

RUNNING HEAD: Transitioning from High School

## Transitioning from High School: A Postgraduate Study

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Abstract

Individuals transitioning from college face many decisions about their future. Making these decisions is not always easy for some. The role of all individuals involved in a high school is to prepare students for life after high school. A review of past postgraduate data was explored as well as programs that have been implemented to help students transition. A postgraduate survey was given to past graduates of a local school. The results of the survey were examined.

Recommendations for helping students transition were made.

### Transitioning from High School: A Postgraduate Study

The transition from high school to college can be a challenging experience (Jason & Burrows, 1983). Individuals, such as school personnel or postgraduates, may have the perception that high schools do not follow up with graduates after leaving. It is up to schools to send a different message. A number of theorists have investigated the transition from high school to work or college, such as, Mazzuea (1983), Freed (1987), Arnett (2000), and numerous others that will be discussed. Schools need to ensure that each student feels that school is preparing them for a life after high school. It is the job of the school to look at where their graduates decide to go and if graduates complete their plan for a career following graduation. This information is crucial to understand what worked for these students in the process, and is critical information for schools to better their role as a key to successful career decision making.

As a future school counselor, having the skills to prepare students for life after school is important (ASCA, 2005). Knowing what programs can be implemented to help students feel confident to make an appropriate career decision is essential to helping high school students transition successfully to college or work. Continuing to research the transition process for students out of high school allows for better knowledge of what is effective for a healthy transition. Having such knowledge can help students and school personnel build relationships with each other. Students will then feel more confident that counselors, teachers and administrators are working together with them to create a plan. Providing an education for students and preparing them for life after high school is what schools aim to do. Being able to provide evidence that this is being accomplished is important to all involved in the journey.

### Review of the Literature

The transition for high school seniors into adulthood and life after high school is a major change for individuals (Mazzuea, 1983). Adolescents nearing the end of their high school experience are asked to make numerous life changing decisions in a climate of an ever-changing career world with a great degree of unknowns. Unknowns may include what career to pursue, how to pursue goals, what college will be like, and what having a job will be like. It is a time of deciding to go to college, enter the world of work or join the military. Not only do high school graduates have these choices to make, but in addition, they experience developmental changes. This process into adulthood can be extremely frightening. Young people are wrestling with questions that they may not feel prepared to answer. Students are asked to choose a career, choose a college, complete form after form, and enter a world that is ever changing (Mazzuea, 1983).

In order to understand the stressors that young people deal with, it is essential to examine what decisions and changes students face and what high school staff can do to make the transition easier. First, a review of other postgraduate data and literature that has been collected will be explored. Why it is important to collect such data and what other researchers have found will be examined. Transitioning from high school to the world is a major developmental change for individuals. After this change in development is examined, it is essential to see what others have found to be beneficial in preparing graduates for a successful transition out of high school. Given that school's have the opportunity to play a significant role in the transition for students to school or work, what programs other researchers have implemented are examined and suggestions are made. Previous attempts to assist students in their transition are evaluated.

### Postgraduate Data

Educational programs at the high school level are designed to help students prepare for their future after high school (Copa et al, 1976). It is essential that educators are able to identify relationships between what was done in high school and the individual's post high school decisions. This is important because it will provide feedback to schools so that school personnel are able to better prepare students for transition (Copa et al, 1976). Moreover, such data can be used for planning services that could be more beneficial while in high school (Copa et al, 1976). Not only can postgraduate data be useful to a school district, but to states for federal reporting as well. To continue to collect data annually provides information to assess the impact of and plan for public education (Freed, 1987). Furthermore, Adragna (2009) stated that students' perceptions of school and their experiences had an impact on their academic performance, and positive attitude about their higher education aspirations. For instance, when students feel skilled in a particular area, the more positive of an attitude the student will have toward that subject and the more likely the student will be to engage in that type of setting (Adragna, 2009).

Copa et al (1976) examined some criteria that would be beneficial when assessing postgraduate data as well as the justifications for the criteria. Most importantly, Copa et al (1976) stated that the data must provide information that school personnel could use in planning and evaluating. School personnel are the closest individuals to the students and have the most control over how school programs will be implemented, meaning they are a main factor in how successful students will be after high school (Copa et al, 1976). In addition, they have a good amount of power over how a school will prepare students for life outside of high school. Although there are many variables such as, relationships, peers, and the media, that influence student's choices for high school, academic intensity and quality of curriculum seems to be most important in determining how successful the transition will be (Smith & Pidi, 2009).

Justifying the importance of postgraduate data, Smith and Pidi (2009), stated that research has continued to show that a rigorous academic program is vital to being successful. Using postgraduate data, these academic programs can be created to be more successful. Providing such data to school personnel allows for a better awareness of what is successful. In addition, such data provides feedback that can instill motivation for change. Copa et al (1976) also stated that it is important to make sure that the information being collected is useful and asks questions that are valid. It is essential to ask questions that can lead to justifying what works for students to transition to life after high school. In addition, one wants the questions to assess what can be changed to better the transition.

#### *Types of Postgraduate Data Collection and Results*

A high school postgraduate survey can be a means to documenting what happens to students after leaving high school. Many postgraduate surveys seek to gather the same information such as if students attended college, military or work (Freed, 1987). Questions regarding ratings of high school classes and courses are a common assessment of postgraduate surveys. Additionally, it is important to question graduates not just the year after. Those individuals six months out of high school and into college and work may not offer the same experience and judgments of those who have had more time to experience the transition (Freed, 1987).

Procedures for completing graduate surveys differ for schools. One postgraduate study discussed the school counselor to be the one to coordinate the survey as well as mail surveys to graduates and do follow up calls (Freed, 1987). Freed (1987), discussed a postgraduate survey done in 1987. He reported that 62.2% responded to the survey, being the sixth year in a row to have response rates about 60%. Some of the findings of the survey included reviewing courses

and finding out what individuals were currently doing. When asked to rate programs in high school, English, vocational, and extracurricular received the highest ratings. Foreign language received the lowest rating. In addition, it was found that over 50% of respondents were working at the current time and the same amount was continuing their education. Many of the respondents were doing both (Freed, 1987). Collecting this data is important because students are going through a great amount of decision making as well as changing developmentally (Arnett, 2000).

*Development: Adolescent to Adult*

One young adult explained the time of transition into adulthood as “having nothing ahead to count on means I now have to count on myself; that having no direction means forging one of my own (Arnett, 2000, p.469).” These years from the late teens and into the early twenties are a time of great change and have a great impact on an individual. It is the beginning of a time when the emerging adult will make numerous life choices, exploring the world that has opened up to them (Arnett, 2000). This is very similar to what Brody et al (1986) stated. Brody et al (1986) stated that seniors report feelings of happiness and sadness as they have to leave a place that they have spent much of their lives up to that point. These feelings can bring on a sense of separation anxiety. This time can be traumatic, but at the same time offers a force of growth and development (Brody et al, 1986).

Adolescence is a time of multiple separations, not only from parents, friends and school, but from one’s own way of thinking. Graduating from high school and transitioning to what follows marks the emergence of the adolescent into a young adult (Brody et al, 1986). Emotional dependence on others is further diminished in this transition into adulthood. During the transition from the high school environment, students may experience emotional problems, psychological distress and anxiety (Brody et al, 1986). Arnett (2000) believes these feelings arise from a sense

of ambiguity and instability that happens at this time of development. Hicks and Heastie (2008) stated that even though one can experience these feelings of anxiety, the life transition creates an opportunity for positive growth and change. Arnett (2000) on the other hand explored some of the not so enjoyable aspects of the emerging adult. Exploration in work sometimes leads to a failure to achieve a desired occupation. In addition, there may be the inability to find a program or career that is fulfilling. Some individuals may not use this time of emerging adulthood as a time of change and exploration. Not all young individuals have the motivation or opportunity to use the time as an exploration of growth and change (Arnett, 2000).

Transitioning into adulthood brings about a time of much diversity among individuals. For instance, while in high school the majority of American adolescents aged 12-17 live at home with parents, are unmarried and enrolled in school. After high school, the demographics of individuals are diverse and constantly changing. For example, young Americans leave home and have a number of different living situations. Some will live independently and for others, they may continue to live at home. Another constantly changing demographic is school attendance. Over 60% of individuals enter school the year following graduation. In the years that follow, only 35% of young people have completed four or more years of college. This is evidence that emerging adults experience a time of demographic diversity, change and exploration deciding what they will continue to pursue in their futures (Arnett, 2000).

For adolescents, researchers have identified identity versus role confusion as the central crisis. Much research has shown that identity achievement has not been reached by the time individuals are out of high school (Arnett, 2000). Arnett (2000) explained that the three main identity explorations the emerging adult is making are love, work, and worldviews. With regard to work, the majority of adolescents in high school work part time, but this experience does not

give them the knowledge and experience related to future occupation. As they enter adulthood and make career decisions, adolescents start to focus on how their work experiences prepare them for adult work roles. Identity issues that are being explored at this time include what individuals are good at, what kind of work would be satisfying and chances of getting that kind of job. This time of emerging adulthood lacks some role commitment allowing for a time of great exploration (Arnett, 2000). Similarly, Hicks and Heastie (2008) stated that students see college and other new opportunities as a time for discovering who they are and who they have the potential of becoming and are anticipating new life identities.

Career decision making is one of the most important developmental decisions that emerging adults are making during transition into adulthood (Savickas, 1999). Savickas (1999) examined a developmental perspective on the school to work transition in his research. Developmentally, Savickas (1993) stated that two distinct factors that condition career decision making are attitudinal and cognitive. The individual must have a positive attitude toward planning and exploration of a career, independence in making choices and willingness to compromise. Moreover, an individual must have information about the occupation they choose (Savickas, 1993).

Transitioning from high school is a time of increased anxiety and stress. This psychological discomfort is evident to parents, teachers and school counselors (Smith, 1997). Bloxom (2008) used the Comprehensive Career Needs Survey to collect his data. The survey focused on the perceptions of junior and senior high school students, parents, teachers, school counselors and administrators of the success of career planning services and resources and the perceived gaps in services. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. Bloxom (2008) found that students reported a need for resources and support from others while developing

career plans. A majority of junior and senior students reported that career services in their school would be helpful. What the junior and seniors shared to be most important was finding ways to pursue things that students are passionate about, understanding interests and abilities, and obtaining information (Bloxom, 2008). Adragna (2009) found this to be true as well. Self esteem is an important factor in development in adolescence. This plays a role in adolescents' decision making. When adolescents have higher self esteem during this exploratory period of life, adolescents will have less confusion about their future. Perceptions of abilities can influence adolescents' motivation to perform well when individuals think they can do it (Adragna, 2009).

#### *Transitioning from High School: School to College Transition*

Gathering postgraduate data is a very useful tool in finding out what graduates have pursued and what was effective for graduate's transition to life after high school. The transition from high school is different for each individual. For some individuals, this means going to college, for others it can mean entering the world of work and for some there may still be no plan. Options that students have are numerous (Jason & Burrows, 1983).

The transition process involves students separating from parents and friends, and becoming more autonomous in their decision making (Jason & Burrows, 1983). Moreover, peer groups that students drew their support from throughout high school may no longer be able to provide support because of different plans for after high school (Goodnough & Ripley, 1997). Loss of these relationships can be extremely stressful. One student stated that "the college transition is a transformation from dependence to independence, from being a mere product of one's upbringing to being a responsible individual who makes real choices, practical and philosophical, about one's path in life" (Journal of College Admission, 2009, p. 9).

Terenzini et al (1994) also reported on the feelings of students transitioning. He stated that for some students the transition can be exciting, but for others, it can be extremely anxiety provoking. It is not uncommon for individuals to feel stressed and worried about the next big step the individual is taking in his or her life. The dynamics and nature in which student's transition can vary according to their social, family and educational background. Other factors include personality, aspirations for the future, and encounters and interactions with peers, faculty and staff members of the school they attended (Terenzini et al, 1994).

Currently, high school students have higher educational aspirations than individuals did in the past (Conley & Venezia, 2003). Conley and Venezia (2003) reported that 70 percent of high school graduates attend college within two years of graduating. Some individuals report that going to college is not even a question. In some families, college is the definite thing to follow high school and these individuals may be the first generation to attend college. Terenzini (1994) found that the transition for first generation students was reported to be far more difficult. The process into college for first generation students can be an intimidating cultural transition. Some individuals experience it as a decision to escape the hopelessness they see their life otherwise taking (Terenzini, 1994).

In the past, a high school graduate had the choice to attend college or find a job. Attending a four year college is not the only option after completing high school. An increasing proportion of those students who go to college now enter two year institutions. A two year college is predominantly made up of working and lower-middle class individuals. Two year colleges tend to do a better job accommodating individuals that choose to work while attending (Anderson, 1981). Anderson (1981) found that students that enter two year colleges have lower odds of persistence compared to four year students. The high probability of these individuals to

drop out may be attributed to peer influence on individuals to leave and attend a vocational school or to become more involved in a job (Anderson, 1981). Vocational education has become an extremely essential part of preparing individuals for the world of work. The military has become of increased importance to training high school graduates for work as well. Most research has concentrated on the transition into college following high school graduation and not on those entering a vocational or military school (Schoenfeldt, 1968).

Researchers have examined some of the difficulties faced for individuals transitioning after high school. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching found that a discontinuity exists between schools and institutions of higher education. Almost half of the students surveyed stated that trying to select a college is confusing and they do not feel there is a sound basis for making a decision. Moreover, reports from students revealed that they looked to school counselors for college information, but rated the advice as less influential than advice from parents and friends (Boyer, 1986). Boyer (1986) attributes this to the fact that counselors are overworked and do not have sufficient information. Like Boyer (1986), Conley and Venezia (2003) stressed that coursework between high schools and college's is not connected, leading students to have to meet a whole new set of standards that they may not be familiar with.

Meyer (1970) looked to provide evidence on high schools effects on college intention. Schools that have a higher status in the community are more likely to foster more college attending students. Meyer (1970) believes that these schools are also most likely to foster a student's doubts about academic capabilities. When students were asked if they did not enter college following high school what the reason would be, about 20% said because they felt that their grades were too low or that they did not think they had the ability. These answers show a

lack of academic confidence. This provides evidence that it is in the school and counselors power to instill academic confidence (Meyer, 1970).

*Transitioning From High School: School to Work*

Non college bound students should feel as if educators have made a plan and have programs that will prepare them for life after high school (Black, 1995). For those students that choose to enter the world of work, Savickas (1999) stated that it is easier for youth to cope when they have developed awareness of their choices, gathered information and made plans for their future. The school to work transition involves choosing an occupation, getting the proper training, obtaining a position and securing the position. Being aware of the choices to be made and having the appropriate information is the main developmental predictor of a smoother transition (Savickas, 1999). Black (1995), a principle of a high school stated that he does not feel schools are doing enough to prepare students for the world of work. He continued to state that all students need skills that enable them to enter the world of work as well as completing a degree (Black, 1995).

Swenson (1977) reported that vocational counseling is no longer about choosing an occupation. Vocational counseling should now involve making a series of decisions that affect a lifelong process. This includes teaching students decision making skills that will help individuals make decisions that arise at the current time and in the future. Vocational counseling should allow students to clarify their own values and feelings in order to then relate them to their education and occupational decisions. Students that drop out of school should be made aware of the choices for employment and sources of help. School counselors should use the last chance they have to ensure that the student can make a transition into the world of work (Swenson, 1977). Likewise, Weiss (1996) stated that seeing as not all students are college bound; schools

should merge routine academics with career education. Before students have entered 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade, providing students with school-to-work information will help students have a head start on choosing a career (Weiss, 1996).

### *Preparing High School Students for Transition*

One of the jobs of a high school is to provide students with the skills and the knowledge needed to pursue career goals in a rapidly changing world (Bloxom, 2008). It is evident that preparing high school students for the transition out of high school is an extremely important task for all individuals involved. The importance of successfully preparing high school students for the transition to college, work or military is beneficial to the students as well as to society (Leppel, 2001). Leppel (2001) states that the more a student's experiences serve to prepare them socially and intellectually, the more likely the individual will complete their degree.

High school students must decide whether to enter the work force or further their education after high school (Wei-Cheng, Hitchcock, & Calvert, 1998). Professionals involved in the transition phase for high school students need to place the interest of the student above anything else. Students who are involved with individuals that have their best interest in mind will find it easier to reach their goals. These students will most likely, with the help of these individuals, make decisions that are more appropriate for their interests (National Association of College Admissions Counselors, 1984).

Some struggles that high schools face is how to relate the experiences and what is learned in the last years of high school to what is taught when they enter college (McLendon, Heller, & Lee, 2009). McLendon, Heller, and Lee (2009) stated that students in high school taking advanced classes are more prepared for college material than other students. It is important to prepare all college bound students for the material. Moreover, academic standards vary from

each state as well as college. Being aware of all the different standards can be confusing. Some programs have been implemented to deal with the problems presented. For example, “Running Start” is a program that allows high school students to take college level courses in high school. Simultaneously, students earn college and high school credits (McLendon, Heller, & Lee, 2009).

It is important for school’s to be aware that students are diverse and some minorities may struggle with the transition out of high school more than others. For example, Hispanic individuals are the second largest group after white, non Hispanic individuals in schools. The application process to college can be a difficult task due to the fact that applications and information may not be provided in their primary language. If school counselors work with these students and their families, guiding the students and their family through the application process, these obstacles can be overcome (Marsico & Getch, 2009).

Smith and Zhang (2009) conducted a study of who students perceived to be most helpful in their transition to college. A survey was given to students in an Introduction to Sociology class, resulting in a 94% response rate. Students reported that parental encouragement was the strongest factor when planning for college. Mothers were specifically claimed to have the highest impact on college success, giving evidence that mothers efforts are taken more seriously by students. Student’s relationships with parent’s influences attitudes and behaviors about college due to the expectations or social norms set by parents (Smith & Zhang, 2009). Like Smith and Zhang (2009), Choy et al (2000) found that parent involvement in the planning of student’s future was linked to an increase in college attendance for at risk students. Enrollment in college was almost twice as high for students whose parents frequently discussed school related matters with their children (Choy et al, 2000). Incorporating parents in the planning of student’s career

goals is essential to an easier transition. Schools should have a good relationship with parents in order to collaborate and involve parents in career programs for students (Smith & Zhang, 2009).

One way that schools can help with the struggles of transitioning academics, is to place emphasis on the basic learning skills of students. There are the basic courses such as English, Math, Science and Social Studies that individuals have to take, but on top of that, it is important to teach other skills such as leadership skills (National Association of College Admissions Counselors, 1984). A paper by the National Association of College Admissions (1984) stated that students need to know “to read, to talk, to think, to know, to act, to live” (p.12). Education should not just lead to college or work, but to a productive life overall (National Association of College Admissions Counselors, 1984).

School systems should help every student make career decisions and have a successful transition from school to what follows (Bloxom, 2008). Bloxom (2008) stated that career services can provide students with the motivation to complete high school and make good decisions about a career. These programs should provide students with knowledge about their skills, interests and talents (Bloxom, 2008). Like Bloxom (2008), Watson (1993) agrees with the importance of career services for students. Placement tests are one way that schools can help individuals measure their skills, allowing them to examine what may hinder their academic progress. Being aware of individual skills and weaknesses is essential to students in order to make changes (Watson, 1993).

Lindstrom et al, (2007) emphasized that self knowledge and self awareness are the first steps to helping student’s better transition. Having this awareness allows students to become more aware of their own interests and preferences. Student involvement in goal setting and self determination instills a sense of self confidence allowing students to advocate for themselves,

making their own career decisions and promoting independence (Lindstrom et al, 2007). School counselors should help individuals make the connection between lifelong goals and the education needed to achieve their standard of desired living (Watson, 1993).

Not all students are in need of career counseling, but the majority of students do need guidance to increase their career awareness (Author Unknown, 2005). Students were asked to rank the individuals they were most comfortable to approach for career help. The students stated that they would first go to their parents then school counselors (Bloxom, 2008). School counselors are unique individuals in high schools that should play a major role in the transition. One of the roles of a school counselor is to be the link in the school community. In addition, he or she has the role to connect high schools and colleges. The counselor can advocate for programs and motivate students to better themselves following high school. As school budgets are tightened, some counselors are asked to perform duties that are not of benefit to students and can take away from important roles of the counselor. It is important for school counselors to advocate for the importance of the school counseling position (National Association of College Admissions Counselors, 1984).

Student's career goals can be shaped significantly by school counselors (Wei-Cheng, Hitchcock, & Calvert, 1998). It is important for school counselors to aid students in picking courses that match their appropriate degree of difficulty, help students pick programs in school and after high school that compliment their interest, and numerous other tasks to elevate student quality. Counselors are a bridge between parents, teacher, administrator and student. Counselors need to continue their education to keep updated on vocational and college possibilities. The counselor must make sure they have information on career and college options after high school, financial aid procedures, and other opportunities to be prepared to transition (National

Association of College Admissions Counselors, 1984). It is of great importance that school counselors explore a variety of career opportunities with young adults and encourage students to participate in community based work experiences (Lindstrom, 2007). In order to do this, counselors will have to respond to the challenge of learning about emerging jobs to maintain their effectiveness to students in the career process (Minkoff, 1985). School counselors also play an important role in the transition to work, technical degrees and apprenticeships, not just four year colleges (Dobson, 1994). Dobson (1994), shared that counselors should meet with students and parents to create a Student Education Occupation Plan. The plan lays out all the options that are available to high school students (Dobson, 1994).

Not only is a school counselor responsible for providing students with information, but school counselors are a support system in the decision making of students (National Association of College Admissions Counselors, 1984). Moreover, students need to be reassured that they can succeed (Terenzini et al, 1994). School staff should never make assumptions about an individual's skills and abilities. School staff should listen closely to student's hopes and interests, making no judgments about what are realistic. It is the job of the school staff to guide individuals without limiting possible career choices (Lindstrom, 2007).

Wei-Cheng, Hitchcock, and Calvert (1998) examined student's perceptions of school counselors. They found that well over half of 10<sup>th</sup> grade students believed that their counselors expected them to go to college and this increased by 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Less than 5 percent of students felt that their counselor did not care about their career plans. The high percentage of individuals reporting that they perceive counselors expect them to go to college could suggest that counselors focus on college attendance over the military or work force. There is increasing emphasis on the school to work transition, but those planning to go to college have more contact

with counselors than vocational students (Wei-Cheng, Hitchcock, & Calvert, 1998). Bloxom et al (2008) findings are not congruent to the findings of Wei-Cheng, Hitchcock and Calvert (1998). Bloxom et al (2008) found that students rated school counselors second as who they would approach for career help, not just college help.

Using admissions officers as resources for counselors can be a great help. In lower income settings, college counseling staff may not be a priority, but are essential for providing career knowledge. Private schools employ more counselors than do public schools and these counselors tend to have time to be more focused on college and career counseling (Lautz, Perez, & Hawkins, 2005). Lautz, Perez, and Hawkins (2005) reported that having a high student- to-counselor ratio was correlated with lower percentages of students moving on to four year colleges, evidence that career counselors or relationships with admissions officers would be of great importance in these higher populated schools.

“Building relationships with postsecondary institutions is part of good college counseling” (Lautz, Perez, & Hawkins, 2005, p. 10). Holding college nights, open houses and college visits is a great way to build relationships with college admissions (Tornatzky, Cutler and Lee, 2002). In schools where college visits are limited or the college is not located near the school, having college admissions officers visit allows for questions that cannot be answered by the school counselor to be answered (Lautz, Perez, & Hawkins, 2005).

Research has examined ways to address concerns that individuals have about the transition for high school students. Goodnough and Ripley (1997) found that group counseling is an excellent way to assist high school students. Groups were formed for seniors to help them deal with the emotions they were experiencing. Groups were divided by those planning to attend a four year college, a two year college, the military, and work. The groups focused on feelings

and thoughts students were having about their next big transition. Those planning to attend college were able to talk about their excitement as well as acknowledge their losses associated with the transition. Focus of discussion for those in the military group was on the real possibility of war, violence and death. Those planning on continuing on to work did not choose to create a group. A possible reason of this could be there is less interaction between these individuals and counselors and students may have felt less comfortable. Group counseling can be an effective way for school counselors to help soon to be graduates understand their fears and the process of transition (Goodnough & Ripley, 1997). Hanson and Sander (1973) asked the question if counseling would be helpful to vocational students with unrealistic plans. Subjects were chosen by completing a questionnaire and judged by a professional school counselor. It was found that group counseling provided the appropriate peer feedback needed for these individuals to challenge their goals. In addition, the research found that individual counseling was helpful for those individuals that were undershooting their career goals (Hanson and Sander, 1973).

Moreover, groups can be used to teach skills for dealing with the stress of transitioning. Skills that are helpful include physical coping, cognitive restructuring, and behavior rehearsal (Leonard & Burrows, 1983). Leonard and Burrows (1983) hoped that groups would provide high school students with higher self efficacy, more rational thinking and better problem solving skills. Group members took part in role playing, relaxation skills and changing their negative way of thinking. A year after graduation the students were contacted to assess their current status. The program brought about significant positive gains and was positively perceived by both students and school faculty, providing evidence that students transitioning could benefit from such a program (Leonard & Burrows, 1983).

Not only can individual and group counseling be helpful, but programs have been created to ensure students are prepared for the high school transition. Henriksen et al (2008) believes that schools need to set high expectations and get more students to meet them, increase student access to intellectually challenging career and technical studies, enroll students in college prep classes, and complete a senior project asking students to do research and an oral presentation. With these tasks, students will be more prepared for what is asked of them at a college level. Most importantly is a senior project that is of choice. It is beneficial to ask that the project be reflective and personal in order to celebrate past experiences and where these experiences will take future graduates. It was found that 75 % of Northern University High students found these projects and involvement internships to be helpful for their transition (Henriksen et al, 2008).

Another program sought to accommodate both college and work bound students. Counselors should devote the same amount of time to both college and work bound students and provide resources to both groups (Despres, 2008). Despres (2008) reported on Employment Day which is a career development experience for seniors in hopes to lead them to gain full time employment. Employment Day was created in the 1960's. Businesses, trade schools and the Military all recruit participants from different specialties to take part in Employment Day. Thousands of young people have found their first jobs while attending Employment Day. School personnel and the community must collaborate for the direct benefit of the students. Some schools hesitate to participate due to the fact that they believe all students should be college focused. In addition, some school districts believe it is too expensive for registration fees and transportation. This program sought to allow for all students, no matter their plans, to gain knowledge about careers that are of interest to them whether students begin right away or have to continue their education to one day reach that goal (Despres, 2008).

School counselors may not always be viewed as helpful in the transition for students. One survey that assessed how helpful school counselors were in helping engineering students make decisions found that not one of the 29 respondents felt a school counselor influenced their decision (McCuen & Greenberg 2009). McCuen and Greenberg (2009) stated that counselors are more likely to provide help in disciplines that they are familiar with. Due to the fact that counselors may not have sufficient knowledge about certain careers, limits the ability to offset any misconceptions a student may have about a certain career choice. Counselors reported feeling more confident discussing career responsibilities of disciplines related to their educational background (McCuen & Greenberg 2009). Bloxom et al (2008) findings relate to the findings of McCuen and Greenberg (2009). Bloxom et al (2008) found that student's occupational aspirations clustered in a limited amount of themes. Bloxom et al (2008) recommended that such a trend may be due to a lack of awareness of the diversity of career choices, which a school counselor could be responsible for providing.

McCuen and Greenberg (2009) suggested that it is important for school counselors to take part in continuing education. For example, McCuen and Greenburg (2009) suggested a one day seminar be implemented to increase the knowledge of school counselors. Counselors can be informed of the day to day activities of engineers, become familiar with the diverse disciplines that make up engineering and what preparation for students to enter the field is required. Not only can this work for engineering careers, but any careers that counselors may not be familiar with (McCuen & Greenberg, 2009).

In conclusion, the evidence provides a great deal of support that schools play a vital role in the transitioning of high school students. Collecting data from graduates provides evidence if past students felt that their school did what they could to prepare them for life after high school.

Developmentally, adolescents are becoming adults. There is a great deal of exploration and change as they enter a new chapter in their lives. After graduation, students have numerous options. Most commonly, individuals continue on to college or enter the world of work. High schools need to do their part to prepare all students no matter their choice. Implementing different programs to help students gain knowledge about their skills and options has proved to be successful. The following research asks the question of how prepared one suburban school's students felt after graduating. A postgraduate survey was conducted to examine this question. If students did not feel prepared, what changes can be made to better prepare students at this school will be explored.

## Method

### *Demographic Data*

The school being researched is located in a suburb of a mid-sized city in the northern east part of the United States. It is a public school of choice located in the largest district in the area, meaning students have the choice to attend. All students are eligible to attend the school being discussed; however, students who have siblings enrolled receive top priority. The school being discussed has three self contained autism classrooms (Greece Central School District, 2009). In 2008, the school was recognized in the Newsweek Challenge for top public high schools in America (Newsweek, 2008).

At the school being discussed, core academics as well as electives in the arts, music and languages are offered. Close to 60% of students at the school accelerate for mathematics and science in grade eight. The school being researched offers an honors Advanced Placement acceleration program for grades 6 through 10 and then in grade 11, students have the option to

choose to enroll in the International Baccalaureate Program (Greece Central School District, 2009).

Distinctive aspects of the school being discussed include a family style faculty eating with students four days a week. Students return to their homeroom to sit and eat lunch with their teachers and fellow students. In addition, there is time set aside each week for students to make personal connections with peers and faculty in a program called *Connectime*. Four days a week, there is period referred to as Student Academic Support for small groups to receive extra help and for students to complete school work. Another distinctive aspect of the school being discussed includes a music activity period within the school day. During Student Academic Support, students that are enrolled in Band or Chorus attend music instead of SAS. This allows for students to do other extracurricular activities before and after school (Greece Central School District, 2009).

The school being discussed supports a major commitment to college preparation. Across grades 6 through 12, the school has a career development program that is incorporated in classes. The program includes *Connectime* and special programs such as College Admissions Panel, Shadowing Day, and career interviews. An extensive use of learning styles and personality theory is used with teachers for teaching and with students for career guidance. Before students graduate, the students in twelfth grade complete a thirty minute speaking presentation that must include visual evidence of the students seven year schooling at the school being discussed (Greece Central School District, 2009).

The district serves approximately 14,000 students. The specific school is a 6-12 school where all grades are located in the same building. Currently, 803 students are enrolled, 459 of them are in grades 6-8 and 344 are in grades 9-12 (The New York State School Report Card,

2009). The school being discussed has a waiting list of about 1000 individuals (Greece Central School District, 2009). There are 165 females enrolled in grades 6-8 and 218 females enrolled in grades 9-12. In grades 6-8, 179 are male students and in grades 9-12, 241 of students are male (Greece Central School District, 2009). According to the New York State School Report Card in the 2008-2009 school year, 7% of students were eligible for free lunch and 6% were eligible for reduced lunch. No students are limited English proficient. Ethnicity of students enrolled breaks down to 3% African American, 2% Hispanic or Latino, 2% Asian or native Hawaiian, and 93% are white (The New York State School Report Card, 2009).

The percent of Advanced Placement students in the 2008-2009 school year was 45% of students, 65% of these students graduated from the International Baccalaureate Program. The percentage of students that graduated from the school in 2009 is 99% (Greece Central School District, 2009).

The annual attendance rate for 2006-2007 was 96%. Throughout the school year, 6% of students were suspended, one of these suspensions resulted in a long term suspension. Cohorts from 2002 and 2003 reveal that one individual dropped out in the 2008-2009 school year and one student was homeless or in temporary housing (Greece Central School District, 2009). In 2008-2009 there were approximately 63 teachers, 1 principal, 3 assistant principals, 3 counselors and 1 psychologist. In 2008-2009, 16% of these teachers had less than 3 years experience. The school has a 20% turnover rate for teachers. At the high school level, the average class size is between 19 and 28 (The New York State School Report Card, 2009). According to The New York State School Report Card (2009), the school is in good standing for middle and high levels in English, Math and Science. Good standing means it has not been identified as a school in need of

improvement or a school under registration review (The New York State School Report Card, 2009).

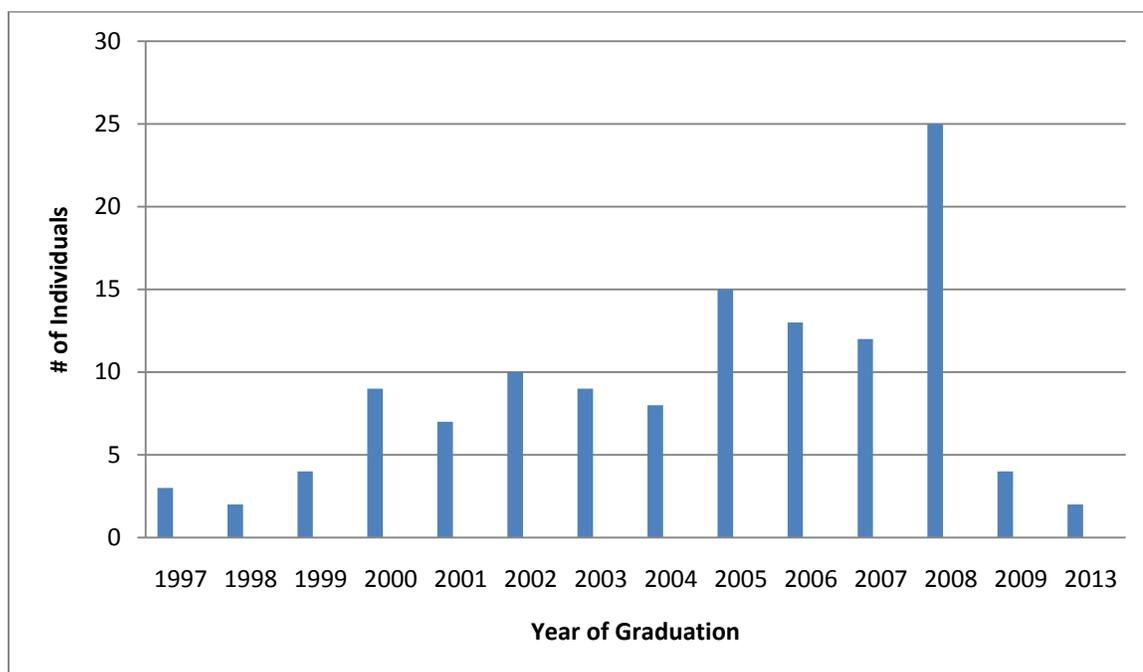
One program special to the school is a program called WISK (working, interview, and self knowledge) day. On WISK day, sophomores, juniors and seniors experience something different. Sophomores experience an interview with an admissions representative. Junior's shadow an individual involved in a career of interest to the student, and the seniors do a presentation based on what they have learned about themselves during their years at the school. The presentation includes an understanding of themselves in academics, identity and development, social-emotional development. Work habits and a category of their choice.

### *Participants*

A student directory was collected at the school being researched of past graduates from the years 1997 to 2008. Approximately 1,044 letters asking past graduates to complete a survey online were mailed out to the addresses that the school had on record. Many of the letters were returned due to the fact that the addresses were from when the postgraduates were in high school. For those students that graduated in the beginning years of the school, it was assumed that some of the addresses have changed or individuals have since moved. At the beginning of September 2009, 55 people had taken the survey. Due to a low number of responses Facebook was used to reach more of the school's past graduates. On Facebook, the school's alumni group was discovered and an email containing the link to the survey was sent to members. Members of the alumni group were asked to complete the survey if they had not previously done so. When the survey closed on September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2009, 122 individuals had completed the survey, 38 (31.1%) of which were male and 84 (68.0%) of which were female.

Figure 1 represents the analysis by participant's graduation year. Two of the respondents claimed to be from the graduating class of 2013, which means they have not yet graduated. It is not clear how these individuals could have answered the questions on the survey.

Figure 1: Participants Graduation Year



Most of the postgraduates that completed the survey were from the graduating year of 2008. As seen in figure 1, the most recent years of 2005-2008 had the highest response rate. Some reasons for a higher response rate from the graduating years of 2005-2008 include that these individuals may have received the letter to take the survey due to the fact that the addresses the school had on record were still accurate. Moreover, Facebook is a fairly new online network and younger individuals may be more familiar with Facebook.

### *Design and Materials*

A 34 question survey was used to gather data from postgraduates. The questions were designed by the researcher and other faculty at the school. A quick review of numerous examples

of postgraduate surveys was used to get ideas of questions. Examples used include the San Francisco State University School of Engineering Senior Exit Survey, a high school follow up example survey from Advancing Excellence in Education Worldwide, an example of a high school exit survey from Advancing Excellence in Education Worldwide, Weast's (2004) high school exit survey and an example exit survey from Southwestern University. The researcher decided what questions to ask depending on what kind of information was trying to be gathered. The survey was designed using SurveyMonkey. SurveyMonkey is an online survey software program that allows individuals to design surveys (See Appendix), (SurveyMonkey, 1999).

### *Procedure*

First, from a secretary at the school, a directory of all past graduates and their addresses was requested. Mailing labels were created with the addresses on file. A letter was created explaining that a survey was being conducted. The researcher stuffed and labeled all envelopes to be mailed. The envelopes containing the letter were then taken to the schools mail room to be sent.

In the letter sent, the researcher was explained to be a graduate student interning at the school being researched. The purpose of the survey was discussed, explaining the potential benefits of the study and what the survey was being conducted for. It was also explained in the letter to go online and enter the web address provided in order to take the survey. Once entering the web address, individuals were brought directly to the survey. It was explained that by taking the survey, the individuals were giving their informed consent. The survey opened on June 16<sup>th</sup> and was first intended to close on August 31<sup>st</sup>. In the beginning, emails were sent to the researcher stating that some people were having problems getting on to take the survey. The web address was long and contained both lower and upper case letters. This was a problem because

initially home addresses were all that were on file to contact postgraduates, making it impossible to email a link to postgraduates. For those that were having problems getting on and stated that in emails, the response to the email was a link to the survey that directed postgraduates directly to the survey.

Every few days, the researcher would sign on to keep track of the number of responses. When the survey was about to close on August 31<sup>st</sup>, there were only 55 responses. The researcher was not satisfied with that amount and was hoping for a higher response rate. The idea to use Facebook as a tool to search for an alumni group from the school was successful. An alumni group was located and an email was sent to the creator of the Facebook alumni group. The email asked the creator of the group to send an email to all members with information about the survey and a link to be directed to the survey. The survey was kept open by the researcher until September 30<sup>th</sup>, resulting in the responses increasing to 122. Percent of responses increased from 5% to 12%.

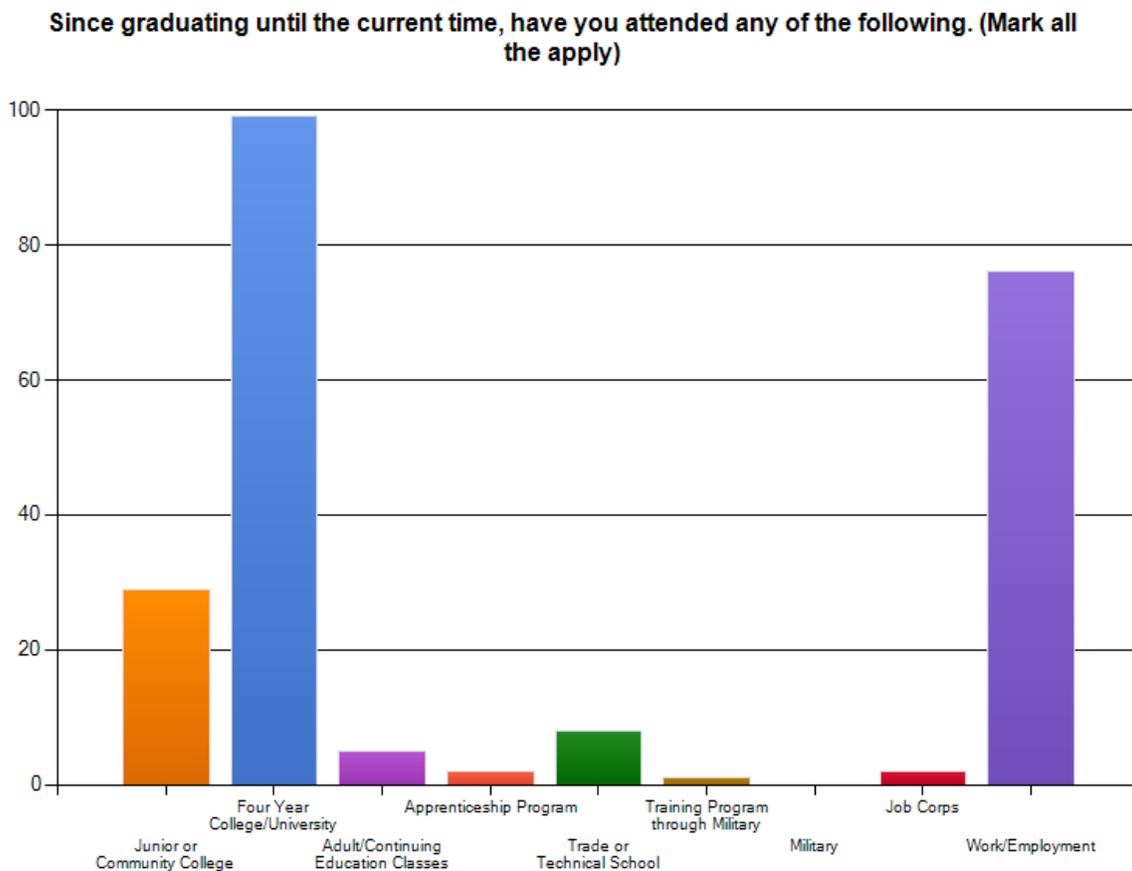
The status as far as what postgraduates are doing currently and what they have attended since high school will be reviewed. How prepared students felt following high school will be analyzed using the comments of the postgraduates. What recommendations postgraduates have to have felt better prepared if necessary will be compared to one another in order to come to conclusions about what programs and faculty were beneficial and what can be improved.

### Results

Qualitative anecdotes of the results will be explained. Two of the respondent's answers were disregarded due to the fact that they reported their graduation year as 2013. Seeing as these students have not yet graduated from the high school, their answers would not be appropriate due to the fact that questions address life after high school. The data revealed that the majority,

(82.5%) of graduates at some point since graduation have attended a four year college or university. Figure 2 represents all postgraduate choices individuals have attended following high school. Currently, 81 of the respondents are still enrolled in college. When asked the current status of postgraduates, the highest percentage of postgraduates, (54.9%) reported that they are full time students. The second most frequent answer included being employed full time, (41.8%). Out of those respondents still enrolled in college, 44.2% (42) are anticipating completing a Bachelor’s degree, 21.1% (20) are anticipating completing a Masters degree and 5.3% (5) are anticipating completing a Doctorate degree.

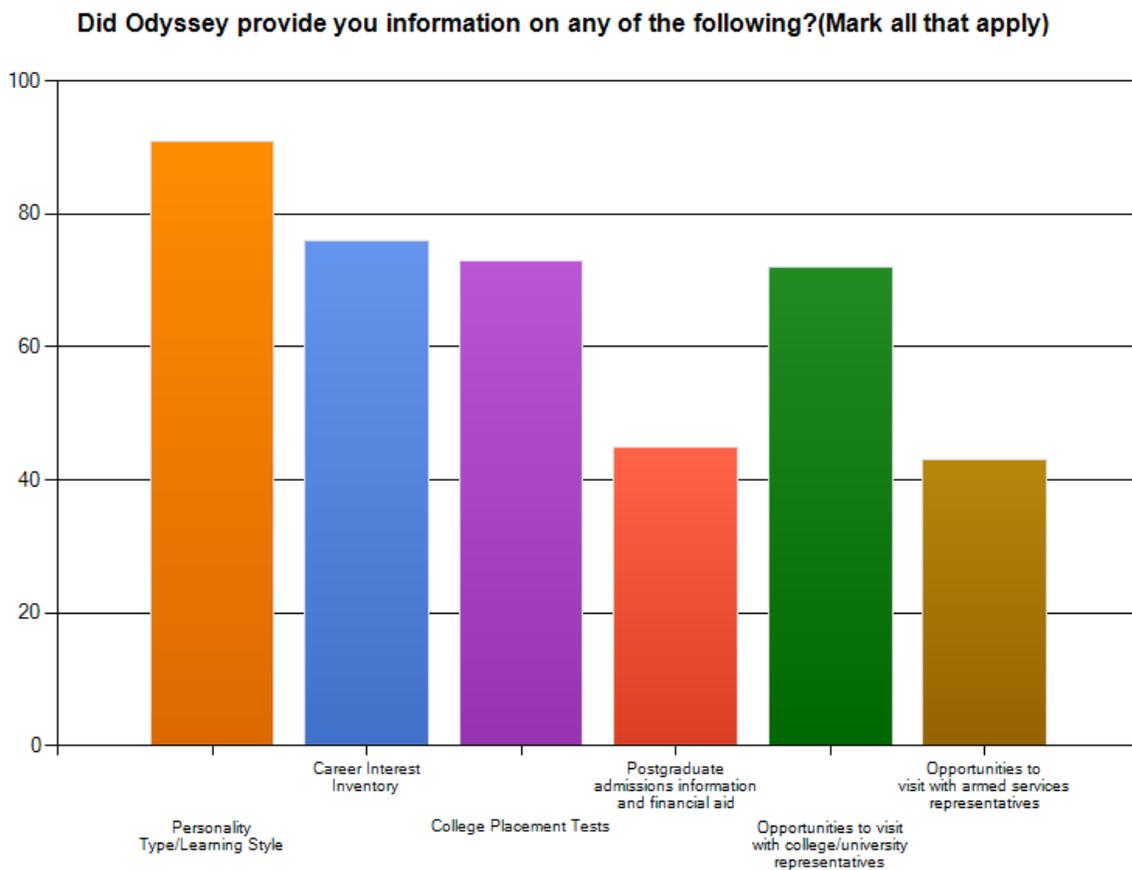
Figure 2: Attendance of Activities Following Graduation



Out of the 56 respondents that have completed their degree, 34 of the individuals are employed in their degree. Respondents who were currently employed were asked to rate their job satisfaction. Out of the 102 participants that rated their job satisfaction, 28.4% rated their satisfaction an 8 on a scale from 1 to 9, 9 meaning extremely satisfied.

When asked what kind of information was provided for students while they were enrolled in the school, personality type/learning style got the highest response. Figure 3 shows that a lot of individuals reported being provided with information on the listed things.

Figure 3: Information Provided to Students



Respondents were asked which of these services were beneficial to their postgraduate choices and why. One individual responded “Personality Type/Learning Style. I don't think one

can attain a career in which they will find fulfilling unless they can fully understand their learning and personal capabilities.” Another postgraduate responded that “Postgraduate admissions information and financial aid and career interest inventory and personality type/learning style were helpful tools for my postgraduate choices. Post grad admissions info helped me to navigate the college applications with ease. I felt that Odyssey were readily available and enthusiastically helped me to understand what I needed to stand out amongst thousands of applicants. The career interest inventory was valuable because it gave me an idea where I could possibly be successful in post grad life. It also helped me narrow down what careers I wanted to pursue. The personality type and learning style has been something I have referred to over and over again in my life. Understanding my learning style has really helped me to employ effective study techniques and made me a better learner.” In addition, there were respondents that stated none of the services were helpful.

A majority of respondents (89.2%) stated that they were offered electives while attending the high school being researched. When asked if the electives allowed students to explore their interests, preferences and needs, 73.4% agreed that they did allow them to explore. When explaining how electives helped, one student reported, “I can't tell you how much select choir forced me to respect discipline and have control over myself, how to train it. I would give anything to have that class again. And to be honest the IB Art course was in fact the only IB course I found to be dead-on with its form of assignments as "college level". I will say that I have much more confidence than some of my peers when it comes to having to write a report or give a presentation.” There was a theme found in students answers regarding music electives. Respondents reported enjoying these electives. Some respondents reported wanting more electives, but that “it’s difficult having a wide variety of electives offered at a small school.”

Reviewing the answers, many respondents stated that being enrolled in the IB program did not allow time for many electives. Respondents who graduated in the earlier years of the school reported having more options for electives. This was before the IB program was introduced.

When asked the question what class's graduates felt prepared them best for life after high school, there was a range of answers. The most popular answers were any IB courses and English courses. On the other hand, graduates were then asked to explain what classes should have been offered to better prepare them. The most recurring answers were related to home economics and financing classes. Other answers included career development courses, more language courses, typing and computer courses, more AP/IB courses and public speaking courses.

Many of the graduates (89.3%) were students involved in WISK day. Both the job shadowing and career interview was found to be beneficial. It was close when asked if the job shadowing experience helped those that participated in WISK day influenced students career decisions, 52.3% stated it did and 47.7% stated that it did not. Many graduates viewed the job shadowing experience as helpful in realizing that the job they shadowed was not what they wanted to pursue. One problem that was consistent in responses was not having the opportunity to shadow who students wanted to shadow. One graduate responded "The breadth of career options for the job-shadowing experience was not particularly great."

When answering about the career interview, respondents were close in feeling that it was and was not beneficial, 54.5% of respondents said that it was and 45.5% responded that it was not beneficial. Again, the same problem was consistent in responses. Postgraduates stated that they had to interview professionals that were not related to the student's career interest. There

was an assortment of experiences. Some stated it helped and others believed it did not prepare them.

The ESK part of WISK day was not found to be beneficial to most graduates. 71.6% of graduates answered no to this question. When asked to explain, “I thought it did make you learn about yourself a lot, but I thought it was kind of a waste of time. Our time as seniors could have been spent doing other things that would be beneficial to being successful in college. And I think it is ridiculous that the ESK is a graduation requirement.” Many responses included that it was a waste of time, it was not individual enough, students did not take it seriously, the only good thing that came from it was presentation skills, and that it should not be a graduation requirement.

Out of 115 respondents that answered whether they were enrolled in AP or IB courses, 78% stated that they did take these courses while attending high school at the school being researched. Had they been offered, 68.5% of those respondents stated that they would have taken more. Many of the themes in the responses state that the courses better prepared them for the work load, independent thinking and study skill for college, was able to transfer credits allowing for less time in college.

One respondent that did not believe these courses had an impact stated that “2005 was the guinea pig year for IB at Odyssey; I felt a lot of pressure from teachers to take IB courses because I was a good student, not necessarily because it would help me in my future career as a musician. It is important for students and faculty to know that IB is not going to make or break you. Students get into great colleges without having IB. Students need to have a life and enjoy high school (socially and with extra-curricular activities). Students are still well prepared for college and after high school life without taking IB courses.” Some struggled with the fact that credits did not transfer and felt that their work took away from last two years of school.

A small majority of postgraduates took vocational courses while attending the school being researched (22 respondents), although only 93 individuals answered the question. Respondents that were enrolled in vocational courses stated that the programs were helpful for those individuals that entered the career being studied through the vocational courses.

Figure 4: How Prepared Students Felt

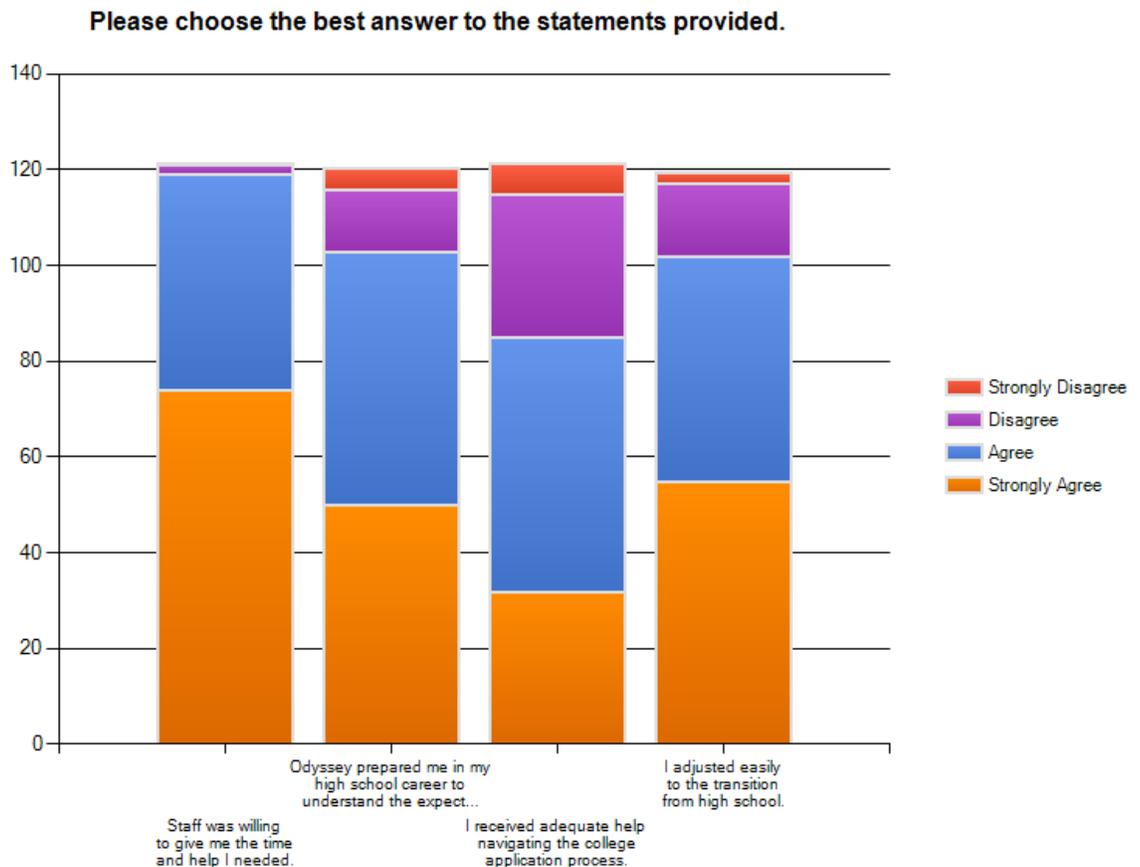


Figure 4 portrays that most respondents felt the school prepared them for life after high school and that respondents strongly agreed that they adjusted easily to the transition. When asked what the school could have done to make the transition out of high school easier, some disclosed that faculty was too lenient. Respondents reported that classes should be more like

college courses to be better prepared. They felt that more help with college decisions would be more beneficial as well. Regarding the development of a four year graduation plan, 47 respondents were not sure if their counselor developed one, 37 stated that they counselors did not and 36 stated that they did. When reviewing the survey, it was found that 100% of participants who strongly disagreed to the statement that they adjusted easily to the transition from high school also did not feel their career interview and job shadowing experience were beneficial. The survey asked whether or not individuals were involved in any individual or group counseling. Responses revealed that 44 (36.7%) of respondents were involved in individual counseling at the high school and 12 (9.9%) were involved in group counseling.

Figure 5: Review of Counseling Services

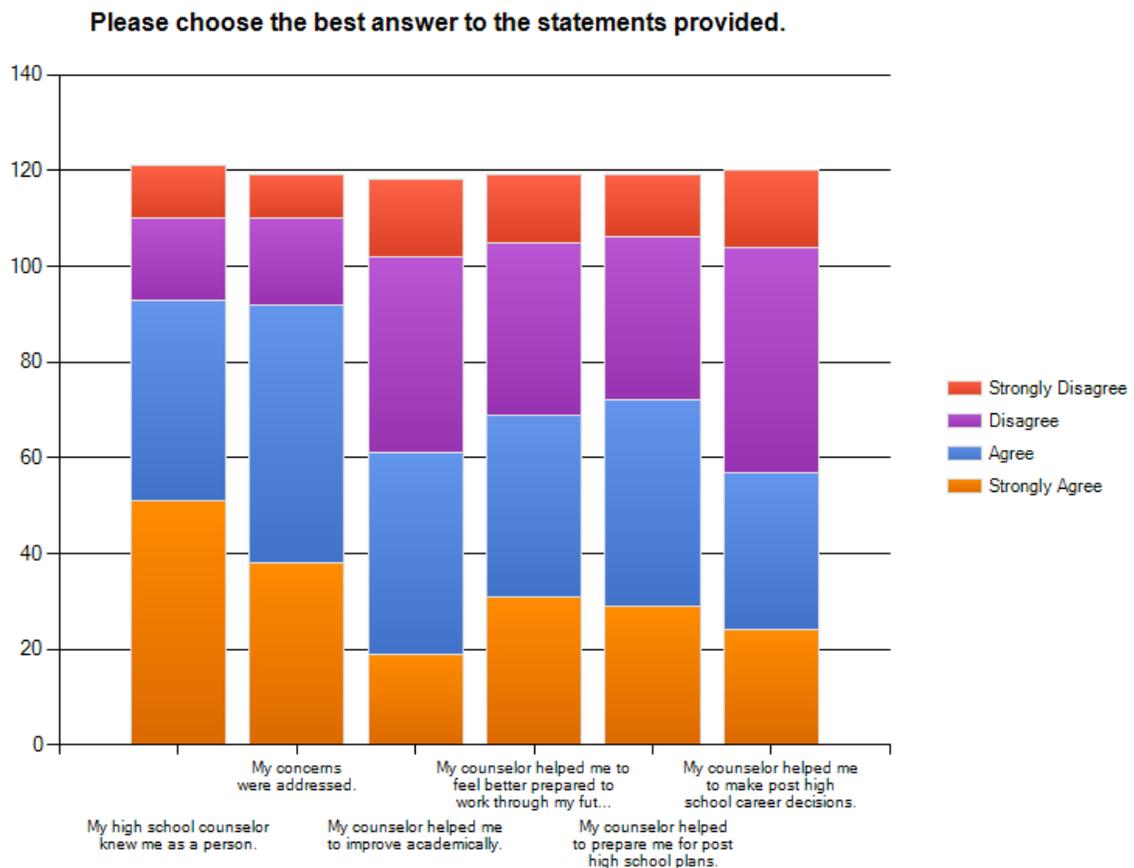


Figure 5 reveals that the majority of respondents strongly agreed, or agreed that counselors knew individuals and helped address concerns. There was a higher percentage of disagree responses when asking about helping students improve academically and in making post high school decisions. In the comments section, a common theme about students not reaching out to counselors was due to the individuals not having any concerns or already “having a handle” on academic plans. When asked for additional comments, one student stated that “Odyssey is a great school that allows people to further their learning. IB provided a higher level of learning that definitely prepared me for the workload of college. I still go back to some of my notes from high school as a quick reference. The teachers were great! I have so many good memories from high school and I’m still friends with all my friends from Odyssey.” Some respondents felt that counselors played favorites, or reached out to the high achieving or needy students and not the students in the middle. Additional comments at the end of the survey included a variety of opinions about the school being researched and how prepared students were. Some postgraduates agree that the school being researched prepared them for life after high school and others stated that it did not. For example, one response stated, “Unfortunately my parents did nothing to help me get into college, and I feel I didn't get the help I needed to be helped by a counselor either.” Postgraduates discussed that the career coordinator at the school was helpful in their decision making at times more than their counselor was.

### Discussion

The results support much of what the literature has reviewed about preparing students for the transition out of high school. Having programs such as career days, or WISK day are extremely important in preparing students to make postgraduate decisions. Career interviews, college visits, interviews with admissions representatives and career shadowing are all

experiences that high school students should have. This is evident in the answers that students had on the survey. A majority believed these experiences were helpful even if it turned out that the career was not of interest. In order for school to ensure that students are getting the most out of these experiences, it is important to have a variety of professionals and volunteers. Some respondents stated that they were not able to shadow or interview with an individual that fit their interests. One recommendation is to be creative and find ways to offer students who may not have the opportunity to shadow a certain career other options. For example, doing an interview over the phone could be an option.

The research by McCeun and Greenberg (2009) revealed that students felt that counselors did not have any influence on their career decisions when pursuing an engineering career. This was due to the fact that counselors reported being more comfortable with careers that they are knowledgeable about. Counselors need to take opportunities to continue their education and become familiar with popular careers. It is not realistic that an individual be familiar with all aspects of careers and colleges. If a counselor is not familiar with a college, career or military program, counselors can use other resources. For instance, collaborating with professionals familiar with the interest of the student or using resources such as the internet can be helpful.

Postgraduate preparation needs to be a continuing process throughout a student's school experience. Not just in high school, but in the years prior as well. Getting student's to think about postgraduate planning can make for an easier transition. It is not realistic that a student just entering high school will know what career they will pursue, but realizing what the interests of an individual are will help in planning for high school. Other basic skills besides what career to choose can be started early as well. Having students think about what courses in high school best

fit their interest. If a student knows that college is a goal of theirs, then realizing what needs to be done in high school to achieve that goal is important.

Introducing students to personality tests and interest inventories was reported by respondents to be both helpful and not helpful. Those respondents that found this to be helpful believed that knowing personality and learning styles provided an idea of what postgraduate choices would fit ones interests. Others may not have found such ideas or services to be beneficial due to the fact that the individual did not have the motivation to plan or the individual may have not been ready to think about postgraduate plans. Individuals not ready to think into the future may be more focused on the here and now of their lives. Not all individuals will take advantage of services to better prepare the individual for life after high school.

Although interest inventories are helpful for students in making career decisions, correlating aptitude tests such as the ASVAB with interests could allow for better career planning. It is recommended that schools take the time in classes to take aptitude tests. Some careers might fit a student's interests, but it is important to know if the student has the aptitude to pursue that career. Becoming familiar with ones strengths and weaknesses aids in the decision of which career one would succeed at. Moreover, if a career of interest does not fit the individual's aptitude in that area, the test can give the individual inspiration to strengthen the skills necessary for the career

Arnett (2000) discussed that a reason some postgraduates did not find counselors helpful could be due to the fact that the individual did not have the motivation to seek help for postgraduate planning. This could be one of the reasons that some respondents did not find services or counselors helpful. For some individuals the truth for them could have been that counselors and the school were not helpful or supportive. There will always be students that will

say no one spoke to the student in high school to help prepare them due to the fact that at that time the individual was not ready to receive the help. It is the responsibility of counselors to reach out to all individuals. Even though students may not take the help that is offered, the student will be aware that their counselor is available when the student is ready.

Counselors have to be creative in finding ways to reach out to all individuals. Much of what a counselor can do depends on the support of the administration. When counselors are more valued at a school, there is more support given to how counselor's time is spent. Counselors must advocate for the importance of their job. Boyer (1986) stressed that counselors are overworked and must provide evidence of their importance in schools in order to be granted time that is more of value to students.

One effective way that counselors can use their time to get to know students and begin discussion about postgraduate decisions is to have a meeting at the start of high school to introduce a student's four year graduation plan. It also makes the student aware that the counselor is keeping track of the student's progress. Moreover, in this small interaction, there is a face to both the student and counselor allowing for a relationship between student and counselor to begin. During initial meetings, the counselor can get a sense of some decisions students have already made regarding their postgraduate plans. If meeting individually with each student is not a possibility, breaking students into groups or going into classrooms to learn about students and let students know what your role as their counselor is could be an option.

Another recommendation would be to include postgraduate preparation in classes. Teachers should continue to be aware of lessons and reference how material relates to decisions that will be made once students graduate. It was reported in the survey results that International Baccalaureate classes were successful in preparing some students for the workload in college.

Research such as McLendon, Heller, and Lee (2009) supports the finding that advanced courses were reported to better help students prepare for college material. It is important to prepare all college bound students for the material. The question is how much high school work should be like college work and if students at the high school level are prepared for that. Some respondents stated that the school being researched was too lenient. Students enter college not prepared for definite deadlines, with no leniency. Respondent's recommended that sticking to deadlines and not being so lenient would only be doing the students a favor.

One common problem with taking IB or advanced classes is the struggle with time. The rigorous courses do not allow for much time to take electives. More than half of respondents stated that electives allowed for them to explore their interests but that an opportunity for more electives would have been ideal. Smaller schools struggle more with having the time and teachers to offer more electives. Taking advanced or IB courses may allow for college preparation, but not allow for a student to explore more interests that could relate to plans after high school. It comes down to priorities of the individual and the individual's plans following high school. In addition, time management skills can be practiced.

Courses that were recommended to prepare students better included home economics classes, computer classes and financial classes. For students pursuing college, the amount of time using a computer is great. Requiring students to use computers for assignments allows students to become more prepared to use computers in the future. Whether a student is pursuing college, work or military, having the skills that home economics or financing classes provides is important. Becoming an adult requires cooking, balancing money, living independently and other life skills. Courses in high school to teach these skills can make for a smoother transition for individuals.

Some respondents reported that it was not helpful to seek out counselors because parents were the individuals support and help. In Boyer's (1986) research, the same idea was found. Students had reported that parents had more of an influence on decisions than counselors. Seeing as parents can have such an impact on a student's postgraduate decisions, parents need to have to knowledge and be involved in the process. Not all parents attended college or the military and may not be able help students through the process. Even parents that did attend college may not be familiar with new standards or other procedures such as financial aid.

Seeing as research has found that students look to parents for postgraduate help, incorporating parents is essential. Schools could hold parent nights in which opportunities for their students after graduating high school is introduced. In addition, parents should be aware of what their children should be doing to plan and where their children need to be in the planning process. Helping parents become familiar with the college acceptance process, standard tests, financial aid, military entrance, and training programs will allow for another support that a student has. Counselors can collaborate with parents to ensure that parents are familiar with the decisions their children are making and can help motivate their children.

### *Limitations*

The school being researched had a large amount of students that attended college following graduation according to the survey. Due to this, the survey did not assess how prepared individuals not attending college were. The reality of high schools is not all individuals will attend college. Electives and training programs while in high school are important for students who are not attending college to obtain skills.

Another limitation of the study included the lack of questions regarding individual and group counseling. The literature provided evidence that group counseling was successful in

lessening the stress of transitioning out of high school. The majority of respondents were not involved in group counseling and would not have been able to provide feedback on the effectiveness of group counseling.

The school being researched was a small school and not diverse with 93% of students being white. Results are limited in the fact that they are not reliable and cannot be applied to the overall population of postgraduates. In addition, the majority of the respondents were from recent graduation years. More responses from the individuals that graduated longer ago would have allowed for a different perspective on changes the school has made. The individual's that have had more time to experience the transition and life outside of high school may give a different view than those who have not had as much time outside of high school.

#### *Recommendations for Further Research*

Recommendations for further research include more diverse research as well as more research on the transition for students who do not attend college. A majority of the literature focuses on programs and courses for students that will attend college. It would be interesting to know if students who do not plan on attending college feel left out when it comes to preparing for life after high school. Additionally, more research on individual and group counseling and the effect it has on individuals emotionally could be beneficial. Career and postgraduate planning can be stressful and anxiety provoking. Incorporating support in schools can help with the many emotions students are facing.

One of the biggest changes in an individual's life is transitioning to life after high school. For some it is an easy transition and for others it is more difficult. Preparing students for the transition from high school is the role of the high school as a whole and not just any single individual. Literature and this study have provided evidence for the importance of gathering

postgraduate data. In addition, the importance of programs to enable students to begin planning for life after high school has been stressed. Planning for life after high school should be a continuous process throughout an individual's junior and high school years.

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Appendix

Odyssey Post Graduate Survey

**1. Gender**

- Male
- Female

**2. What year did you graduate from Odyssey Academy?**

**3. Since graduating until the current time, have you attended any of the following. (Mark all the apply)**

- Junior or Community College
- Four Year College/University
- Adult/Continuing Education Classes
- Apprenticeship Program
- Trade or Technical School
- Training Program through Military
- Military
- Job Corps
- Work/Employment

**4. What is your current status? (Mark all that apply)**

- Military
- Employed full time

- Employed part time
- Unemployed not seeking employment
- Unemployed seeking employment
- Full-time student
- Part-time student

**5. If employed, what is your current position?**

**6. Rate your job satisfaction on a scale from 1 to 9, 9 meaning very satisfied and 1 meaning not satisfied.**

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      N/A

**7. If attending school, what school are you attending?**

**8. If attending school, what is your anticipated degree?**

- Certificate or Technical Diploma
- Associate's Degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctorate Degree
- N/A

**9. Which field are you pursuing a degree in?**

**10. If completed college/university, what is your current degree?**

- Certificate or Technical diploma
- Associate's Degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctorate Degree
- N/A

**11. Which field do you have a degree in?**

**12. Are you employed in that degree?**

- Yes
- No
- N/A

**13. Did Odyssey provide you information on any of the following?  
(Mark all that apply)**

- Personality Type/Learning Style
- Career Interest Inventory
- College Placement Tests
- Postgraduate admissions information and financial aid

- Opportunities to visit with college/university representatives
- Opportunities to visit with armed services representatives

Which of these services were influential in your postgraduate choices and why?

**14. Were you offered electives at Odyssey?**

- Yes
- No

**15. If yes, did these electives help you explore your interests, preferences and needs?**

- Yes
- No

Explain

**16. What courses in high school prepared you most for your transition after high school?**

**17. What courses should have been offered to better prepare you for your post high school experiences?**

**18. Were you a student at Odyssey when ESK/WISK Day/Shadowing Day were introduced?**

- Yes
- No

**19. If yes, did your job shadowing experience at Odyssey influence**

**your current career decision making?**

- Yes
- No

Explain

**20. If yes, was your career interview beneficial?**

- Yes
- No

Explain

**21. If yes, was the ESK beneficial?**

- Yes
- No

Explain

**22. If applicable, did you take AP/IB courses while at Odyssey?**

- Yes
- No

**23. Would you have taken more had they been offered?**

- Yes
- No

**24. Did they have an impact on your higher education?**

- Yes
- No

Explain

**25. If applicable, did you take Vocational courses while at Odyssey?**

- Yes
- No

**26. Would you have taken more had they been offered?**

- Yes
- No

**27. Did they have an impact on your higher education?**

- Yes
- No

Explain

**28. Please choose the best answer to the statements provided.**

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
<b>Staff was willing to give me the time and help I needed.</b>	<input type="radio"/> Strongly Agree	<input type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Disagree	<input type="radio"/> Strongly Disagree
<b>Odyssey prepared me in my high school career to understand the expectations of college/workforce.</b>	<input type="radio"/> Strongly Agree	<input type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Disagree	<input type="radio"/> Strongly Disagree
<b>I received adequate help navigating the college application</b>	<input type="radio"/> Strongly Agree	<input type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Disagree	<input type="radio"/> Strongly Disagree

**process.**

**I adjusted easily to the transition from high school.**

Strongly Agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

**29. What ways could your high school have helped you transition from school to work or college better?**

**30. While at Odyssey, did your counselor develop a four year graduation plan for you?**

Yes

No

Not sure

**31. While at Odyssey, were you involved in individual counseling?**

Yes

No

**32. While at Odyssey, were you involved in group counseling?**

Yes

No

**33. Please choose the best answer to the statements provided.**

**Strongly Agree**

**Agree**

**Disagree**

**Strongly Disagree**

**My high school counselor knew me as a**

Strongly Agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

**person.**

**My concerns were addressed.**



Strongly Agree



Agree



Disagree



Strongly Disagree

**My counselor helped me to improve academically.**



Strongly Agree



Agree



Disagree



Strongly Disagree

**My counselor helped me to feel better prepared to work through my future problems on my own.**



Strongly Agree



Agree



Disagree



Strongly Disagree

**My counselor helped to prepare me for post high school plans.**



Strongly Agree



Agree



Disagree



Strongly Disagree

**My counselor helped me to make post high school career decisions.**



Strongly Agree



Agree



Disagree



Strongly Disagree

**34. Please provide any additional comments here.**