

Impact of Group Counseling on Transfer Student's Grade Point Average and Attendance

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine if group counseling would have an impact on transfer students' grade point average and attendance rates. A literature review is presented, which discusses the reasons for student mobility and the challenges mobile students face. Various types of transition programs, along with their strengths and weaknesses, and the role of the school counselor are defined. For this study, 4 students volunteered to participate in a 4 week group counseling program, all of whom transferred into the high school during the 2012-2013 school year. Each participant's GPA and number of absences were collected before the start of the group and again at the conclusion of the third quarter to measure any changes. Results are discussed, as well as the implications this study may have on future school counselors and future studies related to transition programs.

### Impact of Group Counseling on Transfer Student's Grade Point Average and Attendance

Each year millions of Americans pack up their belongings and move. There are a variety of reasons and conditions that contribute to these moves, such as life changes, personal and economic opportunities, and setbacks and misfortunes (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). The U.S. Census Bureau (2012) defines geographic mobility as the movement of people within the United States from one location to another at various geographic levels. According to the American Community Survey (ACS; 2011), 15.4% of the population (one year and older) live in a different residence than one year ago. Geographical mobility has an impact on the students enrolled in American schools. Students that are joining or leaving school, at a point other than the normal age in which children start or finish their education at school, are known as transfer students (Demie, Lewis, & Taplin, 2005).

In the past twenty years, more attention has been paid to the trends and impacts of school transfers on students (Pillen, Jasen, & Olson, 1988). Much of this attention has been focused on young children. Less information can be found on how teenagers are affected by moves (Wilson, 1993).

The purpose of this study is to determine the impact that a counseling group has on student's grade point average (GPA) and attendance rates. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2004) defines GPA as the average obtained by dividing the total number of credits attempted. Attendance can be defined as the number of days the student is present in the classroom (Roby, 2004). The researcher is looking to answer the question: "Will group counseling be effective, as measured by GPA and attendance rates, in helping new students transition into a high school setting?"

The results of this study will contribute to the counseling profession by continuing research in the area of school transitions, specifically at the high school level. This study provides suggestions for school counselors interested in supporting transfer students through group counseling. Recommendations to improve the outcome of future replications of this study are made.

One of the limitations of conducting this type of research study was the lack of information about transfer student programs currently used by other schools. Thus, there were no known existing, validated and reliable curriculum or programs to use in the implementation of the research. Another limitation was the limited number of transfer students during the time of the research study. Thus, the small sample size impacts the ability to appropriately evaluate the results.

Important ethical considerations for conducting research, involving group counseling, are: proper training of the group leader, confidentiality, and the screening and orientation of group members. Adequate training of the group leader is important to every aspect of the counseling process (Corey, Williams, & Moline, 1995). A school counselor properly trained in group counseling will have knowledge of ethical guidelines and practices for the use of groups within a school setting. Proper training will also inform leaders of the group process and techniques to help create an environment that facilitates growth and exploration.

Confidentiality is an ethical principal that denotes a counseling practice relevant to privacy (Remley, Hermann, & Huey, 2003). A group facilitator cannot guarantee confidentiality to participants due to the lack of control over what member say or do outside of the group. Thus, it becomes increasingly important that a school counselor is able to properly screen students for

the group. During the screening process it is essential that the school counselor inform potential group members about the risks of participating in a group and the implications it may have on confidentiality. The screening process also helps to eliminate potential participants who may be inappropriate for group counseling (Corey et al., 1995).

Transitioning to a new school has been previously found to have an impact on student academic achievement. The research study conducted aimed to address known barriers to transferring to a new school. The results suggest that students who participate in group counseling targeted on the transitional issues can minimally maintain their academic trajectory rather than experiencing the loss that is often presented in the literature.

### **Literature Review**

A review of the literature supports the need for programs available for transfer students to help them with their adjustment into a new school environment. This literature review investigates the impact of introducing a counseling group for high school transfer students. The reasons for student mobility will be addressed, as well as the challenges student's face when changing schools and their impact. Various types of transition programs, along with their strengths and weaknesses will be explored, and the role of the school counselor will be defined.

### **Reasons for Student Mobility**

The United States of America has a long history of being a mobile nation (Pew Research Center, 2008). People came to America with a yearning for freedom and prosperity (Stahl-Ladbury, Hall, & Benz, 2010). Americans quickly embraced a strong sense of independence and continuously pushed the boundaries of our frontier. With the arrival of the Industrial Revolution in the 1750's, a mass production of automobiles and a growth of railroads were seen across the nation, which led to Americans becoming more mobile than ever before. People now had the choice of moving out of undesirable locations, particularly when seeking new economic opportunities (Skidmore, 2011).

Americans have remained mobile in an effort to improve their lives. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), 37.5 million people, which accounts for 12.5% of the population (1 year or older), moved within the U.S. in the last year. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012), the most cited reasons for moving were housing related (43.7%), followed by family related (26.5%), and employment related (17%). Young adults between the ages of 18 and 29 were the most mobile group of the U.S. population perhaps because young adults typically experience

several major life events, such as college, employment, and marriage. People who did not graduate from high school were the most mobile group with a mobility rate of 14.4 %.

Demie, Lewis and Taplin (2005) defined student mobility as “a child joining or leaving school at a point other than the normal age at which children start or finish their education” (p. 131). Early educational research focused primarily on the upwardly mobile student. From the 1880’s to the 1950’s mobility was often seen as the result of job promotion or economic opportunity. Since the 1970’s there has been a change in focus to that of the downwardly mobile student. Poverty factors and increasing numbers of low socioeconomic status (SES) families have been known to contribute to downward mobility. In the 48 continental states and the District of Columbia, the poverty level is defined as income at or below \$10,830 for a single person. An additional \$3,740 is added to the base income level per family member living in the household. For example, the poverty level was set at \$22,050 total annual income for a family of four (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2011), 15.9% of the U.S. population earned income at or below the poverty level. This increased from 46.2 million people in 2010, to 48.5 million in 2011. One-in-five children in the U.S. currently lives in poverty, which means that over 15.75 million children go with their most basic economic needs being unmet (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

According to Popp, Stronge and Hindman (2003), students in poverty and low SES are more likely to live in unstable environments. Instability at home can mean more mobility for the student. Thirty percent of low-income families changed schools versus eight percent of families with an annual income of \$50,000 or more (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012); this mobility is due to not having the resources to maintain an affordable, stable home in a safe neighborhood. People that live in the inner cities often are low SES or live in poverty. High rates of student mobility

can be seen in the urban environment. Some urban schools report student turnover rates of 40 to 80% (Popp et al., 2003).

Another highly mobile group of students are those in military families. The United States currently has over 1 million active duty military personnel and over 800,000 people that are a part of the Reserve and National Guard (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). More than 700,000 children with parents in the military attend public schools throughout the U.S. In addition, the Department of Defense Education Act provides free and appropriate educational programming to eligible Department of Defense military and civilian dependents preK-12 living in other countries (Popp et al., 2003). Military families may relocate frequently, which often involves little notice. Being uprooted from one's home, family and community can be extremely difficult for children. Children of military personnel also have to deal with the possibility of parental deployment. A deployment can last anywhere from a few weeks to several months. Deployments often temporarily or permanently change dual-parent family dynamics to those of single-parent dynamics. The change in family dynamics can be incredibly challenging for the family unit to continue to function normally (Popp et al., 2003).

The last common group that makes up mobile students is children of divorced families. As of 2009, 34% of marriages end in divorce (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Approximately one fourth of mothers with custody move to a new location within the first four years after the divorce. Three percent of custodial parents moved out of the area within 12 weeks of the divorce filing. Ten percent moved within a year, and 17% moved within two years (Braver, Fabricius & Ellman, 2003). A divorce, and the possible relocation afterwards, can have a huge impact on a child's life. Not only is the child losing the family unit, but they are also losing friends and family members during the move. Children of divorce may have to adjust to living in a single

parent household, visitation with the other parent, a new neighborhood, school and peers (Stein & Oler, 2010).

The relationship with the non-custodial parent is often the most affected. More than 20% of children have no, or infrequent contact with their non-custodial parent. If the custodial parent chooses to relocate, this can seriously impact the child's relationship with the other parent. Geographic distance can lead to the non-custodial parent missing out on many of the child's important milestones. Some of these milestones and events include parent/teacher conferences, play dates, birthdays, holidays, sporting events, and regular face-to-face conversation and involvement. All of these aforementioned factors can have an impact on the child's success in school (Stein & Oler, 2010).

### **Challenges**

There are a number of common challenges that mobile students face; the first is becoming adjusted to the new school environment. Students need to familiarize themselves with the building, including their classrooms, lunch-room, and library, how to open their lockers, and where the buses drop them off and pick them up (Stahl-Ladbury et al., 2010). Students also need to adapt to the new school's code of conduct, course structure, understand graduation requirements, and emergency policies and procedures (Weiss & Bearman, 2007).

**Academic.** One of the most common themes found among the research done with transfer students is that of academic difficulty. A number of studies have shown a decline in grades following school transitions (Weiss & Bearman, 2007). Students are expected to continue to maintain their GPA as they are going through the transition process. It is a lot to ask of an

adolescent to deal with the emotional stress they are experiencing, as well as continue to perform academically at the same level or higher (Stahl-Ladbury et al., 2010).

Matching previous education standards to the new district's standards presents another academic challenge to mobile students. Classroom curriculum and standards vary from state to state, and school district to school district. The closest thing the United States currently has to a national curriculum is that of the *Common Core* standards. The Common Core standards are meant to establish consistency and quality to the education students receive across the United States. English language arts and Mathematics Common Core standards were released in 2010 (Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011). States are not presently required to adopt these standards and have the right to establish their own curriculum, standards, and tests. By late 2010, 36 states and the District of Columbia adopted the Common Core standards. Schools that have not adopted these standards put their mobile students at a disadvantage (Porter et al., 2011). Students who have changed schools may be ahead, at, or behind the academic standards set for that school district within the state it resides. Students may need remediation courses, tutoring, or additional accommodations in order to catch up (Stahl-Ladbury et al., 2010).

**Personal/Social.** New students need to establish relationships within the school. Often times, the first connections new students make within a school are with an adult. The principal, vice principal or school counselor may be the first person the student comes into contact with during the registration and orientation process (Stahl-Ladbury et al., 2010). Once the student begins to attend the school, they will have more contact with teachers and peers. Establishing peer relationships and becoming a member of a peer group is a crucial part of a new student's adjustment.

High school students are in the middle of their adolescent development, which occurs between the ages of 13 and 19 (Santrock, 2009). Adolescence is a time when the importance of peer acceptance and interaction increases. It is a time when students begin to withdraw more from their parents and begin to establish their own identity, self-esteem, and self-concept (Stahl-Ladbury et al., 2010). Erik Erikson was one of the first developmental theorists to explore the importance of identity formation during adolescence (Santrock, 2009). According to Erikson, adolescents are in the identity versus confusion stage of development. During this time adolescents are faced with deciding who they are, what they are about, and where they are going in life. Feeling like an outsider or not being welcomed into the new school environment can have a huge impact on an adolescent student's identity development and emotional health (Stahl-Ladbury et al., 2010).

**Special Populations.** It is also important to address the challenges that specific populations of mobile students face. Some of these populations include low SES, or students living in poverty, children of military personnel, and children of divorced, or separated families.

**Low SES.** Students of low SES, or living in poverty, are more likely to have to deal with multiple moves during the time they are in school. These students also face the risk of homelessness. Some of these students may experience homelessness on a short term basis. Others will be living with this crisis for extended periods of time. Highly mobile students from a low SES background, or living in poverty are twice as likely as the rest of their peers to repeat a grade and half as likely to graduate high school (Popp et al., 2003).

One of the biggest challenges low SES students face is an inconsistent level of parental involvement. There are a number of reasons why parents are unable to be involved in their

children's daily lives. A common problem seen amongst low SES parents is their need to work more than one job in order to financially support their families. Parents working long hours are often unable to help their child with their homework, or to provide the emotional support they need through their transition (Popp et al., 2003). Researchers found that parents of low SES students have an interest in their children's education, a desire to cooperate with the schools, and a willingness to learn how they can help (Warren-Sohlberg, Jason, Orosan-Weine, & Lantz, 1998). Interestingly 63% of parents surveyed believed they did not have the skills to tutor their children correctly. The researchers concluded that parental educational attainment was a barrier for involvement in their child's education.

***Military Families.*** Another population that faces challenges specific to their group is children of military personnel. It is well known that being a part of the U.S. military calls for its personnel to follow orders and be available to move when necessary. Resulting in military families frequently being uprooted and relocated during their loved ones career. For the most part, children of military personnel are well adjusted and supported (Popp et al., 2003). Multiple moves, however, can have academic, emotional, and social impacts (Kelly, Finkel, & Ashby, 2003). Unfortunately, there are some children who grow up with serious fears and anxiety about moving again, or their parent leaving. The possibility of their parent being deployed is always looming in the back of their family's minds. Deployments can last anywhere from a few weeks, to up to a year. While the parent is deployed their child has to deal with the fear of the parent dying or being injured, missing them, and not having the parent's day to day support and involvement. The child also has to learn to adjust to a period of living in a single parent home along with the other transition issues previously mentioned (Popp et al., 2003).

*Divorced or separated families.* One of the challenges specific to mobile students, as a result of family structure changes, is the strain that divorce or separation puts on parental relationships, both custodial and non-custodial. After a divorce, there often is a loss in the frequency of interaction between the non-custodial parent and child, which is especially true when one parent chooses to move post separation or divorce (Stein & Oler, 2010). Stein and Oler (2010) found that the geographical distance imposed following the relocation of divorced parents can create a significant challenge in maintaining the parent-child relationship. The first challenge of geographical distance on the parent-child relationship is being able to maintain frequent and consistent contact. Attending school conferences, sporting events, concerts, play dates, holiday celebrations, and birthdays can become virtually impossible after parental relocation.

A second challenge children of divorced parents face, is dealing with the possible lack of financial support. Braver, Ellman, and Fabricus (2003) conducted a study with students of divorced parents enrolled at a southwestern state university. The focus of their study was on the relocation status of the student's parents following divorce. Braver et al. (2003) found that students from families in which one parent moved reported receiving less financial support. It was also reported that these students worried more about their financial situation, suffered distress related to their parent's divorce, and felt more hostility in their interpersonal relationships. Another study found that 25% of youths from divorced families have serious social, emotional, or psychological problems, as compared to 10% coming from non-divorced families (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Some of these problems include emotional distress over the family breaking up, hostility, and a sense of lack of control in their lives (Stein & Oler, 2010).

**Impact on students**

When students begin the process of transitioning into a new school there are three areas that are commonly impacted: grades, attendance, and social interaction. A student's grade point average (GPA) can be an excellent predictor of how well they are transitioning into a new school. GPA can reflect a student's ability to understand and implement course work. If a student is struggling to adjust to teaching style or has yet to make a connection with their teachers, this may be reflected in their GPA (Langenkamp, 2009).

**Grades.** A student's GPA may also be impacted due to differences in curriculum or testing. Transfer students may find themselves having to academically catch up at their new school. Having to catch up can be especially detrimental to mobile students at the high school level as they have less time to meet new graduation requirements and state standards (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). Due to the lack of a nationally established curriculum or testing standards, students who are moving from one state to another may find gaps in their education (Porter, et al., 2011). Transfer students may need remediation courses or additional accommodations in order to meet the expected skills levels at the new school. If these gaps are not addressed quickly it can lead to poor performance on exams, lower achievement levels, and disengagement from classes (Stahl-Ladbury et al., 2010).

**Attendance.** Another area in mobile student's lives that an impact can be seen is in their attendance of school. A student's attendance records can tell a lot about what is going on for them. A study by Roby (2004) found a strong positive relationship between student performance and attendance. Looking at attendance records can give insight to a number of questions about a new student's adjustment into the new school setting. With the use of updated technology, such

as Infinite Campus, administrators, school counselors, teachers, and parents can keep track of how many days of school a student has missed (Kratsch, 1993). They can also view any classes the student was late to, or skipped entirely. Having this information available to parents, teachers, counselors, and administrators, gives them the ability to find patterns and address them early in the school year.

If a student has a pattern of avoiding attending school, this can be a red flag that something more is going on. The social isolation that transfer students commonly experience can have an impact on their attendance (Popp, et al., 2003). Students who move frequently have been found to have lower attendance rates, with a 20% absentee rate. It is important for school faculty and staff to recognize when a student is missing a lot of school and explore the reasons behind it with them.

**Social Interaction.** Students who transitioned into a new school setting often reported feeling isolated and alone (Stahl-Ladbury et al., 2010). These students also may not feel like they fit in or have an identity within the new environment. Transfer students are especially vulnerable and may be in need of extra time with their family and additional support. The student may be feeling overwhelmed with all of the changes they experienced during and after the move, which can lead to a student being absent from their new school. If a pattern of avoiding school is established it will be important to explore the reason behind it. Some possible reasons include feeling disconnected from the school and teachers, trouble adjusting to teaching styles, and feeling isolated or alone while in school (Weiss & Bearman, 2007). Other reasons the student may be avoiding classes include: not performing well, not completing assignments, not knowing anyone in the class, or not knowing where the class is.

***Social Life.*** Transferring to a new school can also have a large impact on the new student's social life. Looking at a student's social integration into the new school environment is important, especially at the high school level. Moving or changing schools can have a lasting impact on the student's social lives (Popp et al, 2003). The new student has been removed from their core peer support group and is immersed in unfamiliar surroundings, which can produce a great deal of anxiety for the student (Stahl-Ladbury et al., 2010). Rumberger and Palardy (2005) found the social integration of new students at the high school level positively correlated with their attendance and GPA. It is important for transfer students to have the support at home, and in school, that they need during this time. Parents, teachers, counselors, and administrators need to be in communication and aware of the student's needs. Having someone to confide in and advocate for them can be helpful through the transition process. It is often an adult who ends up taking on this role (Langenkamp, 2009).

***School Climate.*** Fan, Williams, and Corkin (2011) defined school climate as “the character and quality of life within a school that is shaped by its organizational structure, physical environment, instructional practices, interpersonal relationships, and overarching values, objectives, and customs” (p.632). Positive school climate is associated with a variety of student outcomes, such as academic achievement and performance, satisfaction with school, a sense of belonging, academic value, and motivation to learn. A student that is comfortable in their school setting is more likely to attend, which leads to higher achievement academically and socially (Fan et al., 2011; Roby, 2004).

***Schedule.*** Another factor that can have an impact upon a student's social interaction in school is their schedule (Winship, 2009). High school students usually have schedules that involve moving to different classrooms, with different teachers, in different parts of the school

building throughout the day. Having a schedule that does not correlate with peers that the new student can identify with or know can impact their socialization. Scheduling can actually prevent students from interacting with entire populations of their peers (Winship, 2009). Having a disorganized schedule may lead the new student to continue to keep to themselves, and create further anxiety about going to class. Lunch is often identified as a time on a new student's schedule that can create anxiety. Lunch time is one of the most important social interaction periods of the school day (Kochenderfer-Ladd, Ladd, & Kochel, 2009). Being assigned to a lunch in which the student does not know anyone can lead to them sitting alone, or possibly avoiding lunch completely.

*Activities and Clubs.* Involvement in after school activities and clubs has been shown to have an impact on the development of social relationships in school (Langenkamp, 2009). Participating in sports, band, theater, chorus, or student organizations is a great way for new students to meet peers. Being a part of a group or team that is working together and has common goals or interests is a positive way for students to establish friendships. School based extracurricular activities provide a structured environment in which adolescents can exert control and express their identity through the selection of activity and their actions within that setting (Darling, Caldwell, & Smith, 2005). Extracurricular activities enable youths to socialize with peers and adults, set and achieve goals, compete fairly, resolve disputes, and learn good sportsmanship.

### **Program Attempts**

Most schools have some type of orientation process in place for transfer students (Stahl-Ladbury et al., 2010). Some of these programs include student registration, scheduling, a tour of

the school, and assignment of lockers. Orientation programs often vary from school to school. Some are held once or twice a year, or only last the first couple of weeks of school. Other schools are willing to offer more individualized programs to fit each new students needs and continue over an extended period of time. Not a lot of research can be found on these types of programs or their effectiveness. The literature identifies three orientation programs adapted to fit their schools specific needs: The School Transitions Project (Jason et al., 1993), George Jenkins High School New Student Orientation Program (Smither, 2008), and North High School's "New to North" group counseling program (Stahl-Ladbury et al., 2010). Each program has similar goals of improving the student's transition into the new setting, but varies in their focus and implementation.

**School Transitions Project.** A study conducted by Jason, et al. (1989) evaluated the *School Transitions Project* developed by DePaul University. Students participating in the School Transitions Project attended a one-hour orientation at the beginning of the academic year. Participants were placed in groups of 15 to 20 students and provided a review of school rules, personnel, clubs and activities, along with other general information about the school by the peer leader. Students were also guided through a discussion and activities led by project personnel that facilitated sharing of feelings about the transfer process (Jason, et al., 1993).

Tutoring is a second component of the School Transition Project. Participants were provided school based tutoring from October until the end of the school year. These were 40 to 60 minute, individual tutoring sessions that were conducted weekly by project trained staff (Jason et al., 1993). The study also included a home tutoring component. The parents or primary caregiver were contacted and encouraged to participate in home tutoring with their student. Parent or guardians that agreed to participate were scheduled for a home tutoring training session

at their convenience. The training session was approximately one hour in length and taught parents how to negotiate a daily homework schedule and weekly homework goals with their child. The training also taught parents how to give corrective feedback to their child during exercises in reading, math, and spelling (Weine & Kurasaki, 1993).

Jason et al., (1989) found the transfer students that participated in the School Transitions Project made significantly greater gains in reading, spelling, and math than students in the control group. Reading increased from speeds of 70.4 to 90.2 words per minute. Their accuracy of words read also increased from 90.6% to 95.6%. Reading comprehension rose from 78% to 83.1%. Student spelling also improved from 76% to 83% of words correct. There were also significant gains found in mathematics (Jason et al., 1993).

The researchers expected to find a link between school learning and attendance. They found no clear impact of the program in numbers of absences or tardies. The DePaul program also did not specifically aim to address social issues, but they found student improvement on several social measures. Weine & Kurasaki (1993) believed this suggested a link between academic investment and social functioning. Student participating in the intervention reported an increase in their self-concept and behavioral competence. Overall, the School Transition Program was shown to hold promise for aiding high-risk students in their adjustment to a new school setting (Weine & Kurasaki, 1993).

**New Student Orientation Program.** George Jenkins High School in Lakeland, Florida developed its own unique new student orientation program. Administrators, faculty, and staff worked together to change the ways in which new students are received to the school. Previously, the new student, along with their parent or guardian, met with the registrar to fill out

the proper paperwork and provide any documentation needed for enrollment. Then the student received his schedule and a guided tour of the school by his counselor (Smither, 2008). Some of the faculty and staff recognized that the transfer process was inadequate for the needs of new students.

In collaboration with administrators, faculty, and staff, the High School's media specialist developed an orientation DVD. New students were instructed to watch the DVD after their tour of the school was finished (Smither, 2008). The DVD featured each of the administrators welcoming the new student to the High School. The DVD then explained school rules and policies. Policies on attendance, grades, dress code, and conduct were described. The DVD also discussed clubs, activities, and athletics available at the school. After the DVD was finished the student was given a *New Student Notebook*, which featured many important items such as, the school calendar, their schedule, a "where to go for help" sheet, a list of clubs, a list of tryout dates for sports, and some school related coupons and passes (Smither, 2008). The New Student Orientation program had not been evaluated on its effectiveness or impact on the new student's adjustment, but represents a simple intervention that may ease the transfer student's transition into the new school.

**New to North.** The school counselors at North High School in Fargo, North Dakota noticed their transfer student's uncertainty about what to expect once they were enrolled at their new school (Stahl-Ladbury et al., 2010). Transfer students raised concerns about what to expect in their classes, how to find their way around, and how to become involved in school activities. North High School offered an orientation and "new student lunch" once a year, but students arriving after these events were unable to attend them. The counselors at North High worked together to develop the *New to North* group. The group met weekly for 4-6 weeks for

approximately 50 minutes. The New to North group was created as an opportunity for new students to meet and support one another through the transition process (Stahl-Ladbury et al., 2010).

Bishop, Stone, & Dahir (2006) defined group counseling as working with two or more students at the same time to more efficiently address common concerns or problem behaviors. Being part of a group gives its members the opportunity to learn from each other. Members have a place to share ideas, feelings, give and receive feedback, increase self-awareness, gain new knowledge, and practice skills (Jacobs, Masson, & Harvill, 2009). Participating in a group gives new students a sense of belonging, or a place where they are important and safe, even if outside of the group they have not found their place in the new school (Stahl-Ladbury et al., 2010).

The counselors at North High School reported seeing benefits from the creation of the New to North group. Counselors reported a population, previously overlooked in the school, was now receiving the attention and support they needed through the transition process. The group experience provided new students the opportunity to make a connection with the counseling staff and to interact with their counselors for reasons other than scheduling and academic planning (Stahl-Ladbury et al., 2010). There were not any measureable or documented outcomes found for the New to North group.

### **Strengths & Limitations**

The literature on school transition programs emphasizes how difficult the transfer experience can be for many students (Weine & Kurasaki, 1993). The literature revealed a few programs tailored to meet the needs of transfer students.

**Strengths.** Overall, schools that invested in the creation of new student orientation programs saw a smoother transition for their transfer students.

Many schools that implemented new student orientation programs saw an improvement in the areas of academic and social adjustment (Jason et al., 1993; Stahl-Ladbury et al, 2010). Creating an orientation program can be an opportunity for administrators, teachers, counselors, and students to work together to welcome new students to their school in a compassionate and sensitive manner (Jason et al., 1993). The use of an orientation program can help to make the entire school community aware of the individual needs of new students and address them in the best possible way.

Although some funding is necessary to implement an orientation program for transfer students, the cost is not substantial (Smither, 2008; Stahl-Ladbury et al. 2010). The most costly components are related to the type of orientation program the school offers, the amount of time invested to develop and implement it, or any necessary training.

**Limitations.** There are some weaknesses or limitations that are associated with the implementation of transfer student orientation programs in a high school setting. Some of the limitations include a lack of evidence-based interventions, time required for student participation in such programs, and lack of financial and personal resources.

**Lack of Evidence.** The literature revealed a lack in research about the types of transition programs available to new students in high school. Most schools have some sort of transition or orientation program in place for new students, but these programs do not appear evidence based (Stahl-Ladbury et al., 2010). There also appears to be a large variety in the kinds of programs offered in schools across the United States. Some transition programs are done in one day, while

others are spread out over a period of weeks or months, which may lead to inconsistent support available to students (Smither, 2008; Stahl-Ladbury et al., 2010; Jason et al., 1993). The American School Counseling Association's national model emphasizes the importance of counselors addressing student's individual, as well as group needs. According to the ASCA model school counselors must address four components when developing programs: the foundation, delivery, management, and accountability (Dimmitt & Carey, 2007).

*Additional impact on academic time.* One common complaint about long term transfer student orientation programs is the amount of time it takes students out of the classroom. With the rise of standard based curriculum and testing, there is more pressure on students to perform well academically. Student performance not only reflects on the student, but also their school counselors, administrators, teachers and the school as a whole. It is important for students to be in class in order to learn the content of what they will be tested on (Porter et al, 2011). Faculty may be hesitant about letting a new student be pulled out of class in order to participate in a long term orientation program. This especially may be true if the student arrived at the school with low grades, has been absent from several classes, or is continuing to struggle academically.

*Lack of resources.* Many budget cuts have been made to programming at schools (Klien, 2011). Educators may be reluctant to back any new or additional programming without evidence to the effectiveness of these programs (Walker, 2004). The question is then how do educators measure the effectiveness of an orientation program? It is possible to do this by tracking new student's grades, attendance records, and behavioral adjustment before and after the intervention. Another easy way to gather information about the effectiveness of a school program is by administering a pre and post-test to the participating student's and allow them to evaluate the program anonymously (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006).

Effective transition programs improve attendance, achievement, and retention (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). The research suggests that effective programs target students, parents, and teachers and should extend over a period of time. It is important for these programs to address social, as well as academic needs. Programs that include support and collaboration from teachers, counselors, and administrator have been found to be the most successful (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006).

### **Role of School Counselor**

The role of school counselors has changed dramatically over time. The American School Counseling Association created a set of standards that has changed the definition and training of school counselors. Currently, school counselors in training take courses and receive supervision that encourages them to work collaboratively within the school setting, as well as seeing their students as whole beings (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010). Most school counselors struggle with balancing the traditional roles many schools assign to them with the new roles and expectations of the ASCA standards (Dimmitt & Carey, 2007).

School counselors are often responsible for developing and sustaining school programs for their students (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010). School Counselors are in an excellent position to develop programs due to their overall understanding of human development, multi-cultural issues, student needs and concerns. School counselors also have contact with teachers, administrators, and most importantly students. Counselors need to advocate for their students within the school setting.

The school counselor is often the first point of contact for students new to a school (Stahl-Ladbury et al., 2010), which puts counselors in an excellent position to develop and

implement a program for transfer students. Counselors often end up being the ones to make sure all of the student's registration paperwork is filled out, and records from the previous school are received. The school counselor is responsible for creating the new student's schedule, and often is the first person to introduce them to the new school environment. The role of tour guide can also fall onto the shoulders of school counselors. Giving new students and their families a tour of the school gives counselors an opportunity to make a connection and address any questions or concerns they have (Stahl-Ladbury et al., 2010), while also getting to know the student.

School Counselors have been trained to recognize and address populations of students in need. The literature has identified transfer students as a vulnerable population (Langenkamp, 2009). School counselors are in a unique position to be able to recognize the ways in which transfer students are affected academically, as well as social/emotionally, during the transition process (Stahl-Ladbury, 2010). They are also knowledgeable in a number of different programs and techniques used to address these issues. Advocacy for neglected populations of students is an important role that school counselors are responsible for filling (Dimmitt & Carey, 2007).

**Further interventions School Counselors can use with transfer students.** Some (Popp et al., 2003; Rumberger, 2003; Smither, 2008) have suggested a variety of further interventions for assisting in the transition process. Preparation for new student arrival is one of the first interventions a school counselor can implement to ease the student's transition into the school (Popp et al., 2003). Popp et al. suggested school counselors make an appointment with the new student and their parent/guardian after all school records have been received and registration paperwork was completed. Rumberger further proposed that the counselor could provide the administration and teachers with background information about the student and anticipated arrival (Rumberger, 2003). Having a new student information packet or folder prepared to give

during their first meeting was another simple and helpful intervention proposed. Smither suggested that the folders include information about clubs, activities, school policies, code of conduct, a map of the school, daily schedule layout, and a list of groups the counseling office offers (Smither, 2008).

Additional recommendations for school counselors included: following-up with the new student within the first two weeks of arrival (Rumberger, 2003); having referral procedures prepared ahead of time to quickly address any adjustment issues; and being flexible and willing to meet with new parents and students after hours may be helpful in monitoring the new student's adjustment and needs, as the problems transfer students face may occur over an extended period of time (Warren-Sohlberg et al., 1998).

Counselors are considered to be in an excellent position to sponsor and develop school-wide "acquaintanceship" or "buddy system" programs or activities (Rumberger, 2003). Matching new students with peers who have similar interests and values may help establish friendships and make connections within the school.

***New student support group.*** Forming a support group for transfer students is a cost effective way to reach several students going through the transition process at one time (Stahl-Ladbury, 2010). A counseling group would be appropriate for any new student who is having trouble adjusting to the new school setting, or is in need of additional support (Wilson, 1993). According to Rumberger (2003) the group should be formed within the first two weeks of the start of the school year and extend over several weeks and should be held during both semesters of the school year to account for late arriving transfer students.

Using curriculum that focuses on orienting the student to the new school, academic transition, and social/emotional concerns has been shown to be effective (Jason et al., 1993). School counselors should have curriculum prepared in advance for the group sessions, but should remain open to possible changes. Each group of transfer students is going to have their own unique concerns and issues. A group provides the opportunity for contact between new students and schools counselors, which allows counselors to intervene appropriately and as necessary (Wilson, 1993). A counseling group also provides the opportunity for students to learn coping skills and strategies to use during future transition periods in their lives.

### **Rationale for Study**

Group counseling has been found to be an effective technique to use within school settings (Stone & Dahir, 2006). Creating a group can be an effective way of reaching several students with similar issues at once. Adolescents want to be accepted by their peers. High school is a time when the importance of peer relations increase. Adolescents often develop their identity, self-esteem, and self-concept based off of their interactions with their peers (Stahl-Ladbury et al., 2010), which makes the impact of group counseling that much greater. The counseling group can be a place for students to address the difficulties they face during their transition, both academically and personal/socially. The group can also be a place to explore the feelings they have around leaving their old school, their adjustment to the new school, and making new friends.

This study offers a counseling group for new student transfers into the high school setting. It will look at the impact the group intervention has on the participants GPA and

attendance rates. The findings of this study can help the high school improve the way in which it welcomes new students.

### **Research Questions**

1. Will group counseling be effective, as measured by GPA and attendance rates, in helping new students transition into the high school setting?

Therefore, the hypothesis is stated: If transfer students participate in a counseling group, then they will not decrease in their overall GPA or attendance rates after transferring to the new school. The null hypothesis is stated: If transfer students participate in a counseling group, then their overall GPA and attendance rates will drop from what is listed on their previous schools records.

### **Method**

Previous research has demonstrated that transfer students typically experience lower GPAs and increased absences after the transition to a new school. The current research study was designed to address the research question: Will group counseling be effective, as measured by GPA and attendance rates, in helping new students transition into the high school setting? A paired-samples t-test was conducted to determine if the counseling group had a statistically significant impact on participants GPA and number of absences. t-tests, degrees of freedom, and level of significance were determined for GPA and number of absences. The confidence interval was set at 95%. The researcher also conducted a Pearson product correlation to detect any statistically significant correlations between participation in the counseling group and GPA and number of absences.

### **Setting**

This study was conducted in a high school from a rural/suburban school district in western New York. The high school consisted of approximately 1,417 students, grades nine through twelve. The school was comprised of a predominately white population with approximately 94% Caucasian, 2% African American, 3% Hispanic/Latino, 1% American Indian/Alaska Native, and 1% Asian/Pacific Islander. Approximately 17% of students received public assistance for the 2010-2011 school year. During the current year 10% of students were eligible for free lunch, and 7% for reduced-price lunch. The school's 2010-2011 school report card indicated 96% of graduates received a Regents Diploma and 55% received a Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation. Forty percent of graduates became enrolled in a four-year college and 44% enrolled in a two-year college. The school's 2010-2011 accountability report

revealed a 96% annual attendance rate. The group counseling sessions were held in a small conference room in the high school counseling center.

### **Participants**

There were a total of four participants in this study, all females currently enrolled in a suburban/rural high school located in western New York, grades 9-12. The participant's ages ranged from 14-17, with an average age of 15.5 at the time of the study. Each participant was a recent transfer into the high school during the 2012-2013 school year. Of the four participants, three identified themselves as Caucasian, and one as African American.

The participants involved in this study were recruited using a variety of convenience sampling methods. First, an email was sent to all of the school counselors notifying them that the researcher was going to be facilitating a counseling group for transfer students. The researcher briefly explained the purpose of the study, explained the timeline, and asked the school counselors to identify any transfer students who may benefit from and be willing to participate in the study. Next, the researcher obtained a list of all the transfer students for the 2012-2013 school year from the registrar's office. This list identified 59 students, who had transferred into the high school between July 2012 and January 2013. The researcher then verbally explained the study in further detail to the school counselors during one of their weekly meetings. From the weekly meeting, the researcher was able to further gather the names of 15 possible participants from the school counselors in a smaller, more personal setting.

The researcher invited the recommended students to her office to for a brief, individual session to be interviewed and screened for the study. During the screening process, participants were asked about their personal experience with transferring into a new school, how well they

felt they transitioned, and whether the student felt they were in need of additional support (See Appendix A). Potential participants were informed of the group process, the possible risks/benefits of participation, and confidentiality. After the screening process, 13 students were invited to join the group. Each student was given an information packet, which included a description of the study (See Appendix B), and participant and parent/guardian consent forms to return to the researcher (Appendix C). Following the initial screening session, a parent or guardian of the participant was contacted via phone by the researcher and was given further information on the study. It was explained to parents, students, school counselors, and administration that the participants may be missing classes and homework as a result of the study. It was also explained that it is the primary responsibility of the participant to make up any missed work.

The four students, who brought back their signed consent forms, were the participants in the transfer student counseling group. Due to the small population of transfer students, and their various levels of adjustment, the sample size of this study is inadequate and is not generalizable to the entire transfer population. The group met once a week, for approximately 50 minutes. The group met for a total of four sessions and used psycho-educational and discussion based activities aimed at helping participants transition into their new school setting.

### **Materials**

Students who brought back the signed consent forms voluntarily participated in the group lessons and activities developed by the researcher. The researcher developed the group lesson plans from shared information gathered in the screening sessions, as well as, literature on the use of group counseling with transfer students (Stahl-Ladbury et al., 2010). The curriculum for each

of the counseling sessions included a variety of psycho-educational topics, discussions, informational handouts, and activities (Popp et al., 2003). The impact the group has on participants' GPA and number of absences was measured using student records on Infinite Campus and recorded on a data collection sheet created by the researcher.

The topics for each of the group sessions are as follows in Table 1.

Table 1

*Group Counseling Activities by Session*

Session	Activity
Session one	Introduction and Confidentiality Discussion Schedule/Benefits of Participation Icebreaker Activities
Session two	Meeting New People/Making Friends Maintaining Past Friendships Peer Pressure/Wanting to Fit in Collage Activity
Session three	Adjusting to a New School Setting Graduation Requirements Color Code Building Map Who to Ask for Help
Session four	Academic Success in a New School Setting Time Management Skills Tutoring Group Wrap up

**Session one.** Three of four students were present for group. At the start of session, the researcher introduced herself and outlined the group process and content for the session. The participants were then asked to introduce themselves to the group. Students shared their name, where they transferred from, and when they transferred into the high school.

Next, confidentiality was defined and explained to the group. Specifically, the researcher asked participants what *confidentiality* meant to them and then defined it. The researcher further explained the importance of confidentiality. The researcher described the ways in which she would maintain the participant's confidentiality during and after the group experience, within her graduate thesis, and the presentation of her research thesis. The researcher also explained whom confidentiality applies to and its limits. The researcher then opened the topic up for discussion or any questions or concerns.

Next, the researcher briefly described the group schedule and discussed the benefits of participation in the group. The researcher explained the group would be meeting once a week for four weeks, and that the meeting time would vary to ensure less impact on students' attendance in each class. The researcher enforced the importance of members going to their scheduled class first, to check in with their teacher about missed class work and assignments. The researcher further explained that participants would be responsible for any quizzes, tests, assignments, or class work missed as a result of the group. The researcher and participants discussed the possible benefits of the counseling group and shared what they hope to gain from being a part of it.

After the schedule and benefits of participation were discussed, the group members completed two icebreaker activities, the "desert island" and "IF" activity. During the "desert island" activity, group members were presented with the scenario of being exiled to a deserted island for a year with only the essentials of clothing, food, water, and shelter. Participants were asked to name one piece of music, one book, and one luxury item they would choose to bring with them and explain why. The "IF" activity consisted of a stack of "if" question cards. Going around the circle, each member was asked to draw an "if" card from the pile, read it out loud,

and give their answer, comment, or explanation. The purpose of the icebreakers was to help group members get to know each other and begin to form rapport.

Lastly, the researcher opened the last few minutes of the group up for questions or concerns. The researcher also asked participants to name one thing they learned about each of the other members to further build rapport.

The researcher met individually with the absent member to fill them in on what was discussed our first session together.

**Session two.** All four participants were present for group. At the start of the session, the researcher outlined the group content. The researcher then introduced the participant who was absent from the first group meeting. The researcher reminded group members about the importance of maintaining confidentiality and discussed its limits. The researcher then led a quick icebreaker called “Would you rather...”. The researcher presented group members with scenarios in which they had to choose one option or the other. Each group member was asked to share their decision and reasoning behind it out loud.

Next, the researcher asked group members to share what the most difficult part of making new friends has been. The group discussed topics such as, difficulty becoming part of established groups of friends, building trust in new friendships, developing genuine relationships, and concerns about having to move and leave friends again. The group then discussed ways to meet new people and make friends. The researcher provided handouts of clubs and activities offered at the high school, a calendar of upcoming school events, the spring sports schedule, and a list of volunteer opportunities in the area. The purpose of the handouts was to encourage group members to become involved in school and community activities, which provide the opportunity to meet new people.

The next topic of discussion was maintaining friendships from previous schools. Group members discussed the friendships they continue to maintain from their previous school. Group members then shared the reasons why they continue to keep in touch with their friends and shared the ways they are able to do so. The group also discussed the characteristics they look for in friends.

Lastly, the researcher connected making new friends with the possibility of feeling peer pressure. The group discussed their experiences with peer pressure since transferring to their new school. The researcher and participants shared strategies for handling similar situations in the future. The researcher then had group members participate in a collage activity. Participants were provided with a blank mask, magazines, scissors, glue sticks and colored pencils for this activity. Group members were asked to create a mask representing the things they want new people to know about them when they first meet. The purpose of the collage activity was to get group members to think about how they present themselves to others versus what they want others to see/know. The group spent the last five minutes of the session sharing and discussing their masks as a group.

**Session three.** Three of four participants were present for group. Session three began with the researcher asking participants how they have been since the last meeting. The researcher outlined the topic of discussion for the group session and started the discussion by asking the question “What is the biggest difference you have noticed between your current school and your previous school?”. The group then processed differences, such as building size and layout, schedule/lunch structure, student attitudes, and lack of freedom.

All of the members mentioned difficulty finding their way around the school building, which led to a school mapping activity. The researcher distributed maps of the school building

and provided colored pencils to group members. As a group, participants color coded common areas of the school for each of the three floors. Common areas included the art, technology, and consumer science classrooms, as well as the Math, English, Social Studies, Science, and Foreign language wings. At the conclusion of the activity, the group processed any additional questions they had about navigating the building.

The discussion was brought back to processing other differences they have noticed in the new school setting. Group members identified their current school setting as “more country”, and “not as open” as schools they have previously attended. Members then processed the meaning and impact this has had on them since moving.

Lastly, group members discussed differences in curriculum and graduation requirements at their new school. Participants were given a handout of the tutoring services offered at the high school. The researcher encouraged participants to make parents, teachers, counselors, and administrators aware of their needs. The researcher also gave participants a copy of the graduation and exam requirements and encouraged them to set up an individual session with their school counselor if they had any questions or concerns.

The researcher opened the last few minutes of the session up for questions or concerns. The researcher reminded group members that the next session would be the last.

**Session four.** All participants were present. The researcher began this session by reminding students this was the last session and outlined the topics of discussion. The researcher explained the fourth session would be different from the others due to it being the final group. The group discussion began with the researcher asking members a series of process questions, such as “What has it been like for you to be a member of this group?”, “What has been the most/least helpful part of this group?”, “Is there anything you wanted to talk about that has not

been addressed in this group?”, and “What are some of the feelings you are having about this group ending?”. The group spent the majority of the session processing their answers to these questions and supporting one another.

Participants were then asked to share something they have learned or taken from being a part of this group. The researcher also shared what she has taken from the group and encouraged group members come back and see her if they need additional support.

### **Measurement Instrument**

The researcher developed her own data collection apparatus to measure any changes in GPA and attendance before and after participation in the group. The researcher used Infinite Campus to obtain participants records of GPA and number of absences (See Appendix J).

### **Procedure**

Using a pretest posttest research design, the researcher investigated the impact of group counseling on a transfer students' GPAs and attendance rates. The researcher used convenience sampling to select participants for the study. In convenience sampling, there is no way to determine bias or sampling error and the samples are not externally valid. The results of this study are only representative of the transfer students that participated in this study and are not representative of the entire target population.

Students invited to participate in the study were each given a packet of information, which included a description of the study, and statements of informed consent/assent, to bring home and review with their parents. Following the initial screening session, the researcher contacted each of the potential participants' parents by phone to further explain the study and answer any questions or concerns they had. Once participants returned their signed consent forms, the researcher used Infinite Campus to collect data on each student's Quarter 2 GPA from

their previous school and number of absences in the Quarter 2 in the new school since transferring. The researcher assigned coded numbers in place of participants' names to ensure the anonymity of their identities in the data collection process. The researcher looked up participants' GPAs (from their previous school records) at the end of the second quarter, which concluded the week before the group started. The researcher also recorded the number of absences between the students' enrollment in the high school until the end of the second quarter.

Participants then attended four, 50 minute, weekly group counseling sessions. These sessions addressed various issues transfer students commonly face as identified in the literature (Popp et al., 2003). Table 1 provides an outline of the group lessons developed and used by the researcher. Topics included discussions about friendships, adjusting to the new school setting, and academic expectations (Boon, 2011).

After the completion of the group sessions, the researcher once again used Infinite Campus to record participants' GPA at the end of the third quarter. The researcher also recorded the number of absences between the start of the counseling group, until the end of the third quarter.

In the days and weeks after the group terminated, the researcher met with each participant individually for debriefing. Members gave verbal feedback about their experiences and were given the opportunity to express any concerns or ask questions. Lastly, the counselor held a meeting in which she invited administrators and counselors to attend for debriefing.

**Results**

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to determine if the counseling group had a statistically significant impact on participants GPA and number of absences. T-tests, degrees of freedom, and level of significance were determined for GPA and number of absences. The confidence interval was set at 95%, which means that the difference in numbers is expected to arise by chance less than 5% of the time. There was no significant difference detected between participants' previous school GPA and current school third quarter GPA,  $t(3) = -.28, p = .80$ . No significant difference was detected between number of absences before the counseling group and after,  $t(3) = 1.85, p = .16$ . The researcher also conducted a paired samples correlation to find any statistically significant correlations between participation in the counseling group and GPA and number of absences. A significant correlation was found between student's previous school GPA and current school third quarter GPA,  $(r = .997, p = .05)$ .

*Figure 1. Mean Absences and GPA Before and After the Counseling Group*

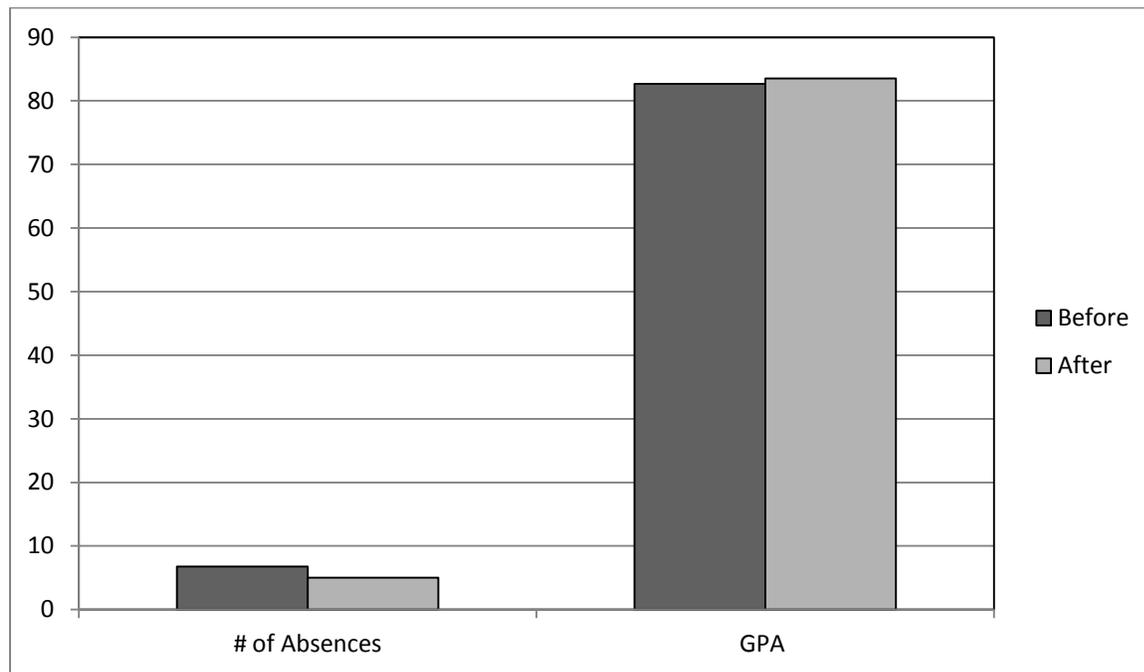


Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics*

Variable	<i>m</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>sd</i>	SE
Pair 1				
Absences Q2	6.75	4	5.74	2.87
Absences Q3	5.00	4	4.83	2.42
Pair 2				
GPA Q2 previous school	82.65	4	13.83	6.92
GPA Q3 current school	83.525	4	8.92	4.46

Table 3

*Paired Samples Test*

Variable	<i>m diff</i>	<i>sd</i>	SE	CI 95%		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>P</i> (2-tailed)
				LL	UL			
Pair 1 # of absences Q2 # of absences Q3	1.75	1.89	.95	-1.26	4.76	1.85	3	.16
Pair 2 GPA Q2 GPA Q3	-.88	6.32	3.16	.1093	9.18	-.28	3	.80

*Note.* CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit.

Table 4

*Pearson Product Correlations*

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
GPA Q4 Previous School to GPA Q3	4	.997	.05

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to ensure that participants did not experience educational/academic loss during the transition to the new school through the use of a counseling group. One of the most common themes found among the research done with transfer students is that of academic difficulty. A number of studies have shown a decline in grades following school transitions (Weiss & Bearman, 2007). Transfer students may find themselves having to catch up academically at their new school, which may cause an initial drop in their GPA during the first marking period (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). The relationship between previous school GPA and Q3 new school GPA, after participating in the study, was statistically significant with a strong correlation ( $r = .997, p = .05$ ). The strength of the correlation demonstrates stability of GPA from previous school to new school. Participants in this study even slightly improved their GPAs; although, the gains were not statistically significant.

A second common theme found among the transfer student population is maintaining attendance rates. A study by Roby (2004) found a strong positive relationship between student performance and attendance. Students need to be consistently attending school in order to learn the material that is being taught in the classroom. Participants initially experienced an average of 6.75 absences from the time they enrolled in the new school and the end of the second quarter. During the course of the study, attendance rates improved and lasted beyond the final group session, but were not statistically significantly different from Q2.

Students who have transitioned into a new school setting often report feeling isolated and alone (Stahl-Ladbury et al., 2010). Students in high school are in the middle of their adolescent development. According to Erik Erikson, adolescents are in the identity versus confusion stage of development. Adolescents are deciding who they are, what they are about, and where they are

going in life (Santrock, 2009). Participation in this study gave transfer students the opportunity to be a part of a counseling group. The counseling group facilitated the process of members meeting and interacting with their peers in a safe supportive environment. The group counseling curriculum consisted of a variety of discussion based topics and psycho-educational activities. The material was an equal balance of education and process, with the primary goal being providing support and stabilizing of transfer student's GPA and attendance rates in a new school setting.

Participation in the group itself, along with discussions covering topics such as peer pressure, and making and maintaining friendships addressed the social concerns transfer students commonly have when entering a new school setting (Stahl-Ladbury et al, 2010). A calendar of school events, information about clubs and activities, a schedule of upcoming sporting events, and a handout of volunteer/community service opportunities encouraged participants to become more involved in their new school and community.

Five-week progress reports were distributed in the time that the group met. Group members had dialogue about their five-week grades and strategies for improving upon them. Topics such as strategies for effectively managing time and organizing class materials were discussed. The researcher also informed participants about tutoring opportunities and provided a handout outlining the subject and time they were offered.

The topics selected by the researcher were relevant to the population being served. The literature assisted in the development of the group lessons, which were appropriate and aided students in their transition into the new school setting.

The data suggests that participant's number of absences and GPA remained stable during the transition to the new school. The literature suggested that it is more common for transfer

students to experience a decrease in GPA and an increase in number of absences after transitioning to another school (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). The results of this study implies that the development of a support group for transfer students may help to maintain, and possibly improve, GPA and attendance rates through the period of transitioning into a new school.

### **Limitations**

Only 4 students participated in this study. Due to the small sample size generalizations cannot be made about data based on the small number of subjects involved. Start up timing was a challenge, due to the IRB approval process, as some student were already in school 2-4 weeks before participating in the group. During the debriefing sessions, participants stated that it would have been more helpful if the group had started upon their arrival, rather than a few weeks later.

A final limitation to this study was the length of the group. By the end of the four weeks participants were just beginning to build relationships and comfort with one another and may have benefitted from additional time together.

### **Implications/Recommendations**

The researcher recommends that this school district, and possibly others as well, consider incorporating an ongoing and open group counseling program into the standard counseling program for transfer students. The data revealed that participant's GPA and attendance were stable throughout the duration of the group, as well as after the final group session. Furthermore, there were modest improvements in GPA and attendance, but those improvements were not statistically significant.

The researcher also recommends that this study be replicated with a larger sample size and include students who transferred from previous years. Past transfer student's stories of transition may be helpful to new transfer students.

Finally, school counselors should continue to study the effectiveness of group counseling on GPA and attendance rates of transfer students. Further, there is an increased need for school counselors to report their data on the effectiveness of counseling programs through the use of carefully designed experimental studies. Through research, school counselors will be able to use more effective interventions when working with a specific population.

### **Conclusion**

There continues to be a need for the development of relevant transition programs to be made available to transfer students adjusting to a new school setting. With 12.5% of the U.S. population moving within the last year alone (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), student mobility will continue to be an issue that needs to be addressed. The results of this study showed participant's GPA and attendance rates remaining stable throughout the process of transitioning into a new school. Previous studies have found a decline in GPA and an increase in number of absences to occur following school transitions (Weiss & Bearman, 2007). In addition, participants shared verbal feedback that participating in the group was helpful and relevant in orienting them to the school and feeling supported during the transition process.

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Appendix A



**HILTON CENTRAL  
SCHOOL DISTRICT**

WWW.HILTON.K12.NY.US

**High School  
400 East Avenue  
Hilton, New York 14468  
585-392-1000 (Phone)  
585-392-1032 (Fax)**



**Brian Bartalo  
Principal  
Ext. 2021**

**David Leahy  
Assistant Principal  
Ext. 2242**

**Scott Wilson  
Assistant Principal  
Ext. 2243**

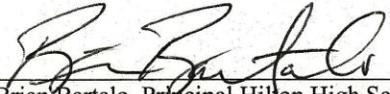
**Michael Zaffuto  
Assistant Principal  
Ext. 2300**

To: Institutional Review Board  
The College at Brockport, SUNY

I have read and approve the research study entitled, "Impact of a Group Intervention on Transfer Students Adjustment into the High School Setting"

By Jodie M. Overstrom and give consent for the study to be conducted at, or through Hilton High School.

The institution may add any other appropriate requirements, so long as information regarding the study is shared with staff of the agency after the completion of the study, so long as parental permission is obtained, etc.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Brian Bartalo, Principal Hilton High School

10/11/12  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix B



The College at  
**BROCKPORT**  
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Grants Development Director

**Date:** December 10, 2012  
**To:** Jodie Overstrom  
**From:** Colleen Donaldson  
Institutional Review Board Director  
**Re:** IRB Project # 2012-45

**Project Title:** Impact of a Group Intervention on Transfer Student Adjustment into the High School Setting

Your proposal, "Impact of a Group Intervention on Transfer Student Adjustment into the High School Setting" has been approved as of 12/3/12.

You must use only the approved consent form or informational letter and any applicable surveys or interview questions that have been approved by the IRB in conducting your project. If you desire to make any changes in these documents or the procedures that were approved by the IRB you must obtain approval from the IRB prior to implementing any changes.

If you wish to continue this project beyond one year, federal guidelines require IRB approval before the project can be approved for an additional year. A reminder continuation letter will be send to you in eleven months with the specific information that you will need to submit for continued approval of your project. Please note also that if the project initially required a full meeting of the IRB (Category III proposal) for the first review, then continuation of the project after one year will again require full IRB review.

Please contact Colleen Donaldson, IRB Administrator, Office of Academic Affairs, at (585) 395-5118 or [cdonalds@brockport.edu](mailto:cdonalds@brockport.edu), **immediately** if:

- the project changes substantially,
- a subject is injured,
- the level of risk increases
- changes are needed in your consent document, survey or interview questions or other related materials.

Best wishes in conducting your research.

## Appendix C

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Hello, my name is Jodie Overstrom. I am a graduate student doing my internship at the Hilton High School counseling center. I am in the Counselor Education graduate program at the College at Brockport. Part of my requirement for graduation is to complete research for my Master's Thesis. I am doing my research on the impact of group counseling on transfer student's adjustment in their new school. Your child has been identified by their school counselor as a student who has recently transferred into Hilton High School and may benefit from participation in this group. I would like to invite your child to participate in the transfer student counseling group that I am offering this school year.

The group would consist of participating in four weekly sessions that would last approximately one hour. I am going to try and schedule the groups during study halls, lunch, or elective classes. Your child will not be taken out of the same class more than once. Participating in the group would be an opportunity for your child to meet other students who have recently transferred into Hilton High School. The group would also be an opportunity to address and questions or concerns your child has since moving to Hilton.

Attached is a consent form that further explains the research I am conducting. If you agree to allow your child to participate in the group, please sign the attached form and have your child bring it back to me in the counseling office. If I am not in my office your child may leave them with Mrs. Soper, or in my mail box. Once I have both signed consent forms, I will schedule a one-on-one meeting with your child to gain a better understanding of what their personal concerns are since transferring into Hilton. I will create the group lesson plans based off of the concerns identified by students who have agreed to participate. If you have any questions or concerns, you can reach me by phone at 392-1000 x 2102, or email me at [joverstrom@hilton.k12.ny.us](mailto:joverstrom@hilton.k12.ny.us). I am in my office at the high school on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday.

Thank you,

Jodie Overstrom

## Appendix D

**STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARENTS**

This form describes a research study that aims to measure the impact participation in a group has on the adjustment of transfer students into high school. The purpose of this research is to better understand the issues transfer students face when transitioning into a new school, and whether offering extra support and resources has any impact on this process. The person conducting this research, Miss Jodie Overstrom, is a graduate student in the Counselor Education Department at The College at Brockport, SUNY. This research is being conducted for Miss Overstrom's Master's Thesis. Your child has been identified and referred to me by their school counselor as a student who has recently transferred schools and may be in need of additional support. Your child is eligible to participate in my research investigating the benefits of offering an additional support group to transfer students. If you agree to allow your child to participate in this study they will be asked to attend group counseling sessions with other transfer students who are transitioning into high school. Your child is invited to attend four weekly group counseling sessions that would be approximately one hour in length. The sessions would be scheduled during study halls, lunches, or elective classes. The schedule would rotate so that your child would not miss more than one class in a row. The researcher will be looking at your child's GPA and attendance rates before and after participating in the group counseling sessions.

The possible benefits to your child from participating in this study could be meeting other transfer students, receiving additional support, and addressing some of the issues they may be facing. They could also gain some new knowledge about themselves and the transition process.

Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. Being in it, or refusing to be in it, will not affect your child's grades, or class standing. They are free to change their mind or stop being in the study at any time.

I understand that:

1. My child's participation is voluntary and they have the right to end their participation at any time. My child will have a chance to discuss any questions they have about the study during their initial meeting with the primary researcher.
2. My child's confidentiality will be protected and held to the highest standards. Anything my child shares within the group will be protected and remain confidential. The only situations in which confidentiality can be broken are if my child discloses thoughts or actions of hurting themselves or others, or if the researcher suspects abuse. If any publication results from this research, my child would not be identified by name. Results would be given anonymously so that neither the participants nor their schools can be identified.
3. My child could possibly benefit from participating in this study by meeting other transfer students, receiving additional support, and having issues they have identified addressed. A risk associated with my child participating in this group is breach of confidentiality. The researcher will address the importance of protecting confidentiality at the start of

each group session. The researcher will also remind students of the consequences of breaching the confidentiality of the group.

4. My child’s participation involves an initial one-on-one interview with the researcher to share their concerns or possible topics of interest to be addressed in group. My child will then be participating in 4 weekly group sessions that will be approximately 1 hour in length.
5. Approximately 10 people will take part in this study. The results will be used for the completion of the researchers Master’s thesis.
6. The master list will assign each student a coded number to protect their identity on the data collection sheet. The data collection sheet will not use any identifying information that can be linked back to my child, thus the results of the study cannot be traced back to my child. The master list, data collection sheet, and consent forms will be kept separately in a locked filing cabinet in the investigator’s office, which is locked at the end of each day. All documents will be destroyed by shredding when the research has been completed.

You are being asked whether or not you will permit your child to participate in this study. If you wish to give permission to participate, and you agree with the statement below, please sign in the space provided. Remember, you may change your mind at any point and withdraw from the study. Your child can refuse to participate even if you have given permission for her/him to participate.

I understand the information provided in this form and agree to allow my child to participate as a participant in this project. I am 18 years of age or older. I have read and understand the above statements. All my questions about my child’s participation in this study have been answered to my satisfaction.

If you have any questions you may contact:

<u>Primary researcher</u>	<u>Faculty Advisor</u>
Name: Miss Jodie M.Overstrom	Name: Dr. Summer Reiner
Phone Number: 585-392-100 x 2102	Department and phone number: Counselor Education Department at The College at Brockport, SUNY 585-395-5497
Email address: joverstrom@hilton.k12.ny.us	Email address: sreiner@brockport.edu

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Child’s name \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E

**STATEMENT OF ASSENT FOR MINORS**

This form describes a research study that aims to measure the impact participation in a group has on the adjustment of transfer students into high school. The purpose of this research is to better understand the issues transfer students face when transitioning into a new school, and whether offering extra support and resources has any impact on the process. The person conducting this research, Miss Jodie Overstrom, is a graduate student in the Counselor Education Department at The College at Brockport, SUNY. You have been identified by your school counselor as a student who has recently transferred schools and may benefit from additional support. You are being asked to participate in research that looks at the benefits of offering additional support to transfer students. If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to attend group counseling sessions with other transfer students who are transitioning into high school. You are invited to participate in four weekly group counseling sessions that would be approximately one hour in length.

The possible benefits from participating in this study could be meeting other transfer students, receiving additional support, and addressing some of the issues you may be facing. You could also gain some new knowledge about yourself and the transition process.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Being in it, or refusing to be in it, will not affect your grades, or class standing. You are free to change your mind or stop being in the study at any time.

I understand that:

1. My participation is voluntary and I have the right to end it at any time. I will have a chance to discuss any questions I have about the study during my initial meeting with the primary researcher.
2. My confidentiality will be protected and held to the highest standards. Anything I share within the group will be protected and remain confidential. The only situations in which confidentiality can be broken are if I disclose thoughts or actions of hurting myself or others, and if the researcher suspects abuse. If any publication results from this research, I would not be identified by name. Results would be given anonymously so that neither I, nor my school can be identified.
3. There is a risk of other group member breaking confidentiality and talking about things I have shared. The researcher will explain the importance of maintaining and protecting confidentiality and will remind group member of this at the beginning of each session. The researcher will also explain the consequences of breaching the confidentiality of the group.
4. My participation involves an initial one-on-one interview with the researcher to share my concerns or possible topics of interest to be addressed in group. I will then be participating in 4 weekly group sessions that will be approximately 1 hour in length.

5. Approximately 10 people will take part in this study. The results will be used for the completion of a Master’s thesis by the primary researcher.
6. The master list of participant names, data collection sheet, and consent forms will be kept separately in a locked filing cabinet by the investigator and will be destroyed by shredding when the research has been completed. I will not be identified by name on the data collection sheet, thus the results of the study cannot be traced back to me.

You are being asked whether or not you want to participate in this study. If you wish to participate, and you agree with the statement below, please sign in the space provided. Remember, you may change your mind at any point and withdraw from the study. You can refuse to take part in the study even if your parent/guardian gives permission for you to participate.

If you have any questions you may contact:

<u>Primary researcher</u>	<u>Faculty Advisor</u>
Name: Miss Jodie Overstrom	Name: Dr. Summer Reiner
Phone Number: 585-392-100 x 2102	Department and phone number: Counselor Education Department at The College at Brockport, SUNY 585-395-5497
Email address: joverstrom@hilton.k12.ny.us	Email address: sreiner@brockport.edu

I understand the information provided in this form and agree to participate in this project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Birth date of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of a witness 18 years of age or older

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix F

## Group Lesson Plan: Week 1

1. Introductions: Explain that this group is going to be a little bit different today. Today we are going to start to get to know each other and break the ice. Go around the room and introduce yourself: Your name, when you are coming from, and when you transferred to Hilton.
2. Address Confidentiality
  - **What is confidentiality?:** It is keeping things that are shared in is group, between each other, and with the counselor, private. Confidentiality is very important to creating an atmosphere of trust and respect. Anything that is shared within this group is not to be talked about to others. All of the information I collect from this group will also be kept confidential. The master list of participant's names, the data collection sheet, and consent forms I have already collected will be kept in a locked filing cabinet that only I have access to. At the completion of the group, I will be shredding all of the documents. None of the information I include in the presentation of my thesis research will be traceable back to you.
  - **Who does it apply to?:** It applies to everyone in this group, including myself.
  - **What are its limits?:** There are some limits to maintaining confidentiality in a group. I am not able to be with you all of the time and I am not able to control whether a group member decides to breach confidentiality. That is important to keep in mind when sharing very private things. I believe that you all will respect one another's privacy and will not repeat anything that is shared in the group. If I become aware that someone is breaking confidentiality it will be addressed as quickly as possible and there will be consequences. Another limit to confidentiality is if I suspect on of you is a danger of harming yourself or others. I then have an obligation to report those suspicions to my supervisor and make your parents aware.
  - **Questions?**
3. Schedule
  - We will be meeting for the next 4 weeks every Tuesday for an hour. The time we meet will rotate through your schedule. This means you will only miss each of your classes only once. You should be receiving passes to come down to the counseling office in your first set class. It is important that you go to your class first and check in with your teacher. You will be responsible for any classwork or homework you missed, so checking in before you come down will be essential.
4. Icebreakers
  - Desert Island Activity

- You have been exiled to a deserted island for a year. You are given the essentials of clothing, food, water, and shelter. You take once piece of music, one book, and one luxury item of your choice with you. What would you bring with you and why?
  - “IF” Activity
    - I have a stack of “If” questions. Do you guys know what an “if” question is? An example of an “if” question would be: “if you could have a super power, what would it be?” So what we are going to do is go around the circle and have each person draw an “if” question from the pile, read it out loud, and give their answer, comment, or explanation. The card is then returned to the bottom of the pile and the next person picks a card.
5. Open the session up for discussion
- Does anyone have any questions or concerns?  
What are your goals for the group/what do you hope to achieve or gain through the group?

## Appendix G

## Group Lesson-Week 2/Introductions

1. Introductions: Group members are asked to share their names and one good thing they had happen to them since our last group.
2. Reminder about confidentiality
3. Quick icebreaker: Would you rather...?
4. Meeting new people/making friends
  - What has been most easy/difficult aspect of meeting new people or making friends?
    - Simple tips to keep in mind when meeting new people
      - Be approachable, open, and friendly.
      - Take a deep breath, relax, and be yourself.
      - Be inviting. A smile goes a long way!
      - Make the first move to strike up a conversation. You will have many opportunities to speak up and talk to others: in the hallway, in the bathroom, at your locker, in class, etc. Ask simple and easy questions or even give compliments.
      - Try to remember people's names when you meet them. People like it when they are remembered, so this is an easy way to show it.
      - Look for other people who are new to the school: that is exactly what this group is for!
      - Try to sit in the middle of the classroom rather than in the back. In the middle you will have others around you which makes striking up a conversation easier.
      - Join afterschool activities you like: clubs, sports, volunteer work, choir, and band. This is an opportunity to meet others who you share similar interests with.
      - Attend school sporting events, plays, musicals, concerts, and dances. It shows your support and interest in being a part of your new school.
      - Meet up with people outside of school once you get to know them. This is an important step to making TRUE friends who you can rely on.
5. Pass out handouts
  - Events calendar
  - sports schedule handout
  - clubs and activity packet

- volunteer opportunities in the community
6. Maintaining old friendships
    - Are maintaining friendships at your previous school important to you?
    - Why did you become friends with them? What do you look for in a friendship?
    - How have you been able to keep your friendships going since moving to a new school?
  7. Peer pressure
    - When meeting new people and wanting to fit in, it can be easy to become influenced by peer pressure.
    - Have any of you experienced peer pressure since coming to Hilton? If you have, would you share your experience with the group? How did you handle it? What would you do the same/differently?
    - It is really important to remain true to yourself during this transition time in your life. You will adapt and change as you are going the transition process, but it should be your own path, not others.
  8. Collage Activity: It is important to remember who you are deep down inside while you are going through this process. I would like for you all to take one of the blank masks and use clippings from the magazines to create a collage about yourself. As you are clipping from the magazines keep in mind the following questions:
    - What do you want other people to see/know about you when you meet them?
    - What do you present about yourself when you first meet new people?
    - Process each group members mask

## Appendix H

## Group Lesson-Week 3/Adjusting to a new school setting

1. Introductions: Group members are asked to share their names and one good thing they had happen to them since our last group.
2. Reminder about confidentiality
3. Adjusting to a new school setting:  
I would like to open this session up to the group and give you all an opportunity to share your experiences with adjusting to a new school.
  - What is the biggest difference that you notice between Hilton and your previous school?
  - Are there any ways that Hilton is similar to your previous school?
4. Something that all of you mentioned when I talked to you one on one was adjusting to that change in building size:
  - What helped you find your way around on the first day of school?
  - What would have been more helpful?
  - How are you able to navigate the school now?
    - Color coding building map
5. Getting used to our schedule
  - What did you think of our schedule when you first got here?
  - Did anyone explain the way it worked to you in a way you understood?
  - How long did it take for you to figure out?
  - Do you still have any questions about it?
6. Diversity
  - Have any of you noticed differences in diversity between your previous school and Hilton?
  - What has that been like for you?
7. Graduation requirements
  - Handouts
8. Course curriculum
  - Did you notice any differences in the curriculum between your previous school and Hilton?
  - Tutoring
    - handout
  - Asking for help: would you ask for help if you need it? How would you do so? Who would you ask?
9. Reminder that our next session will be our last – how do you feel about that?

## Appendix I

## Lesson Plan-Week 4/Final Group

1. Introductions: How have things been since I've seen you last? Share one good thing that has happened since the last time we met.
2. Discuss 5 Week Progress Reports coming out
  - How do you feel about your grades at this point in the third quarter?
  - What course are you the most proud of?
  - What course would you like to improve in?
3. Academic success in a new school setting
  - Communicating needs to teachers, counselors, parents, administrators
  - Not being afraid to ask for help!
  - Attendance
  - Time management/organization
  - Tutoring
4. Group Processing/Wrap up
  - What has it been like for you to be a member of this group?
  - What has been the most helpful part of this group?
  - What has been the least helpful part of this group?
  - Is there anything you wanted to talk about that has not been addressed?
  - What are some of the feelings you are having about this group ending?
  - Name one thing you have learned/taken from this group.

Appendix J

Data Collection Sheet					
Student	# of absences before intervention	# of absences after intervention	Final GPA at Previous School	GPA before intervention (End of Q2)	GPA after intervention
1					
2					
3					
4					
<b>Total</b>					
<b>Mean</b>					