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Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

STUDENT TRANSITIONS INTO THE FULL-TIME VIRTUAL HIGH SCHOOL SETTING

A dissertation proposal submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Leadership, Administration, and Policy

by

William Crockett

October, 2017

Molly McCabe, Ed.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

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under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

To my daughters, Samantha and Amanda, thank you for making my life better than I could ever have imagined. I hope you both learn education is a journey not a destination.

To Jackie, my wife, thank you for your support on this long journey. You never told me to stop or let me give up. I think this accomplishment warrants some white port.

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Finally, to all the friends and family not mentioned. Not once did I hear that my dream of getting my Doctorate in Education was dumb, stupid or a waste of time. Too often we decide what to do based upon what we will get. Not once did you make me feel as if this journey was dumb, stupid or a waste of time. Thank you.

VITA

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ABSTRACT

Every year, tens of thousands of students transition from middle to high school or from one high school to another. Most of these student transitions are moving from one traditional school to another. This study sought to explore the experience of high school students as they transitioned to their new, very non-traditional, full-time virtual school.

This study first profiles eight high school students that transitioned to their current full-time virtual high school during the 2016-2017 school year. Next, it summarizes their thoughts on what school-based practices helped them during their transition. Finally, it presents their recommendations for their school to make the transition easier for future students.

This qualitative, phenomenological study utilized semi-structured interviews to gather data on their rich lived experience of transitioning into a full-time virtual school. The 8 full-time virtual high school students were selected because they entered a full-time virtual high school for the first time during the 2016-2017 school year and were willing to share their experiences. The interview questions were designed and validated to elicit sincere, authentic recollections of their experiences transitioning from their old school to their new one. One-on-one, personal interviews were conducted and recorded virtually using Adobe Connect and were coded and analyzed using Atlas.ti qualitative analysis software.

This study resulted in four conclusions. First, students participated in orientation, but it was inadequate for the needs of student transitioning into a virtual setting due to the lack of social interaction. Second, communication between full-time virtual schools and its students is vital for transitioning virtual students. Thirdly, school personnel are an important factor in a student's transition from a traditional high school setting to a full-time virtual one. Fourth, parent/guardians need to be engaged more while their student transitions to their new school. In

summary, this study might help full-time virtual schools design transitional programs that meet the needs of this unique group of students.

Chapter I. Introduction

Background of the Study

Virtual schools are a recent addition to the educational landscape. The two largest providers of virtual schooling, K12 Inc., and Connections Learning just celebrated their sixteenth year in existence. During the past 16 years, virtual environments and the devices that facilitate interaction between people could be facilitating the movement of students from a traditional education setting to a virtual one. Apple Inc. has sold over 1 billion iPhones since the launch of the iPhone in 2007 (Costello, 2017). The iPhone and similar devices not only enables the user to make phone calls but also allows access to friends, family, and information on twenty-four hours, seven days a week basis. (Arafeh, Rankin, & Smith, 2008) found over 94% of the teens they surveyed use the Internet with 63% of them going online daily. Over 80% of teens engage in some form of electronic communication at least occasionally (Arafeh et al., 2008). Education has not been immune to the influence of electronic devices. Over 1.8 million Kindergarten through High School students are taking courses using the Internet at least part-time; and almost 275,000 students in the United States are educated in the virtual environment almost exclusively (International Association for K-12 Online Learning, 2013).

Technology's influence upon education does not stop at creating new access. It has affected how teachers educate students. Teachers are finding conflicting consequences, positive and negative, of the digital revolution on students and at times they appear to be contradictory. Buchanan et al. (2012) studied how students conduct research in the digital world. They found teachers overwhelmingly find the influence of Internet and digital technologies have been mostly positive, but this same group of teachers also felt equal that search engines have conditioned students to come to expect to find information quickly and easily (Buchanan et al., 2012).

Another contradictory finding by Buchanan et al. (2012) was 95% of teachers encourage some form of research online yet 87% of them feel these same technologies are creating an easily distracted generation. Along with society, education is adjusting to this new paradigm and what it means to student achievement.

A possible outcome to this new paradigm is the creation of new ways to educate children and new schools to support the new ways. Virtual courses and virtual teaching have been in existence for over 30 years (Barbour, 2013). Virtual courses were originally used to supplement a more traditional means of education-teachers teaching. Students attended a traditional school but took one or two virtual courses to supplement their traditional education. The International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) estimates that students took over 1.8 million online courses in traditional educational institutions in the United States during the 2009-2010 school year (International Association for K-12 Online Learning, 2013). The sole use of online courses to supplement rather than supplant traditional educational institutions continued until 1997 when the first virtual schools were opened. A catalyst was needed to help support this innovative way of educating children. That catalyst would come in the form of the charter school movement.

The charter school movement has its foundation in Ray Budde's paper *Education by Charter* was written in 1974. The movement gained momentum after the federal government published *A Nation at Risk* in 1983. The first charter school law was passed in Minnesota in 1991. California was an early supporter of the charter school movement and passed its own Charter School Law of 1992. California was only the second state after Minnesota to allow charter schools to operate. The original intent of the California law was to create competition in the public school system and spur innovative ways to educate students ("EdSource," n.d.).

One such innovation in California's educational landscape was virtual schools. The widely accepted definition of a virtual school is Clark's (2000) defining them as "a state approved and/or regionally accredited school that offers secondary credit courses through distance learning methods that include Internet-based delivery" (p. 1). California's support for innovative ways to educate and the digital revolution created an educational environment that resulted in the opening of California's first chartered virtual school in 2002, California Virtual Academy (CAVA).

While some states supported charter schools in the early 90's and the innovations they would bring to the educational community, it took ten years for the federal government to clarify their position on the charter school movement. In 2001, Congress enacted No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and finally weighed in on charter schools and school choice. NCLB was the first piece of federal legislation that supported school choice for parents (United States Department of Education [USDOE], n.d.). Operating charter schools has increased substantially since the passing of NCLB. In California alone, 305 charter schools were in existence in 2001 when NCLB was passed but twelve years later 1,063 were operating, yielding a 330% increase (California Charter Schools Organization, 2013, p. 2). In addition to the increase in the quantity of schools, the original intent of California's charter law, increased innovation, is seen. Following the intent of California's charter school law, charter schools in California are 7% more likely to be organized innovatively or differently, than non-charter schools ("EdSource," n.d.). Charter schools and their greater likeliness to be organized differently could have helped facilitate the spread of full-time virtual schools.

Full-time virtual schools are one education model that has increased its share of students since the passage of NCLB in 2001 (International Association for K-12 Online Learning, 2013).

Since the passage of NCLB in 2001, the number of full-time virtual charter schools in the United States has grown from 37 in 2001 to over 229 schools in 2011 (California Charter Schools Organization, 2012). Student enrollment in full-time virtual programs has also increased tremendously in the same time span. It is estimated by 2016, 4.8 million children will be enrolled in some form of virtual schooling (Barbour, Hasler Waters, & Menchaca, 2014, p. 381). It is believed that 217,000 students are enrolled in full-time virtual programs during the 2011-2012 school year (Barbour et al., 2014). Greater flexibility under NCLB and a greater prevalence of non-traditional organization in charter schools could have contributed to growth in part and full-time virtual schooling. It is uncertain if the growing charter school trend helped increase the prevalence the full-time virtual school model, but both have grown tremendously in California since the opening of CAVA in 2002. It is estimated between twenty and thirty full-time virtual charter schools operate in California (California Department of Education [CDE], n.d). Over 14,000 students were enrolled in the CAVA system during the 2013-2014 school year (In The Public Interest, 2015, p. 8)

While NCLB implemented federal support for school choice, it also created new accountability and greater opportunities for students and schools. NCLB's four pillars are a stronger accountability for results, more freedom for states and communities, proven educational methods, and more choices for parents (United States Department of Education, 2004).

Having greater accountability under NCLB, schools, including full-time virtual schools, were required to ensure success in areas they were not previously accountable for (Jennings & Rentner, 2006). States were charged with eliminating the achievement gaps between high and low achieving students (Chaplin & Swanson, 2003). Students became categorized into groups

entitled *numerically significant sub-groups*. A school's sub-group is created when 100 students or 50 students that make up at least 15% of the school's population in the following areas:

- Each of the five race/ethnicity groups
- Students that are disadvantaged economically
- Students that are limited English Proficient
- Students with identified disabilities (United States Department of Education., 2004)

A student before NCLB would have been grouped only with the rest of their peers in the school; now they might be part of the English learner sub-group, the free and reduced lunch subgroup, or both. Each sub-group has its instructional needs and accountability. Before NCLB student achievement was reported school-wide, but with the passing of NCLB student achievement became two categories: whole school and individual student (Jennings & Rentner, 2006). All students and subgroups of students are now required to achieve and show progress towards meeting state standards (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.).

In 2013-2014 California replaced its 40-year-old funding formula with the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). The LCFF sought to streamline funding to K-12 schools through base, supplemental and concentration grants (Taylor, 2013). To receive funding school districts are required to write the Local Control Accountability Plan, a three-year plan that is updated annually. Accountability in the LCAP/LCFF is different than during NCLB. Instead of heavily relying on standardized test scores as under NCLB, it also requires school districts to be held accountable in eight priority areas; student achievement, course access, implementation of common core standards, student engagement, access to core services, school climate, parent involvement and other student outcomes. Accountability for a school's graduation rate can be

found in multiple priorities. A school's dropout rate is measured in the student engagement section. Students that not only graduate but are ready for college and/or a career is measured in the student achievement section. With the new LCFF/LCAP, funding appears to be tied to students graduating more than ever.

The ESSA, previously called NCLB, was revised and re-authorized in December of 2015. ESSA was now labeled as Every Child Achieves Act of 2015 (ESSA, 2015). Whereas NCLB established a nation wide accountability system, ECA returns greater accountability to the states. Although states have greater accountability flexibility under ECA, they are now required to include graduation rates into their accountability model. Once again, graduation is becoming an integral part of the current accountability model (ESSA, 2015).

One measure of the effectiveness of a high school, including virtual schools, has always been its graduation rate. NCLB and now LCAP did not deviate from this measure but rather how it was calculated. High schools now had to specifically meet graduation goals not only for the school as a whole but students entering high school the same year otherwise known as "cohorts" (Chaplin & Swanson, 2003). Instead of being determined by the percentage of seniors entering and graduating during their final year in high school, graduation rates are calculated using a cohort model. At the end of four years, the school receives a calculated graduation percentage based upon the number of students graduated and the number of cohort students that started high school four years ago. A lower cohort graduation rate may indicate higher dropout rate, and thus students might not be meeting academic requirements of the school.

Cohort graduation rates vary across the country. For the class of 2009, the lowest cohort graduation rate, 56.3%, was in Nevada. Contrast that to Wisconsin that saw 90.7% of its class of 2009 complete in four years. California experienced a 71% graduation rate amongst the class of

2009, a drop of 1.7% since 2001-2002 (Chapman, Kewal Ramani, & Laird, 2011). Gibson (2006) studied urban districts in Virginia and found urban districts in particular face “tremendous challenges” to meeting mandated graduation goals (p. 176). California’s 82.3% graduation rate for the class of 2015 indicates that 17.7% of students that started high school in 2011, failed to graduate. This rate includes traditional and virtual schools found in California (California Department of Education [CDE], 2016c).

The impact high school dropouts have upon society is not limited to the state they live in. Students that drop out of high school are not only a California problem but also a national problem (Rouse, 2005). Students that do not complete a high school diploma or its equivalency earn less income than a high school graduate (Rouse 2005). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2012) found students with less than a high school diploma also had more health problems and were less likely to have health insurance than adults with more education thus social assistance is needed more frequently. The strain high school dropouts regardless of the type of school they come from place upon society is two-fold (a) lower income and, (b) greater social assistance.

Researchers have identified certain characteristics that high school dropouts possess independent of what type of school they dropped out of (Allensworth & Easton, 2005; Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Chaplin & Swanson, 2003; Chapman et al., 2011; DeLuca, Estacion & Gaspar, 2012; Herlihy, Kempel, & Smith, 2005). These uniting characteristics can be broken down into demographic and family background predictors, experiences before and in ninth grade, and social integration issues (Chaplin & Swanson, 2003; Chapman et al., 2011). Researchers studying the transition between eighth and ninth grade have found that this transition between eighth and ninth grade appears to be crucial to a student’s

eventual graduation from high school. They also found that transition programs might reduce the effect this transition has upon a school's dropout rate (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Christie & Zinth, 2008; Gibson, 2006; Roderick, 1993).

While most student transition from middle to high school between eighth and ninth grade, some students move between schools at a time other than a grade level change. DeLuca, et al. (2012) termed this movement as student mobility. Their study explored student mobility, and its effect upon students dropping out of high school. They found that students that attend more than one high school are more likely to dropout. Since most full-time virtual high schools are charter schools and not part of a traditional district, students are required to change schools to attend the full-time virtual school. Following DeLuca et al. (2012) conclusions, simply enrolling in a full-time virtual school may contribute to a higher drop out rate in full-time virtual schools.

While DeLuca et al. (2012) narrowly defined the term mobility; those researchers studying the eighth to ninth grade transition argued that this transition is one of the most crucial regardless of the grade change. It might be argued the transition to high school is as impactful as changing schools more than once. Most schools designated as high schools in California serve grades 9-12 (California Department of Education [CDE], 2016a). Because of the physical organization of schools, student transitions are required, and poor transitions to high school could have an effect upon their dropouts. Understanding that full-time virtual schools rely on all students to transition at least once, eighth to ninth, and possibly twice, traditional to virtual, during their high school career this could have an impact on dropout rates for virtual schools.

By seeking to understand the affect dropouts have upon society, looking at the characteristics of dropouts and when they tend to drop out, some schools are seeking to reduce their dropout rate by creating ninth grade transition programs (Bryant, 2008; Christie & Zinth,

2008; Gibson, 2006). Organizations such as The Boomerang Project and Talent Development Secondary have been created to help schools facilitate the creation of ninth grade transition programs by providing curriculum, training, and support. The essential purpose of these ninth grade transition programs, either created or adopted, is to reduce the percentage of students that drop out in the ninth/tenth grades (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Bryant, 2008; Christie & Zinth, 2008; McKevitt & Uvaas, 2013).

Full-time virtual high schools are not safe from dropouts or mobility. In fact, investigations have found dropouts and mobility are higher in virtual schools than traditional schools. Hubbard and Mitchell (2011) in their article on Colorado's virtual schools, state that half of the student enrolled in full-time virtual schools leave within a school year. They also found that online schools in Colorado produce three times as many dropouts. Molnar (2013) in his report on virtual schools found that virtual schools were graduating students at one-half the rate of traditional schools. CAVA has seen similar trends. They graduated 57% of their class of 2015 in contrast to the overall rate of 82.3% in California (California Department of Education [CDE], 2016b). CAVA's most recently reported mobility or transition rate was 24% (In The Public Interest, 2015). Knowing that greater mobility leads to higher dropouts and dropping out of high school is a traditional sign of low student achievement, it is not surprising that over 60% of virtual schools fail to be deemed as "academically acceptable" (Molnar, 2013).

Problem Statement

While some traditional high schools seek to address high school student dropouts through transition programs, the degree to which full-time virtual schools are addressing dropouts through transition programs is unclear. Graduation rates in virtual high schools lag behind the national rates. In 2013, the national graduation rate average for all virtual schools in the United

States was 37.6%, half of the national average of all schools, 79.4% (Molnar, 2013). Molnar (2013) suggests these results are not unexpected due to poor results on other academic indicators. If virtual schools are to be touted as a viable alternative to traditional high schools, they must start to address the discrepancy between their graduation rate and the national average. One possible approach to addressing this discrepancy is to examine the act of and the effects of a student's transition from a traditional school to a virtual one. Because there are very few virtual schools, percentage wise, in California, and even fewer that serve kindergarten to twelfth grade, many students are transitioning from a traditional middle or high school to a virtual high school. This transition may or may not be contributing to the lower graduation rate seen in some virtual schools in comparison to the national average.

After a review of the literature related to online education and traditional education, no literature could be found regarding transitional models in the virtual setting. The body of literature in refereed journals and conferences surrounding virtual schools as a whole is limited (Black, DiPietro, Ferdig, & Preston, 2008). Also, no literature could be identified to either support or refute the idea that transitions between the traditional setting and the virtual setting must be approached differently. Whether this is due to the educational model existing in its infancy, or the lack of students enrolled in full-time virtual schools, the need for further study of how students' transition from traditional schools to full-time virtual charter schools is apparent. While the need to study the transition is apparent, more importantly, there is a need to study and possibly identify effective school-based practices that could help assist a student's transition to the full-time virtual school setting. Identifying these effective school-based transitional practices could help full-time virtual schools meet the needs of their students more effectively.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study is to explore what school-based practices if any, do students enrolling in a full-time virtual high school in Southern California for the first time believe helped or hindered them to successfully transition to their new school.

Importance of Study

This study stands to make an important contribution to the educational community because of the need for greater understanding of the needs of students as they transition from a traditional high school to a virtual one and its effect upon this student's academic progress and eventual graduation. Very little research exists on K-12 virtual schools and even less on students' transition into this setting. Research in this area could also lead to a greater understanding of the applicability of research of transitions within a given transitional model. With a greater understanding of the nuances of transitions in the virtual setting, further research could lead to not only better understanding of successful models but also the students they serve. A better understanding of students and their transitional needs could lead to teaching them more effectively in both the virtual and the traditional setting.

The practical importance of the study is directly connected to its theoretical importance. Full-time virtual K-12 schools continue to grow in numbers. Every year, states pass legislation allowing charter schools and/or full-time virtual programs. The increased availability of educational options has also increased the mobility of students between schools, both virtual and traditions. Bilfulco and Ladd (2006) studied charter schools in North Carolina and found the charter schools studied had twice the turnover rate than traditional public school even when a charter school was over five years old. Bilfulco and Ladd (2006) goes further in their study to attribute almost 30% of the negative results of charter schools to the higher turnover rate. With

more effective transition programs, schools both charter and full-time virtual schools can demonstrate greater effectiveness. A better understanding of the how students are successfully transitioned to the virtual setting is needed. In California, virtual schools continue to enroll students; this study sought to provide some insight to California's virtual school leaders that may lead to better transitions for their students.

Definition of Terms

- **Asynchronous e-learning:** Hrastinski (2008) defines asynchronous e-learning as instruction that is facilitated by media rather than personnel. Asynchronous learning allows learners to self-pace and not is limited to time. It allows flexibility but can lead to isolation.
- **Brick and Mortar School:** Term used by virtual educators to differentiate between virtual schools and more traditional schools or school buildings.
- **Class Connects:** California Virtual Academy's main form of online, real-time instruction. Students use Adobe Connect to view directed instruction by a teacher.
- **Credit Recovery Courses:** Courses in which students are taking the course or a similar course covering the same material as a previous course. Credit recovery courses are meant to replace courses a student has failed. 62% of all online courses taken by high school students in the United States in 2013 were credit recovery courses (International Association for K-12 Online Learning, 2013).
- **High School Cohort:** A group of students entering high school for the first time. These students are part of high school accountability within NCLB ("Four Pillars," n.d.).
- **International Association of K12 Online Learning (iNACOL):** iNACOL is the largest online learning advocacy organization in the US. They seek to support activities and

policies that remove barriers and support effective online education; facilitate, conduct and disseminate research; identify promising practices; and develop national K-12 online learning quality standards (International Association for K-12 Online Learning. n.d).

- LASSI. Learning and Study Strategies Inventory: A measurement tool that gauges a student's study and learning styles on ten scales (Loomis, 2000).
- Learner Control: The degree to which a learner can direct his/her learning experience (Hsin-Yih & Scott, 1992).
- Learning Coach (LC): A person, usually a parent, who facilitates student learning in virtual school. In high school, the LC typically plays a supportive role and monitors the student's progression and achievement in assigned courses.
- No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB): NLCB is the reauthorization of The Elementary and Secondary Education Act.
- Original Credit Courses: Courses in which student are taking the course for the first time. Graduation Credit is given to students if they meet the requirements of the course enough to receive a passing grade.
- Online Learning: Watson & Kalmon, 2005 define online learning as "Education in which instruction and content are delivered primarily over the Internet." Online learning is also used interchangeably with Virtual learning, Cyber learning, e-learning. (International Association for K-12 Online Learning, n.d., p. 7).
- Student Mobility: Students that change schools due to reasons other than grade promotion (DeLuca et al., 2012). In virtual schools the term that has been used to describe mobility is churn.

- Synchronous e-learning: Online learning supported by real-time tools such as video conferencing and chat. Hrastinski (2008) writes that synchronous e-learning is more social and can mitigate isolation found with asynchronous e-learning.
- Traditional High School: A California public school that enrolls grades 9-12, enrolls the general student population and has less than 75% of its students enrolled in the full-time independent study (Barrat & Berliner, 2009).
- Transitional Program (model): For the purpose of this study refers to a plan to move from one school to another either through grade change (8 to 9) or from traditional schools to virtual schools (Bryant, 2008).
- Virtual High School: Clark (2000) defined a virtual school as “a state approved and/or regionally accredited school that offers secondary credit courses through distance learning methods that include Internet-based delivery” (p. 1).

Conceptual Framework

Whether it is due to virtual education still a relatively new concept or the scarcity of researchers in the field of virtual education, research in virtual education lacks depth and breadth according to some researchers (Barbour, 2013; Barbour, Cavanaugh, & Clark, 2009; Barbour & Reeves, 2009; Bendixen & Hartley, 2001). According to these same researchers, what research that does exist is most often regarding the model of deliverance, not methodology or on the learners themselves (Barbour, 2013; Barbour et al., 2009; Barbour & Reeves, 2009; Bendixen & Harley, 2001). Due to the lack of research in the topic being studied, a conceptual framework must be stitched together using multiple sources. Four sources were used in developing the conceptual framework for the study. These include:

- Predicting Success of Virtual High School Students: Preliminary Results from an Educational Success Prediction Instrument (Marshall & Roblyer, 2003),

- Middle and high school transitions as viewed by students, parents, and teachers (Akos and Galassi, 2004),
- Toward Practical Procedures for Predicting and Promoting Success in Virtual School Student (Davis, Mills, Pape, & Roblyer, 2008),
- Connecting entrance and departure: The transition to ninth grade school dropout (Furstenbert, Neild, & Stoner-Eby, 2001).

These resources can be divided into two main conceptual frameworks: the facets of a successful ninth grade transitional program and the specific needs of full-time virtual high school students.

Table 1

Alignment of Sources for Conceptual Framework

Topic	Source
Successful Ninth Grade Transitional Programs	Furstenbert et al. (2001)
Specific Needs of Full-Time Virtual High School Students	Akos & Galassi (2004)
	Barbour (2008)
	Davis et al. (2008)
	Marshall & Roblyer (2003)

Due to the absence of research in the specific area being studied, the researcher was required to expand his exploration of extant research. The researcher examined research related to successful ninth grade transition programs, specific needs of full-time virtual high school students to understand what could lead to a successful transition into the full-time virtual setting. Akos and Galassi, (2004) and Furstenbert et al. (2001) both studied ninth grade transition programs. Barbour (2008), Davis et al. (2008), and Marshall and Roblyer (2003) provided the researcher with insight into the specific needs of virtual learners. The specific contribution by each to the conceptual framework is discussed in detail in Chapter II: Literature Review.

Research Questions

This study was guided by two research questions:

1. What school-based practices if any, did students enrolling in a full-time virtual high school time in one virtual school in Southern California for the first time believe helped them to transition to their new school?
2. What suggestions for additional school-based practices if any, did students enrolling in a full-time virtual high school time in one virtual school in Southern California for the first time believe could have helped them to transition to their new school?

Delimitations

Delimitations for the study surround the selection of participants for the study. At the broadest level, selecting students currently participating enrolled in full-time virtual schools in California limited the research study population to an estimated 23,228 (International Association for K-12 Online Learning, 2013). Only studying students in grades 9-12 further limited the study population. Finally, studying first-time enrollees in virtual schools will add additional limits. Full-time virtual students in grades 9-12 that have enrolled in the same or another virtual school prior were not included in the study.

From the literature about student transitions into high school and that surrounding virtual schools the researcher has identified the three central variables or themes to study. These themes are Individual transitional attributes, academic transitional factors: individual, school and transition: and technical competency and knowledge. By focusing on these three variables and limiting the scope of participants additional variables were limited.

Assumptions

The researcher assumed students need transitional programs when entering the full-time virtual setting. The researcher also assumed transitional programs in full-time virtual settings need to be studied. Third, it was assumed all participants are volunteers and complete the survey truthfully. Finally, it was assumed that student achievement at the participant's school is not due to any one specific teacher or one specific group of teachers rather any successes or challenges are due to the school community as a whole.

Organization of Study

This research study is presented in five chapters. Chapter I: Introduction, includes the background of the study, the problem statement, the purpose statement, the importance of the study, the definition of terms, conceptual framework, research questions, research hypothesis, limitations, delimitations, assumptions and finally organization of the study. Chapter II: Review of the Literature, includes an introduction, a conceptual framework, and a section for each of the four emergent themes in the literature: procedural factors: technology and communication related, structural factors: organization of the student, the course, the school and the transition, academic factors: achievement responsibility/risk taking, and social factors: self-esteem and beliefs of ones academic success. Chapter III: Research Methodology, contains the following sections: introduction, research design and rationale, design validity, setting, population, same and sampling procedures, human subject considerations, instrumentation, data collection procedures, data management, data analysis, and finally positionality. Chapter IV: Findings, contains an introduction, profile of the participants, findings, and a summary of key findings. The final chapter, Chapter V: Discussion of the Findings, contains an introduction, discussion of

key findings, conclusions, implications for policy and practices, recommendations for further study and finally a summary of the study.

Chapter II Literature Review

Introduction

This study sought to research experiences of high school students as they transition into a full-time virtual school for the first time. More specifically, the study sought to explore, what school-based practices if any, do students enrolling in a full-time virtual high school time in one virtual school in Southern California for the first time believe helped them to transition to their new school and what suggestions for additional school-based practices if any, do students enrolling in a full-time virtual high school time in one virtual school in Southern California for the first time believe could have helped them to transition to their new school.

Due to the lack of depth and breadth of literature dealing specifically with the transition from traditional schools to virtual schools an expanded review of the literature is needed. This review examined current literature surrounding successful transition programs in traditional schools and specific needs of successful virtual students in addition to any existing literature on student transitional programs into the full-time virtual settings. In studying successful ninth grade transitional programs, the researcher identified possible best practices that have been identified to help students transition to high school in a more traditional setting. In researching the specific needs of full-time virtual school students, the researcher sought to better understand the specific needs of the studied population. Understanding the specific needs of full-time virtual students allows the researcher to explore the experiences of the target population better as they navigated the transition from a traditional model of high school to the virtual setting.

Synthesizing existing literature surrounding transition programs in traditional schools, literature surrounding transitional programs into the virtual setting, and specific needs of successful virtual students, four overlapping areas emerged:

- Individual transitional attributes.
- Academic transitional factors: individual, school, and transition.
- Technical competency and knowledge.

A review of the historical, theoretical and empirical body of research will provide a clearer understanding of what constitutes a successful high school transition and a successful virtual high school student and consequently how an effective transitional program in the virtual setting could meet the needs of a student entering the virtual environment for the first time.

Research into virtual schooling continues to lack consistency and breadth. Bendixen & Hartley, (2001) examined existing research on the virtual school field and classified it into three areas: research on media, research on methods, and the effect of learner characteristics. A majority of the available research on virtual schools can be found concerning the media that delivers content (Barbour, 2013; Barbour et al., 2009; Barbour & Reeves, 2009). Some have suggested that research into the media used in virtual schools has little impact on student learning because the instructional methodology is the foundational influence, not media (Clark, 1994). What little research is found in methodology and learner characteristics is currently concentrated in doctoral dissertations and unpublished masters' thesis (Barbour et al., 2009). Barbour (2013) goes further and states "However, the literature – and, in particular, the research – to support the effective design, delivery, and support of K-12 online learning has not kept pace" (p. 21). Barbour et al. (2009) indicate the lack of research is expected due to the foundational nature of the subject, and this absence of research naturally coincides with experimentation in any scientific field. Without a specific theoretical framework to draw upon, a cobbled conceptual framework of what research has been completed regarding student transitions into high school and successful online students.

Conceptual Framework

Research in virtual education lacks depth and breadth and what research that does exist is most often regarding the model of deliverance, not methodology or on the learners themselves (Barbour, 2013; Barbour et al., 2009; Barbour & Reeves, 2009; Bendixen & Hartley, 2001).

Four sources were used in developing the conceptual framework for the study. The sources can be divided into two main conceptual frameworks, what are the facets of a successful ninth grade transitional program and what are the specific needs of full-time virtual high school students. The four main sources that were used in developing the conceptual framework for the study were:

- *Predicting Success of Virtual High School Students: Preliminary Results from an Educational Success Prediction Instrument* (Marshall & Roblyer, 2003)
- *Middle and high school transitions as viewed by students, parents, and teachers.* (Akos, & Galassi, 2004)
- *Toward Practical Procedures for Predicting and Promoting Success in Virtual School Students,* (Davis et al., 2008).
- *Connecting entrance and departure: The transition to ninth grade school dropout* (Furstenbert, et al., 2001).

Marshall and Roblyer (2003) created and validated an Educational Success Prediction Instrument (ESPRI). The goal of the creation of the ESPRI was “to (1) help predict which high school students would be likely to succeed in VHS courses and (2) provide a basis for counseling and support for other students interested in becoming online learners to help them become more successful” (Marshall & Roblyer, 2003, p. 241). The seventy-five questions on the ESPRI were developed to measure five cognitive factors identified by Marshall and Roblyer (2003) as

contributing to the success of online students. These five cognitive factors are achievement and self-esteem beliefs, responsibility/risk taking, technology skills, access, finally organization, and self-regulation. The first of these factors, achievement and self-esteem beliefs, is centered around the perception that a student's success depends on his or her own contribution not from an outside source. The second factor, responsibility/risk taking, is associated with the ability of a student to be responsible for one's own tasks and the student's ability to initiate and complete tasks when explicit instructions are not present. The third factor, technology skills and access, surrounds the ability of a student to use technology and their ability to access it when needed. The fourth and final factor surrounds organization and self-regulation. Marshall and Roblyer (2003) found that successful online students needed a better organization and the ability to approach tasks in a goal-oriented way more so than other traditional academic tasks. The initial use of the instrument had predicted 100% of the pass students and 95.2% of the students predicted to fail. The results of the initial use of the ESPRI were promising but Marshall and Roblyer (2003) suggested using the instrument with larger and more diverse groups.

Akos and Galassi in their 2004 study asked 666 parents, students and teachers their experience with transition programs. During their study, they found three interrelated components to transition programs: academic, procedural and social. The academic component seeks to help students manage the greater homework and specialized courses. The procedural component focuses on helping students navigate the complexity of the new school. Finally, the social component seeks to help student fit in to their new school, make friends, and get along with others.

In 2008, Davis and Roblyer revisited the ESPRI. The team modified the ESPRI instrument from the original seventy-five items to sixty. However, they did attempt to measure

the same five cognitive factors identified by Marshall and Roblyer (2003) as contributing to the success of online students: achievement and self-esteem beliefs, responsibility/risk taking, technology skills and access and finally organization and self-regulation. The team was able to predict with 93% accuracy successful students. They did not have as much success in predicting failing student this time as a result of only 70% correct (Davis et al., 2008). They attributed the lower success of predicting a student's success or failure in this version than the previous use of the ESPRI to learning environmental variables and a reduced scale of the reliability of the organizational factor. The team did feel their generated probability of passing table (POP) could help schools identified students that needed greater support (Davis et al., 2008). Finally, the most relevant recommendation by the group for this study was that a pre-course orientation should be a requirement for all virtual schools (Davis et al., 2008).

Furstenbert et al. (2001) looked at how the transition from eighth to ninth grade affected the likelihood of a student dropping out. They found ninth grade to be crucial to a student's eventual graduation. Knowing a student's success or failure during their ninth-grade year increased considerably the ability of Furstenbert et al. (2001) to predict a student's eventual probability of dropping out. Furstenbert et al. (2001) could determine "ninth grade problems are not simply a reflection of what students bring with them when they enter high school" (p. 29). Finally, Furstenbert et al. (2001) argue that the "dropout problem" in general cannot be fixed until schools organize themselves in ways that address the difficulty in transitioning into high school.

Each of these four sources contributes a portion to the conceptual framework. Akos and Galassi (2004) and Furstenbert et al. (2001) was used to determine what constitutes a successful ninth grade transition program. Marshall and Roblyer (2003) and Davis et al. (2008) help

establish what are the specific needs of virtual learners. Combined a general understanding of what are the needs of virtual learners and how transition programs can meet those needs can be ascertained.

Historical Context

Creation of virtual schools and programs. The charter school movement can trace its beginnings to Ray Budde's paper *Education by Charter* written in 1974. He proposed restructuring public education through granting, chartering, groups of teachers more autonomy, effectively reducing the role of the central district and the principal (Budde, 1988). During the 1980's incremental progress towards full charters was seen in Philadelphia and Minnesota. Schools-within-schools were opened and were titled "charters" (Chen, 2014). It was not until 1991 when Minnesota passed the nation's first charter school law that the first official charter school was opened. Other states soon followed Minnesota in passing their charter laws. California specifically, passed its own Charter School Law of 1992, the second state to pass a law supporting charter schools legislatively. California's Charter School Law of 1992 allowed charter schools to begin operating in the state. The original intent of California's charter law was to create competition in the public-school system and spur innovative ways to educate students ("EdSource," n.d.). Support for charter schools varied by the state through the nineties, and it took 10 years for the federal government to either support or discourage the charter school movement.

Nearly 27 years after Budde's paper and ten years since the first charter law, the federal government chose to support the growing charter school movement. In 2001, Congress re-authorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, more commonly known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and in one act created federal support for school choice. "The law also

supported the growth of more independent charter schools, funds some services for children in private schools, and provides certain protections for homeschooling parents” (United States Department of Education [U.S. D.O.E.], n.d., para. 1). In California alone, operating charter schools increased 330% during the 12 years after the passing of NCLB (California Charter Schools Organization, 2013, p. 2). Charter schools are also 7% more likely to be organized in ways other than the traditional grade/course organization found in more traditional school models (“EdSource,” n.d.). Some of these non-traditional models include but are not limited to: schools following specific educational philosophies (ex: Waldorf), schools focusing on specific activities (ex: arts schools), accelerated programs (ex: early college) and schools that cater to a subset of the general educational community (ex: independent study programs). In California, full-time virtual schools fall under the last category, schools catering to subsets of the educational community. They are officially designated as non-classroom based independent study schools due to California not having any legislation that specifically deals with full-time virtual schools. Berg and Clark (2003) go further and identify the home-schooled community, a subset of the larger educational community, as a key benefactor of the expansion of virtual schools through greater school choice. He states that large-scale surveys of an estimated 850,000 home-schooled students and their parents cited a key reason for participating in virtual schools is their general dissatisfaction of traditional public schools (Berg & Clark, 2003).

Virtual courses and virtual teaching have been in existence for over 30 years. Virtual courses were originally used as a supplement too more traditional means of education. Because of supplemental nature of online courses, most students were working in a blended environment, receiving instruction in both virtual and traditional settings. It would be another 20 years before full-time virtual schools were created.

In 1997, The Concord Virtual High School, subsequently re-named Virtual High School (VHS), and Florida Virtual School (FLVS) were founded. Both schools were created through public funding. VHS was formed using a five-year, \$7.4 million federal grant and FLVS was started from a much smaller allocation of \$200,000 from the state legislature. Florida was the first state to fund virtual schools directly (Clark, 2000, p. 3). FLVS currently serves over 300,000-course enrollments for both full and part-time students. Over 9,500 students participate full-time in FLVS throughout the state (International Association for K-12 Online Learning, 2013).

An exact year of when online courses were first offered in California is unavailable, but in 2001 there were only 13 different online programs. None of the 13 programs offering online courses in 2001 were full-time virtual programs. The programs were part-time whose course offerings ranged from a single course offering to a wide range of AP courses (Darrow, Freedman, & Watson, 2002). California Virtual Academy (CAVA) opened in 2002 marking the first time a full-time virtual program opened in California. Since 2002, CAVA's enrollment has grown to approximately 15,000 in the 2012-2013 school year. From these germinal starts in Florida and Massachusetts, iNACOL estimates over 1.8 million students took some form of distance-education courses during the 2009-2010 school year with the most of these being online courses. This number does not include the estimated 275,000 students that are enrolled in full-time virtual schools (International Association for K-12 Online Learning, 2013).

Hassel and Terrel (2004) describe the legitimacy of virtual schools under the NCLB Act of 2001. They identified five possible benefits of online learning: enhanced communication, support of different learning styles, flexible access to curriculum, frequent assessment, and a greater supply of teachers interested in virtual schools. They also found that virtual schools have

the capability to provide equitable access to traditionally underserved populations (Hassel & Terrel, 2004). This finding is echoed by the U.S. Department of Education “E-learning offers flexibility in the time, place, and pace of instruction” (United States Department of Education [U.S. D.O.E.], 2005, p. 35).

Young (n.d.) attributes various reasons why virtual schools have become attractive alternatives and thus greater growth. She espouses the ability of students to arrange their courses beyond the normal school day. Young (n.d.) also recognizes the ability of virtual curriculum to be delivered regardless of physical location of the student. “Virtual schools can help close economic and demographic gaps between student groups by delivering courses to students no matter where they live.” (Young, n.d., para. 6). Sacirbey (2013) supplies a similar reason to Young (n.d), but instead of access being the catalyst he suggests some students move to the virtual environment due to religious reasons. Whether it is for religious reasons or greater flexibility, Sacirbey (2013) and Young (n.d) both found full-time virtual schools attract students that want something that traditional model of schooling does not.

With virtual schools entering their third decade of existence, greater popularity has also increased the number of critics. Graduation rate amongst Colorado's virtual schools is much lower than traditional schools. "Online schools produce three times as many dropouts as they do graduates. One of every eight online students drops out of schools permanently – a rate four times the state average" (Hubbard & Mitchell, 2011, para. 9). Molnar (2013) suggests more time is needed to allow research to catch up to policy. He goes further and recommends a suspension of requiring students to take online courses, a halt to expansion of full-time taxpayer-funded virtual schools and creation of long-term programs to support the independent research of virtual schools and their iterations (Molnar, 2013). The full-time virtual school community will have to

address critics of the community and in particular, the considerably higher dropout rate of full-time virtual schools.

Changed graduation rate accountability. Historically, the graduation rate was monitored, but it was not part of the accountability model. The accountability model changed under NCLB, and so did the importance of graduation rate (United States Department of Education [U.S. D.O.E.], 2004). The importance of graduation rate was further expanded under the ECA Act of 2015. Schools were required to ensure success for all students and subgroups of students. High Schools were also now required to meet graduation goals for students enrolling in the school in the ninth grade. Each entering ninth grade group is called a "cohort," and their dropout rate is monitored through their high school career. At the end of four years, the school receives a graduation percentage for this "cohort." Cohort graduation rates vary across the country. For the class of 2009 the national low of 56.3% completion rate in four years was in Nevada, but on the other hand, Wisconsin leads the nation with 90.7%, a difference of nearly 35% (Chapman et al., 2011). The most recent data for California shows its graduation rate at 80.8% an all-time high. Further study of why states vary so much in their cohort completion rate may yield a better understanding of why students dropout. With graduation rate accountability written into both the LCFF/LCAP and ECA act of 2015, both state and federal levels now require schools to address potential dropouts.

Disaggregating dropout data helped create generalizations of which groups tend to drop out of high school can be ascertained. When looking at differences between ethnic groups, Hispanic students were three times more likely to drop out of high school than other ethnicities (Chapman et al., 2011). Economic status of the family appears to influence dropping out. Students classified as low income were four times more likely to drop out than middle or high-

income students (Chapman et al., 2011). Although there are differences amongst subgroups, overall graduation rates and cohort graduation rates have continued to improve since 1972 (Chapman et al., 2011, Figure 4).

Students that drop out of high school are not only a state problem but also a national problem (Rouse, 2005). Students that do not receive a high school diploma or its equivalent earn 63% less than a high school graduate (Rouse, 2005). Rouse (2005) proposes that the annual loss in federal and state taxes from high school dropouts exceed \$50 billion annually. The strain placed upon the economy due to high school dropouts is not only on the income side of the balance sheet. The \$50 billion loss of income does not consider the added expense high school dropouts place upon society. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2012) found students with less than a high school diploma had more health problems and were less likely to have health insurance than adults with more education. In addition to health assistance, one in four high school dropouts receives public assistance of some form (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Dropouts contribute less to the economy and receive more assistance than their more educated peers.

Student characteristics of high school dropouts. Students that fail to graduate within the anticipated four years from traditional high schools tend to exhibit certain characteristics. Furstenbert et al. (2001) studied dropouts in Philadelphia and suggest the predictors of dropouts are well established. They summarized predictors of dropouts into five categories: demographic, family background, experiences before ninth grade, social integration, and ninth grade experiences. Gibson (2006) found similar predictors in studying transitional programs in Virginia.

Demographic characteristics of students that are at risk of dropping out are: older than their cohort peers, male, and minority. Older students are less likely to graduate in the four years (Allensworth & Easton, 2005, Furstenbert et al., 2001). Male students also drop out at a higher rate than their female counterparts. Finally, non-Asian minority students were more likely to drop out by age 16 than their white cohort members (Allensworth & Easton, 2005).

Another key characteristic of a student's risk of dropping out is their family background. Children of single parents were more likely to drop out than students with two or more parents. Children of parents with little formal education were more likely to drop out also. Finally, students that were members of families that had limited family resources tended to drop out before graduation (Furstenbert, et al., 2001).

Experiences before ninth grade had an impact on a student's likeliness to graduate in four years. Allensworth & Easton (2005) found that when Chicago Public Schools implemented an eighth-grade promotion standard graduation rates reduced. The first graduating cohort subject to Chicago's promotion standard entered high school in 1996. Their graduation rate was less than the cohort before. The second graduating cohort subject to Chicago's promotion standard had an even worse graduation rate than the first one (Allensworth & Easton, 2005). Chicago Public School's decision to subject eighth graders to a promotion standard did the opposite of what its purpose was. It decreased the graduation rate amongst the first two cohorts at least.

Finally, social integration and experiences during the ninth grade seem to be one of the most influential factors upon the tendency of a student to drop out. (Furstenbert, et al., 2001) found that urban schools in Philadelphia were deeply disorganized and contributed to a school's dropout rate. They felt a student could get lost in the shuffle and even if they were exhibiting behaviors that contributed to the lack of achievement such as skipping class, there were few

consequences. Richardson (2011) found many of the students interviewed felt some form of anxiety regarding their ninth-grade transition. Sixty-five percent of ninth grade dropouts often missed class during their ninth-grade year (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Furstenbert et al. (2001) succinctly summarize their findings on the effects of ninth grade upon dropouts "Our analysis suggests that ninth grade problems are not simply a reflection of what students bring with them when they enter high school" (p. 29).

Factors that contribute to high school graduation. For this study research surrounding factors that contribute to a student graduating with their cohort was divided into two areas: factors specific to a student's ninth grade year and factors that appear to be not specifically tied to a specific year. Reviewing the literature allowed a greater understanding of factors that a transition model should be aware of and others that a school may include into their general school-wide graduation program.

Some indicators for graduation can become predictive even during a student's first year in high school. One indicator during a student's ninth grade year that appears to be a predictor of graduation on time is a student's academic achievement. Academic achievement is gauged by a student's grade point average, but it can also be gauged by how many courses they failed during their freshman year (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). Allensworth and Easton (2007) was able with 80% accuracy able to correctly predict if a student would graduate with their cohort (Table 1). The higher the grade point average of the student the greater the ability to correctly predict if they will graduate. "...almost all students with a B average or higher at the end of their freshman year graduated within four years" (Allensworth & Easton, 2007, p. 8). Academic success in a student's ninth grade year appears to be very important, but it is influenced by other factors.

The second indicator during a student's ninth grade year that appears to affect a student's graduation is their attendance and consequently their academic success during the ninth grade (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Saunders, Silver, & Zarate, 2008). Saunders et al. (2008) found students were almost four times more likely to graduate when they had zero to five absences than their cohort members with 20+ absences. Allensworth and Easton (2007) saw 90% accuracy in using course attendance in predicting graduation. The research appears to indicate school policies and practices may influence the affect absenteeism has upon student achievement (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). The relationship between attendance and achievement during a student's ninth grade is strong yet like an academic achievement; it is influenced by school practices and procedures.

While the performance of students in various factors is predictors of eventual graduation, these can be influenced by some school-based factors. Two factors that appear to affect attendance and academic achievement are: a strong relationship with their teachers and coursework is viewed as relevant and important to their future. Allensworth & Easton (2007) found both factors appear to influence academic success and attendance regardless of characteristics students bring with them to high school.

Academic achievement, attendance, trust, and relevancy all seem to affect the success of a student in the ninth grade. It appears they are all inter-related and each affects the results of the other. Any attempt to create greater success for ninth graders needs to fully understand the relationship between the four.

Attempted solutions to high school dropouts. Knowing the predictors of dropouts in traditional school and when they tend to drop out, some traditional schools are seeking to

improve their graduation rates by creating ninth grade transition programs. McCallumore and Sparapani (2010) summarizes current research by writing:

There has been a lot of research done to pinpoint exactly why student have so much trouble during their ninth-grade year, and most of the research points to one overarching problem, the transition from eighth grade to ninth. (p. 449)

Many urban schools started transition programs in response to many of their students entering high school below grade level (Gibson, 2006). Roderick (1993) writes that over 60% of students that eventually drop out of high school fail at least 25% of their courses during their first year in high school. Only 8% of their peers that graduated in 4 years had similar struggles during their freshman year. Both non-profit and for-profit companies have recognized this need in traditional high schools for effective ninth grade transition programs and have developed programs themselves. Some organizations such as The Boomerang Project and Talent Development Secondary have been created to help schools facilitate the creation of ninth grade transition programs by providing curriculum, training, and support. These programs can either be school-wide reform or a program that is integrated into the current school structure. The essential purpose of these ninth-grade transition programs either created or adopted is the same, to reduce the percentage of students that drop out due to their ninth grade experience (Herlihy et al., 2005; Richardson, 2011).

Traditional high school transition models. Researchers have identified a successful transition between eighth and ninth grade as critical to the success of students (Furstenbert, et al., 2001; McKevitt & Uvaas, 2013; Roybal, Thornton & Usinger, 2014). McKevitt & Uvaas, (2013) describe the complexity of this transition when they write:

After transitioning to a new school, students must learn to adapt to much more than to

new curriculum and academic subjects. Students must learn to navigate a new school layout, and they must meet and adjust to new, older students in the school, while adapting to new expectations, grading methods, and teaching styles. (p. 70)

Furstenbert et al. (2001) have narrowed the transition to just the first grading period. They identified 40% of students that failed all their core courses during the first marking period also failed them at the end of the school year (Furstenbert, et al., 2001).

In their review of the literature surrounding ninth-grade transition programs, Roybal et al. (2014) concluded: "...freshmen need effective transition programs to successfully move from the eighth grade to the ninth grade" (p.484). They have identified six key points for transition models need to address:

- Schools should create an environment in which students develop a sense of belonging.
- Parents should be activity involved in high school education of their students.
- Multiple components need to be able to address the barriers to the success of all students.
- Highly effective caring teachers are critical. Often, ongoing professional development will be required.

Formative program evaluations should be conducted using the following indicators:

- credits earned, a number of core courses failed, on-track to graduate, and measures of connectedness; as well as, traditional measures of student achievement.
- Formative evaluations should be the basis for continuous improvements of transitions programs (Roybal et al., 2014, p. 484).

One model for a transition programs is the Talent Development Model of High School (TDM). The TDM is a full school reform model that seeks to raise the expectations of students and staff. It was created by the Center for Research on Education of Students Placed at Risk

(CRESPAR). CRESPAR is funded by US Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Evaluation and works in conjunction with John Hopkins and Howard Universities. The TDM reforms a school by creating teacher teams or professional learning communities, implementing a specialized curriculum that seeks to close skill gaps, providing tiered student supports and finally a can-do attitude for all students and staff.

While the program is not widespread, only 80 schools in 20 districts in 2005, it is showing positive results in a variety of schools. (Herlihy et al., 2005) found schools in the Philadelphia area that followed TDM model produced substantial gains in attendance, academic course credits earned, and promotion rates during students' first year of high school. They also found this increased rate was sustained through high school. The highest gain in credit received by first-time ninth graders was in Algebra I. TDM schools saw nearly a 25-percentage point gain over schools that were not employing the Talent Development Model (Herlihy et al., 2005). The TDM model seemed to be working for some schools in the Philadelphia area.

The Boomerang Project created another, more widespread, program. Link Crew in contrast to TDM is a program that is integrated into existing school structures. Link Crew is being used in forty-one states and four Canadian provinces. Over 1,800 schools and 6,800 educators have been trained on how to implement the Link Crew program (Boomerang Project, n.d.). Link Crew's foundational premise is using students from eleventh and twelfth grade to mentor incoming ninth graders. The mentorship is provided through orientations, academic follow-ups, social follow-ups and finally individual contact. The Boomerang Project provides support by training a program leader for each school. This leader then trains the students how to mentor their assigned ninth graders. The Boomerang Project also has curriculum and materials for purchase if desired.

Studies have found that implementing the Link Crew program at any level has positive effects upon student transitioning into ninth grade. Richardson (2011) found in one school even partial implementation positively helped students in their ninth-grade transition by lowering procedural and academic anxiety. Bryant (2008) postulate that even partially implemented programs would have an impact on standardized testing. Some studies have found that even if Link Crew did not have a direct affect upon achievement or attendance, there was an increase in the feeling of being connected to their school by ninth grade students (Stoltz, 2005).

Link Crew and TDM seek to meet the specific academic needs of freshman but also connect them to the school (Herlihy et al., 2005). They also seek to help students navigate through the complex transition that McKeivitt and Uvaas (2013) talks about. Research suggests that schools that implement either program or any program will see a decrease in dropouts and an increase in graduation (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Allensworth & Easton, 2005). Several researchers did not find significant improvement in academic success and attendance, but all said researchers found positive results on students and the schools they attended (Bryant, 2008; Herlihy et al., 2005; Richardson, 2011; Stoltz, 2005).

Virtual school transition models. Between distance learning enrollments and students enrolled in full-time virtual schools, iNACOL estimates over 2 million students choose to be educated at least partially in a virtual environment (International Association for K-12 Online Learning, 2013). iNACOL also estimates 75% of the student engaged in distance learning courses are in high school with the majority, 62%, of course, enrollment falling in to credit recovery type of courses (International Association for K-12 Online Learning, 2013).

Research into current transitional models for virtual students centers mainly around orientation courses. Scagnoli, (2001) suggests six facets an orientation to an online course should

have; additional information about the program, information about the course itself, the applications used in the course, instruction and opportunities on how to socially interact in the course, cultural awareness of those taking the course. Scagnoli (2001) spends much of the time describing the operational factors in online orientations. While operational factors are important to understand what currently exists in the body of research, their insight into transitional models for full-time virtual schools is limited.

Themes in Literature

After a review of the literature related to transitions into virtual online education, no literature could be found studying transitional models in the virtual setting. Also, no literature could be identified to either support or refute the idea that transitions between the traditional setting and the virtual setting must be approached differently. Without a historical, theoretical or empirical body of literature to draw from in regards to transitions or transition programs into the virtual setting the review of literature must be expanded.

Looking at literature surrounding traditional high school transition models and the specific needs of virtual learners four overlapping themes that transitional programs must address emerge; individual transitional attributes, academic transitional factors, technical competency, and knowledge.

Individual transitional attributes. The first theme that has emerged from the study of literature surrounding transitions into full-time virtual setting surround attributes that are specific to individual learners or individual attributes. Individual attributes are those characteristics that students demonstrate before enrolling in a full-time virtual school. These characteristics range from learner control and self-directed learning to student mobility. The individual attributes

theme examines what the literature says about how these characteristics affect readiness for full-time virtual schools and the need for transition programs to address gaps.

One of the more consistent characteristics or behaviors of successful virtual learners is learner ability to control and direct their learning. Learner control and self-direct learning have been found to be crucial to student readiness to be successful in the online environment (Bendixen & Hartley, 2001; Chen, Chou, Hung, & Own, 2010; Horzum & Kaymak, 2013). McVay (2000) encourages distance learning learners to set up and maintain a strict schedule of learning activities. She goes further and describes self-direction as an “integral part of independent learning” (McVay, 2000, p. 19). Lin and Hsieh (2001) explored learner control further and found learners can be empowered by handing control of their learning over to the student. Lin and Hsieh (2001) also suggested that that caution is exercised when giving too much control to the learner. Barbour, McClaren, and Zhang (2012) found that their subjects attributed more independence and greater self-direction as a reason why they enjoyed online courses more. They also found that students found course work satisfying when they could show responsibility and a high degree of ownership.

Another behavior or characteristic that many successful online learners exhibit is effective time management. Effective time management specifically has been found to be important to a student’s success in online courses. Hurley (2002) studied his school that primarily enrolled at-risk students. He found time management to be the major barrier to their success. The barrier was thought to have such a profound effect on student achievement that they modified student requirements from one year to the next. They switched from a global requirement of 20 hours a week to specific time-bound requirements. Students were required to complete 12 of the 20 hours by Thursday and 16 by Friday (Hurley, 2002) thus effectively

managing their time for them. Loomis (2000) found time management was a very strong predictor of one's overall success in the class. Loomis (2000) also found that "... some students do not have the skills to discipline themselves to adequately learn and study promptly" (p. 26).

Research into individual student mobility and its affect upon graduation are central in studying student transitions into full-time virtual high schools in California. Currently, in California, all full-time virtual high schools are charter schools. Because of the short time full-time virtual schools have been in existence, most full-time virtual students already are considered to have more mobility than their traditional peers because they have transitioned from a full-time traditional school to a full-time virtual high school. (DeLuca, et al., 2012)

DeLuca et al. (2012) found a statistically significant difference between students who attended more than one high school. They were up to four times more likely to drop out than their peers that only attended one high school (DeLuca et al., 2012). DeLuca et al. (2012) went further in their student and sought to determine if the factors that lead to greater student mobility were the true indicator and mobility is only a result. What they found was, even when factors that lead to greater student mobility were isolated, dropout rate does, in fact, increases 6% if a student has attended more than one high schools. They concluded that student mobility is part of a student's disengagement of the school and does contribute to dropping out (DeLuca et al., 2012).

Understanding mobility is a contributing factor to dropout, and many students move schools from eighth to ninth grade, how schools transition students from one school to another must be reviewed.

Transitional programs into full-time virtual schools must understand what attributes students come to them with. While learner control and effective time management are the most common and biggest predictors of student success, there are other individual attributes that

contribute to a student's success in online courses. Blended within these attributes are external factors such as student mobility that contribute to dropping outs within the traditional school system and possibly within the virtual setting. According to the research, it appears what students bring with them may have a significant effect on their possible success in full-time virtual schools.

Academic transitional factors: Individual, school, and transition. A second theme found in the literature surrounds academic factors. Due to the lack of research surrounding student transitions in the virtual environment much of the research is done in the traditional environment. While recommendations and findings of researchers are not fully translatable to the online environment concerning organizing of the transition they do provide insight into what students, parents, and teachers believe an effective transition program should be. Synthesizing current research surrounds both traditional and virtual schools, research in this theme can be divided into three different areas: individual, school, and transition.

Research into academic skills practiced or demonstrated by the transitioning student may lead to greater later academic success. Loomis (2000) identified the ability to create and utilize existing study aids as having the greatest predictor of academic success. While the study aids predictor is an individual skill, it consists of a student's ability to interact with the curriculum directly thus is being included under the academic factors. Loomis (2000) states that students in his study that did not report good study skills did not do well in the course.

One individual characteristic that may influence a student's success in virtual courses is a student's learning style. Battalio (2009) identified four of the possible eight learning styles measured using the Index of Learning Styles that were compatible with online learning (Table

2). McVay (2000) suggests students need to become acutely aware of their learning style to be a successful online learner.

Table 2.

Learning Styles Compatible with Online Learning

Style	Characteristics
Reflective Learner	Those who prefer to think quietly about information rather than be actively engaged
Intuitive Learner	Those who prefer to learn through discovery and innovation. They dislike example-based concrete example learning.
Verbal Learner	Those who prefer to learn through words, not visual representation
Global Learner	Those who prefer to learn through leaps in learning. They seek to understand the “big picture” as opposed to more traditional sequential learning.

Note. The data in this table are from “Success in distance education: Do learning styles and multiple formats matter?” by J. Battalio, 2009, *The American Journal of Distance Education*, 23, p. 74. Copyright 2009 by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC. Adapted with permission.

A review of the research suggests that at least one learning style, reflective, appear to be most successful in online courses (Battalio, 2009; Covington, Larsen, & Miller, 2000; McVay, 2000).

McVay (2000) encourages students that prefer other learning styles to engage in what he calls “reflective practice.” She goes as far as to suggest online learners keep a journal to actively reflect on one’s learning. When it comes to the other learning styles, conflicts in the research regarding their importance (Battalio, 2009; Covington et al., 2000). Further research may be needed to ascertain if other learning styles are successful in the virtual environment and any school practices that mitigate any negatives found in specific learning styles.

Full-time virtual schools seeking to ease the transition into the virtual setting may look to their traditional counterparts to implement remediation or academic preparation programs for incoming students. Many schools that had formalized transition programs had some form of

remediation or academic preparation programs to help students with their transition into high school (Gibson, 2006). These academic preparation/remediation programs appear to be found in two different formats. Both formats may be similar in implementation, but the main difference is when they are implemented. Some transition programs prefer to do remediation before students starting high school while other prefer to offer it as their academic program during their ninth-grade year. Some high school teachers suggest harder curriculum in the middle school, more help with study skills, and academic remediation during the summer before ninth grade to help ease the transition from middle to high school (Akos & Galassi, 2004). Those schools that offered remediation programs during the school year ranged from “catch up” plans to afterschool tutoring. In the Talent Development Model for ninth grade transitions, the school would offer remediation time for failing grades after school. In conjunction with this schools would offer students the ability to make up failing grade from previous semesters outside the regular day (Gibson, 2006). Regardless of when remediation was offered most schools offered some form of remediation.

Research into teacher behaviors specifically during the transition appears to be an important academic factor leading to student success. Teacher behaviors during the transition could include both curricular and non-curricular items. One such behavior that appears to be important on many levels is communication (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Blumenfeld, Fredericks, & Paris, 2004; Gannon-Cook & Ley, 2014; Roybal et al., 2014). Communication in the virtual setting appears to not only be important on the student side but also the instructor side. Communication surrounding instructors not only includes the frequency of communication but also the format and purpose of communication.

Gannon-Cook and Ley (2014) identified five learner-valued instructor interactions.

These learner-valued learner interactions: check email to assess learner needs, post to a discussion board, provide examples, provided timely feedback and responded to student inquires. Gannon-Cook and Ley (2014) believed that by leveraging these five interactions school's instructors can enlist and retain learners that choose the instructor's school.

One specific form of communication that has been found to have a positive influence on student success, in both virtual and traditional schools, is encouragement (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Chen et al., 2010). Gannon-Cook and Ley (2014) calls encouragement “positive social presence” and believes expressing genuine concern for the student establishes rapport with the student and encourages positive academic performance. (Gannon-Cook & Ley, 2014).

Gannon-Cook and Ley (2014) writes “unless learners felt they are valued, they will feel less inclined to do the work necessary to achieve success in the course, or even less inclined to complete it” (pp. 29-30). Using synchronous communications tool specifically allowed online learners the ability to accomplish takes immediately and gave them the impression that they were attending a regular face-to-face class (Wang, 2008). Akos and Galassi, (2004) found that 10% of high school parents provided some form of encouragement to ease the anxiety students felt when transitioning into high school.

Feedback, one of the five learner-valued instructor interactions, appears to be a fundamental and essential component in online learning (Gannon-Cook & Ley, 2014; Wang, 2008). Prompt and clear feedback has shown to help students achieve in virtual courses and conversely lack of prompt and clear feedback contributes to student distress (Hara & Kling, 2001). Espasa and Meneses (2010) identified three basic types of feedback: interactive regulation; retroactive regulation; and proactive regulation. Interactive regulation consists of questions about course content. Retroactive regulation surrounds any type of feedback following

an assignment. Proactive regulation is feedback after a final assignment. Espasa and Meneses (2010) found the most frequent form feedback provided in online courses studied was during what they called the continuous assessment process. Feedback during this time centered around improving work and expanding learning. Espasa and Meneses (2010) concluded that this form of feedback provided a solution and helped students improve their work. Howland and Moore (2002) suggests using feedback to measure learning or to change perceptions of work that may be perceived as busy work. Wang (2008) found that synchronous communication helped online learners improve their hands-on skills.

In reviewing the literature surrounding student transitions schools may analyze how curriculum, or how the curriculum is accessed, is formatted. This message is consistent across the literature surrounding both virtual and traditional schools is the intentional formatting of the curriculum or the learning environment that students use to access their curriculum both in transition courses and academic courses. Horzum and Kaymak (2013) found a negative relationship between student readiness and course structure. A higher readiness by the students results in a lower structure in the course and vice versa. Reviewing literature about traditional schools and their transition model's recommendations are frequently made about curriculum used in the transition. Conflicting opinions exist regarding what curriculum should be used and/or what specifically should be in the curriculum but those researchers specifically studying the transition into high school find the most success in schools that use a curriculum specifically for the transition (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Bryant, 2008; Chen, et al., 2010; Churchill, 2010; Kerr & Legters, 2001). Many researchers studying virtual environments have also made recommendations regarding the organization of curriculum or the deliverer of the curriculum. (Barbour, 2008; Barbour et al., 2009; Chen et al., 2010; Clark, 1994; Clark, 2000; Hrastinski,

2008; Hurley, 2002; Scagnoli, 2001). Course and curricular design appear to be important to a student's successful transition from one school to another but the literature is unclear regarding specifics.

It has been found that different ways of organizing the school have been found to increase student achievement. Kerr and Legters (2001) studied reform practices in high schools in Maryland and found many large high schools created a school within a school setting to ease the transition into high school. Gibson (2006) studied four urban high schools in Virginia and found all the created school teams to facilitate the transition to high school. This was consistent with her literature review. Various other researchers recommend organizing the school specifically to ease the transition (Barbour, 2008; Barbour et al., 2009; Chen et al., 2010; Clark, 1994; Clark, 2000; Hrastinski, 2008; Hurley, 2002; Scagnoli, 2001) or allocating resources directly towards the transition (Christie & Zinth, 2008). While the review of the literature indicates that organizing the school to help in a student's transition to high school is a recommended practice, it is unclear in any specific ways to organize or specific models with this transition.

Possibly the least translatable recommendation, yet rated the highest most consistently is school actions that creating a connection to the school. Roybal et al. (2014) found that it is "imperative that students feel the sense of connectedness to their school" (p. 478). Practices that increase a students' sense of belonging have shown positive effects in various settings (Bryant, 2008; Kerr & Legters, 2001; Scagnoli, 2001). McVay (2000) suggests that community can be built through "sharing information through active and ongoing dialogue and constructing knowledge through mutually-shared understandings" (p. 40). How schools create activities that encourage school connectedness vary, but one of the most common is campus tour. Parents and

students agreed that better tours of the campus would help in the transition from middle to high school (Akos & Galassi, 2004).

Technical competency and knowledge factors. Technical competency and technical knowledge factors surround a student's ability to use technology and their knowledge of technology to enhance their learning. A review of the literature surround technical competency, and knowledge factors appear to place a greater importance in a virtual environment than in a traditional high school. Little research into technical competency and knowledge and its effect upon students transitioning into the traditional high school exists. It has been found that K-12 students perceive technological issues as a major barrier to success in their online learning. (Barbour, 2008; Hara & Kling, 2001) Barbour (2008) wrote it was identified by 78.1% of the students, over 20% greater than the next problem. A study of the literature surrounding technical competency and knowledge factors can be divided into two areas: use and access of technology, and communication.

The ability to communicate effectively plays an important role in the virtual setting. Much of the communication between students and teacher, students and students is done asynchronously. Chen et al. (2010) found their participants were comfortable with their communication styles. Researchers suggest that clear guidance needs to be provided for instructors on the importance of online communication (Bannister 2009, Hara & Kling, 2001). Horzum and Kaymak (2013) found that as interaction increases within a course the probability of student's ability to fulfill their learning needs increases. Even in traditional schools, Gibson (2006) found that 61% of respondents felt that work bridging communication gaps by the schools was a facilitating factor in their success. Carr (2000) identified frequent contact as being important to reducing dropouts in distance-education courses.

Barbour et. al., (2012) found the most frequent challenge was the lack of on-task activities during asynchronous classes. Social interactions within the virtual environment are more complex than traditional models thus greater care needs to be taken in designing orientations regarding virtual courses (Scagnoli, 2001). Students must be not only able to interact socially in the courses but also in non-instructional settings. Providing opportunities outside of course work for participants to become familiar with the each other and ways to communicate reduces the time needed to accomplish the same goal in the course (Chen et al., 2010; Scagnoli, 2001).

It has been found that providing opportunities for non-instructional interaction eases the transition from a traditional to a virtual environment (Scagnoli, 2001). Practices that increase a students' sense of belonging have shown positive effects in various settings (Bryant, 2008; Kerr and Legters, 2001; Scagnoli, 2001). Increasing a student's sense of belonging also appears to foster a collaborative learning environment. Akos and Galassi (2004) found that high school student's top recommendation focused on personal adjustment. After their initial focus on student achievement, teachers suggested providing greater opportunities for parents and students to be involved. The teachers went even further and suggested increased parent involvement and informing students about extracurricular activities specifically during the students' first fall semester. Gibson (2006) found in the schools studied that building positive relationships was a facilitating factor to the programs development and longevity. According to the literature, relationship building appears to be important in creating an easier transition into the virtual setting. The research does not touch on the actual transitional program in the virtual setting.

Next, research suggests schools that offer online courses need to be mindful of students and their equipment they will be using to access the course (Hara & Kling, 2001; Howland &

Moore, 2002). Students that did not have access to technical support were more likely to be frustrated with their course (Hara & Kling, 2001). Howland and Moore (2002) encourages online curricular designers to keep in mind the end user. They summarize their findings by suggesting:

Creating "high-tech" learning environments does not necessarily improve the quality of learning, but it may increase technical problems and the ineffectiveness of the learning experience. (Howland & Moore, 2002, p. 193)

Finally, research suggests virtual programs might be able to increase success by creating technical supports for students. Hara and Kling, (2001) found virtual students distress most frequently centered around technological problems and communication issues. Transitional programs addressing technical competency and technical knowledge issues have shown to help students' transition to the virtual environment. Conversely, programs that lack concern for procedural issues create the opposite effect.

Summary

A review of the literature has explored research, reports, dissertations, studies surrounding students and their experience transitioning from a traditional school model to a full-time virtual school model. While the literature that specifically explores the transition from a traditional school model to a full-time virtual high school model is scarce, there is research surround the transition from middle to high in a traditional setting and research surrounding the needs of virtual students. The research surrounding the transition from a traditional middle school to traditional high school indicates a successful transition is crucial for success in high school and beyond (Bryant, 2008; Christie & Zinth, 2008; DeLuca et al., 2012; Richardson, 2011). Research surrounding the needs of virtual learners varies depending on the level of

student studied but the research is clear regardless of level, virtual students have some specific needs that are unique to their population (Bannister, 2009; Barbour, 2008; Barbour et al., 2012; Battalio, 2009; Gannon-Cook & Ley, 2014; Horzum & Kaymak, 2013). This study bridges the two topics and contributes to the known literature surrounding not only the needs of virtual students but also their specific needs as they transition from a traditional model of schooling to an emerging model.

Chapter III Methodology

Introduction

While much of the research on virtual courses and virtual schools surrounds the curriculum itself, little is known on the transition from more traditional forms of education to virtual education. This phenomenological study explored the experience of students transitioning from traditional forms of education to a full-time virtual education. Participants were asked to participate in interviews regarding their experience in transitioning from traditional to virtual educational models. The data gathered from the interviews was used to explore the experiences of first time virtual high school students and analyzed to better understand the experience of students as they transition from one model of education to another. More specifically this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What school-based practices if any, did students enrolling in a full-time virtual high school time in one virtual school in Southern California for the first time believe helped them transition to their new school?
2. What suggestions for additional school-based practices if any, did students enrolling in a full-time virtual high school time in one virtual school in Southern California for the first time believe could have helped them to transition to their new school?

This chapter describes the research design, the setting of the study, the sample and the sampling procedures of the population. This section is followed by a description of human subject considerations and measures to reduce the risks to the participants. Following the section of human subject consideration, the instrument used is defined, the process of data collection outlined, and finally, process and procedures used to manage and analyze the data collected are summarized.

Research Design

This qualitative study used a phenomenological approach to uncover the experiences of students in Southern California entering a chartered virtual high school for the first time and what school-based practices if any they believe helped them transition to their new school. The purpose for choosing a qualitative approach to this study was to obtain detailed perspectives from those that actively participated in the transition from traditional to virtual schooling.

Phenomenological research focuses on describing a shared experience of the participants (Creswell, 2007). Using qualitative measures; in-depth interviews, observations, work samples; the researcher can answer the two broad general questions of phenomenological research. "What have you experienced regarding the phenomenon? What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?" (Creswell, 2007, p. 61). Other open-ended questions may be asked to explore the phenomenon fully, but these seek to dig deeper into the two fundamental questions (Creswell, 2007). Because the researcher sought to understand the experience of high school students as they transition from traditional schooling to a virtual charter high school, a phenomenological approach to research design was chosen.

Data analysis was conducted simultaneously with the data collection, data interpretation and note taking. The researcher used the Framework approach to qualitative analysis. Jane Ritchie and Liz Spencer (1994) developed the Framework approach in the 1980s. The key characteristics of the 'Framework' approach are: case and theme-based approach, matrix display, data is reduced through summarization and synthesis, it retains links to the original data, and finally the process allows transparent and comprehensive analysis (NatCen Learning, 2012).

Setting

The setting for this phenomenological study included full-time high school students entering a chartered virtual school in Southern California for the first time. Although there is no published number of students enrolled in full-time virtual schools in California, using recently published funding documents it is estimated over 15,000 students are enrolled in full-time virtual schools (California Department of Education [CDE], 2016a). California Virtual Academies, California's largest network of virtual schools, serves 45 of 58 counties in the state (California Department of Education (California Department of Education [CDE], 2016a). Of the estimated 15,000 full-time virtual students in California, 51% have been designated free and reduced lunch, and 1.2% has been identified as English language learners (California Department of Education [CDE], 2016a).

The turnover rate in California's full-time virtual schools has not been published, but a 50% turnover rate has been published for other full-time virtual schools in Colorado (Hubbard & Mitchell, 2011). There is no evidence to validate or challenge that California's full-time virtual schools' turnover rate is any different than Colorado's. Because it has been found that students changing schools even once are more likely to drop out of high school than their peers and the more schools they attend, the more likely they are to dropout, first-time virtual school students are a strong group to explore this transition because they are transitioning for the first time (DeLuca et al., 2012). If a student has experienced the transition multiple times, it may be difficult to determine what specific school-based practices were implemented to help in their transition.

California Virtual Academies, a leader the full-time virtual school area, provided access to students with varied backgrounds and varied experiences. Studying the experiences of CAVA

students as they enter the full-time virtual setting for the first time allowed the researcher to better understand the experience of transitional students and provide recommendations for an easier transition.

The interview portion of the study took place virtually using Adobe Connect, a virtual synchronous instructional tool. The participant and/or their parent chose the time of the interview. Due to the virtual nature of Adobe Connect, no consideration was needed for the location of the interviewee or their parent/guardian. The researcher attempted to honor time requests by the participants and/or their parent to create a comfortable environment to discuss their experiences.

Positionality of the Researcher

The researcher was employed by two educational management organizations that currently manage virtual schools across the country. While the researcher was never enrolled in a full-time virtual school, he has completed courses in the virtual environment and has experienced the transition from a traditional model of education to a virtual one.

Due to the transiency of virtual school students and the recent appearance of full-time virtual schooling as a viable alternative to traditional school, the researcher may have worked at a school where participants were enrolled.

Population, Sample, and Sampling Procedures

For this study, the researcher used purposive and criterion sampling to limit the scope of the participants. Irby and Lunenburg (2008) write that purposive sampling keeps with qualitative research's emphasis on in-depth exploration of participants' experiences. The criteria used was; first-time enrollees in a full-time virtual school in Southern California during the 2016-2017 school year. Students that meet the criteria were eligible to engage in the instrument the

researcher proposes to use for purposive sampling. The researcher was employed by a full-time virtual school provider and has general knowledge of the group to be studied.

The estimated pool of participants the study drew upon was 300 individuals. The participants were selected from a list of potential participants that were obtained with help from California Virtual Academy's administration. CAVA administration sent an invitational email to all CAVA high school students. In the invitation email, potential participants were asked to complete a Google survey to determine eligibility. To encourage survey participation, participants received a \$25 gift card their choice of either Target or Amazon. Participants may have felt obliged to participate in the survey to receive a gift card. If a participant is eligible but did not complete the interview they were excluded from receiving a gift card.

Of the 134 students that responded to the invitational email, only 88 potential participants were identified as eligible. The only requirement to be deemed as eligible for participation in the study was the participant had to have enrolled in a full-time virtual school for the first time during the 2016-2017 school year. Students or guardians/parents self-stated their eligibility in the Google survey but it was confirmed during interviews. No other demographic data was collected other than contact and eligibility information. Of the 88 participants that self-selected themselves for participation, there was one duplicate thus the pool of interviewees was 87. Invitations to be interviewed were sent to 73 potential participants. Of those 73, 21 replied to the invitation wishing to participate in the interview. One was immediately determined to be ineligible because the researcher sent out an invitation in error. The student had been in a full-time virtual school before. Of the 20 deemed eligible for the interview, twelve responded to a request asking for availability times. Twelve interviews were scheduled, nine were conducted, and one was determined ineligible. During the interview, one student was deemed ineligible

because she had been in CAVA multiple years' contrary to their response in the Google survey. In total, of the 88 that responded to the initial invitation, eight interviews were conducted. The time from initial invitation to completion of interviews was twenty-three days. The eight students that participated in the interviews were incredibly diverse in their experiences. All participants were under the age of 18 and freely shared their experience and offered many recommendations to the researcher to help future students in their transition to a full-time virtual high school.

Human Subjects Considerations

To conduct the study the researcher has completed the Social and Behavioral secured permission from Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board. These ensured the researcher was trained to conduct human subject studies and had approval from the sponsoring academic institution.

All students and their parents/guardians eligible for participation in the study were sent an introductory email asking for volunteers to participate in the study (Appendix A). Those wishing to participate in the survey completed a short survey asking for contact information, confirming their eligibility for the study, indicate their willing consent or assent to participate in the survey and their parent's guardians permission to participate (Appendix B). The completed contact survey served as an informed consent or an assent document depending on their age. The informed consent or assent portion of the contact survey described the study and the necessary protections for participants in a human subject study. This portion of the study took two weeks.

Once a student indicated their wish to participate in the interview the researcher called or emailed the student and parent/guardian in an attempt arrange a mutually agreed upon time for

the first interview. If more students indicated they are willing to participate in the survey than are needed, the researcher would have randomly select students to interview. The researcher would have assigned a number to each eligible participant and would use random.org to randomly select the needed number of participants. After a mutually agreed-upon time has been established, the researcher would have sent a second email confirming the time along with instructions needed for the interview (Appendix H). If needed this portion of the study would have taken approximately one week.

At the interview, the researcher reminded participants of their informed consent or assent to participate in the study, asked if there are any further questions regarding the study and finally asked permission to record the interview prior beginning the interview process. Participants and/or their parent/guardian were informed that they could ask the researcher to turn off the recording at any time. Notes were taken during the interview. To remove any potential risk to the subjects' social, academic, or future professional status, only the researcher knows the identity of the participants.

All recordings are stored on the researcher's personal laptop computer. Notes made during the interviews are stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home office. The laptop computer is kept in a secure location in the researcher's home office and saved in a password-protected file on the researcher's password protected home computer to which only the researcher has access. While the interviews were being completed, the responses were coded using ATLAS.ti. The researcher maintains digital copies of the coded data files, as well as digital scans of research notes in a password-protected file on the researcher's password protected home computer to which only the researcher has access. All physical research notes are stored in locked file cabinet in the researcher's home office. All files will be stored securely

for three years and will then be destroyed or deleted unless the researcher is granted permission by Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board for further exploration of the data within the 3-year period.

While the risk to the participants is minimal, they may experience a loss of time or increased boredom when participating in the study. The fear of possible sensitive needs of the participants may cause participants to answer questions in an untruthful manner. To alleviate such risks, participants were provided with informed consent during the first portion of the study.

To meet Pepperdine University's compliance requirements with federal guidelines for the protection of human subjects and following the acceptance of this proposal, the researcher applied for exempted review through the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). This request was based on minimal potential risk to human subjects, and the research was is conducted in a commonly accepted educational setting. Approval was granted by Pepperdine University's IRB.

Instrumentation

This study employed a semi-structured, open-ended one-on-one interview protocol to uncover the experiences, thoughts, impressions, and recommendations of the participants in the study. The interview protocol consisted of 12 semi-structured interview questions. Interviews provided a greater understanding of the experiences of the participants and their transition from a traditional school model to a virtual model. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed the participants to reflect upon their experience and allows them to respond in their words.

The interview questions correspond to the themes found in the literature: procedural issues, structural issues, academic issues, and social issues. Table 2 presents the relationship between the interview questions and the literature.

Table 3.

Relationship Between Interview Questions and the Literature

Theme	Interview Question	Research Question	Cited Research
Procedural Issues	In what ways, if at all, did the school teach you practical ways to be a successful virtual student?	1	Akos and Galassi (2004), Bannister (2009), Barbour (2008), Barbour et al. (2009), Barbour et al. (2012), Carr (2000), Chen et al. (2010), Howland and Moore (2002),
	What recommendations, if any, would you make to your school to help you be a more successful virtual student?	2	Akos and Galassi (2004), Bannister (2009), Barbour (2008), Barbour et al. (2009), Barbour et al. (2012), Carr (2000), Chen et al. (2010), Howland and Moore (2002),
	Did you participate in any form of orientation before starting your course work? If you did can you describe to me what you did or provide any recommendations?	1	Christie and Zinth (2008), DeLuca et al. (2012), Kerr and Legters (2001), Herlihy et al. (2005), Roybal et al. (2014), Scagnoli (2001)
	What procedures or practices that, if any, that you learned in your school helped you in your transition to your old school and the new one?	1	Christie and Zinth (2008), DeLuca et al. (2012), Kerr and Legters (2001), Herlihy et al. (2005), Davis and Roblyer (2008),
Structural Issues	In what ways, if at all, did the school structure your learning or your courses that helped you be successful?	1	Howland and Moore (2002), Roybal et al. (2014)
	What suggestions, if any, would you have for your school that could have helped you be more organized?	2	Davis and Roblyer (2008), Howland and Moore (2002), Roybal et al. (2014), Scagnoli (2001)
	In what ways, if at all, did the school help you become more confident in your academic success?	1	Black et al. (2008), Chen et al. (2010), Davis and Roblyer (2008), Richardson (2011), Roybal et al. (2014)
Academic Issues	Did you find yourself struggling academically? If so, in what ways, if at all, did the school help you?	1	Black et al. (2008), Chen et al. (2010), Davis and Roblyer (2008), Richardson (2011), Roybal et al. (2014)
	What suggestions would you have, if any, for you schools to help students that might be struggling academically?	2	Black et al. (2008), Chen et al. (2010), Davis and Roblyer (2008), Richardson (2011), Roybal et al. (2014)

(continued)

Theme	Interview Question	Research Question	Cited Research
	In what ways, if at all did the school help you feel like you belonged in the school? Did they help you connect with other students? Did they help your parents or guardians connect to other parent or guardians?	1	Akos and Galassi (2004), Herlihy et al. (2005), Roybal et al. (2014)
Social Issues	What suggestions, if any, would you have for increasing you or your parents/guardians feeling connected to the school?	2	Akos and Galassi (2004), Herlihy et al. (2005), Roybal et al. (2014)
	What teacher or individual do you think has helped you the most in your transition to your new school? Can you tell me how they helped you?	1	Davis and Roblyer (2008), Gannon-Cook and Ley (2014), Roybal et al. (2014)

To ensure content validity and alignment with the relevant research question, the interview questions were reviewed by a graduate faculty member from Pepperdine University, an employee of K12 Inc., and a faculty member of CAVA (Appendix H). Expertise was determined by first-hand knowledge of the issues surrounding students transitioning into the virtual environment for the first time. By reviewing the interview questions, these experts verified the interview questions sought to explore the guiding research question and would have elicited meaningful responses from the participants.

Upon the validation of the interview instrument, the researcher sought one high school student over the age of 18 to pilot the questions. The final twelve interview questions were piloted with one student, Mako Aoki. Mako is currently a senior in a traditional public school in Los Angeles. She transitioned to her current school during her ninth-grade year.

The purpose of the pilot interview was to ensure questions asked during the interview could elicit an open-ended meaningful response from high school aged students. Mako indicated

the questions were adequate as they were currently written and even stated: "I wish they would have asked me these questions when I changed schools."

Data Collection and Data Management Procedures

This qualitative study employed qualitative collection and recording. During the sampling process, the researcher informed the participants of the purpose of the study. The researcher also informed participants of the intent of the interviews and the anticipated time of 45 minutes it would take to complete. The semi-structured interviews commenced with eight students that enroll in a full-time virtual high school for the first time during the 2016-2017 school year. Interviews were conducted to capture the participant's experiences in their words as directly related to the purpose, problem and the research questions of the study. Interviewees indicated their willingness to participate in the interview by responding to the invitation sent to all eligible participants and their parent/guardian(s).

Participants who volunteered to be interviewed were contacted by phone or email to schedule a mutually agreed upon interview time. Because the interviews were conducted using Adobe Connect the location of both the participant and the researcher is not a concern. The researcher attempted to schedule all initial interviews within a three-week time span. Once a time had been mutually agreed upon, copies of the semi-structured interview questions and instructions on how to log into Adobe Connect were attached to the email along with the agreed upon time for participants to review and prepare if needed (Appendix H).

Interviews were scheduled for 60 minutes at an agreed upon time. They were conducted one-on-one when possible. Parent/guardians could observe or log on to observe our conversations if requested. Every effort was made to conduct the interview free of distractions. Conducting the interview virtually in a location of their choosing may encourage them to share

their experiences honestly. The established interview protocol (Appendix I) was followed to create consistency between different participants. Interviews were conducted in the spring semester of the 2016-2017 school year. All participants were asked the same questions. Informed consent was provided in the invitation to participate in the interviews. The participant and their parent/guardian indicated their willingness to participate by scheduling the interview, but it was reiterated during the interview protocol. Participants were informed that their participation in the interview portion of the study was limited to the amount of time to complete the twelve-item interview. Once participants verbally indicate their willingness to continue the interview commenced.

The researcher asked permission to record the interview using tools built within Adobe Connect before starting the interview. Participants were informed that they or their parent/guardian could ask to turn off the recording at any time. They were told the recordings are stored securely in the Adobe Connect system until the research has been completed and at that time the recordings were downloaded, encrypted and stored on the researcher's home computer and are password protected. The recordings were coded for analysis using ATLAS.ti, a computer application that facilitates the coding of media files. The researcher also took notes during the interview in case the recording failed. These notes are stored in the researcher's home office and are locked in a secure location.

As the interviews were being completed and coded, responses were analyzed for common themes within the context of the research questions. An additional person who has received a doctorate in education reviewed the interview data and themes to minimize the bias of the researcher. A final thank you email (Appendix J) was sent to each of the participants and their parent/guardian containing the interview media file.

Data Reporting and Analysis

The data analysis for this study was conducted simultaneously with the data collection, data interpretation and note taking. According to Ritchie and Spencer (1994), 'Framework' is "an analytical process which involves several distinct though highly interconnected stages" (p. 310). The five stages are familiarization, identifying a thematic framework, indexing, charting, and finally mapping and interpretation.

During the familiarization phase, the researcher immersed himself in the data. The researcher studied, listened to the material collected to that point in the study. As key ideas or recurrent sub-themes emerged, the researcher used Atlas.ti to code directly to the media files. Atlas.ti allowed the researcher to create a list of the coded key sub-themes as they became apparent regardless of organization.

The next step in the Framework method was identifying a thematic framework. During this stage, the researcher used priori from the literature review and sub-themes created in the prior stage to create a framework or index. The first version is "often largely descriptive and heavily rooted in priori issues" (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994, p. 315). During the literature review, the researcher identified four major themes influencing the transition to a full-time virtual school for the first time. The researcher used these four priori themes to help refine the sub-themes. This first index was applied to a few transcripts allowing for greater refinement and responsive to emerging themes.

Once the theoretical framework or index was refined the next step in the method is called 'Indexing.' During this process, the index is systematically applied to all transcripts. Indexing references are recorded on the media files.

After all the transcripts had gone through the 'indexing' stage, the researcher created a chart to organize the results of the 'indexing.' During the charting phase, the researcher must decide if to display the information gained during the indexing stage in a thematic or a case approach. In the thematic approach, the researcher creates a chart for each theme and data from several respondents is on each chart. In the case approach, a chart is made up for each respondent, and several themes are on each chart. The researcher chose to use the thematic approach for displaying the data. The indexing charts had headings and sub-headings that were drawn from the priori themes and the thematic framework

Between the indexing stage and the mapping/interpretation stage, a peer who has received a doctorate in education reviewed the interview data and themes to minimize the bias of the researcher. No indications of bias were received from the reviewer.

The researcher identified 35 sub-themes divided amongst the four major themes. All participants mentioned all major themes during their interview.

The final step of data analysis is the mapping and interpretation stage. During this stage, the researcher reviewed the charts, any research notes; searched for patterns; compared experiences, and sought to find answers or explanations within the data itself. During this stage, the researcher also "address the questions that triggered the research in the first place, or to account for issues and patterns of behavior which arise from the research itself" (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994, p. 325-326). This pattern or relationships may be displayed in a typology if the researcher feels a multi-dimensional format is needed.

All data collected through Google Survey or Adobe Connect was compiled through the system's administrative process, downloaded by the researcher, and saved in a password-protected file on the researcher's home computer. Alternatively, data collected during the

interviews was stored on the system and only accessible by the researcher through password protection. Upon completion of the study, all data was downloaded to the researcher's computer and stored on their personal computer. All data stored on the researcher's computer is password protected at the file and operating system level. Any physical copies of survey responses are stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home office. Files will be saved for a total of 3 years and then will be deleted by the researcher. All physical documents were converted to electronic copies upon completion of the study and shredded at that same time.

Interviews conducted by the researcher were recorded electronically and securely stored on the Adobe Connect system and protected with a password. Both the filing cabinet and the home computer are in the researcher's home office. Physical notes and interview responses are stored in a locked filing cabinet, also in the researcher home office. All Files and physical documents will be stored for three years and at the end of that time will be deleted or shredded.

Summary

This chapter presents the methodology that was used to address the purpose and research questions of the study. This qualitative study used a phenomenological research approach to determine what school practices if any help a student transitioning to a virtual school for the first time during the 2016-2017 school year.

This study employed a phenomenological research design. Students enrolled in a full-time virtual high school during the 2016-2017 school year were asked to participate in the study to provide a better understanding of what supports if any their school provided they believe helped them transition to virtual schooling for the first time. Participants had the opportunity to participate in a twelve question semi-structured interview.

It is hoped that all virtual schools will benefit from the research findings because it may shed light upon a critical time-period in a virtual student's academic career. Understanding how students transition from traditional to virtual settings may help students succeed in a young but emerging form of education.

Chapter IV Data Analysis and Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the research. The chapter begins with a synopsis of the personal experience of eight students personal experience as they transitioned from a traditional high school to a full-time virtual high school. The chapter concludes with the findings for each of the research questions. The findings are organized using the priori or major themes identified in the literature review: academic, procedural, structural and social. Contained within each of these major themes are sub-themes that were identified during the indexing phase of data analysis. Findings are further disaggregated by participant and their responses within each sub-theme.

Profile of Participants

The profiles of the eight participants are candid sketches of the conversations the researcher had with each student. Each participant was asked the same 12 questions; however, the questions were purposely open ended in an effort to obtain their authentic lived history of their unique and varied experience. Because the researcher collected minimal demographic data, the profiles of the participants were gathered from the interviews.

Participant A: (Pseudonym: Ashley). Ashley was in her second semester at CAVA. She was bullied in her prior school and she did not have much of a transitional time between schools. She felt she could not spend an extra year at her prior school.

Ashley struggled when she first entered CAVA. She struggled with classes changing frequently. She found it hard to know what classes she had on a weekly basis. She also took a rather unorthodox way of approaching her first semester struggles. Courses she did not need for graduation that she was struggling, she “decided not to take them”. The result was that she passed all her classes at the semester.

Ashley participated in an orientation at the beginning of the school year so she would “know what to do on the first day”. Here orientation also taught her how to start the work and how to “get into the class connects to get the content”.

Ashley has engaged in many of the social aspects of the school. She found the school to be very welcoming, both students and teachers. She went on an outing where she met students from the school. She did find the outing “different” from her previous school. Finally, Ashley joined three clubs.

She found that the teachers were “really helpful” when she asked for help. She would attend classes where the teacher would re-explain material and she would take notes. Ashley also felt the other adults in the school were encouraging and supportive. She raved about her guidance counselor. “She’s like the best guidance counselor I’ve ever had”. Ashley’s counselor helped here with her class schedule and gave her information on college and what was required to graduate.

Participant B: (Pseudonym: Billie). Billie was in her second semester at CAVA. She felt she was a “pretty independent” student and felt she was prepared for her new school. She felt she adjusted to the transition well and felt it was “easy to catch on”.

During the first part of her time in CAVA, Billie participated in an orientation. This orientation was over the phone with her homeroom teachers and covered topics such as: “run through on computer and what day was going to be like.” She also said her content teachers had some form of orientation specific to the class. Billie stated that her English class spent the first two weeks of the class focusing on time management which Billie admitted to struggling with. She felt those two weeks helped her with the transition.

Billie felt that the person that most helped her in her transition to the new school was her homeroom teacher. She felt was “inviting” and provided some positive feedback to her. She had the opportunity to meet her homeroom teacher and once again classified the teacher as inviting. This positive relationship was not limited to just her homeroom teacher, she felt that her other teachers were “encouraging” and provided good feedback on how to “better my learning”.

Billie was made to feel welcome in her new school Billie also talked about her interactions with other students during class sessions. She found her classmates to be helpful. She interacted with students that were not in her in her grade level. Billie also mentioned a program that connected underclassmen to older students.

Participant C: (Pseudonym: Charlie). Charlie was in his second semester at CAVA. He felt like he was easily distracted while doing work. He enjoyed the freedom of structuring his classes the way he wanted. He felt that CAVA was easier than public schools because he could structure his day the way he wanted.

Charlie participated in an orientation that taught him “what he was going to do” and planning on what he was going to throughout the day.

Academically, Charlie liked the ability to take his time on the lessons and liked the ability to read the lesson and take a test on what he learned. He felt he had “pretty good grades” while being at CAVA. He academically struggled sometimes during his first semester but appreciated the ability to turn late assignments in or watch a recording of class connects.

Socially, Charlie interacted with students in class connects and the discussion boards. He felt that “people made friends on the chat” and discussion boards were used to find out what others thought. Charlie did not connect with one specific adult during his time at CAVA but he felt “all of them” helped him because they taught him the system.

Participant D: (Pseudonym: Doug). Doug was in his second semester with CAVA. He describes his transition as a “difficult one” but he described the transition as one he “eventually got used to”. An interesting note about Doug, while he felt his transition was a tough he didn’t feel like he was struggling academically. He stated his grades were a “A’s and B’s”.

Doug describes three different orientations. One orientation was done with his homeroom teacher which focused on procedural issues were the focus. Doug was told how to submit work, what to do in classes etc. A second orientation was done in each academic class. Doug describes these as like the homeroom orientation and the only difference was when there was something specific to the course. Finally, Doug was aware his parents went through an orientation but was not aware of any details.

Doug describes himself as not being “connected with other students” in his school. He attributed this to a couple factors. The first factor was although there were outings they were at times that were not convenient for him plus as the year went out the frequency of the outings was lessening. Like most other participants, Doug described the discussion posts and the open chat box in live sessions but these two items did not appear to help him feel connected to other students.

Additionally, Doug felt as if he had a connection with three of his teachers. His math teacher personalized his education more by allowing Doug to ask specific questions directly to her. He stated his history teacher “socialized more” in the chat box during class connects thus it allowed him to “connect more with her and the students”. Finally, like many other participants, Doug felt connected to his homeroom teacher because they were one of the first people they engaged with first in the transition.

Doug was the one of the first students to describe a two-layer system of structuring classes. He describes the initial course organization that he participated one as more prescriptive. He called this track as the “guided path”. He was required to attend class connects during this phase in his time at CAVA. After an unknown period, Doug was moved to the “independent” path that allowed him more freedom. During the independent path, he could attend or not attend live session and was granted more independence with his school work. Doug found this path to be more difficult and “a bit hard to understand the topic when there are less sessions.” He believed he was more successful under the guided path.

Doug did not feel as if he was struggling in his classes but he was aware of some academic support sessions for struggling students. He attended one such academic support session by mistake. He described it as a session in which a teacher would go through organizational skills, time management skills and specific academic skills with students. Sometimes the lessons were individual and sometimes small group.

Participant E: (Pseudonym: Ernie). Ernie was a very new student to CAVA. He had started a short time before the interview. Ernie had a tough time entering CAVA. He mentioned his equipment had issues serious enough that his coursework was delayed three weeks. He also did not participate in the first orientation that other participants mentioned in interviews. According to Ernie, his mother took the orientation. This atypical entrance into CAVA would manifest itself into Ernie struggling in the beginning.

Ernie struggled academically when he entered the school. It is unclear as to if he struggled because of the technical issues he had starting the school or if it was because he did not participate in an orientation prior to start. His teacher intervened, held a meeting with all his teachers, and held a “re-orientation”. It was at this meeting that Ernie was told how to connect

and how to do his work. “They introduced how to go about the class connect sessions everyday and the recordings if I needed those”. This meeting allowed him to catch up on his work.

Once he got past this initial struggle, Ernie mentions frequently the help he has received. His homeroom teacher helped in class connects, K12 Inc. technical support helped him get his equipment running. An adult of an advisory nature meets with him frequently to help keep him on pace. Ernie expressed throughout his interview the various forms of support he has used.

Ernie did not participate in many of the social aspects of the school utilized by other participants. He admittedly has been invited to outings and visits with his classmate but as of the interview had not participated in any.

Ernie was the only participant that was aware of outreach by the school to the parents. He knew of emails and messages like the ones he had received about visits and outings. It was unclear from the interview if Ernie’s parent had participated in any of the outings. Like most other participants, he was unaware of any school-based procedures that helped parents and/or guardians in their belonging to the school.

Like other participants, he had a positive relationship with his homeroom teacher. Ernie felt that his homeroom teacher had “really helped” with the support aspect of the school. He goes on further to mention a couple examples of support that he had used already.

Participant F: (Pseudonym: Frankie). Frankie was what she described as a “late start student”. She had only been enrolled in CAVA a couple weeks prior to the interview. This caused additional strain on her transition because she did not know which lessons to start on. She goes further to state “at the beginning it was a lot to take on.” She eventually “got it all figured out”.

Frankie's orientation was a one-day class connect that has been described by other participants where they tell you "what you are going to do and how to start off". This one day orientation was followed by orientations by her content teachers. She felt it was "pretty good the way they did it".

Additionally, Frankie was on the independent path where she was not required to attend class connects. She appreciated this independence because it gave her more free time.

Frankie appreciated that she could take the same courses she had in her previous school. The two differences between her old and new schools were two-fold. Her new school is not in a block schedule forcing her to complete work in all classes every day and two, she was unable to take Mandarin because it is not offered at CAVA.

She connected the most with her homeroom teacher who helped her when she first got started. He helped troubleshoot some technical difficulties and guided her on where to start on the academic side. She found him very helpful in her first couple weeks of school. Frankie felt that teachers were there to help her and appreciated that she could ask a question and get a "live answer" in her class connect sessions. She also found it helpful when her classmates would ask questions that maybe it did not occur to her to ask. Frankie was aware of academic supports and that she had to contact her counselor if she needed help but as of the interview, she did not feel that she was struggling academically.

Like most other participants, Frankie was selective in her social interaction. She had joined the photography club. She commented there were emails and class connects specifically for the club. Additionally, she describes clubs as "a good way to meet good people".

In the end, Frankie felt CAVA was a "pretty good program". She appeared to have a good understanding of what was required of her to be successful virtual student.

Participant G: (Pseudonym: Ginny). Ginny was in her second semester at CAVA. She felt she was “super prepared for anything they hand out to you”. She stated that she was doing extremely well and liked the program she was in. She also felt she understood what she was getting into. She had who friends were in K12 inc. schools that referred her to the program.

She loves the structure of her new school because it allows her more free time to work on her hobbies. The extra free time inspired her to join CAVA. Ginny participated in an orientation over the phone. At her old school, she felt she lost work which has stopped at the new school. Ginny felt as if she was the same student in her prior school but her grades did not reflect upon her effort. She was working harder in a prior school and getting the same grades she has now. She feels she is doing good in her new school and

She felt the adults at her prior school did not care as much. She describes her new school as “super relax and chill”.

Participant H: (Pseudonym: Harry). Harry was in his second semester at CAVA. He categorized himself as a “slow learner” and had a “bad memory”.

Harry mentioned numerous times that the school had taught him how to be a student. One example he gave the researcher surrounded the organization of his desk and physical aspect of being a good student.

Harry participated in an orientation and when prompted to describe the orientation mentioned many of the procedural aspects of how to be a CAVA students. He mentioned his teacher “explained how the program goes” and “what we were supposed to do” and mentioned specifically that he had to “log on at 8:30 for a 9:00 class”.

Harry admittedly struggled when he first started. He did not “attend classes” or complete work. He reached out to one of his teachers that helped him navigate his new school. Although

he mentioned his orientation taught him the skills to attend his classes and complete his work he needed extra help. On the positive note, when asked what he would recommend if students struggled, he appeared to have a solid plan on how to solve problems.

Harry did not participate in many of the social aspects of the school utilized by other participants. The extent of his social interaction with other students was using the chat box in his only courses to “crack a joke”.

In regard to belonging to the school, Harry did mention he felt that he did. He mentioned his teachers were nice and helpful. Like most other participants, he was unaware of any school based procedures that helped parents and/or guardians in their belonging to the school. Like all other participants, he had a positive relationship with an adult in the school. In Harry’s case, a teacher taught him desktop publishing tools. He went at great length to describe his most recent lesson.

Review of Research Questions and Findings

This section contains the key thematic categories that emerged from the discussion with eight students that transitioned from a traditional high school to a full-time virtual high school. Twelve sequential questions were asked of them and they shared their unique thoughts of their transition and any recommendations they might have had for their school in the future.

Research Question 1: What school based practices, if any, do students enrolling in a full-time virtual high school time in one virtual school in Southern California for the first time believe helped them to transition to their new school? The participants of the study were a very eclectic group. Time enrolled in the school varied from seven months to three weeks. Some participants categorized their transition as an easy one while others stated it was a “hard transition”. While this diverse participant group had some differences between them, some

commonalities were found. The researcher identified 35 sub-themes divided amongst the four major themes. All participants mentioned all major themes during their interview. The frequency of each major theme from a low of one structural theme mention by Billie to a high of twelve social theme mentions by Ashley.

Table 4

Frequency of Mention by Participant by Major Theme

	Charlie	Frankie	Doug	Harry	Ernie	Billie	Ginny	Ashley
Academic	3	4	5	4	4	3	8	5
Procedural	4	6	4	2	5	4	5	3
Social	2	7	8	5	4	6	5	12
Structural	4	5	5	4	2	1	5	3

Research Question 1: Academics. When talking about academics the group seemed to focus mostly on academic supports that were available. Four of the eight students interviewed struggled academically in one way or another. Each of the struggling students received some form of support academically. These supports ranged from one on one tutoring by individual teachers to a meeting of all teachers of a participant that was called a “re-orientation” by the participant. One student did not feel he was struggling but felt the transition was a tough one. “It is a bit of a hard transition but you eventually get used to it”. All students interviewed knew of academic supports that were available but there was some difference between the participants when it came to describing these supports. Ernie and Charlie described in detail the academic support that was provided by teachers. These supports described by Ernie and Charlie included breakout sessions in their academic classes or recordings that teachers sent out. Doug and Ginny described a separate class connect for struggling students. Doug describes this academic support

as a place to “help them be more organized and create a better schedule”. Creating a strict schedule follows in the vein of McVay (2000) whom encourages distance learning learners to set up and maintain a strict schedule of learning activities. Although Billie indicated she did not struggle academically in her new school, she did appear to know what services were available for struggling students. Like Doug and Ginny, she described a group of classes other than ones that she was taking that were “like tutoring”.

Additionally, two students described a new perspective on academic success. Ginny felt “pumped” to look at her grades. Harry said he “looked forward to getting online and doing my (his) work”.

Finally, when students discussed academics, there was no mention of curriculum and very little of instruction. One student mentioned that her teachers were engaging and while all students described class connects, only two participants described them in an academic manner. They were most often only casually mentioned when discussing orientations.

Table 5 presents all themes identified when interviewing participants that fell within the academic theme identified by the review of the literature. Column headings are the pseudonyms of participants. Row headings name sub-themes identified during the interviews. Each sub-theme below is associated with the academic major theme that was identified in the literature review.

Table 5

Sub-Themes in Academic Major Theme

	Charlie	Frankie	Doug	Harry	Ernie	Billie	Ginny	Ashley
Academic Struggles	X		X	X				X
Academic Support	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

(continued)

	Charlie	Frankie	Doug	Harry	Ernie	Billie	Ginny	Ashley
Content Delivery: Class Connects			X				X	X
Greater Focus on academics							X	
Individual Academic Traits				X	X			
More free time		X					X	
Positive View of Academics				X			X	
Teachers engaging							X	

Research Question 1: Procedures. One of the ways students often learn how to learn in a virtual school is through an orientation. All participants had an orientation. Four participants had orientations with their homeroom room teacher and with content teachers. Seven of the participants had an orientation through class connect and one, Ginny, had an orientation over the phone. All participants describe the orientation as concentrating on procedural items. The orientation as described by the participants appears to focus on how to submit work, how to check the calendar, and other procedural items. This description was similar for both homeroom and content teacher orientation. One participant, Harry, describes the orientation as encouraging him to demonstrate good academic traits such as “getting up in the morning and setting up everything”.

The second most describe procedural practice was teaching participants how to manage their time. Six of the eight students describe being taught time management skills. Participants did not describe what exactly was taught about time management but that they were just

encouraged to manage their time wisely. Some of them created or used “a planner or a schedule for the week”.

Beyond what appears to be a standard orientation and encouragement of time management, other procedural practices taught by the school appear to be on a student-by-student basis. Two students were taught how to solve technical procedures. As discussed by Barbour (2008) and Hara and Kling (2001) technological issues could be major barrier to success in their online learning. Two students were taught how to take notes. Two students were taught to create folders for better organization.

Table 6 presents all themes identified when interviewing participants that fell within the procedural theme identified by the review of the literature. Column headings are the pseudonyms of participants. Row headings name sub-themes identified during the interviews. Each sub-theme below is associated with the procedural major theme that was identified in the literature review.

Table 6

Sub-Themes in Procedural Major Theme

	Charlie	Frankie	Doug	Harry	Ernie	Billie	Ginny	Ashley
Felt Prepared							X	
Focus on System Procedures	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
No help on transition	X							
Note taking Instruction					X			X
Orientation for Academic Class		X	X			X		X

(continued)

	Charlie	Frankie	Doug	Harry	Ernie	Billie	Ginny	Ashley
Orientation for Parents			X					
Orientation for Students In Class Connect	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Orientation over Phone							X	
Taught How to Organize with Folders	X						X	
Taught Technical Procedures		X			X			
Taught Time Management	X	X	X		X	X	X	

Research Question 1: Structure. School based practices that fell within the structural theme identified in the literature review was sporadic amongst the participants. Ginny and Frankie mentioned structural items the most, five times, during their interview. Ginny stated that she loved the structure of the school because it allowed her more time for her hobbies. Ernie and Billie mentioned structural items once during the interview.

One structural item mentioned amongst seven of the eight participants was organization. Some participants, such as Charlie and Ginny, were specific about how they were taught to organize. Charlie and Ginny were taught how to make folders to keep everything organized. Ginny stated that she felt “more organized because I (she) don’t (did not) lose my (her) papers because it’s all in folders”. Other participants such as Doug simply mentioned the school encouraged them to be more organized “to work faster”.

One common item amongst six of the participants was how the school structured their ability to attend class connects. Two participants, Frankie and Doug, mentioned a “Guided Path” which required students to attend class connects. Other than Doug and Frankie, the other four participants mentioned an “independent path.” In this path, participants could attend class

connects according to their need. When interviewed, Doug was on the independent path but believed the guided path worked better for him. Doug communicated it was “much easier for him to understand a topic”. Doug went as far as recommending more required class connects. It appears there are multiple ways a student can receive instruction in CAVA. During the interview, Harry suggested he was on the independent path because he felt he was successful because he could “work at his own pace and could go on to the next without waiting for others”.

Contrary to Harry, Ashley struggled with classes changing frequently. She found it hard to know what classes she had on a weekly basis. One of the recommendations she had to limit the changing of classes so “if the schedule didn’t change every day, it would be easier to know what classes you would have every day. So, you could keep like a concrete plan”.

Although mentioning of structural items varied wildly amongst participants, two major themes were woven through the interviews. The first theme surround the school-based practice of teaching students to be organized and the school provided some direct instruction surround organization. The second theme surrounds the ability of students have varying levels of responsibility when attending class connects. Both themes were revealed in seven of the eight participants.

Table 7 presents all sub-themes identified when interviewing participants that fell within the structural theme identified by the review of the literature. Column headings are the pseudonyms of participants. Row headings name sub-themes identified during the interviews. Each sub-theme below is associated with the structural major theme that was identified in the literature review.

Table 7

Sub-Themes in Structural Major Theme

	Charlie	Frankie	Doug	Harry	Ernie	Billie	Ginny	Ashley
Class Schedule help Organize	X	X	X				X	X
General Organization	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Given Materials							X	
Guided Path		X	X					
Independent Path		X	X					
Self-Paced	X	X		X	X			X
Taught How to Organize with Folders	X						X	
Taught Workspace Organization							X	

Research Question 1: Social. Of the four major themes identified in the literature review social aspects was described the most amongst the participants. Social aspects were described with 50% more frequency than the second most theme, academic. This increased frequency did not result in greater variability within the theme itself. Eight sub-themes were identified in the social theme.

Davis et al. (2014) found that it is “imperative that students feel the sense of connectedness to their school” (p. 478). When students were asked if they felt connected to the school, seven out of the eight described multiple ways they felt connected to the school. All students mentioned adults in the school that helped them in some fashion during their time in the school. Six of the eight participants mention positive relationships with an adult in the school. Six of the participants mention their homeroom teacher as the teacher or individual that helped them the most. Other responses were content teachers. Seven participants described ways they

socially interacted with others in the school. The two primary ways students described their social interaction was: in discussion boards and during class connect in the chat box. Harry, felt he was connected to his classes because during class connects “some of the teachers let us draw on the screen and stuff and draw funny faces”. Ginny liked the discussion boards and she felt that she “definitely connected” with other students because other students would respond to her post if they had similar interests and she would do the same. A secondary way three participants interacted was in clubs. CAVA appears to have clubs for students that have like interests. One such club mentioned was the photography club. Frankie felt clubs were a good place “to meet new people”.

The two least frequent sub-themes seemed to be outliers. Billie mentioned a “Link program” in which she could connect to underclassmen. She did not go further about the program and it is unclear if the CAVA link program is like Link crew mentioned in the literature review. This outlier was kept in the sub-themes because it might indicate the school trying to address the transitional needs of first time full-time virtual learners. The second sub-theme that was mentioned by one student was they did not feel “connected to other students unless in live chat”. No other participant qualified his or her connection to the school.

Finally, three candidates described their parents as not having a connection to the school. “I’m not sure about the parents connecting, I don’t know if they have that”. One candidate mentioned their parent went through an orientation specifically for parents and this participant was one of the three describing their parent as no connection. “My parents only went to one, there was an orientation for parents”. This is the same participant that described himself as not connected to the school unless it was in live sessions.

During the interviews, it became clear that adults in the school were important to the participants interviewed. To be more specific, homeroom teachers appeared to be very important to many of the participants. Frankie described her homeroom teacher as “a person that answered all my random questions”.

They were most often mentioned as the most helpful in the participants transition. How they helped varied from simple technical assistance to teaching the students what to do arranging a meeting with all a participant’s teachers.

Table 8 presents all sub-themes identified when interviewing participants that fell within the social theme identified by the review of the literature. Column headings are the pseudonyms of participants. Row headings name sub-themes identified during the interviews. Each sub-theme below is associated with the social major theme that was identified in the literature review.

Table 8

Sub-Themes In Social Major Theme

	Charlie	Frankie	Doug	Harry	Ernie	Billie	Ginny	Ashley
Adults in School mentioned		X	X	X		X		X
Adults Helped Participant in Transition	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
How They Communicate with Adults		X	X		X		X	
Link Program						X		
No Parent Connection	X	X	X					X
Program is More Personal			X		X			
Social Interactions		X	X	X		X	X	X
Student not Connected			X					

In summary, all participants addressed all major themes during their interviews. Variations were found in the frequency and the variability of responses between the participants. The procedural theme was the most varied between the four major themes. Procedures had eleven different sub-themes identified by the researcher. The social major theme was the most frequent amongst the four themes. The social major theme was mentioned 58 times between the eight participants in the context of research question one. With procedural and social major themes emerging from the original group of four it possibly provides the foundation for recommendations for future research and possible policy and practices.

Research Question 2: What suggestions for additional school based practices if any, do students enrolling in a full-time virtual high school time in one virtual school in Southern California for the first time believe could have helped them to transition to their new school? Suggestions for additional school based practices by the participants were limited to three of the four major themes identified in the literature research. The major theme that had the most recommendations was structure. The least was procedural in which no students had any recommendations. Table 9 displays number of suggestions by participant. Column headings are the pseudonyms of participants. Row headings name major themes identified in the literature review.

Table 9

Number of Suggestions by Major Theme by Participant

	Charlie	Frankie	Doug	Harry	Ernie	Billie	Ginny	Ashley
Suggestions: Academic	2	2	0	1	1	0	0	0
Suggestions: Procedure	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Suggestions: Social	1	1	2	0	2	2	0	4
Suggestions: Structure	1	1	2	0	0	0	1	7

Research Question 2: Academics. Four of the eight participants had suggestions in the academic major theme. Suggestions in this theme seemed to be concentrated in the academic help realm. Three students, Frankie, Harry, Ernie and Frankie, suggested more teacher help. Frankie specifically suggests teachers to “set up one-on-one time” for students that might need help. Two students, Charlie and Frankie, suggested to offer tutoring. Charlie went further to suggest tutoring either “in between certain class connects or after every one”. He stated with tutoring, “it would make it a lot easier to catch up”. Frankie took a different yet similar take. She suggested online tutors like Charlie but also suggested “some sort of tutor in the area”. She saw this face-to-face tutor as a guide to “direct us in the guidance we need”.

Finally, Charlie also suggested parent-teacher conferences. He described these conferences as “that way the parents can talk to the teacher about what’s going on with the student”. No mention of any form of parent conference or similar concept was mentioned in any of the other interviews.

Table 10 represents which participants had suggestions that were within the academic major theme. Column headings are the pseudonyms of participants. Row headings name sub-themes identified during the interviews. Each sub-theme below is associated with the academic major theme that was identified in the literature review.

Table 10

Suggestions: Academic Major Theme by Participant

	Charlie	Frankie	Doug	Harry	Ernie	Billie	Ginny	Ashley
Suggestion: Parent Teacher Conferences	X							
Suggestion: Teacher help		X		X	X			
Suggestion: Tutoring	X	X						

Research Question 2: Social. Suggestions falling under the social major theme were more widely spread than academic. Six of eight participants had suggestions that would be considered social in nature. Sixty-six percent, 8 out of 12, suggestions were specifically about increasing communication. Erie wanted his teachers to “put it out there a little more than they do”. Frankie echoed this sentiment by stating that her teachers did not “exactly reach out to you and tell you what you are supposed to start on”. Billie wants an “easier way to communicate with the teachers”. She believed that there were times when she could not contact her teachers and it was not clear when they were on vacation and unavailable. Ashley wished to have more communication about her class connects and when they were going to happen. She also added that she would suggest more information about the school in general.

Participants also suggested two minor recommendations. The first minor suggestion was by Doug and Billie. They suggested more outings. They both suggested gatherings where students could meet other students. Doug goes further and suggests having the outings at times when parents can come. “make assemblies for all students and their parents can come”. Other participants also expressed that they were unable to go to outings due to their times and or frequency. The second minor suggestion was to hold parent and teacher conferences. Charlie felt this would help parents feeling more connected to the school because they would learn more about what their student was doing. “That way the parents can talk to the teacher about what’s going on with the student”.

The most common idea found in this subset of recommendations is the need for the school to communicate more about specific items. What the specific item did participant vary but four of them felt they needed more information during the transition.

Table 11 represents which participants had suggestions that were within the social major theme. Column headings are the pseudonyms of participants. Row headings name sub-themes identified during the interviews. Each sub-theme below is associated with the social major theme that was identified in the literature review.

Table 11

Suggestions: Social Major Theme by Participant

	Charlie	Frankie	Doug	Harry	Ernie	Billie	Ginny	Ashley
Suggestion: Communication		X			X	X		X
Suggestion: Easier Communication		X			X			
Suggestion: Outing			X			X		
Suggestion: Parent Teacher Conferences	X							

Research Questions 2: Structure. Participants had twelve suggestions for the structural major theme. These twelve suggestions were concentrated in four participants and seven of the twelve suggestions were from one participant, Ashley.

One area of recommendation suggested by three participants was surrounding assignments. Frankie suggested a way to differentiate between current and past due assignments for students that started late in the semester. Frankie wanted greater clarification on assignments when they are assigned because she was a “late start student and the assignments from the previous semester showed up there. That way the parents can talk to the teacher about what’s going on with the student”. Finally, Ashley wanted more time on the assignments she was given.

The other seven suggestions were limited to one of the participants. Doug suggested having more required class connects because he felt he did better when class connects were required. Charlie suggested having a private server so he would not be distracted while doing his online work. Ashley had multiple suggestions on how to structure her school differently to help in her transitions. She suggested having a directory so parents and students could contact each other. She suggested having the school organize study groups for students that might be struggling. Finally, she mentioned twice, suggestions about needing more information about online learning and how the school works.

Table 12 represents which participants had suggestions that were within the structure major theme. Column headings are the pseudonyms of participants. Row headings name sub-themes identified during the interviews. Each sub-theme below is associated with the structural major theme that was identified in the literature review.

Table 12

Suggestions: Structure Major Theme by Participant

	Charlie	Frankie	Doug	Harry	Ernie	Billie	Ginny	Ashley
Suggestion: Assignments		X					X	X
Suggestion: Directory								X
Suggestion: More Required Class Connects			X					
Suggestion: More time Notes								X
Suggestion: Planner or schedule								X

(continued)

	Charlie	Frankie	Doug	Harry	Ernie	Billie	Ginny	Ashley
Suggestion: Private Server	X							
Suggestion: Study Groups								X
Suggestion: Understand Online Learning								X

In summary, recommendations provided by the participants appeared to be very personal based upon their own experience. No participants provided recommendations for their school that would fall into the procedural major theme. Two participants provided recommendations for the remaining three. One participant had one recommendation that fell in structural major theme. Even when there was overlap amongst the major themes when it came to research question two there was little overlap when it came to recommendations by the participants. This variability will need to be considered when providing recommendations for future research, policies and practices.

Summary

This phenomenological study of a diverse group of first time full-time virtual high school students has produced several key findings. Eight participants were interviewed to better their experience in transitioning from a traditional high school into a full-time virtual setting. Participants experience in their new school ranged from eight months to less than a month. Charlie, Doug, Harry and Ashley had struggled in their transition. The range of experience in their school and the diversity experiences of the students created a rich dataset regarding not only how the school affected their transition but also how the school might improve their transition.

Research question 1 focused on what school based practices, if any, helped in their transition to the new school. Through the literature review the researcher could identify four

major themes crucial for a school transition: Academic, Procedure, Social, Structure. All participants identified one or more school based practices in each of the major themes. Over half of the participants appear to identify more with one specific major theme. The theme with the most identification was regarding social interaction and feeling connected to the school. The least identified was items in which students had to follow a procedure to help them be successful. One participant, Billie, identify one school-based practice, general organization, as helping them transition to the new school.

Due to the nature of the study and the lack of prior research on the topic, it is difficult to determine if the thoughts of the participants are unique to the school or unique to them. All the findings of this study could be connected to other studies on the needs of transitional students but the findings of this study neither confirm nor expand upon prior research because simply put there is none.

Research question 2 focused on what recommendation participants would have for their school that would have made their transition even better. Participants did not have recommendations in all four major areas. They did not have any suggestions for improvement in the procedure major them. There were six suggestions in the academic theme but social and structure had thirteen and twelve suggestions respectively. One participant, Ashley, had eleven suggestions that were contained in the social and structure area. Overall, all participants provided suggestions but they seemed to be very personal and tied to a participant's transition. Of the fourteen different sub-themes that were identified in the suggestions, four were echoed by more than one participants. Overall, the participants wanted greater communication with their teachers and a better understanding of when and how to communicate with their teacher. Finally, five of the eight participants suggested some form of academic support. This support

could be found either through more direct teacher help, more tutoring or study groups.

Each of the recommendations by the participants provided the researcher with a small glimpse into what each participant needed to be successful in their new school. During the literature review, the researcher was unable to find any existing researcher that discussed the specific and unique needs of virtual learners. Because of this, all recommendations provide opportunities to increase the body of research surrounding this topic.

Chapter V Discussions, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This chapter discusses the key findings, proposes conclusions and provides recommendations. The chapter begins with a restatement of the study's design. Then chapter V transitions to a discussion of the key findings. Next, conclusions are presented. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further study and recommendations for future policies and practices.

Using a phenomenological approach, the researcher sought to explore the rich and varied experience of students as they transitioned into a full-time virtual school for the first time. A semi-structured protocol was used while interviewing eight participants. During the interviews, participants could describe what school-based practices, if any, helped them during their transition to their new school. Also, during the interview, participants could recommend future practices they perceived might have helped them be more successful in their transition. Upon completion of the interviews, the researcher coded and analyzed the recordings looking for themes or commonalities to the participants. Next, the researcher coalesced the themes into findings. This chapter discusses key findings, provide possible conclusions to findings and recommend future research, policies, and procedures.

The researcher recognizes the unique nature of the study. The body of research surrounding virtual schools is growing, but there are many nuances to virtual schools that have yet to be studied. Because of this, the researcher understands that while any conclusions, recommendations add to the body of researcher about virtual schools. Greater analysis and study is needed to better understand this relatively unique format of education.

Discussion of Key Findings

Research Question 1 was, What school-based practices, if any, did students enrolling in a full-time virtual high school time in one virtual school in Southern California for the first time believe helped them to transition to their new school?

Many participants recognized orientations, communication, and school personnel helped them in their transition to their new school. Supporting Davis et al.(2008) and Roblyer et al. (2008), one of the more consistent school practices that were mentioned by the students was their orientation. Even one student that initially stated he did not participate in an orientation changed his mind when he started talking about a meeting with his homeroom teacher. In this meeting, the central topic was what to do in the school. When participants talked about their orientation much of it centered on the procedural theme of the student's transition into a new school. Most participants mentioned their orientation focused on "what to do" or "how to submit work." What the orientation described by participants is similar in nature to what Scagnoli (2001) described as best practices for orientations.

Having students complete an orientation upon entering the school is a logical step. Because full-time virtual schooling is different from more traditional forms of education, it would only seem appropriate for students to learn how to navigate their new school, how to submit work, et cetera. Orientations experienced by participants are reflective of much of the research into virtual learning. It focused mainly on delivery, procedural items, rather than methodology support the work of: Barbour, 2013; Barbour et al., 2009; Barbour and Reeves, 2009; Bendixen and Hartley, 2001. Even in Scagnoli's (2001) research on student orientations for online programs, more time is spent on procedural items than any other topic. Most often

research focused on how to build an effective virtual course and what virtual learners need from a course rather than the needs of virtual learners.

Another consistent school practice that was mentioned by all participants was communication between them and school personnel. This supports the work of: Akos and Galassi (2004); Blumenfeld et al., (2004); Gannon-Cook and Ley (2014) and Roybal et al. (2014). They all discuss the importance of communication in the virtual setting. Communication was bi-directional between the students and the adults in the school. Some were synchronous such as phone or class connects, others were asynchronous such as email and discussion boards. Research and interviews indicate communication is an important school-based practice to transitioning students. Given the nature of virtual schools, communication between the school and students would seem to be important. During their interviews, participants did not mention a preferred quantity or method of communication.

If there was one single thread that was woven through all eight interviews, it was that adults were essential to their transition. Every single participant mentioned adults as being important in their short time in CAVA. One participant could not limit his praise to one specific individual. He simply said, "all of them".

The most mentioned category of adults mentioned was homeroom teachers. These teachers not only led the participants through their orientation but also helped students when they struggled. One helped solve some technical issues; another helped arrange a meeting to "re-boot" at student's time in the school. Even those participants that mentioned other teachers, they also mentioned their homeroom room, teacher. Many of the participants describe the homeroom teacher's roll is not only one of guidance but also support. The overall feeling expressed by the participants is the homeroom teacher was there for support even if they did not need it.

Other positions mentioned by the participants were a chemistry teacher and guidance counselor. Both positions were mentioned for different reasons. The chemistry teacher was mentioned because help was offered when the student entered school late and did not know what to complete. It seems like the chemistry teacher was mentioned not because of the content taught but rather the support they provided. The guidance counselor was mentioned because once again the support she provided to the student. Ashley describes her guidance counselor as “sweet and supportive” and “helped me (her) a lot...and was the best guidance counselor I’ve (she) ever had”.

Research Question 2 was, What suggestions for additional school-based practices if any, do students enrolling in a full-time virtual high school time in one virtual school in Southern California for the first time believe could have helped them to transition to their new school? Unlike research question one, suggestions for additional school-based practices varied amongst the participants.

Participants provided 30 recommendations over 15 different sub-themes. Thirty-six percent of recommendations were concentrated in one participant, Ginny, and found in the social and structural sub-themes. Beyond this concentration of recommendations, the other participants/sub-theme combinations have a maximum of two requests.

The researcher surmises the variations in recommendations could be due to the variety of reasons students enter full-time virtual schools. During the interviews, although it was not specifically asked about, many of the participants disclosed why they had chosen to enter virtual schools. This variation of differing reasons for entering a virtual school supports the work of: Sacirbey (2013) and Young (n.d) whom both found full-time virtual schools attract students for different reasons. While they specifically describe two populations of students that entered

because of religious reasons or greater flexibility respectively, the participants in the study had other reasons. One had entered because she was “bullied really badly in my (her) prior school”, another had felt her effort had “not reflected well on how I work”, and still another had entered because some prior friends had been in the school and the flexibility of the schedule provided them with additional free time.

Another possible phenomenon unique to this group was the fact that suggestions were made by some participants yet described in practice by others. One example of this happening surrounds tutoring and the other surrounds outings. Billie mentioned tutoring is available for students while Charlie and Frankie suggest tutoring should be available for students. Similarly, Billie and Doug suggest outings for students, yet Charlie mentions that he went on an outing, but he did suggest more outings later in the year.

A possible reason for the differences in practice perceived by the school could be two-fold. It is possible that communication is not consistent amongst the homeroom teachers. Also, when the student entered could be a factor in perception. Charlie mentioned outings were more prevalent during the beginning of the school year. It is possible that Billie and Doug entered the school later in the school year.

Limitations

There are various factors that were studied to determine if they were considered limiting to the study. The largest limitation placed upon the study was the lack of quantity and quality of research on student outcomes in the virtual settings (Barbour, 2013; Barbour & Reeves, 2009; Barbour et. al., 2009; Bendixen & Hartley, 2001). Another limitation was the accessibility or lack thereof of full-time virtual high school students. Due to the dispersed geographies of virtual schools, there is no single location where students could be accessed. Next, the participants were

self-selected because they completed the initial survey and responded to the requests of the researcher to interview. The final possible limitation to the study was contained within the complexity of student transitions to the virtual environment. Because results were self-reported, it was difficult to know all the factors contributing to the success or failure of a first-time enrollee in a full-time virtual school and therefore may be unique to the individual. Each of the stated limitations had an effect upon the generalizability of the results.

Internal Validity

The limitations of this study did not affect the internal validity of the study due to the following reasons: researcher's experience in leading full-time virtual high school and the use of peer review for interview questions and coding of the interview recordings.

In the researcher's experience, although the participants were self-selected, they were typical students entering full-time virtual schools for the first time. Each student was unique in why and when they transitioned to CAVA. Even though it was not collected, many of the participants shared why they had entered the school and how long they had been in the school. One participant entered CAVA because she was being bullied, one entered because she did not feel her grades reflected the effort she was putting into her studies. The reasons for transitioning to CAVA shared by the participants were unique to each participant. Also, time in school varied from three weeks to eight months. This variety added to the richness of the study because it allowed the researcher to explore the experiences of newly transitioned and students that had transitioned month's prior. Each student was it's own, unique glimpse into the experience a student has when transitioning to a full-time virtual school. Little commonality was found among the participants beyond they were students in one full-time virtual high school in southern California.

Finally, the peer review process was used in two areas during the study. One K12 inc. employee and one member of the CAVA administration reviewed the questions for the interview. Each of the reviewers brought their unique frame of reference when reviewing the questions some suggestions were offered but ultimately not used. Also, an additional person who has received a doctorate in education reviewed the interview data and themes to minimize the bias of the researcher.

Because of the use of peer reviewers at critical points during the study and the positionality of the researcher, the researcher believes the study to be internally valid and adds to the body of research that currently exists.

Conclusions

This study resulted in four conclusions that are simple in words but complex in application. The conclusions reached by the researcher include:

- Students participated in orientation, but it was inadequate for the needs of student transitioning into a virtual setting due to the lack of intentional social interaction.
- Communication between full-time virtual schools and its students is vital for transitioning virtual students.
- School personnel are an important factor in a student's transition from a traditional high school setting to a full-time virtual one. Many different types of school personnel were called upon to help during a student's transition.
- Parent/guardians were only minimally engaged while their student transitioned to their new school.

Conclusion 1: Students participated in orientation, but it was inadequate for the needs of student transitioning into a virtual setting due to the lack of intentional social

interaction. The first conclusion was reached due to the discovery during the interviews that the participants perceived their orientation only focused on procedural items such as how to navigate their classes, or how to submit work. These perceptions of participants are contrary to the research of Chen et al. (2010) and Scagnoli (2001) who mention specifically the need for social interactions inside and outside their coursework is important. Scagnoli, (2001) specifically identified social interactions within the virtual environment are more complex than traditional models thus greater care needs to be taken in designing orientations regarding virtual courses. This need was further reflected in the interviews because most participants mention feeling connected to their teacher or classmates in both instructional and non-instructional settings. The two most common settings mentioned was the chat box in class connects and discussion posts. Both settings were mentioned in conjunction with their academic classes, not their orientation. At no time were social interactions mentioned as being part of the orientations.

Orientations must provide opportunities for students to interact socially with their instructors and their peers. Simply telling students how to navigate their new programs and not addressing other aspects of their transition in their orientation force students to learn new academic content while learning new procedures and trying to socially integrate into their new school.

Conclusion 2: Communication between full-time virtual schools and its students is vital for transitioning virtual students. The second conclusion, communication between full-time virtual schools and its students is vital for transitioning virtual students, was reached due to the importance participants placed upon communication and their recommendations that even more communication would have helped their transition even more.

Through the interviews, the researcher frequently heard about how participants communicated with the school. The most often way the students communicated with their teachers were in an asynchronously, through e-mail. Even though during the interviews it became clear communication between the school and the students was happening, an increase in the quality or type of the communication is requested. Communication by adults must be frequent, clear and concise. This conclusion supported the work of Gannon-Cook and Ley (2014) when they identified five learner-valued instructor interactions. The full-time virtual school must be aware of each of these learner-valued learner interactions and ensure they are utilized.

Conclusion 3: School personnel are an important factor in a student's transition from a traditional high school setting to a full-time virtual one. Many different types of school personnel were called upon to help during a student's transition. The third conclusion, school personnel are an important factor in a student's transition from a traditional high school setting to a full-time virtual one, was the clearest of the four conclusions. Universally, the participants recognized the relationships they built with their teachers as helping them transition to their new school. This conclusion is supported by the work of McMillan and Reed (1994) when they found the most resilient at-risk students had strong relationships with their teachers.

The researcher could not determine the importance of one specific category of an adult. Although homeroom teachers were mentioned most frequently, academic teachers, guidance counselors, and even K12 Inc. technical support was mentioned during the interviews. This varied group of school personnel was often described as nice, caring, helpful and encouraging.

Like, Akos and Galassi (2004) and Chen et al. (2010) encouragement was identified by the researcher to have a positive influence upon students.

How this group of school personnel helped students varied as much as the actual positions they held. They led the participants through their orientation but also helped students when they struggled. The support they offered participants varied from as simple as answering questions about assignments to, helping solve some technical issues, to as complex as a arranging a meeting to "re-boot" at student's time in the school. Even when participants mentioned specific positions, such as a chemistry teacher and guidance counselor, they were mentioned more for the support they provided than the content they delivered. The chemistry teacher was mentioned because help was offered when the student entered school late and did not know what to complete. The guidance counselor was mentioned because once again of the support she provided to the student. Ashley describes this guidance counselor as sweet and supportive. She also helped Ashley with college information. The overall feeling expressed by the participants regarding their teachers was they were there for support even if they did not need it.

Available research, statements, and suggestions made by participants named communication by adults as important for them during their first year in a full-time virtual school. During their orientation, they helped them get to know the learning management system, understand the intricacies of the new school and provide technical help if needed.

Conclusion 4: Parent/guardians were only minimally engaged while their student transitioned to their new school. Conclusions in research are most often based on what data is collected during the study. This conclusion, parent/guardians need to be engaged more while their student transitions to their new school, is based upon what has not been uncovered. During

the interviews, three participants mentioned attempts by the school to engage the parents or guardians. One mentioned their parent went through an orientation. This orientation might have been for the participant because no other participant mentioned an orientation for parents. The other two-mentioned communication sent to them. The brief description of the communications appeared to be just informational, what was happening in the school, assignments that were due et cetera. No mention of any communication that sought to engage the parents in feeling connected to the school. Contrary to Roybal et al. (2014) and Akos and Galassi (2004) whom both mention parents being an important part of a smooth transition into a new school, there is little indication participants parents/guardians were only minimally engaged by the school.

Participants recommended various ways for CAVA to engage their parents more. One participant suggested a directory; one mentioned more outings where they and their parents could meet. Some of the recommendations by the students might be impossible due to regulations or other factors but, regardless of the actual recommendation by the participants, the research is clear that parents are an important part of the transition.

Recommendations for Further Research

Research on virtual schools mainly concentrates on providing content to participants. Few studies study the actual participant in virtual schools. Due to the qualitative nature of this study, three items of further research have been identified.

The first item that needs further study is the actual orientation that first-time, full-time virtual students complete. This study indicated the participants either participated or perceived their participation as only engaging in the procedural area of a transition. Scagnoli (2001) on the other hand indicates an orientation should also engage in other identified areas. The social area is mentioned specifically. Further research should investigate if this is a perception or a practice

issue. Identifying which would allow virtual schools to adjust practice to meet needs of this very important subset of their student body.

The second item that needs further research is the actual communication between homeroom teachers and their transitioning students. Homeroom teachers were identified by participants as important to their transition. What was not identified in this study was frequency, quality and type of communication that is valued by transitioning students. Understanding communication between homeroom teachers and transitioning students would allow virtual schools to provide recommendations, build policies that are supportive of the needs of this crucial group of students.

The third item that needs further research is the role of parent engagement in a full-time virtual school. The studies by Roybal et al. (2014) and Akos and Galassi, (2004) both mention parents being an important part of a smooth transition into a new school. Neither of these studies was done in a virtual setting thus transference is limited. Greater understanding of not only how parents can be engaged more in the virtual setting but also what their role, if different than traditional schools, is.

Recommendations for Future Policies and Practices

The researcher believes a traditional transition from eighth to ninth grade is difficult. Research indicates this traditional transition is crucial to success in high school (Akos & Galassi, 2004). Participants interviewed not only were faced with a transition to a new school but also a transition to a new way of attending school. In addition to the difficulties students are having, virtual schools are facing increasing scrutiny. Even those participants that felt they were prepared or had a smooth transition had simple, easily implementable, suggestions. Four recommendations for future policies and practices: review current orientations and ensure they

meet all the needs of transitioning students, develop personnel to better understand their role in the success of transitioning students, create systems to engage parents/guardians of transitioning students and finally, examining current practices to ensure they meet all needs of transitioning students.

Recommendation 1: Review current orientations and ensure they meet all the needs of transitioning students focusing specifically on their need to socially interact with their peers. The researcher concluded that students participated in orientation, but it was inadequate for the needs of student transitioning into a virtual setting. One of the areas virtual schools must include in their orientations is the ability to transition students to be able to interact socially in academic and non-academic settings. One when he possible way full-time virtual schools could address this recommendation is to review current orientations and compare those to successful transitional programs in traditional high school settings. Bryant (2008), Herlihy et al. (2005), Richardson (2011) and Scagnoli (2001) might help guide virtual schools in developing stronger orientations. Bryant (2008), Herlihy et al. (2005) and Richardson (2011) looked at practices of transitional programs, as they currently exist in traditional high schools. Scagnoli (2001) provided some recommendations, including some specific recommendations in the social theme, for orientations for students taking virtual courses including. Using the framework of current successful transition programs and recommendations for parts of a successful orientation might enable virtual schools to meet the needs of transitioning students.

Recommendation 2: Because of the variance of the relationships built by transitioning students, all school personnel need to have an excellent understanding their role in the success of transitioning students. The researcher concluded that school personnel is an important factor in a student's transition from a traditional high school setting to a full-time

virtual one and many different types of school personnel were called upon to help during a student's transition.

Since so many different types of school personnel were influential in the participant's transition, it would be difficult to identify specific school personnel that needs to have a good understanding of their roll in the success of transitioning students. Because the roll of school personnel is important to the success of transitioning students and the unpredictability of whom students will build relationships with, it is recommended all school personnel need to understand the important they play in the success of transitioning students.

One possible way full-time virtual schools could address this recommendation is to develop a training course for their teachers to understand better the importance of their role with transitioning students. Suggestions to include in the course would be; ensuring high-quality communication between school and home, relationship building between student and teacher in a virtual setting and finally indicators and solutions for transitioning students that start to struggle.

Full-time virtual high schools need to cultivate the relationships students' build with their teachers. These relationships need to be not only on an academic level but also on a social level. Participants most often fell connected to a school when one of their teachers engaged in them outside academic endeavors. More often than naught, participants indicated the relationships they had built with their teachers were formed organically. Full-time virtual schools should not leave this relationship to chance. It is too important to transitioning students.

This course could be developed in conjunction with teacher development programs. The partnership could leverage the expertise of both partners. Teacher development programs understand the needs of teachers and adult learning. Virtual schools understand the unique needs of their students and teachers. Virtual schools also have expertise in developing online

curriculum. The partnership might provide benefits to both entities. Virtual schools would benefit from having the ability to hire teachers that have had some specific training to enter the virtual setting. Teacher development programs would benefit from creating additional marketable qualities within their students. It would allow their students access an additional employment vector. The course's ultimate goal should be ensuring high-quality relationships between students and teachers.

Recommendation 3: Create opportunities, such as parent-teacher conferences, to engage parents/guardians of transitioning students. Thirdly, the researcher concluded parent/guardians were only minimally engaged while their student transitioned to their new school. While the researcher suggested further research into the role of parents/guardians in virtual schools, there exists some research into the importance of parents/guardians' role in a traditional transition. Using the work of Roybal et al. (2014) and Akos and Galassi (2004) or virtual schools' traditional counterparts to provide some guidance on developing parent engagement programs, virtual schools must create opportunities for parents of transitioning students to be engaged. One particularly creative student, Charlie, recommended parent-teacher conferences. During his interview, Charlie suggested parent conferences as a way "for the parent to talk to the teacher about what's going on with the student". Parent conferences are a fixture in many traditional schools yet missing in this virtual school.

The researcher recognizes the lack of research surrounding parents and virtual schools but suggests looking at effects of parent engagement programs in traditional schools and adapting them to the virtual setting. Because these programs might be ground breaking, program evaluation will have to occur early in the program's development.

Recommendation 4: Examine current practices to ensure they meet all needs of transitioning students not only during their initial transition but also during their first academic year. Homeroom teachers must conduct regular check-ins with transitioning students. Finally, virtual schools must review the process a transitioning student goes through to entering the school. In the school studied, transitioning students indicated their orientation mostly focused on procedural process. If there are other parts of the orientation that are not procedural, they were either unknown or unimportant to the participants. One possible reason for this recollection of only procedural items by the participant might be the added importance of procedural items to students early in their transition, but other themes may become more important to them later in the transition. If this is the case, a possible solution to the shift in priorities could be an extended orientation.

Another item to review would be how academic supports are communicated to transitioning students. Some participants knew about academic supports, and some suggested the very same type of academic support. This inconsistency might indicate the need for more consistent communication of academic supports that are available. Half of the participants struggled during their time in CAVA. A review of how academic supports are communicated might have helped the students that did not have a smooth transition.

Finally, the transition for first-time, full-time virtual high school students appears to be a very personal experience. While most of the identified school practices that helped them in their transition were somewhat uniform, the recommendations on how the transition could be made better were varied. Each student seemed to have different opinions on how the transition could be improved. Virtual schools should engage their transitioning students on a regular basis to better understand what the needs of newly transitioning students are. Because the participants

identified their homeroom teacher as helping them in their transition it only seems logical to have the homeroom teacher, or it's equivalent, to touch base and monitor the transition regularly during a new student's first year in a full-time virtual high school. Doing this, the school might be able to adjust their processes and meet the needs of their new students. The researcher recommends a qualitative approach to engaging newly transitioning students because through interviews, often the needs of the students are uncovered through unscripted conversation.

Summary

The researcher recognized the appreciation and positivity of the participants towards their new school as they were interviewed. Although it was not studied, many of them described their previous school and reasons why they came to CAVA. Their reasons were as varied as their suggestions for improvement of their transition. The unifying factor was all of them were looking for a school different from the one they had left.

This study showed the varied and rich experiences that students entering a full-time virtual school go through. Many of them struggled at some point during the transition, but all of them felt as if they were successful now. Each of them built a relationship with one or more adults during their transition that will help them continue to be successful while attending CAVA.

Virtual schooling has just entered its teenage years. Compared to traditional high schools the body of research surrounding virtual schools is a minute. Additionally, research into virtual schools up till now has mainly focused on content delivery or learning management systems, not on teachers or students. Like many teenagers, virtual schools struggle to find their place in the world. They are entering a family of educational options that has been established for hundreds of years. While this study is only a glimpse into eight students from one virtual school in

Southern California, it could help other virtual schools be intentional towards transitioning students into their new school. The research community needs to engage in more research to help guide virtual schools towards best practices for the betterment of both students and adults that have chosen this form of education. The virtual school community needs to provide researchers access to their schools and their students for the school to engage in cycles of continuous improvement. Finally, the educational community needs to support this teenager. Help it learn from past mistakes and view virtual schools as partners that can meet the needs of students that traditional methods can no longer meet. Unlike many other charter schools, virtual schools are not seeking to educate children the same way, but in different buildings, they are trying to educate children differently and need to better understand their strengths and limitation.

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APPENDIX A

Invitation Email to Participate in Study

Dear CAVA Family,

My name is Bill Crockett and I am a Doctoral of Education student with Pepperdine University. I wish to invite you/your student to participate in a study that will fulfill a portion of the requirements to receive my Doctorate of Education from Pepperdine University.

I am studying the experiences of students as they transition from a traditional school model to a full-time virtual school model. Studying your/your student's experience, along with other students, as you transition to your/your student's new school will be enable me as the researcher to better understand the needs of a transitioning student and to possibly provide recommendations.

Your/your student's participation in my study will comprise of two parts. The first part, which will be completed in Google documents, will collect some basic demographic data along with contact information. The second and final part, I will interview selected participates asking them in their own words their experience. This interview will take place virtually. You will be asked specifically about what the school has done to ensure a smooth transition to a full-time virtual setting.

If you/ your student completes the interview they will receive a \$25 Target gift card.. Everyone will receive a gift card if they complete the interview. Your/your student's participation will add valuable insight into the experiences of virtual school students. This could lead to better public understanding of the specific needs of virtual learners.

If you/your students are/is willing to participate please go to <http://bit.ly/2jsJOK6> and complete the required questions and I will contact you when it is time to move onto part 2. If you have any questions feel free to contact me at (XXX)XXX-XXXX or xx@pepperdine.edu.

Thank You

Bill Crockett

APPENDIX B

Google Survey with Informed Consent

- Introduction

Dear Student,

My name is Bill Crockett and I am a Doctoral of Education student with Pepperdine University. I wish to invite you/your student to participate in a study that will fulfill a portion of the requirements to receive my Doctorate of Education from Pepperdine University.

I am studying the experiences of students as they transition from a traditional school model to a full-time virtual school model. Studying your/your student's experience, along with other students, as you transition to your/your student's new school will be enable me as the researcher to better understand the needs of a transitioning student and to possibly provide recommendations.

Your/your student's participation in my study will comprise of two parts. The first part, which will be completed in Google documents, will collect some basic demographic data along with contact information. Finally, I will interview selected participates asking them in their own words their experience. This interview will take place virtually. You will be asked specifically about what the school has done to ensure a smooth transition to a full-time virtual setting.

If you/ your student completes the interview they will be receive a \$25 Target gift card. Everyone that completes the interview will receive a gift card; participation will add

valuable insight into the experiences of virtual school students. This could lead to better public understanding of the specific needs of virtual learners.

If you/your students are/is willing to participate please go to <http://bit.ly/2jsJOK6> and complete the required questions and I will contact you when it is time to move onto part

2. If you have any questions feel free to contact me at (XXX)XXX-XXXX or xxxxx@pepperdine.edu.

Thank You

Bill Crockett

- Survey Question 1

Yes, I/my student would like to participate. The participant is:

- A Minor under the age of 18
- An Adult over the age of 18

- Assent by Parent or Guardian for Minor in Study

- PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

Graduate School of Education and Philosophy

- YOUTH ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH (AGES 14–17)

Student Transitions into the Full-Time Virtual High School Setting

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by William Crockett,

M.A., a doctoral student under the supervision of Dr. Molly McCabe in education

at Pepperdine University, Graduate School of Education and Philosophy, because you are a first-year student at a full-time virtual high school. Your participation is voluntary. You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything that you do not understand, before deciding whether to participate. Please take as much time as you need to read the consent form. You may also decide to discuss participation with your family or friends. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to digitally sign this form. You will also be able to print out a copy of this form for your records.

- **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of the study is to better understand the experiences of students as they enter a full-time virtual high school for the first time. Participants will be asked if they have any recommendations for the transition.

- **STUDY PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, your participation will comprise of two parts.

1. The first part, you will be asked to complete in Google documents a basic form that will collect some basic demographic data along with contact information. This portion of the study will require less than fifteen minutes to complete.
2. During the second part, you will be interviewed, asking you in my own words your experience in transitioning to a full-time virtual school. This interview will take place virtually using Adobe Connect and will last approximately one

hour. The interview will be recorded using the tools within Adobe Connect. You will be provided connection instructions once an interview time has been arranged. During the interview, you will be asked specifically about what the school has done to ensure a smooth transition for a student to a full-time virtual setting. It is anticipated that only one interview will be needed but if additional information is needed a second, clarifying interview may be needed.

- **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

The potential risks of participating in this study are minimal. Boredom may occur during the hour-long interview. All recordings will be password protected. All participants will be given pseudonyms. No identifiable information will be contained within the final dissertation.

- **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

While there are no direct benefits to the study participants, there are several anticipated benefits to society which include: better understanding of your transition and possible recommendations to schools for future students.

- **PAYMENT/COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION**

You will receive \$25 Target gift card for your time. You do not have to answer all the questions during the interview to receive the card. The card will be given to you when the interview has been completed.

- CONFIDENTIALITY

I will keep your records for this study confidential as far as permitted by law. However, if I am required to do so by law, I may be required to disclose information collected about you. Examples of the types of issues that would require me to break confidentiality are if you tell me about instances of child abuse and elder abuse. Pepperdine's University's Human Subjects Protection Program (HSPP) may also access the data collected. The HSPP occasionally reviews and monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research subjects.

The interview will be recorded using the tools in Adobe Connect. All recordings will be used for research purposes only. The recordings will be stored on an external hard drive in a locked file cabinet and will be destroyed 3 years after final acceptance of dissertation.

Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. Your responses during the interview will be coded with a pseudonym and transcript data will be maintained separately. The data will be stored on a password protected computer or hard drive in the principal investigators home office to which only the investigator will have access. The data will be stored in a secure manner for 3 years at which time the data will be destroyed.

- PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

If the researcher determines that you have enrolled in a full time virtual school before my participation in the study may be terminated by the investigator without regard to your consent.

- ALTERNATIVES TO FULL PARTICIPATION

The alternative to participation in the study is not participating or completing only the items which you feel comfortable.

- EMERGENCY CARE AND COMPENSATION FOR INJURY

If you are injured as a direct result of research procedures you will receive medical treatment; however, you or your insurance will be responsible for the cost. Pepperdine University does not provide any monetary compensation for injury

- INVESTIGATOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION

I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries I may

have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact Bill Crockett at [REDACTED] or wcrockett@me.com or alternatively Molly McCabe at molly.mccabe@pepperdine.edu if I have any other questions or concerns about this research.

- RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT – IRB CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant or research in general please contact Dr. Judy Ho, Chairperson of the Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board at Pepperdine University 6100 Center Drive Suite 500 Los Angeles, CA 90045, 310-568-5753 or gpsirb@pepperdine.edu.

- Survey Question 2
 - I have read the information provided above. I have been given a chance to ask questions. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I agree to participate in this study.
 - Yes
 - No
- Survey Question 3
 - I agree to be audio/virtually recorded
 - I do not agree to be audio/virtually recorded
- Survey Question 4
 - Please Type Your Full Name

- Survey Question 5
 - Please Type Your Student's Full Name

- SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I have explained the research to the participants and answered all of his/her questions. In my judgment the participants are knowingly, willingly and intelligently agreeing to participate in this study. They have the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study and all of the various components. They also have been informed participation is voluntarily and that they may discontinue their participation in the study at any time, for any reason.

Name of Person Obtaining Consent: William Crockett

- Informed consent of participation of an adult in study

- PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Educational Leadership and Policy Program

- INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Bill Crockett, student, Dr. Molly McCabe, Ed D. at Pepperdine University, because you are enrolling in a full-time virtual high school for the first time. Your participation is voluntary. You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything that you do not understand, before deciding whether to participate.

Please take as much time as you need to read the consent form. You may also decide to discuss participation with your family or friends. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form. You will also be given a copy of this form for your records.

- **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of my research is to explore what school-based practices, if any, do students enrolling in a full-time virtual high school in Southern California for the first time believe helped or hindered them to successfully transition to their new school.

- **STUDY PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

Complete a brief survey asking basic contact information and basic demographic information. This portion of the study will require less than fifteen minutes to complete.

Complete the SmarterMeasure™ readiness assessment. The SmarterMeasure™ is an online test that determines how ready you are to take virtual courses. It also helps identify areas you may need help in. This portion of the study will require less than one hour to complete. Upon completion of the test, you are provided with a report detailing their results.

Some participants will be invited to participate in an interview with me. The interview will occur virtually using Adobe Connect and will last approximately 45 minutes. they will be asked to answer XXXXX questions.

Participation in the study will require a minimum of 1.25 hours and a maximum of 2 hours divided between the three parts.

- **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

The potential and foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study include: loss of time and boredom. There are no foreseeable psychological, social, legal and/or legal risks.

- **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

While there are no direct benefits to the study participants, there are several anticipated benefits to society which include:

Better understanding of the needs of virtual school students

Better understanding of the transition from traditional school models to virtual ones

- **PAYMENT/COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION**

If you or your student completes the interview, you will receive a \$25 Target gift card.

- CONFIDENTIALITY

I will keep your records for this study confidential as far as permitted by law. However, if I am required to do so by law, I may be required to disclose information collected about you. Examples of the types of issues that would require me to break confidentiality are if you tell me about instances of child abuse and elder abuse. Pepperdine's University's Human Subjects Protection Program (HSPP) may also access the data collected. The HSPP occasionally reviews and monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research subjects.

Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. Your responses during the interview will be coded with a pseudonym and transcript data will be maintained separately. The data collected will be stored on a password-protected computer in the researcher's home office for three years after the study has been completed and then destroyed.

- PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

Participation may be terminated by the investigator without your consent if it is determined you did not meet the initial participation requirements of first time enrollment into a full-time virtual high school as you indicated in the first portion of the study.

- **ALTERNATIVES TO FULL PARTICIPATION**

Your alternative to participate in the study is to not participate.

- **EMERGENCY CARE AND COMPENSATION FOR INJURY**

If you are injured as a direct result of research procedures you will receive medical treatment; however, you or your insurance will be responsible for the cost. Pepperdine University does not provide any monetary compensation for injury

- **INVESTIGATOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION**

I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact Bill Crockett, 323-236-7998 or wacrocke@pepperdine.edu or Dr. Molly McCabe, molly.mccabe@pepperdine.edu if I have any other questions or concerns about this research.

- **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT – IRB CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research

participant or research in general please contact Dr. Judy Ho, Chairperson of the Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board at Pepperdine University 6100 Center Drive Suite 500 Los Angeles, CA 90045, 310-568-5753 or gpsirb@pepperdine.edu.

- Survey Question 6
 - I have read the information provided above. I have been given a chance to ask questions. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I agree to participate in this study.
 - Yes
 - No
- Survey Question 7
 - I agree to be audio/virtually recorded
- Survey Question 8
 - I do not agree to be audio/virtually recorded
- Survey Question 9
 - Please Type Your Full Name

Demographic Data

- Survey Question 10
 - Participant's First Name
- Survey Question 11
 - Participant's Last Name

- Survey Question 12
 - Participant's Birthdate
- Survey Question 13
 - Contact Email Address
- Survey Question 14
 - Alternative Contact Email Address
- Survey Question 15
 - Contact Telephone Number
- Survey Question 16
 - Alternative Contact Telephone Number
- Survey Question 17
 - Have you enrolled in a full-time virtual high school before?
 - No, this is my first time enrolling in a full-time virtual high school
 - Yes, I have enrolled in a full-time virtual school before regardless of grade.

Concluding Screen

- Eligible Students

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. If you have any questions feel free to email me at xxxxx@pepperdine.edu or call me at xxx-xxx-xxxx. I will be in contact shortly regarding participation in part two of the study.

- Ineligible Students

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study unfortunately you are not eligible to participate. If you have any questions feel free to email me at

xxxxx@pepperdine.edu or call me at xxx-xxx-xxxx.

APPENDIX C

Invitation Email to Participate in Interview

Dear Student,

Thank you for completing the survey part of my research. You/your student have/has been selected to participate in the last part of my research, the interview. The interview will take place virtually using Adobe Connect. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes and will have 12 questions. Additional clarifying questions might be needed to fully understand your/your student's experience.

Your/your student's participation is not required and you/your student can ask the interview to be stopped at any time. The interview will be recorded but the recording can be turned off at any time. All participants in the interviews will be given a pseudonym that will only be known by the researcher. All recordings and notes will be securely stored on my personal laptop. I will take you/your student's privacy very seriously and will ensure no identifying information is available to anyone except me.

If you wish to participate in the final and very important part my research please respond to this email or call me at 323-XXX-XXX. At that time, we will find a date and time we both can agree on to participate. Once we have agreed upon a time I will send you a second email confirming date and time and instructions on how to connect through Adobe connect.

If you have any questions feel free to contact me at (323)XXX-XXXX or william.crockett@pepperdine.edu.

Thank You

Bill Crockett

APPENDIX D

Letter to Participant Indicating They will be Interviewed

Good Evening,

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. Please reply to this email with 3-4 times over the next 2 weeks in which we can talk. Evenings, after five o'clock, work great for me but I am flexible.

The interview will take approximately one hour. If you prefer one time over another please let me know. Interviews will be done using Adobe Connect and you will be sent a login link once the time is scheduled.

Thank you for your patience and helping me with the study. If you have any questions you can reply to this email or contact me at xxxxx@pepperdine.edu or at XXX-XXX-XXXX

Thank You

Bill Crockett

APPENDIX E

Email to Participant with Interview Login Information

Please join me in the following Adobe Connect Meeting.

Meeting Name: XXXX

Invited By: Bill Crockett

To join the meeting:
URL for meetings

If you have never attended an Adobe Connect meeting before:

Test your connection: https://gsep.adobeconnect.com/common/help/en/support/meeting_test.htm

Get a quick overview: <http://www.adobe.com/products/adobeconnect.html>

APPENDIX F

Interview Protocol

Student Transitions into the Full-Time Virtual High School Setting

William Crockett

Pepperdine University

Date _____

Time _____

URL for Interview _____

URL for recording _____

Interviewer: Bill Crockett

Interviewee _____

Informed Consent signed? ____

Agreed to be recorded? ____

Start Recording

- Please state your name.
- Do you agree to be recorded?

Read Notes Placed on Virtual Whiteboard to Interviewee:

Thank you for your participation. I believe your input will be valuable to my research and help learn more about the unique needs of virtual learners. Confidentiality of responses is guaranteed. Approximate length of interview is 45 minutes. The interview has twenty-one questions in four major areas.

The interview will be recorded, but the recording can be turned off at any time. All participants in the interviews will be given a pseudonym that will only be known by the researcher. All recordings and notes will be securely stored on my personal laptop. I will take you/your student's privacy very seriously and will ensure no identifying information is available to anyone except me

In the Google survey, you were informed and agreed to participate in this research study. Do you have any questions about your consent to participate in the study or any other items before we begin?

- Do you have any questions?

Procedural Issues

1. In what ways, if at all, did the school teach you practical ways to be a successful virtual student?

Response from Interviewee:

2. What recommendations, if any would you make to your school to help you be a more successful virtual student?

Response from Interviewee:

3. Did you participate in any form of orientation prior to starting your course work? If you did can you describe to me what you did or provide me any recommendations?

Response from Interviewee:

4. What procedures or practices that, if any, that you learned in your school helped you in your transition between your old school and the new one?

Response from Interviewee:

Structural Issues

5. In what ways, if at all, did the school structure your learning or structure your courses that helped you be successful?

Response from Interviewee

6. What suggestions, if any, would you have for your school that could have helped you be more organized?

Response from Interviewee

Academic Issues

7. In what ways, if at all, did the school help you become more confident in your academic success?

Response from Interviewee:

8. Did you find yourself struggling academically? If so, in what ways, if at all, did the school help you?

Response from Interviewee:

9. What suggestions would you have, if any, for you schools to help students that might be struggling academically?

Response from Interviewee:

Social Issues

10. In what ways, if at all did the school help you feel like you belonged in the school? Did they help you connect with other students? Did they help your parents or guardians connect to other parent and guardians?

Response from Interviewee:

11. What suggestions, if any, would you have for increasing you or your parents/guardians feeling connected to the school?

Response from Interviewee:

12. What teacher or individual do you think has helped you the most in your transition to your new school? Can you tell me how they helped you?

Response from Interviewee:

Concluding statement to interviewee

Thank you very much for participating in the interview. Your responses will be confidential and you will be assigned a pseudonym that only I know and will be kept separate from the recordings. You have my email address and phone number. If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to call. I do not anticipate any further questions but if I do can I contact you again? _____. Once again thank you very much!

APPENDIX G

Thank You Email with Interview Recording Attached

Dear Student,

Thank you once again for participating in my researching. Attached you will find the recording of our interview. If you wish to change anything please let me know immediately. Otherwise, thank you very much and if you wish a copy of my final dissertation please contact me at William.crockett@pepperdine.edu

You will be receiving your \$25 Target gift card in 2-3 weeks. Please confirm your address by replying to this email.

If you have any questions feel free to contact me at (XXX)XXX-XXXX or william.crockett@pepperdine.edu.

Bill Crockett

APPENDIX H

Expert Review of Instrumentation Interview Questions

Part I: At least one graduate faculty members from Pepperdine University

Twenty-one questions were originally developed by the researcher to export the experience of students transitioning into a full-time virtual school for the first time. Dr. Molly McCabe, the researcher's faculty advisor, originally reviewed these twenty-one questions. Dr. Kay Davis and Dr. Paul Sparks additionally reviewed the questions during the preliminary process for approval to conduct researcher.

Dr. McCabe, Dr. Davis and Dr. Sparks all recommended to reduce the quantity of the questions. They felt twenty-one was too many questions for high school students. After a few iterations, and some reflective conversation between Dr. McCabe and the researcher, the original twenty-one questions were combined and condensed to twelve questions. Dr. McCabe reviewed what became the final questions used in the study.

Part II: An employee of K12 Inc and one faculty member of California Virtual Academy

After being reviewed by Dr. McCabe, the twelve interview questions were reviewed by Shiela Shiebler, Deputy Vice President, Western Region School Services, and April Warren, Head of Schools, CAVA.

Sheila provided numerous recommendations surrounding student engagement, home based support, and social/emotional support. The suggestions although important to the success of the student in virtual schools, they were not valid when viewed under the lens of the research questions. Many of the suggestions focused on what supports were at home not what school based practices help students in their transition.

April did not provide any suggestions.

APPENDIX I

IRB Approval Letter 16-07-328



Pepperdine University
24255 Pacific Coast Highway
Malibu, CA 90263
TEL: 310-506-4000

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: January 23, 2017

Protocol
Investigator Name:
William Crockett
Protocol #: 16-07-
328

Project Title: Student Transitions into the
Full-Time Virtual High School Setting
School: Graduate School of Education and
Psychology

Dear William Crockett:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event.

Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at community.pepperdine.edu/irb.

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chair

cc: Dr. Lee Kats, Vice Provost for
Research and Strategic Initiatives
Mr. Brett Leach, Regulatory
Affairs Specialist