AN EXAMINATION AND ANALYSIS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL TRANSITION PLANS: A STUDY OF LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCIES AND MIDDLE SCHOOLS IN NORTH CAROLINA

A Dissertation
by
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ABSTRACT

AN EXAMINATION AND ANALYSIS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL TRANSITION PLANS: A STUDY OF LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCIES AND MIDDLE SCHOOLS IN NORTH CAROLINA

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The transition to middle school is increasingly becoming an important milestone for adolescents. This study explored if North Carolina school systems had a targeted, formalized, written transitional plan for students traveling from elementary to middle school that was based in middle grades research. All 115 LEAs were initially scanned to discover if such district wide transitional plans existed. Once respondents were determined, 15 faculty were interviewed using a structured interview format: six from a school system in the Piedmont of North Carolina, five from a suburban community outside of a University within North Carolina, and four from a coastal school district along the North Carolina Atlantic shore.

Three themes emerged from the data analysis: existence, elements, and communication. This research study found that there is a shortage of formal, purposeful
implementation of transitional best practice research within North Carolina middle schools and LEAs. This study also explored how systems theory was carried out within LEAs and middle schools to accomplish the task of creating, implementing, and sustaining their middle school transition plan. This research study used systems theory in an attempt to examine the actual and perceived communication styles that each LEA and middle school used. The systems theory models of communication (system-wide thinking, open-systems thinking, and process systems thinking) were not uniform within a LEA or middle school involved in this research. Many versions of systems theory are evident at various stages within schools and LEAs. Implications from the findings and suggestions for further research are presented.

Keywords: Middle School transition plans; systems theory