quantity of transition practices offered to children and families. This finding was of particular interest since quantity of transition practices offered by schools was associated with positive achievement scores at the end of kindergarten (Schulting et al., 2005). In the current study 41 practices were found being used at both schools, 56% of which were high-intensity transition practices. At least 51 practices

were reportedly being used at River City, 55% of which were high-intensity transition practices, and 64 transition practices were reportedly being used at Bridge View, 61% of which were high-intensity. Bridge View Elementary reportedly used more transition practices and more high-intensity practices than did River City. When aligned with the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1), the predicted pattern (Lincoln et al., 1985; Yin, 2009) would be for Bridge View's kindergarteners to have more positive reading outcomes than River City's.

One district initiated difference between the two schools was River City, unlike Bridge View housed two pre-kindergarten classrooms in their building during the 2012-2013 school year. All River City participants responded positively to the pre-kindergartens being housed in the building and remarked on how transitioning to kindergarten would be easier for students moving from pre-kindergarten to kindergarten at River City.

Participants at both schools reported a "gap" between the pre-kindergarten setting and kindergarten. The discontinuity reportedly involved "gaps" in communication and collaboration with pre-kindergarten teachers and in academic expectations. The only exception to this finding was at River City whose participants reported collaboration and an overall satisfaction with the in-house pre-kindergartens.

Principals at both schools reported being involved in community/neighborhood meetings and events. Bridge View's principal elaborated on how her community partnered with her school to provide uniforms and supplies. Bridge View's principal also reportedly encouraged her staff to be seen in the community by eating in community based restaurants and attending cultural events at the neighboring lake.

Perceptions of transition practices such as play dates and whether to create class lists before open house or after staggered entry varied between participants within schools and between schools. These varying perceptions were addressed in the recommendations section below.

### **Research Question 5**

To what degree was there evidence that suggested transition practices had a positive influence on student achievement?

Participants at Bridge View Elementary reported use of more transition practices, and the use of more high-intensity transition practices than did River City participants. Bridge View's kindergarten students overall produced more positive academic achievement on all areas of Reading 3D TRC and DIBELS Next measures of reading achievement than River City's kindergarten students. These findings from the current study correlated with the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) previously cited and discussed that the use of more transition practices (including low-intensity practices) and the use of more high-intensity practices were associated with positive academic achievement at the end of kindergarten. These findings were strongest for low and middle socio-economic status children and families. Notably, any correlation between use of Resources and Activities with student achievement was contradicted by a number of factors (e.g. instructional differences, student absences, class size, school culture, etc.); controlling for these variables was beyond the scope of this study.

Research previously cited and discussed reported teachers who received specific professional development in transitioning children to kindergarten were likely to use more kindergarten transition practices. Only one Bridge View teacher reported having received

information or professional development specifically in transitioning children to kindergarten. As predicted by the literature, this teacher reported use of more kindergarten transition practices than the other Bridge View and River City participants. It was beyond the scope of this study to determine if students in her class were associated with more positive reading achievement than the children in the other classrooms at Bridge View, but this finding is worth future examination.

**Resources and Activities found in the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) were found that were not reported by Bridge View participants, but were reported by River City participants. If the non-reported items found in the literature were included in a written transition plan created by all stakeholders, and designed to fit the individual needs of the children and families at their school, the kindergarten transition programming at both schools could produce a greater ability to transition children into kindergarten creating Ready Schools and Ready Children. Following the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1), and findings from the current study, this could result in positive reading achievement outcomes for children in kindergarten, potentially setting them on a trajectory for school success. This was important not only for children but for schools trying to meet the demands of increased expectations and high-stakes testing.**

### **Conclusions**

Based on the researcher's findings, the following conclusions may be drawn from this study. They were as follows: (a) most practices are teacher-initiated, (b) school level written kindergarten transition plans did not guide kindergarten transitions and most of the practices that were reported were not a part of a written transition plan, (c) there were more similarities found with transition practices conducted at the schools in the current study when compared to the

literature, than dissimilarities, (d) housing pre-kindergartens in the elementary schools could be beneficial to teachers and students, (e) establishing positive relationships with children and families was important to all participants in the current study, (f) specific professional development and information in transitions to kindergarten impacted teacher use of transition practices, (g) teacher demographic similarities may have outweighed teacher experience when compared to use of transition practices, and (h) more use of Resources and Activities, specifically quantity and intensity of transition practices may have had a positive influence on kindergarten reading achievement, setting students on a trajectory for improved academic, behavioral and social Outcomes in the future.

Quantity of transition practices and high-intensity transition practices that were individualized for children occurred more often at the teacher-initiated level than at the district-initiated or school-initiated levels. Teacher participants at both schools reported use (all reported use, not common use) of more kindergarten transition practices and more high-intensity practices than the administrators. These high-quality teacher-initiated programs and practices, however, were often reported by only one or two teachers. This led to a conclusion other teachers, even within the same school, were possibly unaware of high-quality programs and practices they could have provided their students and families that could have increased kindergarten reading achievement, thus setting kindergarten students on a trajectory for future academic success.

Both schools in the current study had a written kindergarten transition plan as a part of the School's Improvement Plan. Each plan delineated 3 kindergarten transition practices. Five of the 6 kindergarten transition practices delineated in the combined plans were reported as a transition practice by participants in the current study. Since the majority of participants were not aware of the existence of the plans, it could be concluded that the plans were not guiding

kindergarten transition practices offered at the schools. This conclusion was further substantiated by the number of practices reportedly used by at least one participant in the study that were not listed in the schools' written plans. A total of 74 transition practices were reported by at least one participant in the current study. Only 6 transition practices were listed in the school level written plans.

More similarities were found with the literature in the current study than dissimilarities. Most of the dissimilarities found in the literature were the result of the qualitative nature of the current research when compared to the quantitative nature of previous research. One of the similarities was with transition plans. As previously cited and discussed, the literature suggested using all stake holders, especially parents, to help schools create and implement kindergarten transition plans to help ease the transition to kindergarten for children. Previous research reported findings similar to the current research that most districts and schools did not provide written transition to kindergarten plans. Both schools in the current study had written plans, however, at least 80% of the participants in the study were not aware of the existence of the plans. If the practices that were reportedly occurring at both schools in the current study were written in an intentionally created and implemented plan, it could be concluded the kindergarten transition programming at both schools could be much more powerful in helping at-risk children transition successfully to kindergarten.

Housing pre-kindergarten classrooms in the elementary schools may be beneficial to teachers and students. The discontinuities between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten environments were similar to those found in the literature with the exception of 2 pre-kindergarten classrooms housed at River City. Participants at River City reported increased collaboration and communication with pre-kindergarten teachers housed in the elementary

school. All River City participants reported a positive connotation in association with the pre-kindergarten program in the building and stated they felt the children transitioning from the pre-kindergarten program to kindergarten in the building would reap benefits because they would already be familiar with the environment and school-wide rules. This conclusion was similar to Magnuson's et al. (2007) previous research who found children who attended pre-kindergarten in the same school as their kindergarten did not exhibit externalizing behaviors which may have resulted from the increased familiarity with the schools for the children and the families.

Establishing positive communication and relationships with families and children was important to all participants in the current study. Establishing relationships was one of only 4 kindergarten transition practices reported by 100% of participants in this study. As previously discussed and cited, this emphasis on establishing positive communication and relationships could have a positive impact on academic achievement in kindergarten for all students in the current study.

Teachers who received specific professional development and information on transitioning children to kindergarten used more transition practices and more high intensity practices than teachers who received no professional development (Early et al., 1999; Early et al., 2001; Rous et al., 2010). Professional development and the subsequent results was one teacher characteristic used to predict a successful transition to kindergarten for children (Burchinal et al., 2002). Findings from the current study revealed only one Bridge View teacher reportedly received specific professional development in transitioning children to kindergarten. This trained teacher reportedly used more kindergarten transition practices than all other participants. This pattern matched the prediction from the literature. So, it could be concluded that there was a correlation between teacher professional development and use of transition

practices. Other factors (e.g. instructional differences, student absences, class size, school culture, etc.) that may have influenced this finding were not accounted for in the current study.

As previously cited and discussed, teacher experience was found to be correlated with the use of transition practices. This finding was contradicted in other studies. In the current study, River City teachers had more experience than Bridge View teachers, but used fewer transition practices than Bridge View teachers. These inconclusive findings were similar to findings from the literature. Upon further examination of teacher demographics, it was noted River City teachers had an age range of 28 years to 57 years, experience range of 7 years to 20 years, and were ethnically dissimilar. Bridge View teachers demographics were overall similar. All were Caucasian, had an age range of 26 years to 34 years (with a mode of 26 years) and an experience range of 4 years to 7 years. Therefore, this phenomenon that arose from this study may be considered in future research endeavors.

The final conclusion drawn in the current study was Bridge View's kindergarteners were on a more positive trajectory for the Impact of improved academic, behavioral and social Outcomes in the future than River City's kindergarteners. This conclusion was based on the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) used to guide this study. The triangulated data showed Bridge View's participants used more Resources and Activities than River City's participants, and Bridge View kindergarteners demonstrated more positive Outcomes on the beginning and middle of the year kindergarten reading assessments than River City's.

This completed the conclusions drawn from the current research. The following section discussed implications found from the analyses of data collected in the current study.

## **Implications**

The researcher's results from this study suggested implications for educational policy and practice. Because this was a comparative case study with a phenomenological approach of two public elementary schools located within one southeastern North Carolina school district, the results from this study may not be used to offer definitive policy and/or practice recommendations in other school districts. Lessons learned from the experiences of the administrators and kindergarten teachers in the current study broadened the amount and intensity of kindergarten transition programming and practices previously reported in research. Experiences revealed in the current research enriched what was previously known about successfully transitioning children and families to kindergarten. A few findings were found that policy makers and practitioners may want to consider based on this study that could have a positive influence on kindergarteners' reading achievement and setting children on a positive trajectory for their future academic success. The following implications were based on the researcher's findings and conclusions of this study.

Research previously cited and discussed revealed the more kindergarten transition practices used and the more high-intensity practices used resulted in improved academic achievement by the end of kindergarten. Evidence from the current study corroborated these findings. Bridge View participants reportedly participated in more transition practices than River City participants, and Bridge View participants reportedly participated in more high-intensity transition practices than did River City participants. Bridge View kindergarteners achieved more positive outcomes than River City kindergarteners in all beginning of the year and middle of the year measures of reading achievement as measured by Reading 3D TRC and DIBELS Next scores. More transition practices and more high-intensity transition practices were reportedly

used at the teacher-initiated level than reported by the administrators. In the current study 27 of the 74 reported kindergarten transition practices were only reported by one teacher participant. This implied kindergarten transition practices at the teacher-initiated level were less likely to be used school-wide or district-wide, narrowing the impact that high-quality, doable kindergarten transition programs and practices could have had on helping children and families successfully transition into kindergarten.

No evidence of a district transition to kindergarten plan could be found. Both schools had written transition to kindergarten plans, but most participants at both schools did not have knowledge of the written plan. The implications for the lack of a written transition to kindergarten plan, or participants knowledge of the plan guiding kindergarten transition planning at both schools may have resulted in a negative impact on the schools' readiness for incoming kindergarten students. Specifically it may have had a negative implication for the schools' ability to create Ready Schools, Ready Students and provide a smooth transition to kindergarten for all students. These potential negative implications of not having a written transition plan, or participants not having knowledge of a written plan could potentially have a negative impact on students' academic achievement in kindergarten and their trajectory for future academic success.

The methodology of the current research produced other implications. This was a comparative case study with a phenomenological approach that examined the lived experiences of teachers and administrators who helped transition children and families to kindergarten. Previous research primarily used quantitative methods for examining this pivotal transition time. The implications of the qualitative approach in the current study resulted in broader communication of kindergarten transition practices, ultimately identifying at least 61

kindergarten transition practices (see Table 34) being used in classrooms and by schools that had not previously been communicated in the literature.

The researcher's findings from this study broadened implications for school administrators. The researcher's findings from the study implied school administrators should ensure school-level transition plans were created by all stakeholders including parents. Communication, implementation and monitoring of these plans were further implications for administrators.

Increased communication and collaboration reported between River City teachers and pre-kindergarten teachers and programs housed in the school, coupled with previous research, implied attending in-house pre-kindergartens may enhance children's transitions to kindergarten. The implication of in-house pre-kindergartens for children who will attend the same school for kindergarten could result in more positive kindergarten reading achievement, thus setting them on a trajectory for future school success.

Implications for teacher professional development were also found in the current study. Only one Bridge View teacher reportedly received professional development or information on transitioning students to kindergarten. This teacher reported use of more kindergarten transition practices than any of the other participants. As previously cited and discussed teacher professional development was associated with the use of more kindergarten transition practices, which was positively associated with academic achievement by the end of kindergarten. The implication of the other 11 participants reportedly receiving no professional development could be a deterrent in helping kindergarten children experience positive academic achievement by the end of kindergarten.

This section outlined the implications of the findings from the current study. The following or concluding section, examined Recommendations for future studies.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the results of this study, three recommendations were made. The researcher's recommendations were: (1) A written kindergarten transition plan that is collaboratively created and widely communicated, (2) Specific teacher professional development in the areas of transitioning children to kindergarten, and (3) Coordination with pre-school programs.

### **Resources**

A recommendation for all districts would be to create a clear and specific district-wide written kindergarten transition plan, and support the creation and implementation of clear and specific school based plans. Another recommendation for practitioners is to ensure all teachers and students in the same school are offered the same high quality kindergarten transition opportunities. Kindergarten teachers should be provided the opportunity to work with all stakeholders, especially parents to create a written kindergarten transition plan that fits the needs of the school's population. This would prevent high-quality transition practices from being used in the isolation of just one teacher's classroom. The creation, implementation and monitoring of the written kindergarten transition plans at the district and school levels were important because schools and districts with clear and specific kindergarten transition plans were more likely to be ready for kindergarteners, increased the likelihood of children successfully transitioning to kindergarten, and resulted in improved academic achievement in kindergarten, setting children on a trajectory for future academic success. This trajectory for success would not only be beneficial for students, but for schools and districts trying to meet the ever increasing high-stakes assessments placed before them.

When creating written plans, districts and schools should ask teachers how they would like for kindergarten transition practices to be facilitated at the schools. In the current study some teachers reported a wish for several practices not currently in use. Some of these included but were not limited to, hosting a transition to kindergarten night before open house, a return of Saturday play dates, and for all in-house pre-kindergarten students to attend kindergarten in the same school. Wishes generated at the school level could produce the stakeholder buy-in and support to make their wishes for increasing the transition to kindergarten process better for children and families.

### **Activities**

**Characteristics Influencing Transitions.** Only one participant in the current study reportedly received professional development in transitioning children to kindergarten. This participant reportedly used more kindergarten transition practices than the other participants. Future plans for district or school level professional development in kindergarten transition practices was not found in the current study. Findings from the current study aligned with the literature that teachers who received professional development in transitioning children to kindergarten used more transition practices than untrained teachers. As previously cited and discussed, the use of more practices led to improved academic outcomes for children in kindergarten. To set children on a trajectory for academic success, and to help schools meet the demands of high stakes testing, consideration should be given to offering staff development for teachers and administrators charged with transitioning children to kindergarten.

**Environmental Impacts.** The southeastern school district where the current study was conducted placed two pre-kindergarten classrooms at River city. With the reported collaboration between River City kindergarten teachers and pre-kindergarten teachers housed at River City,

and with research previously cited and discussed indicating pre-kindergarten children housed in the same building they attended kindergarten helped smooth their transition to kindergarten, it is recommended that this district, and other districts consider placing pre-kindergarten classrooms in elementary schools. Notably students attending these in-house pre-kindergartens should be districted to attend the same school in kindergarten.

### **Limitations**

Caution should be used when interpreting the results of the current study. The omission of kindergarten transition practices from participant responses could not be inferred as the participant did not use the practice. Since face-to-face interviews were open response, the participants may have used a practice they failed to mention during the interviews or member checking.

Findings in the current study may be an overestimation of use of kindergarten transition practices. It was beyond the scope of this study to differentiate between practices that occurred as a part of school-wide beginning of the year activities and those that specifically supported the transition to kindergarten.

### **Future Studies**

Activities offered to children and families were identified in the current study. Data were not collected on the extent to which children and families participated in the activities offered to them. Future studies should examine which transition practices were used by children and families to determine the impact of individual practices on kindergarten reading achievement.

Future studies should increase the purposeful sample to include a larger number of teachers, administrators, elementary schools and school districts to gather more participant experiences regarding kindergarten transition practices. This research involved only 1 school

district out of 115 in the state of North Carolina. The results were merely a report of the findings in this comparative case study with a phenomenological approach and were limited in transferability.

Teacher demographics should be examined in future studies. Data should be collected to ascertain the impact of teacher demographic similarities with teacher collaboration.

### **Summary**

This comparative case study, with a phenomenological approach, explored kindergarten transition practices at two elementary schools in southeastern North Carolina. This qualitative process captured data regarding kindergarten transition programming that had previously not been obtained through quantitative research. The researcher also included the experiences of school administrators, which had largely been omitted from previous research. Data from multiple resources were triangulated and descriptive findings were compared to a Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1).

Bridge View Elementary reportedly participated in more Resources and Activities found in the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) than River City participants. The results were aligned with the predictability of the Kindergarten Transition Program Logic Model Based on the Literature (see Figure 1) in that Bridge View kindergarteners exhibited more positive reading achievement than River City's kindergarteners.

The nature of this qualitative study exposed 61 transition practices (see Table 34) that had not previously been reported in the literature. It is important for districts and schools to work with all stake holders in creating intentional written kindergarten transition plans designed to meet the unique needs of children and families at their schools. The creation and intentional implementation of written kindergarten transition plans could help smooth the transition to

kindergarten for all children. This could set children on a trajectory for improved reading achievement in kindergarten, which could ultimately have a lasting positive impact on the academic, behavioral and social outcomes for children's futures. Besides the obvious benefits for children and their families, this could help districts and schools meet the ever increasing high-stakes testing demands.

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## **APPENDIX A: NATIONAL EDUCATION GOALS**

National Education Goals Panel, 1998

- Goal 1 Ready to Learn: By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn
- Goal 2 School Completion
- Goal 3 Student Achievement and Citizenship
- Goal 4 Teacher Education and Professional Development
- Goal 5 Mathematics and Science
- Goal 6 Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning
- Goal 7 Safe, Disciplined, and Alcohol and Drug-Free Schools
- Goal 8 Parental Participation

**APPENDIX B: NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOL DESIGNATION CHART FOR SCHOOL PERFORMANCE**

Each year, schools in North Carolina receive several designations based on the school’s performance on the state’s ABC tests. These designations are awarded on the basis of the percentage of students performing at grade level and on whether students have learned as much as they are expected to learn in one year. The designations that can be earned by schools are displayed below, followed by a brief description of each designation. The percentage of schools in the southeastern North Carolina district in this study and in the state of North Carolina are identified in this based on 2011-2012 data.

Designation	Performance: Students Performing at Grade Level	Growth: Learning Achieved in One Year			Percent of Schools in North Carolina with Designation	
		High Growth	Expected Growth	Expected Growth Not Achieved	Southeastern NC District in this study	State of North Carolina
Honor School of Excellence	At least 90% of students at grade level and the school met all Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) progress				25%	9%
School of Excellence	At least 90% of students at grade level				0%	0%
School of Distinction	At least 80% of students at grade level				29%	29%
School of Progress	At least 60% of students at grade level				38%	37%
No Recognition	60 to 100% of students at grade level				4%	17%
Priority School	50 to 60% of students at grade level OR less than 50% of students at grade level				0%	8%
Low Performing	Less than 50% of students at grade level				4%	1%

## APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS

The following questions were used during face-to-face interviews with study participants to explore the lived experiences of principals, assistant principals, and kindergarten teachers regarding transitions to kindergarten in schools.

The questioning will begin by asking all participants the same two questions:

- How would you describe your experiences with transition to kindergarten practices, procedures, or activities at your school? Are these practices, procedures or activities site-based decisions or district mandated?
- How would you describe the situations, conditions, or the context that shapes the transition to kindergarten experiences at your school? Who develops the kindergarten transition practices at each school? How are these practices communicated to staff, parents or other stakeholders?

Following the first two questions, school administrators will be asked the following 7 questions:

- Describe your experiences or practices of children transitioning into your school's kindergarten. Describe your thoughts, feelings, images, and memories from how this works at your school.
- Describe your experiences about how you plan for your incoming kindergarten students. Are these experiences different for kindergarten children than for the entire student population? Describe your thoughts and feelings about planning for incoming kindergarten students.
- Describe your practices for making class placements for incoming kindergarten students. What are your thoughts and feelings when placing incoming kindergarten students into classes?
- Describe your experiences with activities that are held in the community or at other sites such as pre-k centers to help students and or families learn about you, their teachers, their school, and about what they should expect in kindergarten?
- Describe your experiences with how students and parents find out who their teachers are at open house. Talk about when and how teachers are given their class lists. Once teachers are given their lists, when and how are they allowed to share the news of who is in their classes? What are your thoughts, feelings, and memories about these practices and how they work?
- Describe how you feel kindergarten transition practices at your school support children and families regardless of each child's level of preparedness.
- Describe how you would like for kindergarten transition practices at your school to look.

Following the first two questions, kindergarten teachers will be asked the following 5 questions:

- Describe your experiences of how you get to know your students personally and academically and / or families before the beginning of the school year, or soon after school begins. What are your feelings or thoughts about these experiences?

- Describe your experiences of how you learn about the children and parents' perceptions, fears, anxieties, etc. before the beginning of school or soon after school begins. What are your feelings or thoughts about these experiences?
- Describe your experiences with helping students and families learn about you, their new school, and what to expect in kindergarten? What are your feelings or thoughts about these experiences?
- Describe how you feel kindergarten transition practices at your school support children and families regardless of each child's level of preparedness.
- Describe how you would like for kindergarten transition practices at your school to look.

**APPENDIX D: KINDERGARTEN TEACHER PARTICIPANT SURVEY**

Thank you for participating in this research project regarding kindergarten transitioning practices. The demographic, quantitative data collected in this survey are necessary to ensure a full picture of kindergarten transition practices are captured at your school. A total of 20 questions are on this survey, and the survey should take less than 10 minutes to complete. Your assistance with the collection of these data is appreciated.

\*For the purpose of this survey, please count the 2012-2013 school year as one year.

1. Please indicate your gender:

<b>MALE</b>	<b>FEMALE</b>

2. Please indicate your race:

<b>AFRICAN AMERICAN</b>	<b>CAUCASIAN</b>	<b>HISPANIC</b>	<b>OTHER (PLEASE INDICATE)</b>

3. Please indicate your age:

<b>YEARS</b>

4. Please identify your Bachelor Degree (Example: Bachelor of Science in Education). Please list all Bachelor Degrees held.

<b>BACHELOR OF</b>	<b>IN</b>

5. Please identify any Master Degrees held (Example: Master of Arts in Elementary Education). Please list all Master Degrees held.

<b>MASTER OF</b>	<b>IN</b>

6. Please list any other degrees held, including any degrees you are currently working towards (Example: Working towards Master Degree in Language & literacy).

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7. Are you Nationally Board Certified?

YES	NO	IF YES, AREA OF CERTIFICATION

8. Have you received specific training in transitioning children to kindergarten?

YES	NO

9. Total number of years you have served as a kindergarten teacher in your current school:

NUMBER OF YEARS

10. Total number of years you have served as a kindergarten teacher in all schools:

NUMBER OF YEARS

11. Total number of years served as a teacher in all grades:

NUMBER OF YEARS

12. If you have ever served as principal, or assistant principal, please indicate the total number years you served as principal or assistant principal:

YEARS AS PRINCIPAL	YEARS AS ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

13. Please list all areas of licensure indicated on your NC State teaching license:

AREAS OF LICENSURE ON YOUR NC STATE TEACHING LICENSE
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

14. Specifically, do you hold a NC pre-k teaching license?

YES	NO

15. Have you ever taught pre-kindergarten? If yes, how many years?

YES	NO	NUMBER OF YEARS

16. Please list all grades taught along with number of years' experience in each grade:

GRADE LEVEL TAUGHT	NUMBER OF YEARS

17. Total number of kindergarten students in your classroom during the 2012-2013 school year:

NUMBER OF STUDENTS

18. Total number years in education (including time served as a teaching assistant or in central office.)

NUMBER OF YEARS

19. Does your school *district* have a written plan for transitioning children to kindergarten?

YES	NO	I DON'T KNOW

20. Does your *school* have a written plan for transitioning children to kindergarten?

YES	NO	I DON'T KNOW

Thank you for your participation ☺

**APPENDIX E: ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL PARTICIPANT SURVEY**

Thank you for participating in this research project regarding kindergarten transitioning practices. The demographic, quantitative data collected in this survey are necessary to ensure a full picture of kindergarten transition practices are captured at your school. A total of 20 questions are on this survey, and the survey should take less than 10 minutes to complete. Your assistance with the collection of these data is appreciated.

\*For the purpose of this survey, please count the 2012-2013 school year as one year.

1. Please indicate your gender:

<b>MALE</b>	<b>FEMALE</b>

2. Please indicate your race:

<b>AFRICAN AMERICAN</b>	<b>CAUCASIAN</b>	<b>HISPANIC</b>	<b>OTHER (PLEASE INDICATE)</b>

3. Please indicate your age:

<b>YEARS</b>

4. Please identify your Bachelor Degree (Example: Bachelor of Science in Education). Please list all Bachelor Degrees held.

<b>BACHELOR OF</b>	<b>IN</b>

5. Please identify any Master Degrees held (Example: Master of Arts in School Administration). Please list all Master Degrees held.

<b>MASTER OF</b>	<b>IN</b>

6. Please list any other degrees held, including any degrees you are currently working towards (Example: Working towards Doctorate Degree in Educational Leadership).

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7. Are you Nationally Board Certified?

YES	NO	IF YES, AREA OF CERTIFICATION

8. Have you received specific training in transitioning children to kindergarten?

YES	NO

9. Total number of years you have served as assistant principal in your current school:

NUMBER OF YEARS

10. Total number of years you have served as assistant principal in all schools:

NUMBER OF YEARS

11. Total number of years served as a teacher other than administrative years:

NUMBER OF YEARS

12. If you have ever served as principal, total number years you served as principal:

NUMBER OF YEARS

13. Please list all areas of licensure indicated on your NC State teaching license:

AREAS OF LICENSURE ON YOUR NC STATE TEACHING LICENSE
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

14. Specifically, do you hold a NC pre-k teaching license?

YES	NO

15. Have you ever taught kindergarten? If yes, how many years?

YES	NO	NUMBER OF YEARS

16. Have you ever taught pre-kindergarten? If yes, how many years?

YES	NO	NUMBER OF YEARS

17. Please list all grades taught along with number of years' experience in each grade:

GRADE LEVEL TAUGHT	NUMBER OF YEARS

18. Total number years in education (including time served as a teaching assistant or in central office.)

NUMBER OF YEARS

19. Does your school *district* have a written plan for transitioning children to kindergarten?

YES	NO	I DON'T KNOW

20. Does your *school* have a written plan for transitioning children to kindergarten?

YES	NO	I DON'T KNOW

Thank you for your participation ☺

## APPENDIX F: PRINCIPAL PARTICIPANT SURVEY

Thank you for participating in this research project regarding kindergarten transitioning practices. The demographic, quantitative data collected in this survey are necessary to ensure a full picture of kindergarten transition practices are captured at your school. A total of 21 questions are on this survey, and the survey should take less than 10 minutes to complete. Your assistance with the collection of these data is appreciated.

\*For the purpose of this survey, please count the 2012-2013 school year as one year.

1. Please indicate your gender:

<b>MALE</b>	<b>FEMALE</b>

2. Please indicate your race:

<b>AFRICAN AMERICAN</b>	<b>CAUCASIAN</b>	<b>HISPANIC</b>	<b>OTHER (PLEASE INDICATE)</b>

3. Please indicate your age:

<b>YEARS</b>

4. Please identify your Bachelor Degree (Example: Bachelor of Science in Education). Please list all Bachelor Degrees held.

<b>BACHELOR OF</b>	<b>IN</b>

5. Please identify any Master Degrees held (Example: Master of Arts in School Administration). Please list all Master Degrees held.

<b>MASTER OF</b>	<b>IN</b>

6. Please list any other degrees held, including any degrees you are currently working towards (Example: Working towards Doctorate Degree in Educational Leadership).

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7. Are you Nationally Board Certified?

<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>IF YES, AREA OF CERTIFICATION</b>

8. Have you received specific training in transitioning children to kindergarten?

YES	NO

9. Number of years you have served as principal at your current school:

NUMBER OF YEARS

10. Total number of years you have served as principal in all schools:

NUMBER OF YEARS

11. Total number of years you have served as assistant principal in all schools:

NUMBER OF YEARS

12. Total number of years served as a teacher before entering administration:

NUMBER OF YEARS

13. Please list all areas of licensure indicated on your NC State teaching license:

AREAS OF LICENSURE ON YOUR NC STATE TEACHING LICENSE
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

14. Specifically, do you hold a NC pre-k teaching license?

YES	NO

15. Have you ever taught kindergarten? If yes, how many years?

YES	NO	NUMBER OF YEARS

16. Have you ever taught pre-kindergarten? If yes, how many years?

YES	NO	NUMBER OF YEARS

17. Please list all grades taught along with number of years' experience in each grade:

GRADE LEVEL TAUGHT	NUMBER OF YEARS

18. Total number years in education (including time served as a teaching assistant or in central office).

NUMBER OF YEARS

19. Total number of kindergarten students in your school during the 2012-2013 school year:

NUMBER OF STUDENTS

20. Does your school *district* have a written plan for transitioning children to kindergarten?

YES	NO	I DON'T KNOW

21. Does your *school* have a written plan for transitioning children to kindergarten?

YES	NO	I DON'T KNOW

Thank you for your participation ☺

**APPENDIX G: SCHOOL DISTRICT APPROVAL**

November 19, 2012

Dear Robin Hamilton,

Thank you for your request to conduct research in [REDACTED]. We are sure your research will be beneficial to education. Your request for the study entitled *A Comparative Case Study of Kindergarten Transition Practices and The Impact On Children's Kindergarten Readiness* has been reviewed and approved by the Research Review Board of [REDACTED] County Schools. Permission has been granted to work with [REDACTED] Elementary and [REDACTED] [REDACTED] act [REDACTED], Principal [REDACTED] Elementary at [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Principal [REDACTED] Elementary at [REDACTED] to proceed with your next phase of your research.

We value research and the benefits your study may have on education. However, maintaining an optimal learning environment for all students remains our top priority. School administration reserves the right to withdraw the school from participation in your project at any time.

Please respect and follow established timelines and finalize research as specified. Fall research projects are to be completed by January 1, 2013 and spring projects are to be completed by April 30, 2013.

A copy of your research findings should be submitted to the Research Review Board of [REDACTED] [REDACTED] by June 30, 2013. Please send a copy to:

Research Review Board

[REDACTED]

Thank you for choosing to complete your research in [REDACTED]. We look forward to collaborating with you.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] Research Review Board Chair

CC [REDACTED]

## APPENDIX H: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



**EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY**  
**University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board Office**  
4N-70 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682  
600 Moyer Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834  
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** · [www.ecu.edu/irb](http://www.ecu.edu/irb)

### Notification of Initial Approval: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral IRB  
To: Robin Hamilton  
CC: Art Rouse  
Date: 12/17/2012  
Re: UMCIRB 12-001730  
A comparative Case Study of Kindergarten Transition Practices and The Impact on Children's Kindergarten Readiness

I am pleased to inform you that your Expedited Application was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) is for the period of 12/17/2012 to 12/16/2013. The research study is eligible for review under expedited category #6 and #7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

Changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a continuing review/closure application to the UMCIRB prior to the date of study expiration. The Investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

The approval includes the following items:

Name	Description
APPENDIX C KINDERGARTEN TEACHER.docx   History	Surveys and Questionnaires
APPENDIX D assistant principal.docx   History	Surveys and Questionnaires
APPENDIX E principal.docx   History	Surveys and Questionnaires
Chapters 1 - 3 October 2012.docx   History	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Informed Consent Template-No More Than Minimal Risk 03.12.2012 (3) version 1.doc   History	Consent Forms
Informed Consent Template-No More Than Minimal Risk 03.12.2012 (3) version 2.doc   History	Consent Forms
Informed Consent Template-No More Than Minimal Risk 03.12.2012 (3) version 3.doc   History	Consent Forms
Informed Consent Template-No More Than Minimal Risk 03.12.2012 (3) version 4.doc   History	Consent Forms
Participant Questions Used to Guide Interviews.docx   History	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Research Review Candidate approval Letter (4).docx   History	Dataset Use Approval/Permission

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.